

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family:

The Ijo or Ejo. Also called Ijaw, which is the anglicised version of a variation of Ujo or Ojo, the ancestor his name to the people. It's the main subgroup of the Ijoid group of Niger-Congo languages.

1.2 ISO code:

639

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Niger Delta, Nigeria. 5.3261° N, 6.4708° E

1.4 Brief history:

The Oru, the original tribe of the Niger River Delta, are said to have "dropped from the sky" (to say the Orus were of divine origin) and were later joined by the Kumoni-Oru from Nubia who'd been sent by their king to establish a strategic camp. Both groups established communities as one people, the Ijo.

The original settlements were in the western & central delta, from where they spread out to people the whole Niger Delta. This period has been estimated to have occurred between 500 BC to 1000 AD.

These original ancestors were spiritual initiates of the ancient African spiritual initiation system of the CREATOR TEM (TEMUNO). They made heavy symbolic ritualistic use of the water, and hence have been referred to as the "Water People," Beni-Otu.

Historically, the forty tribes consisted of villages tied together in loose confederations by marriage bonds and tradition, but more recently, they've started unifying more and more.

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors:

Without the waves of migration of people escaping war from Nubia, the Ijo would never have existed at all and they were some of the first Nigerians to have contact with europeans, serving as middle men in the slave trade. 95% of the Ijo are now christian, mostly catholic and anglican, instead of the traditional water based religion.

Ondo State contains the largest number of public schools in Nigeria - over 880 primary schools and 190 secondary schools.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The Niger River floods yearly, providing fertile soil for the farmers of the region.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

Estimated around 200,000 to 500,000.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice and yams.

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish.

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Spears.

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Very few tasks were exclusively done by women or men. It was agreed that, apart from giving birth, men and women perform all other tasks. Roles specific to men were identified as: - digging graves, fathering a child, digging pit latrines, paying bride prices, marrying women and `disciplining'

women.

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

No.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Some of the kin-based trading lineages that arose among the Ijaw developed into substantial corporations which were known as "Houses", each of which elects a leader and holds a fleet of war canoes for protecting trade. The other main occupations have traditionally been fishing and farming.

Being a maritime people, many Ijaws were employed in the merchant shipping sector in the early and mid-20th century (pre-Nigerian independence).

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Males: 172.2 cm

Females: 141.3 cm

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Males: 81 kg (178.57lbs)

Females: 55 kg (121 lbs)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

There are two forms of marriage, both involving bride-wealth. In a small-dowry marriage, the groom must offer a payment to the wife's family, which is typically cash. In this type of marriage, the children trace their line of inheritance through their mother to her family. This means that when they grow up the children have more choices as to where they can live: with their father's or mother's people. The second type of marriage is a large-dowry marriage, which means that the children belong to the father's family. These marriages are rare, and wives are not usually from the local community.

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Women are traditionally married at around 16, though, recently Nigerian law has discouraged child marriage, declaring that parents should not arrange marriages for girls below the age of 18 .

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

Not high, though some do occur.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

High, most men have at least two wives. Each wife has her own bedroom and kitchen, usually in a single house. Ijo wives are not ranked, and ideally, each is treated equally and has equal access to her husband.

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

Yes. Sometimes large, sometimes small depending on whether the children will be regarded as part of the mother's or father's families.

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Dependant on bride price.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Not generally accepted.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

The Ijaw have been marrying outside of their tribe since at least the fifteenth century, when the matrilineal inheritance pattern became inconvenient due to different Houses vying for monopoly over trade.

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?

Both parents are recognized as having contributed to the child, the male gives his sperm.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

Both parents are recognized as having contributed to the child, the mother gives an egg and womb.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Marriages are not always consensual and due to conflict in the region, rape is sometimes used as a weapon.

4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)

There doesn't seem to be one. Because the Ijo intermarry with other tribes and villages so much, there's really no need for them to worry about how far away someone must be on the family tree in order to produce viable offspring.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Circumcision is practiced for reasons of preventing promiscuity, cleanliness, and being a better wife.

Depending on region, the Ijaw practice female circumcision is one of three ways:

1) clitoridectomy is the excision of the prepuce, with or without partial or total excision of the clitoris.

2) excision is excision of the clitoris with partial or total excision of the labia minora.

3) infibulation is the partial or total excision of the external genitalia and stitching or narrowing of the raw labial surfaces, leaving a small posterior opening for urinary and menstrual flow.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
Dependant on bride price, though traditionally matrilineal

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Yes, several different ones depending on region. During some of them, new husbands have to send money to clear "obstacles" in the road for the bridal party in order for them to make it to the wedding. In other places, there are post wedding parties which last for days.

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)

It doesn't matter whether the spouse is from within or without the tribe or community or whether the person who's marrying in is male or female.

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?

Sometimes. Girls can be betrothed from birth by their parents or at any age after, or a courtship might take place when she reaches appropriate age.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Warfare/homicide

Egbesu is the god of warfare and the spiritual foundation for combating evil. He can only be invoked in defence or to correct an injustice by people who are in tune with the universe. Recently, members of the cult, known as the Egbesu Boys, have been fighting against authorities in the Niger Delta in response to environmental and economic problems caused by oil exploitation. Young men who have joined the cult undergo initiations which impart the powers of Egbesu. The initiation involves being etched with scars on some hidden part of the body. Followers often believe the charms and the cult initiations make them bulletproof.

