Expeditionary Culture Field Guide

MALI

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of 2 parts:

Part 1 introduces "Culture General," the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment.

Part 2 presents "Culture Specific" Mali, focusing on unique cultural features of Malian society and is designed to complement other pre-deployment training. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location.

For further information, visit the Air Force Culture and Language Center (AFCLC) website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ or contact AFCLC's Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil.

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PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all of the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic, representing the importance Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to focus on developing stable political, social, and

economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize these behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – in order to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems among others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the ways different cultures define family or kinship, a deployed military member can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival, although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more sophisticated market economies, producing foodstuffs for

universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

One of our basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different according to our cultural standard.

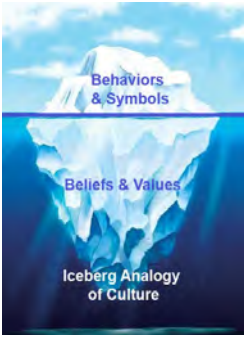
As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Consequently, we assume that individuals falling into the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview– how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people that you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for our actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is physical evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central facet of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply-held beliefs we started developing early in life that have help shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted. Beliefs and values, portrayed by the

deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment in order to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel throughout the African Continent, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common among most African countries. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable or which occurred prior to written language.

Africa has a history that spans the entire existence of humankind. In ancient times prior to the emergence of written languages, history and wisdom were preserved across generations and

ethnic boundaries through oral folk legends or myths. Most early human evolution began as hunting and gathering cultures in East and South Africa, with countries such as Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa renowned for their early human sites. In the last several millennia, the development of agriculture and pastoralism (animal herding) replaced hunting and gathering lifestyles (Photo: *Kutubiyya Mosque* courtesy of CultureGrams, ProQuest, 2013).

Ancient civilizations evolved in all corners of Africa, inspired in part by peoples from the Middle East bringing trade, beliefs, customs, language, and on occasion, colonization. Far from being isolated empires, the African civilizations were intimately connected by commerce and marriage throughout various regions of the continent, and when confronted by outsiders, managed to adapt to their influences. Eventually, Arab traders introduced Islam to Africa and also instituted the Trans-Saharan African slave trade that lasted from the 7th to 19th Centuries.

The “golden age” of European exploration, which lasted from the 18th to mid-20th century, prompted the wholesale exploitation of Africans resources – first human assets through slavery, followed by natural resources such as minerals, precious gems and metals, and wildlife, thereby diminishing most of what was traditional and African.

The introduction of the European Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade altered the slave trade through both the sheer number of Africans enslaved and through the cementing of a racist ideology of Black inferiority to legitimize the institution of slavery. Slavery decimated the African continent for over 400 years through the forced relocation of an estimated 25 to 30 million Africans worldwide. This figure does not include those Africans who died aboard ships or during capture. While abolition of the slave trade dissolved the institution of slavery, it did not end the European

presence on the African continent nor did it drastically alter their attitudes towards Africans.

Starting in the mid-19th century, European colonialism served to redefine African ethnic relations on a large scale; however, as African societies began to resist colonial rule and seek their independence, widespread ethnic conflict and genocide occurred. Sustained westernization and globalization continue to shape the continent through poverty, disease, and social reform. A history still to be recorded, Africa's future identity faces many challenges in critical areas such as environmental change, ethnic strife, women's health and security, and education.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all of the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Traditional African political organizations in the form of bands, tribes, and chiefdoms have existed for several millennia and continue to influence contemporary African governments. Uncommon in modern society, bands are limited to hunting and gathering economies, such as the !Kung of the southern African Kalahari Desert and foragers of central African forests.

Tribes are still represented today across the African political landscape, although the use of the word "tribe" is sometimes misinterpreted due to its western notion of "primitiveness" and oftentimes substituted with the term "ethnic group." Lacking centralized authority, tribes are organized around segmented descent groups or in some cases age groups.

Everyday governance is discharged through councils of respected elders and sanctioned through ritual and other means. East African pastoralist groups such as the Maasai,

along with some West African tribes and the Berbers in North Africa, represent this type of organization.

