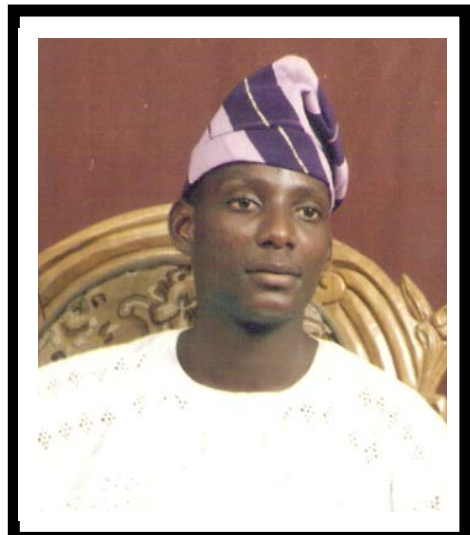


EXCEPTIONAL YORUBA PEOPLE

The **Yoruba people** (*Yorùbá* in Yoruba orthography) are an ethnic group of West Africa. The Yoruba constitute close to 40 million people in total, found predominantly in Nigeria, where they make up around 21% of its population or roughly 35 million in 2012,^[1] making them one of the largest ethnic groups of Sub-Saharan Africa (alongside the Akan, the Hausa-Fulani and the Igbo). The majority of the Yoruba speak the Yoruba language (Yoruba: *èdèe Yorùbá*).



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The Yoruba share borders with the Borgu (variously called "Baruba" and "Borgawa") in the northwest; the Nupe (whom they often call "Tapa") and Ebira in the north; and the Edo, the Ijaw, and the Afemai to the southeast. The Igala and other related groups are found in the northeast, and the Egun, Fon, and others in the southwest. The Itsekiri who live in the north-west Niger Delta, are closely related to the Yoruba but maintain a distinct cultural identity. While the majority of the Yoruba live in western Nigeria, there are also substantial indigenous Yoruba communities in the Republic of Benin. Comparatively numerous Yoruba diaspora communities are found in the United States and the United Kingdom. Also, more than one-third of Afro-Brazilians claim Yoruba ancestry. Yoruba culture is visible in Bahia, Brazil.

Name

As an ethnic description, the word 'Yoruba' (or *Yarib*¹) was first recorded in reference to the Oyo Empire in a treatise written by the 16th-century Songhai scholar Ahmed Baba. It was popularized by Hausa usage and ethnography written in Arabic and Ajami during the 19th century, in origin referring to the Oyo exclusively.

The extension of the term to all speakers of dialects related to the language of the Oyo (in modern terminology North-West Yoruba) dates to the second half of the 19th century. It is due to the influence of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first Anglican bishop in Nigeria. Crowther was himself a Yoruba and compiled the first Yoruba dictionary as well as introducing a standard for Yoruba orthography.

The alternative name *Akú*, apparently an exonym derived from the first words of Yoruba greetings (such as *È kú àárọ?* "good morning", *È kú alẹ?* "good evening") has survived in certain parts of their diaspora as a self-descriptive.

Language

Main article: Yoruba language

The majority of Yoruba people are native speakers of the Yoruba language. The number of speakers is roughly estimated at about 30 million in 2010.^[6]

Yoruba is classified within the Edekiri languages, which together with the isolate Igala form the Yoruboid group of languages within the Volta-Niger branch of the Niger-Congo phylum. Igala and Yoruba have important historical and cultural relationships. The languages of the two ethnic groups bear such a close resemblance that researchers such as Forde (1951) and Westermann and Bryan (1952) regarded Igala as a dialect of Yoruba.

The Yoruboid languages are assumed to have developed out of undifferentiated Volta-Niger group by the 1st millennium BC. There are three major dialect areas: Northwest, Central, and Southeast.^[7] As the North-West Yoruba dialects show more linguistic innovation, combined with the fact that Southeast and Central Yoruba areas generally have older settlements, suggests a later date of immigration for Northwest Yoruba.^[8]

The area where North-West Yoruba (NWY) is spoken corresponds to the historical Oyo Empire. South-East Yoruba (SEY) was probably associated with the expansion of the Benin Empire after c. 1450.^[9] Central Yoruba forms a transitional area in that the lexicon has much in common with NWY, whereas it shares many ethnographical features with SEY.