4.1 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.2 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.3 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.4 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

During the 17th and 18th centuries, the Ijaw served as middle men, taking people from neighboring tribes and selling them to the Europeans.

Despite this, for most of their history, the Ijaw have been known as a fairly peaceful people, however, they do have a tendency to rebel against governments they deem to be unjust (such as the British) and as of late, they've come into conflict with foreign oil companies. The Ijaw Youths Council began in 1998 "to struggle peacefully for freedom, self-determination and ecological justice".

4.5 Cannibalism?

No.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Static.

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes):

People in the eastern region of the delta traditionally lived in small villages and towns that were run by a system of chiefs who were family or clan heads. High status is normally awarded in accordance with elaborate hierarchical systems and often results only after payments have been made to those already holding titles. People from the western and central Delta regions acknowledged no central authorities until the British.

5.4 Post marital residence:

Married couples live in the husband's house, sometimes shared with his family.

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

The Ijaw are spread out all over the Niger River Delta, and even a little to the North as well.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc:

5.12 Trade:

Routes connecting to other tribes were established as early as the 15th century and in the 1600s the Ijo served as middle men to slave traders from Europe and African tribes to the north. Recently, the products produced most for trade have been yams and palm oil.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

The fabric from which a person's clothes are made. Higher quality cloth means higher social status.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Witches - It is their malevolent acts which gave rise to the general saying that the fear of witches is the beginning of wisdom. They are said to hold meetings at night under big trees or in clearings, travel invisibly through the air and are capable of changing into any animal, their favorites being rats to take peoples' money and render them poor, snakes to attack and kill enemies, owls and other birds to pluck their target's eyes out, bats to suck their enemy's blood, cats and dogs. They tamper with the fertility by either eating the foetus, stopping the growth of the baby in the womb or eating the woman's eggs and either drink, steal or damage men's sperm, making it impossible to impregnate. They are also said to be capable of disrupting and changing the course of one's life and turning it to extreme failure by stopping good things from happening. Most importantly, they are said to suck human blood and eat people. It is believed that at their meetings they must dance naked. It is also believed that at their meetings (when they are held in houses), the hostess must offer one of her children to be killed and eaten by members.

Such a fear of witches lead to gruesome ways of disposing of them. They are stoned to death, or drowned, tied to a log and thrown into the swamp. The witch's eyes were also torn out so she would be unable to find her way back to earth to continue to perpetuate her evil deeds. If a notorious witch was found, she was tied to a stake and burned alive.

If one met a suspected witch at night, all one had to do to render the witch powerless was to call her name first, then throw a handful of earth at her.

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal):

It is not unusual for Ijaw children to be expert swimmers and divers. By the time they reach the age of ten, most have become prolific.

6.4 Other rituals:

There are many festivals and masquerades in which Ijaw men dawn costumes and masks and carry weapons and dance "like fishes".

6.5 Myths (Creation):

"There was a once a large field, and in this field stood an enormous Iroko tree with large buttresses. At the sides of the field appeared pairs of men and women, each woman holding a broom and each man a bag. As the women swept the field the men collected the dirt into their bags. And the dirt was manilas [wealth]. Some collected ten or more manillas, others none, and when the field was swept clean they disappeared back into the edges of the field, two by two. The sky darkened, and there descended on the field a large table, a large chair, and an immense 'Creation Stone', and on the table was large quantity of earth. Then there was lightning and thunder; and Woyingi descended. She seated herself on the chair and placed her feet on the 'Creation Stone'. Out of the earth, on the table Woyingi moulded human beings. But they had no life and were neither man nor woman, and Woyingi, embracing them one by one, breathed her breath into them, and they became living beings. But they were still neither men nor women, and so Woyingi asked them one by one to choose to be man or woman, each according to their choice. Next Woyingi asked them, one by one, what manner of life each should like to lead on earth. Some asked for riches, some for children, some for short lives, and all manner of things. And these Woyingi bestowed on them one by one, each according to their wish. Then Woyingi asked them one by one by which manner of death they would return to her. And out of the diseases that afflict the earth they chose each a disease. To all these wishes Woyingi said, 'So be it'."

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

The most famous of the Ijaw art is definitely the traditional river masks made from carved wood, which embody water spirits (owuamapu). Mostly these are depictions of human heads built up of geometric shapes and combined with animal and abstracting qualities.

Musically, the Ijaw have traditionally used drums, percussion planks and other idiophones. These are still used during cultural festivals to accompany dances such as the Fisherman's Dance, the Egbelegbele Sei and the Wind and Trees Dance in addition to horns and other contemporary instruments.

New types of music have popped up over the years as well, including a genre of gospel which sounds a bit more like reggae or ska, making much use of trumpets and other horns, than American gospel. Popular music of the Ijaw seems to hold to this emphasis on horn, percussive, and steady, slow beats as well.