Chiefdoms or kingdoms are ruled by kings or queens from a royal clan and generally incorporate millions of subjects. Kingdoms such as the Zulu or Swazi in southern Africa developed through conquest, while others like Ghana's Ashante developed through an association of related traditional states. However, colonialism eventually diluted the power and reach of these empires, whose leaders were often retained as indirect rulers or figureheads.

Today, all three of these political organizations still exist, although in the confines of modern African nation-states created by colonial powers who had little regard or understanding of African cultures. This juxtaposition of modernity with tradition has caused severe conflict throughout the continent.

Challenged to construct their respective "national" identities, regional leaders attempt to do so by diluting the traditionally cohesive power of ancestry. These national ruling elites, who derive their power from wealth and commerce rather than tribal affiliation, feel threatened by loyalty to these traditional organizations, labeling their rule as "tribalism."

This "class versus descent" scrimmage for power has resulted in conflicts across the continent and a dramatic divergence of interests. As a means to overcome these and other issues on the continent, a 55-nation federation, the African Union (AU), was formed in 2002. AU's charter is to promote "greater unity and solidarity between African countries and peoples" by building partnerships in all segments of "civil society."

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer

individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society. Prior to the arrival of Islam and Christianity, the African continent consisted of orally transmitted indigenous religious practices. As in many societies, African indigenous beliefs influenced diet, subsistence patterns, family structures, marriage practices, and healing and burial processes. In essence, Africans constructed their worldview through their indigenous religions.

Today, the African continent is primarily either Muslim or Christian. Other faiths such as Judaism and Hinduism exist as pockets in different regions of the continent, primarily in urban areas. The historical trajectories of Islamic and Christian expansion in Africa offer intriguing commonalities in how Africans across the continent initially reacted to the introduction of each of those religions. For example, it is common throughout the continent to find a blending of many elements of indigenous religious practices with local Islam and Christianity (Photo courtesy of Wikimedia).

Consequently, many African native religions share similarities with religions such as Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in their understanding of God as the creator and ruler of all life, although He is considered untouchable by humans.

However, unlike Christianity and Islam, many African indigenous religions believe that God is not directly involved in people's lives. To them there is a spirit world populated with former good and bad human beings. The good spirits intercede with God on behalf of their living families to whom they then relay God's will through dreams and acquired possessions. The bad spirits work to bring misfortune through sickness,

death, or natural disasters to those who behave inappropriately.

Many indigenous African religions revere "nature" spirits living in the sky, water, and forests. These impersonal spirits help protect people from harm and provide them with life's essential ingredients such as water, sun, and wildlife. This belief system is commonly referred to as animism.

Just as spirits mediate relations between God and humans, religious specialists act as mediators between spirits and humans to provide protection from harm.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin"). The traditional African family with respect to marriage, family structure, and descent is a much different arrangement than is found in most American families. Likewise, there are several components of the traditional African family that are common to all African cultures.

First, perhaps the most difficult feature to reconcile to Americans is that of polygyny – the practice of a husband having more than one wife. A benefit of this arrangement is that it promotes societal alliances through marriage, procreation, and family wealth through female labor.

Second, due to polygyny, the family in most African cultures has historically consisted of an expanded set of kin or relatives that extends well beyond the American notion of a nuclear family. This arrangement created a family environment where children considered all siblings as "brothers and sisters" and all of the wives/mothers as "mother."

Third, the extended African family traces descent through either the male or female side of the family, a practice which differs considerably from the American family. Patrilineal descent (through the male side of the family) is the more common approach and usually features polygyny. The matrilineal (through the female bloodline) marriage pattern is more uncommon and almost always features monogamy – it is rare to encounter a wife having more than one husband.

Lastly, it is common for two or more blood lines (lineages) to share a common ancestor and collectively form a clan, which is the largest social unit. Clans do not have formal leaders or organizational structures. Membership is transferred from father to child and cuts across ethnic and social boundaries.