Literary Yoruba, the standard variety learnt at school and that spoken by newsreaders on the radio, has its origin in the Crowther's Yoruba grammar compiled in the 1850s. Though for a large part based on the Oyo and Ibadan dialects, it incorporates several features from other dialects.^[10]

History

Main article: History of the Yoruba people

Further information: Ife

Yoruba people are believed to have migrated from Upper Egypt and Nubia around the time of the Exodus of the Book of Genesis. The Yoruba group are assumed to have developed out of undifferentiated Volta-Niger populations by at least the 1st millennium BC. Settlements of early Yoruba speakers are assumed to correspond to those found in the wider Niger area from about the 4th century BC, especially at Ife.

The prehistoric settlement at Ife appears to have entered a "golden age" with the appearance of urban structures by the 12th century. This seems to be the formative period of the Yoruba people as reflected in oral tradition and continues to be seen as the "spiritual homeland" of the Yoruba. Ife was surpassed by the Oyo Empire as the dominant Yoruba military and political power in the 17th century.^[11] The oba or ruler of Ife is referred to as the Ooni of Ife.^[12]

The Oyo Empire was active in the African slave trade during the 18th century. The Yoruba often demanded slaves as a form of tribute of subject populations, who in turn sometimes made war on other peoples to capture the required slaves. Part of the slaves sold by the Oyo Empire entered the Atlantic slave trade.^[13] The *oba* or ruler of Oyo is referred to as the Alaafin of Oyo.

Most of the city states were controlled by Obas (or royal sovereigns with various individual titles) and councils made up of Oloyes, recognised leaders of royal, noble and, often, even common descent, who joined them in ruling over the kingdoms through a series of guilds and cults. Different states saw differing ratios of power between the kingships and the chiefs' councils. Some such as Oyo had powerful, autocratic monarchs with almost total control, while

in others such as the Ijebu city-states, the senatorial councils held more influence and the power of the ruler or *Oba*, referred to as the Awujale of Ijebuland, was more limited.

Yoruba settlements are often described as primarily one or more of the main social groupings called "generations":

- The "first generation" includes towns and cities known as original capitals of founding Yoruba states/kingdoms.
- The "second generation" consists of settlements created by conquest.
- The "third generation" consists of villages and municipalities that emerged following the internecine wars of the 19th century.

Pre-colonial government of Yoruba society

Main article: Yorubaland

See also: Oyo Empire & Political Structure

Oyo Empire and surrounding states.

Monarchies were a common form of government in Yorubaland, but they were not the only approach to government and social organization. The numerous Ijebu city-states to the west of Oyo and the *igba* communities, found in the forests below *iyi's* savanna region, were notable exceptions. These independent polities often elected an *Oba*, though real political, legislative, and judicial powers resided with the *Ogboni*, a council of notable elders. The notion of the divine king was so important to the Yoruba, that it has been part of their organization in its various forms from their antiquity to the contemporary era.

During the internecine wars of the 19th century, the Ijebu forced citizens of more than 150 *igba* and Owu communities to migrate to the fortified city of Abeokuta. Each quarter retained its own *Ogboni* council of civilian leaders, along with an *Olorogun*, or council of military leaders, and in some cases its own elected *Obas* or *Baales*. These independent councils elected their most capable members to join a federal civilian and military council that represented the city as a whole. Commander Frederick Forbes, a representative of the British Crown writing an account of his visit to the city in the *Church Military Intelligencer* (1853),^[14] described Abeokuta as having "four presidents", and the system of government as having "840 principal rulers or 'House of Lords,' 2800 secondary chiefs or 'House of Commons,' 140 principal military ones and 280 secondary ones." He described Abeokuta and its system of government as "the most extraordinary republic in the world."

