

Nzema

1. Description

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

In Ghana, both the language and society are called Nzema or Nzema. In Côte d'Ivoire, the people are known as Appolo. It belongs to the Niger-Congo language family (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com):

nzi (1)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire, Africa. 7.4490° N, 0.9056° W (1)

1.4 Brief history:

The first Nzema settled Ghana around 1230 AD. They came from Bono in North-West Ghana. The foundation of the Nzema kingdom dates back to 1470. From 1503 to 1831 they suffered from transatlantic deportation. Europeans built 3 important forts for the slave trade on the coast where the Nzema lived, many of them were sent as slaves to the Americas. Recent studies assert that African American and Black Caribbeans share up to 35% of their genotypes with Nzema descendants. Slave traders particularly valued them for their physiques and handsome appearance and nicknamed them "appolo" as a designation of their high quality.

European colonization started with the creation of the British colony of Gold Coast (now Ghana) in 1822. In 1831 most of the kingdom was occupied by the British. There was a civil war in 1841 that led to the relocation of the throne into what is now Côte d'Ivoire. Ghana became independent in 1957 and Côte d'Ivoire in 1960. (2)

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

The Nzema actually welcome missionaries and other volunteer organizations because these people bring education with them. Education is very important to the Nzema, especially in today's society so that kids can get better jobs than just farmers. There are a lot of missionaries there currently, mainly working in village schools. I read an article about a King about 15 years ago who would not let missionaries and other non-Nzema people into their territory. The people actually got very angry with him and made him give up his position and picked a new king. The article said that during this time there was a large shortfall in education so since then they have always welcomed missionaries and other similar organizations. (6)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

tropical; warm and comparatively dry along southeast coast; hot and humid in the south where the Nzema live.

Mostly plains and plateaus, but with an occasional forest. (3)

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

Population: 328,700 speakers worldwide. (1)

Villages are comprised of three or more lineages, or families. In one of the articles I looked at, it talked about a coastal village with 336 inhabitants. (7)

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Rice, peanuts, cassava, cocoa, yam and plantain. (3)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Fish. (7)

2.3 *Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:*

2.4 *Food storage:*

2.5 *Sexual division of production:*

Women take on most domestic and childcare duties while men take on more labor oriented roles. Production of crafts is divided. Weaving, carving and metal work is done by men while pottery and food production is done by women. Women work on their husband's farms but will also maintain farms of their own. Capital funding is usually provided by the husband but women control any money they receive from their own efforts. Wives are financially responsible for feeding their husband and children as well as providing for any other child related expenses. (5)

2.6 *Land tenure:*

Use a system similar to share-cropping. The chief of the village owns the land and everyone in the village works it. If you are bad, you may have to work more than others if the chief says so. (8)

2.7 *Ceramics:*

Women make hand painted ceramics that are sometimes sold in markets. (2)

2.8 *Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:*

2.9 *Food taboos:*

2.10 *Canoes/watercraft?*

Although they live near the ocean, the Nzema do not use boats in any situations other than fishing. Then, they only use small canoes or rafts. (7)

3. Anthropometry

3.1 *Mean adult height (m and f):*

Males: 5ft 6 in

Females: 5 ft 2 in (4)

3.2 *Mean adult weight (m and f):*

Males: 150 lbs

Females: 140 lbs (4)

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 *Age at menarche (f):*

4.2 *Age at first birth (m and f):*

Usually very early, depending on how young a girl was upon getting married. The prettier, higher status girls tend to get married around age 15 or 16, thus having more time to produce children than those women who do not get married until later. (5)

4.3 *Completed family size (m and f):*

Women aim to have a total of seven children, it is considered a lucky number. (5)

4.4 *Inter-birth-interval (f):*

Average, about 3 years. No taboos or customs associated with inter-birth.

4.5 *Age first marriage (m and f):*

Men must earn enough money to buy the bride, so it usually takes them longer to marry than girls. Girls are eligible for marriage as soon as they start menstruating. (7)

4.6 *Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:*

A marriage can only end in divorce if the woman is infertile. A man may then choose to get a divorce, or, if he is rich enough, he can marry another woman and have two wives.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Although polygamy is not technically recognized, it is a tribal tradition that still exists and may occur in some rural areas, but not often. Chief status is marked by the ability to marry many women. (5)

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

The groom's family must pay the "bride-price", which is decided by the mother of the bride, who usually also is the one arranging the marriage. (5)

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

Social positions as well as personal belongings and assets are passed down through the uterine or matriarchal line. Territory is usually owned collectively by the village, the chief is in charge of that. (7)

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

Infants are treated with indulgence. They are constantly with their mothers who carry them wrapped in a shawl on their backs throughout the day. They sleep with their parents and are breast fed on demand up to the age of two. Babies receive lots of stimulation and social contact from siblings and other relatives.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

No homosexuality, or it is not discussed in society. I did not see it mentioned in any research.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Do not practice exogamy; marry within their own group. (7)

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

The Nzema are well educated on sex and know how procreation works. Some even use birth control, which they receive from missionaries and other volunteers. (7)

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

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

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

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

Historically, it was preferred to marry a patrilineal cross-cousin, but Western culture has diminished the popularity of the custom nowadays. Most people consider it odd, but not unheard of, to marry your cousin. (7)

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Once a male and female are married, that is their partner for life. There is no information about what may go on before marriage, but I expect that both males and females were allowed to be fairly promiscuous, just based on surrounding tribes and their customs. (7)