The dramatic social changes in Africa during and after colonialism in the last 4 decades have obviously affected the traditional family, and variations on these 3 features can be found across the continent.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles. Gender roles in Africa follow no single model nor is there a generalized concept of sex and common standard of sexual behavior.

Prehistorically, gender role differentiation in Africa's hunting and gathering cultures was based on a division of labor featuring different, yet complementary, sets of responsibilities for males and females, adults and children. Females gathered over half the caloric needs from natural vegetation, while also reproducing and raising offspring. Males were primarily hunters but also assisted with gathering.

These gender patterns continued as agricultural practices advanced.

Females shared in farming while continuing to provide for the family's subsistence, and males produced the cash crops. Pastoralists like the Maasai of Kenya traditionally have featured males involved in cattle-raising and females in food production.

The 19th-century European colonial period introduced a cash economy into Africa, with female labor used to produce the cash crops. By inserting male authority over females, colonial administrators disrupted the distinct yet complementary male/female relationship that had been traditionally African.

More recently, western influence across the continent has dramatically altered the traditional gender roles. Educational and professional opportunities for females, along with increased family migrations to urban areas, have radically altered traditional male and female gender roles.

Likewise, the number of singles parents and even child- or other relative-led families has increased with the predominance of HIV/AIDS-related deaths and warfare, further altering traditional gender responsibilities. Additionally, ethnic conflicts involving abuse of women are prevalent in many unstable countries, and while the rubric of traditional African gender generally remains, the forces of change are gradually ripping it away.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally. America is predominantly a monolingual society, where traditionally, fluency in a second language has been considered a luxury rather than a necessity. Conversely, national survival for many societies in Africa required them throughout their existence to adopt multilingual

practices, if for no other reason than to preserve their native heritage.

You may find it challenging to comprehend the scope of Africa's linguistic diversity. There are over 2,000 African languages (many spoken-only) from 6 major language families, and perhaps 100 of these languages are used to communicate among the more dominant ethnic groups such as Berber, Swahili, Yoruba, and others.

Official languages of African nation-states are few, yet the linguistic diversity expressed across the continent (Nigeria has 250 languages) has prompted an awareness of the value of Africa's linguistic traditions. While most areas of the continent speak the adopted language of their colonial past – such as French and Portuguese in West Africa, French and Arabic in Morocco, and English in Kenya and South Africa – the majority of people also speak one or more traditional "indigenous" languages of their and other ethnic groups. As African independence spread throughout the continent, ethnic groups continued to depend on their indigenous identifiers, such as language, to celebrate their "release" from colonial rule and to preserve a sense of indigenous identity.

While communication styles tend to vary by ethnic or social groups, Africans generally are friendly and outgoing people although they tend to communicate with reserve to avoid confrontation. As in most kin-based societies, Africans believe that saving face or protecting one's honor and dignity are of utmost importance; therefore, they avoid public criticism and controversial topics at all costs – even to the extent of withholding their honest opinion or modifying the truth.

Africans admire and even expect extended greetings and small talk, and to attempt to rush or avoid social graces is considered disrespectful. Similarly, Africans avoid direct eye contact when communicating with new acquaintances and people of status,

particularly elders. They also are fond of non-verbal gestures, and it is common throughout African societies for members of the same gender to hold hands or touch while conversing.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) and culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

The contemporary African educational system hardly resembles the traditional pre-colonial structure, whereby community elders were primarily responsible for preparing youth for adulthood. Their instruction included fundamentals of ethnic ritual and ceremony, along with customary protocol for their distinctive gender roles. A rite-of-passage commemorating their successful journey from childhood to adulthood served as a form of graduation.

European colonialism brought a more structured, formal educational system that catered to a small group of African elite who demonstrated potential to administer expanding colonial territories. Following independence, many African nations adopted the European system because they believed it would prepare them to be more competitive in intra-continental and global marketplaces, thereby enhancing their quality of life.