Leadership

Gerontocratic leadership councils that guarded against the monopolization of power by a monarch were a trait of the *igba*, according to the eminent *iyi* historian Reverend Samuel Johnson. Such councils were also well-developed among the northern Okun groups, the eastern Ekiti, and other groups falling under the Yoruba ethnic umbrella. In *iyi*, the most centralized of the precolonial kingdoms, the *Alaafin* consulted on all political decisions with the chief/prime elector or president of the House of Lords (the *Basorun*) and the council of leading nobles known as the *Oyo Mesi*.

City-states

A Yoruba trader, 1890-1893

The monarchy of any city-state was usually limited to a number of royal lineages. A family could be excluded from kingship and chieftaincy if any family member, servant, or slave belonging to the family committed a crime, such as theft, fraud, murder or rape. In other city-states, the monarchy was open to the election of any free-born male citizen. In Ilesa, Ondo, and other Yoruba communities, there were several, but comparatively rare, traditions of female *Obas*. The kings were traditionally almost always polygamous and often married royal family members from other domains.^[15] Ibadan, a city-state and proto-empire founded in the 18th century by a polyglot group of refugees, soldiers, and itinerant traders from *Ẹ̀yọ́* and the other Yorubá sub-groups largely dispensed with the concept of monarchism, preferring to elect both military and civil councils from a pool of eminent citizens. The city became a military republic, with distinguished soldiers wielding political powers through their election by popular acclaim and the respect of their peers. Similar practices were adopted by the *jẹ̀sa* and other groups, which saw a corresponding rise in the social influence of military adventurers and successful entrepreneurs.

Groups, organizations and leagues in Yorubaland

Occupational guilds, social clubs, secret or initiatory societies, and religious units, commonly known as *Ẹ̀gbà* in Yorubá, included the *Parakoyi* (or league of traders) and *Egbe Odẹ* (hunter's guild), and maintained an important role in commerce, social control, and vocational education in Yoruba polities. There are also examples of other peer organizations in the region. When the *Ẹ̀gbà* resisted the imperial domination of the *Ẹ̀yọ́* Empire, a figure named Lisabi is credited with either creating or reviving a covert traditional organization named *Egbe Aro*. This group, originally a farmers' union, was converted to a network of secret militias throughout the *Ẹ̀gbà* forests, and each lodge plotted to overthrow *Ẹ̀yọ́*'s *Ajeles* (appointed administrators) in the late 18th century.

Similarly, covert military resistance leagues like the *Ekiti Parapo* and the *Ogidi* alliance were organized during the 19th century wars by often-decentralized communities of the *Ekiti*, *Iṣá*, *Igbómìnà* and *Okun Yoruba* in order to resist various imperial expansionist plans of Ibadan, Nupe, and the Sokoto Caliphate.

Society and culture

Main article: Yoruba culture

In the city-states and many of their neighbors, a reserved way of life remains, with the school of thought of their people serving as a major influence in West Africa and elsewhere.

Today, most contemporary Yoruba are Christians and Muslims. Be that as it may, many of the principles of the traditional faith of their ancestors are either knowingly or unknowingly upheld by a significant proportion of the populations of Nigeria, Benin and Togo

Traditional religion and mythology

Main article: Yoruba religion

Further information: Yoruba medicine

The Yoruba faith, variously known as Aborisha, Orisha-Ifa or simply (and erroneously) Ifa, is commonly seen as one of the principal components of the syncretic pool known as the African traditional religions. It largely survived the so-called middle passage, and is seen in a variety of forms in the New World as a result.

Ife bronze casting of a king dated around the 12th Century

Orisa'nla (The great divinity) also known as Ọbatala was the arch-divinity chosen by Olodumare, the Supreme, to create solid land out of the primordial water that constituted the earth and populating the land with human beings.^[16] Ọbatala descended from heaven on a chain, carrying a small snail shell full of earth, palm kernels and a five-toed chicken. He was to empty the content of the snail shell on the water after placing some pieces of iron on it, and then to place the chicken on the earth to spread it over the primordial water.



Philosophy

Yoruba culture consists of folk/cultural philosophy, religion and folktales. They are embodied in Ifa-Ife Divination, known as the tripartite Book of Enlightenment in Yorubaland and in Diaspora.