Another artform the Ijo are famous for is the memorial screen, which is a carved plank of wood depicting the deceased. They were made when members of trading families died and were kept in the trading house and given offerings of food and drink.

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

95% of the Ijaw categorize themselves as Christians and perform a form of gospel music all their own.

6.9 RCR revival:

Most shifts towards revival of older customs seem to stem from practicalities, such as knowing how to fish and swim, rather than a feeling of spiritual lacking within the communities.

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

It is believed that one is always being watched by the spirit of his ancestors and must show appreciation to the dead and pray to them for future well being. Before each meal, one offers a bit of their food to the ancestors by tossing it to the ground and calling out the names of his ancestors, and every eight days, food and drink are set out specifically for them. Every seven years a goat's blood is sprinkled in front of images or pillars representative of the ancestors.

It is against tribal law to speak badly of a spirit. If someone does speak ill of the dead and refuses to apologize, the insulted family retaliates by speaking against his dead family. When apologies are made, they all perform an atonement ceremony.

One can also pray to the spirits at special shrines to ask for help in emergencies. Everyone has two souls - the eternal ego and the life force that dies with the body. Both souls leave the body with the last breath, but the life force can also leave before death at times of great fear. If this soul does not return, the body dies. The eternal soul leaves the body on the last breath and takes the form of a ghost, shadow, or reflection, so it's considered dangerous to step on a shadow. Mirrors are often used so evil spirits will strike the image of the soul reflected in the mirror and not the actual soul.

As in many religions across the world, there is a Ghost King, Nduen-Ama; and a ghost messenger, Ffe, who appears as a skeleton and brings death upon a person by striking him at the base of the skull with a large staff; a ferryman, Asasaba, who brings good souls across the river of death to be reincarnated into trees, animals or other living things.

Although different ethnic groups believe in different forms of reincarnation for good and bad souls, all believe in karma. For example, in one tribe, a good soul could become a cow, elephant, or leopard; in another tribe, good people may be reborn as trees, whereas in a third tribe, only evil people become plants after they die.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No, ancestors are revered and loved. To speak ill of them, though, is taboo.

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

The Ijaw believe in water spirits called Owuamapu which people live with before they're born and, because they're regarded as so closely tied to the Ijaw people, are prominent in the pantheon. In addition, the Ijaw practice a form of divination called Igbadai, in which recently deceased individuals are interrogated on the causes of their death.

Some of this water religion has permeated certain aspects of christianity in the region, leading to beliefs of mermaids and mami watas, which is now thought of as a sort of monster that kidnaps, drowns and temps and can be kept at bay with the lord's prayer.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

Women braid their hair or crop it close and wear it under a head cloth.

Men crop their hair short.

7.4 Scarification:

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

Both men and women of all ages wear necklaces of huge coral beads on formal occasions. Beads are also made of ivory, but only the rich wear these.

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

The day to day wears of the Ijaw man is a shirt and trouser made of a wax material. While the ceremonial dress of the Bayelsa man is a big long-sleeved shirt worn over a long piece of wrapper tied from the waist down to the ankle and most times thrown over the shoulder.

A blouse is worn over a wrap tied from the waist to just below the knee for young girls and unmarried women, while married women wear a wrap from waist to ankle and the blouse worn on top with a wrap tied over it from waist to knee. The ceremonial dress for women is the same pattern, but with higher quality fabric and worn with a head tie and beads. Women of royal blood may wear the two wraps without the blouse, as can maidens during wedding ceremonies.

7.8 Missionary effect:

Many of the Ijo will blend European fashion into their traditional attire, for example, women dressed in the traditional wraps, blouse and beads might also wear their head tie loosely, so their straightened hair shows and wear western styled make up. Men will also blend traditional and European style in the wearing of top hats and carrying of canes along with traditional attire.

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. <http://ogbia.webs.com/theijawsorigin.htm> history
2. <http://www.ijawfoundation.org/people.htm> history
3. [http://medicine.inonu.edu.tr/tfdergi/index.php/public/article/viewFile/4\(3\)261-264/pdf_290](http://medicine.inonu.edu.tr/tfdergi/index.php/public/article/viewFile/4(3)261-264/pdf_290) Equations for calculation of height and weight
4. <http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:http://www.bmijournal.org/index.php/bmi/article/view/5/6> Statistics used in calculation of height and weight
5. http://repository.kulib.kyoto-u.ac.jp/dspace/bitstream/2433/68044/1/ASM_9_197.pdf and <http://www.ajtmh.org/content/81/5/784.full> Circumcision
6. <http://woyingi.wordpress.com/about-woyingi/an-ijaw-story-journey-to-the-presence-of-woyingi/> Myth
7. http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/docum/ljawyouth.html IYC
8. http://www.nigerdeltacongress.com/warticles/witchcraft_myth_of_a_curious_ins.htm Witchcraft
9. <http://www.articlesbase.com/womens-issues-articles/gender-sensitivity-among-nigerian-ethnic-group-228474.html> Labor division
10. http://www.gateway-africa.com/tribe/ijo_tribe.html misc.