However, progress in developing and maintaining reliable educational institutions has been slow for a variety of reasons. Since most Africans live in rural environments, they continue to rely heavily on child labor for family survival, resulting in decreased school enrollments or early withdrawals. Likewise, widespread HIV/AIDS epidemics, ethnic conflict, teacher and resource deficits, and inaccessibility to remote rural areas also hamper progress. According to 2017 statistics, only 80% of the

continent's children were enrolled in primary school, leaving over 33 million African children without any schooling at all.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In low-context western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. Conversely, most African cultures are traditionally high-context societies, whereby people center their activities on socializing and establishing close associations, having little regard for the passage-of-time.

Only after establishing trust and honor will your typical African counterpart agreeably proceed with business. In his worldview, time is a precious commodity used to establish relationships and form alliances. Any attempt to accelerate the tempo at the expense of social pleasantries will likely result in deadlock.

To an African, close physical proximity between individuals encourages cooperative trust, and for centuries they have viewed human linkage as a core element to survival. This closeness is best represented in a traditional African village where strong kinship connections are evidenced by a display of close interpersonal relations among family members.

While conventional African concepts of time and space remain intact, throughout the continent western influence and globalization have stepped up the pace of African living, mostly in urban areas. Consequently, rural-to-urban migrations have reshaped traditional social and subsistence patterns.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill and style. Prior to 19th-century European colonization of Africa,

recreation served a vital subsistence role, whereby adolescents and adults alike participated in intellectually stimulating leisurely activities that concurrently served to develop essential hunting and pastoral skills.

Games of chance and skill were important to early childhood development, providing social outlets within and outside their community. Featuring wrestling, jumping and running; traditional African sport was steeped in religious ritual.

Along with colonialism came the introduction to Africa of western sports such as soccer, cricket, rugby and track and field. This emphasis on western sport continued to thrive with African independence and globalization, as seen in sporting events such as the Olympics and the World Cup.

Leaders such as Nelson Mandela skillfully employed sport to promote a unified South African nation. Importing the predominantly “white” game of rugby, Mandela used it to fuse a racially divided country following his election in 1992. This event is the theme of the motion picture “Invictus,” exemplifying how sport can serve to create national identities and overcome ethnic division. His efforts have inspired many other African nations to follow suit.

Likewise, East African countries such as Kenya and Ethiopia have produced the world’s dominant male and female distance runners, and South Africa, Cameroon and Nigeria emerged as strong contenders in the 2010 World Cup. African nations are now competing in leagues such as the International Basketball Association (FIBA) World Championships, and there is also a

growing number of African basketball players on US college campuses and in the National Basketball Association (NBA).

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Despite having only 17% of the global population, Africa is a victim of many of the world's debilitating health disorders. According to the World Health Organization, 70% of the global HIV/AIDS cases and 92% of malarial diseases occur in Africa.

These and other medical conditions are attributed primarily to viral infection and widespread poverty caused by extreme climatic conditions and civil unrest, coupled with inadequate preventative measures. While extensive drought generates widespread famine, civil disturbances generate millions of displaced persons. Likewise, with only 63% of the Sub-Saharan African population having access to safe drinking water, water-born bacterial diseases such as cholera and schistosomiasis are common.

Many people in Africa lack access to western medicine, and as a result depend on traditional health practices to combat disease. In addition, some traditional beliefs run counter to western medical practice and perhaps discourage individuals from utilizing those services even when they are available. This problem is further intensified by lack of federal regulatory healthcare management.

While modern healthcare procedures are more common in urban areas, many rural people rely on traditional practitioners who use a variety of plants and herbs to treat patients. Similarly, many families have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat many of the more serious conditions.

On a positive note, western influence has stimulated some progress in combating Africa's health crisis. More resources are devoted to achieving basic human security by assessing disease symptoms early and with scientific accuracy.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. Traditionally having an agrarian-based economy, Africa today remains predominantly agricultural, featuring less industrialization than most other parts of the world. Post-colonial adversities such as civil war, disease, poverty, and unstable dictatorships posed unusual hardship on several young African nations; however, Africa currently stands at the cross-roads of economic development with many nations becoming some of fastest growing regions in the world.