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

If there are children from extramarital affairs, their presence is ignored. (7)

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

The grandmother may raise the children if she is still alive, or the mother's sister. Usually the most dominant female in their lives other than the mom; there is not a set rule. (7)

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

About 60% is female, 40% male. (7)

4.22 Evidence for couvades

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

The Nzema use the same word to label your father, your father's brothers, and those uncles' sons (your male cousins on your father's side). (7)

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

Matrilineal descent for almost everything. A husband must go live with his wife's family, where the mother-in-law is in charge until she dies. Then the wife becomes head of the household. (2) Social positions as well as personal belongings and assets are passed down through the uterine or matriarchal line. (7)

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

Not really. Once the dowry has been handed over to the bride's family, the man is now allowed to live with them and share a bed with his wife. Society recognizes their union as soon as he moves in to the home. (7)

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

There does not seem to be any cases of name changing. Even when two people are married, they keep the same names as they were given at birth. (5)

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

Within the community, the only swapping that goes on is in between the lineages within a tribe. (7)

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

Traditionally family elders arranged marriages with the groom's family paying the "bride-price". (5)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

There does not seem to be any class limitations about marriage. If you can afford the bride, then you can have her. It is as simple as that. (5)

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Not much in-group killing. The village all works together on the land, so they must have a strong community. I'm sure there are feuds and arguments, but they do not result in a lot of killing. (9)

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

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

There is no information about Nzema warfare. They have peace treaties with neighboring tribes, so that leads me to suspect that there may have been violence in the past. If there was, I did not find any research about it. Also, many of them were captured by whites and sold into slavery. Some articles mentioned that they did not put up much of a fight, they just went and hid in the forest. Therefore, I do not think they are very aggressive. (9)

4.18 Cannibalism?

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

I read one study where they went to a village of 336 people, but I do not know how this compares to other village sizes. (7)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

They do not migrate. Villages have been in the same area for hundreds of years. However, in the mid 1900s, Ghana was under strict British rule and many Nzema were mistreated. A group of angry Nzema left their land and traveled to Côte d'Ivoire. They renamed themselves Appolo, for reasons unknown. Although they live fairly far apart from their relatives in Ghana, the Appolo still speak the same language and have most of the same customs. (2)

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

The political organization is hierarchical in structure, based on the *abusua*, the family, and headed by the *ahenfie*, the royal court. The King, *hene* and the queen mother, *obahene* are institutions personifying the nation. Actual decision-making power lies with an assembly of notables representing local chiefdoms. This assembly elects the king from among candidates of royal blood. (2)

5.4 *Post marital residence:*

With the wife's family, matrilineal. (2)

5.5 *Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):*

5.6 *Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):*

5.7 *Special friendships/joking relationships:*

5.8 *Village and house organization:*

The village is in the middle of the communal land. The chief's hut is the biggest and is usually in the middle, all the other houses are scattered around that. Houses are made with palm tree leaves and branches woven together. (7)

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:*

See question 5.13.

5.12 *Trade:*

They work with other tribes in the coconut fields and mines, however they mainly stick to themselves. (7)

5.13 *Indications of social hierarchies?*

Women are considered to have a more important role than men. Their society follows a dominant matriarchy.

Nzema women hold important social roles within their extended families. Elder women have authority over other women and are valued as advisors and keepers of family history. (2)

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 *Time allocation to RCR:*

Once a year, they have a very large festival with all the indigenous tribes in southern Ghana. This festival is a large celebration of their culture and history. (2)

6.1 *Specialization (shamans and medicine):*

Most healers combine traditional and modern medicine treatments believing that many illnesses have supernatural causes. Therefore, they must treat them with ancestral magic, yet they know that modern medicine works too. (5)

6.2 *Stimulants:*

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

There are very large puberty rituals that are performed within the family home. However, there is not much information around about this because only family members who have already undergone the ceremony are allowed to be there. (7)

6.4 *Other rituals:*

6.5 *Myths (Creation):*

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

Most Nzema and other Ghana cultures would consider themselves Christian, however, they do not engage in most practices of Western Christians. Almost of all of their rituals are traditional and have been the same for many generations. (5)

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

Funerals tend to be an elaborate occasion because Nzemas see it as a time to rejoice the deceased departure to heaven. Different shaped coffins often indicate the profession of the deceased. Many families believe that if they do not provide a decent ceremony, they will be plagued with misfortune sent from the dead.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

Believe in a mix of Christianity and spirits/ghosts. They believe ancestral spirits come back and may make you do some things. Also, a person becomes a ghost if they messed something up during the funeral. That is why the funeral is regarded as so important.

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

Most women have their ears pierced and sometimes put bones in the holes. (7)

7.3 Haircut:

Both men and women like to keep their hair short or covered because of the heat. (7)

7.4 Scarification:

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

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Both males and females wear brightly colored wraps, like sarongs. Sometimes men will wear them only on their lower half. Women also are more likely to wear head scarves. (7)

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

Siblings are all treated pretty equally, regardless of gender or age. Also, cousins are seen as siblings, the same word is used to describe them EXCEPT for your father's brother's sons. (7)

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

Preference to marry your FZD. All other cousins are treated the same as siblings. (7)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

The Nzema are very particular when it comes to manners. When greeting someone, the left hand is considered rude, it is not used shake hands or wave. It is also rude to accept or give a gift with your left hand.

Numbered references

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