Yoruba philosophy is a witness of two epochs. The first epoch is an epoch-making history in cosmogony and cosmology. This is also an epoch-making history in oral philosophy in oral culture during which time Oduduwa was the philosopher, the head, the Bringer of Light, and a prominent diviner. He theorized about the visible and invisible worlds, reminiscing about cosmogony, cosmology, and the mythological creatures in the visible and invisible worlds.

The second epoch is the epoch of metaphysical philosophy. This commenced in the 19th century in terms of the academic prowess of Dr. Bishop Ajayi Crowther, the first African Anglican Bishop.

Although religion is often considered first in Yoruba culture, nonetheless, it is philosophy, the thought of man and the reasoning of the mind that actually leads the faculty (ori) to the creation and the practice of religion. Thus philosophy is antecedent to religion.

Today, the academic and the nonacademic community are becoming more and more interested in Yoruba philosophy. Thus more and more researches are being carried out on Yoruba philosophy, as more and more books are being written on it—embossing its mark and advancing its research amongst non-African thinkers and political scientists who are beginning to open their doors to other cultures, widening their views.

One thing to remember is that Yoruba philosophy is mainly a narrative philosophy, explicating and pointing to the knowledge of the causes and the nature of things, affecting the corporeal and the spiritual universe and its wellness. Yoruba people regale in hundreds of philosophical aphorisms and lore, and they believe that any lore that widens people's horizons and presents pabulum for thought is the beginning of philosophy.

Mythology

Main article: Oduduwa

Oral history of the Oyo-Yoruba recounts **Odùduwà** to be the Progenitor of the Yoruba and the reigning ancestor of their crowned kings.

His coming from the east, sometimes understood by some sources as the "vicinity" true East on the Cardinal points, but more likely signifying the region of Ekiti and Okun sub-communities in northeastern Yorubaland/central Nigeria. Ekiti is near the confluence of the Niger and Benue rivers, and is where the Yoruba language is presumed to have separated from related ethno-linguistic groups like Igala, Igbo, and Edo.^[17]

Upon the disappearance of Oduduwa, there was a dispersal of his children from Ife to found other kingdoms. Each making their mark in the subsequent urbanization and consolidation of Yoruba confederacy of kingdoms, with each kingdom tracing its origin to Ile-Ife.

After the dispersal, the aborigines became difficult, and constituted a serious threat to the survival of Ife. Thought to be survivors of the old occupants of the land before the arrival of Oduduwa, these people now turned themselves into marauders. They would come to town in costumes made of raffia with terrible and fearsome appearances, and burn down houses and loot the markets. Then came Moremi on the scene; she was said to have played a significant role in the quelling of the marauders advancements. But this was at a great price; having to give up her only son Oluorogbo. The reward for her patriotism and selflessness was not to be reaped in one life time as she later passed on and was thereafter immortalized. The Edi festival celebrates this feat till date.^[18]

Christianity and Islam

Traditional Yoruba religious practices such as the Eyo and Osun Oshogbo festivals are witnessing a resurgence in popularity in contemporary Yorubaland. They are largely seen by the adherents of the modern faiths, especially the Christians and Muslims, as cultural rather than religious events. They participate in them as a means to boost tourist industries in their local economies. There are a lot of Yoruba Pastors with large congregations, e.g. Pastor Enoch Adeboye of the Redeemed Christian Church of God and Pastor David Oyedepo of Living Faith Church World Wide also known as Winners Chapel.

Twins in Yoruba society

Main article: Ibeji

Ibeji twins.

The Yoruba present the highest dizygotic twinning rate in the world (4.4% of all maternities).^[19] The Yoruba have the highest rate of twinning in the world, at 45-50 twin sets (or 90-100 twins) per 1,000 live births, possibly because of high consumption of a specific type of yam containing a natural phytoestrogen which may stimulate the ovaries to release an egg from each side. Twins are very important for the Yoruba and they usually tend to give special names to each twin.^[20] The first of the twins to be born is traditionally named *Taiyewo* or *Tayewo*, which means 'the first to taste the world', this is often shortened to *Taiwo*, *Taiye* or *Taye*. *Kehinde*, or *Kehin* for short, is the name of the last born twin. Kehinde is sometimes also referred to as

Kehindegbegbon which is short for Omokehindegbegbon and means, 'the child that came last gets the rights of the eldest'.