Colonialism institutionalized the exploitation of Africa's mineral resources, resulting in today's oil industry dominating the economic market in several coastal regions. A surge in global oil prices; a growing African middle class; and reduction in civil wars, foreign aid, and inflation collectively promise a more positive outlook for the future.

Countries such as Botswana, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and South Africa are economically the wealthiest on the continent, with regions such as East Africa showing signs of economic stability. Despite the economic upswing, much of sub-Saharan

Africa's future economic prosperity is held hostage by devastating diseases such as AIDS, particularly in areas of southern Africa, and the growing effects of climate change and man-made environmental degradation throughout the subcontinent.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Africa lags far behind most of the world in manufacturing capacity and output. Even the more economically-developed nations such as South Africa are competitively weak when compared to non-African industrialized nations. During the 1970s and 1980s, Africa experienced some growth in raw exports although this increase did little to boost long-term manufacturing capacity.

Today, Africa is experiencing an actual decline in manufacturing capacity due primarily to a lull in the global economy, along with other indigenous issues such as environmental stress, poor physical and organizational infrastructure, and a shortage of skilled personnel. Likewise, African manufacturing capacity is no match against global powers such as China and significant Southeast Asian markets.

International aid from both governmental and non-governmental organizations has helped African nations establish preliminary economic footholds. For example, many of them have dedicated industrial developmental zones to attract foreign investment and increase export-related manufacturing capacity, although Africa is far removed from having a significant role in the global marketplace in the foreseeable future.

Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize African society at large, we will now focus on specific features of Malian society.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Historical Overview

The area currently comprising the country of Mali was once part of 3 successive ancient African empires – Ghana, Mali, and Songhai – that ruled the West African savanna lands between the 8th and 16th centuries. Commonly known as the "Great Three," these kin-based societies thrived on trans-Saharan trade (primarily gold, salt, and slaves) with the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern centers of civilization. The cities of Timbuktu (Tombouctou) and Jenne (Djenné) were established as predominant trans-Saharan commerce centers.

Islamic influence penetrated the region as early as the 9th century, with many Malians converting to Islam. Consequently, Timbuktu established a reputation as an international center for Islamic studies.

Colonial Era

The latter of the three early kingdoms, the Songhai Empire, was destroyed during a Moroccan invasion in 1591, thereby marking the end of its trans-Saharan commercial dominance. With its decline in strategic importance, Mali was divided into smaller kingdoms for the next 3 centuries until the arrival of French forces and the late 19th-century European colonization of the African Continent. While slavery in Mali predates the arrival of Europeans, large-scale slavery was institutionalized with the African slave trade during the French conquest (1879-98). The French primarily recruited African soldiers, many of whom became officers in the French army and fought for the duration of French rule in Mali.

The French appointed a civilian governor of the Malian territory, which they called French Sudan (not the existing Sudan). With most of the area succumbing to firm French control by the early 20th century, French Sudan was administered as part of the Federation of French West Africa and supplied labor to French colonies along the West African coast. In 1958, the colony was renamed the Sudanese Republic, whereby it obtained complete internal autonomy as a member of France's political entity in Africa, the French Community. In fact, all French-ruled territories in sub-Saharan Africa, with the exception of Guinea, joined the French Community and were thereby granted the option of eventually achieving complete independence.

Independence

In early 1959, the Sudanese Republic and Senegal formed the Federation of Mali as part of the French Community and in 1960 following Senegal's withdrawal; the Sudanese Republic became the independent nation of Mali with Modibo Keïta as president. Keïta established a single-party state and withdrew from the French Community to adopt a socialist orientation having close ties to the Soviet bloc. Keita implemented extensive nationalization of economic resources, although following economic decline, Mali was forced to return to a French-backed currency (known as the Franc Zone) in 1967.

One-Party Rule

In 1968, a group of junior army officers, led by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré, overthrew the Keïta regime in a bloodless coup and established a military-led government with Traoré as president. Under the provisions of a new constitution approved in 1974, a second single-party (Democratic Union of the Malian People) state was established in 1978 with Traoré reelected in 1979 and 1985.

Multiparty Democracy

In response to the growing demands for multiparty democracy sweeping the African Continent, cohesive opposition movements began to emerge in 1990. The increasingly turbulent political situation was complicated by progressive

economic decline and ethnic violence in the north between nomadic Tuareg tribesmen (desert herdsmen related to the North African Berbers – see *Political & Social Relations*) and other indigenous groups.

In March 1991, Malian activists engaged in forceful demonstrations against the Traoré regime that ultimately led to its military overthrow. The coup leadership soon formed a civilian-led transitional government and a constitution (approved in a national referendum in January 1992) that created a multiparty democracy and officially a third republic.

Serving as a beacon for African democracy, Mali held national elections in early 1992, with Alpha Oumar Konaré elected to the presidency as a member of the Alliance for Democracy in Mali (ADEMA) political party. The Konaré administration suffered political tension further intensified by flawed presidential and legislative elections in 1997. Konaré was reelected, along with an ADEMA majority in parliament despite strong public opposition.

Sustained Democracy

Konaré stepped down after his second term, with former Lieutenant Colonel Amadou Toumani Touré (pictured left) reemerging as an independent-party candidate in the 2002 election. Having retained popularity for his role in leading the overthrow of Traoré's military dictatorship in 1991, Touré won the Presidency in a runoff against his ADEMA opposition. The 2002 election served as a political milestone, marking Mali's first successful transition between democratic regimes. Touré was reelected in 2007 to a second 5-year term but later dismantled in March 2012 during a coup' état staged by disgruntled soldiers protesting his handling of an insurgency in northern Mali. Touré resigned from the Presidency on 8 April and went into exile in Senegal 11 days later. Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (pictured above right) was elected to the Presidency in July 2013.

Legend of Timbuktu

In ancient times, African oral traditions were used to preserve history and wisdom across generations and ethnic boundaries (See *Learning & Knowledge*).

One popular myth is the legendary city of Timbuktu, recognized universally as a mythical city of wealth. In actuality, the city exists in the African country of Mali, where it was founded by nomads in the 12th century and became a major trading depot.

There are a variety of accounts explaining how Timbuktu achieved fame. According to one version, the legend developed during the 14th century when the Kingdom of Mali's Muslim Emperor Mansa Musa made his renowned pilgrimage to Mecca, Saudi Arabia via Cairo, Egypt, where he distributed fine gifts of gold. Muslim merchants were impressed by the amount of gold (which he claimed was from Timbuktu) and enchanted by the notion of exploiting its gold.

Thereafter established as the famous "city of gold," Timbuktu grew in importance during the 15th century as a major commerce hub, although in reality it produced no gold. The already famed Emperor Musa returned from his pilgrimage to Mecca with master craftsmen, who constructed libraries that established Timbuktu a prominent center of Islamic learning and trans-Atlantic trade.

The "city of gold" legend continued to thrive as Muslim and European explorers sought to adventure to the mythical city, with most of them meeting with misfortune against hostile Tuareg nomads (see *Political & Social Relations*). Notably, the few explorers who were able to complete their journey reported that the city was hardly impressive, particularly after its 16th-century decline.

In 1988, Timbuktu was designated a United Nations Heritage Site, with efforts established to preserve its historic mosques (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
- Republic of Mali

Capital
- Bamako

Political Borders
- Algeria: 849mi
- Niger: 510mi
- Burkina Faso: 621mi
- Cote d'Ivoire: 331mi
- Guinea: 533mi
- Senegal: 260mi
- Mauritania: 1390mi

Features

- Landlocked country located in West Africa, covering about 475,000 sq miles, and about twice the size of Texas (7th largest country in Africa).
- Bamako is the largest city and a major trade center situated along the Niger River – Mali's most valuable natural resource.
- The highest point is Mount Hombori Tondo (3789 feet), located to the east near the Burkina Faso border, with the Senegal River to the west, the lowest point at 75 feet.
- Terrain mostly flat with rugged hills in northeast – 70% of the country is non-arable desert to semi-desert.
- Divided into three natural zones: the Southern-cultivated Sudanese (grasslands region), the Central-semiarid Sahelian (the Sahel is a semiarid region extending across the width of north-central Africa dividing the Sudanese and the Sahara Desert); and the Northern-arid Saharan.
- Has a subtropical-to-arid climate: hot and dry February to June (above 125F); rainy, humid, and mild June to November (average 110F); cool and dry November to February (average 85F).