Calendar

Main article: Yoruba calendar

Time is measured in **isheju** or **iseju** (minutes), **wakati** (hours), **ojo** (days), **ose** (weeks), **oshu** or **osu** (months) and **odun** (years). There are 60 isheju in 1 wakati; 24 wakati in 1 ojo; 7 ojo in 1 ose; 4 ose in 1 oshu and 52 ose in 1 odun. There are 12 oshu in 1 odun.^[21]

Months in Yoruba calendar: Months in Gregorian calendar:^[22]

Sere	January
Erele	February
Erena	March
Igbe	April
Obibi	May
Okudu	June
Agemo	July
Ogun	August
Owere (Owewe)	September
Owara (Owawa)	October
Belu	November
Ope	December

The Yoruba calendar (Kojoda) year starts from 3 June to 2 June of the following year.^[23] According to this calendar, the Gregorian year 2008 A. D. is the 10050th year of Yoruba culture.^[24] To reconcile with the Gregorian calendar, Yoruba people also often measure time in seven days a week and four weeks a month:

Modified days in Yoruba calendar Days in Gregorian calendar

Ojo-Aiku	Sunday
Ojo-Aje	Monday
Ojo-Ishegun	Tuesday
Ojo-'Ru	Wednesday
Ojo-Bo	Thursday
Ojo-Eti	Friday
Ojo-Abameta	Saturday ^[25]

Demographics

Benin

The Yoruba are the main group in the Benin department of Ouémé, all Subprefectures; Collines Province, all subprefectures; Plateau Province, all Subprefectures; Borgou Province, Tchaourou Subprefecture; Zou Province, Ouïhni and Zogbodome Subprefecture; Donga Province, Bassila Subprefecture and Alibori, Kandi Subprefecture.

Nigeria



Yoruba area in Nigeria.

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2. ^ Benin at CIA World Factbook: "Yoruba and related 12.3%" out of a population of 9.6 million (2012 estimate)
3. ^ ^{a b c} Joshuaproject.net "The exactness of numbers presented here can be misleading. Numbers can vary by several percentage points or more."
4. ^ mostly in the United States; Joshuaproject.net estimates 186,000 in the US. About 3,000 in Canada: "Ethnic origins, 2006 counts, for Canada, provinces and territories". bottom: Statistics Canada. <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/hlt/97-562/pages/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo=PR&Code=01&Table=2&Data=Count&StartRec=1&Sort=3&Display=All&CSDFilter=5000>. Retrieved 2010-04-04.. In Canada, 19,520 identified as *Nigerian* and 61,430 as *Canadians*.
5. ^ Mostly in the UK (Joshuaproject.net estimates 94,000), about 6,000 in Greece.
6. ^ The number of speakers of Yoruba was estimated at around 20 million in the 1990s. No reliable estimate of more recent date is known. *Metzler Lexikon Sprache* (4th ed. 2010) estimates roughly 30 million based on population growth figures during the 1990s and 2000s. The population of Nigeria (where the majority of Yoruba live) has grown by 44% between 1995 and 2010, so that the Metzler estimate for 2010 appears plausible.
7. ^ This widely followed classification is based on Adetugbô's (1982) dialectological study — the classification originated in his 1967 PhD thesis *The Yoruba Language in Western Nigeria: Its Major Dialect Areas*. See also Adetugbô 1973:183-193.
8. ^ Adetugbô 1973:192-3. (See also the section Dialects.)
9. ^ Adetugbô 1973:185.

10. ^ Cf. for example the following remark by Adetugbò (1967, as cited in Fagborun 1994:25): "While the orthography agreed upon by the missionaries represented to a very large degree the phonemes of the Abẹokuta dialect, the morpho-syntax reflected the Ọyọ-Ibadan dialects".
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