Flag

It consists of 3 equal vertical bands of green, yellow, and red – which represent the popular pan-African colors of Ethiopia. Because Ethiopia is Africa's oldest independent country, other African countries have adopted the 3 colors upon their independence.

Political Power

Mali is a multi-party Republic containing 3 branches of government – executive, legislative, and judicial – with a legal system anchored in its French colonial structure. With a longstanding single-party rule ending in 1991, a transitional government was formed to oversee the drafting of a new constitution and the transition to a democratic government in 1992 (see *History & Myth*). The constitution provides for a multi-party democracy, with a prohibition against forming parties based solely on ethnicity, religion, region, or gender.

Regional Dynamics

The French divided Mali into 10 administrative regions (Gao, Kayes, Kidal, Koulikoro, Menaka, Mopti, Segou, Sikasso, Taoudenni, and Tombouctou) and the capital district of Bamako, with each province ruled by an appointed governor. Each region is partitioned into five-to-nine districts (*cercles*) administered by commandants (*prefets)* and further divided into communes followed by villages or quarters.

Executive Branch

Chief-of-State: The President serves as both chief-of-state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces; elected by popular vote for a 5-year term and eligible for a second term – currently Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta (elected July 2013).

Prime Minister: Functions as head-of-government and appointed by the President –Boubou Cisse (since April 2019, pictured).
Cabinet: Council of Ministers (36 to include the Prime Minister) appointed by the Prime Minister and chaired by the President.

Legislative Branch

National Assembly: A single-chamber legislative arm, with representation apportioned based on population size. It consists of 147 members, 134 elected from single and multi-seat constituencies and 13 elected by Malians living abroad. Term of office is 5 years.

Judicial Branch

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary with the Ministry of Justice (Executive Branch) appointing judges and supervising both law enforcement and the judiciary. The Supreme Court has both judicial and administrative powers. Under the constitution, there is a separate constitutional court and a high court of justice having the power to judge senior government officials in cases of treason.

Defense

Headed by the Ministry of Defense and Veterans, Mali's defense force consists of an Army, Air Force, and Navy; along with a paramilitary Gendarmerie and Republican Guard. Overall, the military is marginally resourced, and generally has maintained a low profile since the 1992 democratic transition. The military includes over 10,000 active personnel, of which, the Air Force numbers about 800, and the Navy 70 (2017 estimate). Air Forces collectively include less than 50 combat, transport, and training aircraft and a few helicopters.

Malian Air Force Rank Insignia

Private 1st Class

Corporal

Master Corporal

Sergeant

Master Sergeant

2nd Lieutenant

1st Lieutenant

Captain

Major

Lt Col

Colonel

Brig Gen

Maj Gen

Relations with the US

The US and Mali base their strong relationship on shared goals of extinguishing poverty and strengthening democracy. Similarly, Mali is a leading regional partner in US efforts to combat terrorism. Notably, US Defense Department security assistance and training programs have enhanced Mali's contributions to international peacekeeping and counterterrorism efforts. Similarly, Mali is home to a peacekeeper training school which hosts students from throughout Africa.

Trans-Sahara Counter-Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)

The Trans-Sahara region historically has served as a sanctuary for illicit trade and more recently for terrorist activities. Capitalizing on the successful 2003 Pan Sahel Initiative to neutralize terrorist safe havens in Africa, the TSCTP officially began with Exercise Flintlock 2005, with US Special Operations Forces training counterparts in 7 Saharan countries on regional security and stability practices. The TSCTP's primary goal is to deny terrorists the ability to move freely throughout the sparsely populated Saharan region.

Similarly, TSCTP aims to facilitate cooperation among the Pan-Sahel countries – Mauritania, Mali, Chad, and Niger – as well as Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Nigeria and Senegal and its Maghreb partners – Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia – in combating terrorism.

Security Issues

Opposition Groups: Previously known as the Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC), the Aal-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) is a terrorist group allied with Al-Qaida. Notorious for kidnapping Western tourists and holding them hostage in Mali's barren Sahel region, AQIM initially organized an attempt to overthrow the Algerian government and establish a Muslim state. A highly publicized event occurred in 2003 when

the former GSPC transported 15 European tourist-hostages into northern Mali – one died while the other 14 were released to Malian authorities. Consequently, the continued presence of AQIM in Mali's isolated northern desert region poses a threat to Western travelers.

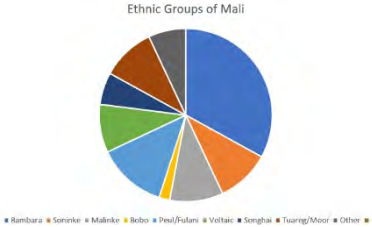
Ethnic Tensions: For decades, Tuareg (a nomadic tribe descended from Berbers in present-day North Africa) rebels occupying Mali's northern Kidal region have staged an armed resistance against the central government aimed at achieving their regional autonomy. Known as the National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (MNLA), these rebel forces ousted President Touré in March 2012, gaining control of the North's 3 major cities – Kidal, Gao, and Timbuktu (*see History and Myth*). Instability mounted as the MNLA resisted efforts by Islamist groups such as Ansar Dine to strictly enforce Sharia (Islamic) law. French and African Union forces intervened on behalf of the Malian government. Despite the Malian government and Tuareg rebels co-signing a peace agreement in June 2013, the fighting has continued.

Historically, these pastoral nomads have maintained their autonomy and remained isolated. Consequently, the strained relationship emerged because their dissimilar cultural traditions led to Tuareg marginalization within state institutions. Similarly, while most Malians are dark-skinned, the Tuareg (known as the "blue men of the Sahara" because of their customary indigo-colored robes and turbans) have lighter skin features. Of note, former Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi was known to have patronage networks with Tuareg tribal leaders, along with other rebel groups in neighboring African countries. After he gained power in 1969, Qaddafi used Libya's oil revenues to promote himself as heroic defender of the repressed and prospective leader of a unified Africa.

Crime: While violent crime is rare in Mali, petty theft is common in urban areas and on the Bamako-Dakar railroad, where travelers are advised to be especially vigilant a night.

Ethnicity

Mali's population encompasses a number of sub-Saharan ethnic groups, most of which share cultural commonalities, although each retains its own respective ethnic language (See *Language & Communication)*. Collectively, the Bambara (33%), Soninké (10%), and Malinké (10%) tribes comprise the Mandé language group. Constituting about half of Mali's population, the Mandé have dominated Mali's political institution since French colonialism (see *History & Myth*). Other significant groups are the Peul (also known as Fulani) (13%), Voltaic (11%), Songhai (6%), Tuareg & Moor (Maur – of Berber descent) (10%), and other (7%) to include the Dogon, Diola, Bozo, and Oulé. Mali has enjoyed a long history of peaceful inter-ethnic coexistence, with the exception of the Tuareg (see *Ethnic Tensions* above).



With only about 19.5 million inhabitants, Mali has one of the sparsest populations in West Africa, although unevenly distributed due to geographic variations. Traditionally an agrarian society, more than 75% of the population continues to subsist from agriculture. The bulk of the population (about 90%) is concentrated to the south and east along the Niger and Senegal River basins, with nomadic Tuareg and Moorish herdsmen populating the northern Sahara Desert region.

Historically, each ethnic group has been associated with a specific occupation favorable to its geographic location. The Mandé were cultivators; the Fulani, Maur, and Tuareg were herders; and the Bozo subsisted as fishermen. In recent years, this linkage has shifted as ethnic groups seek diverse, non-traditional sources of income, most notably by migrating from rural to urban areas. (see *Family & Kinship*).

Dogon Country

Having a population of only about 600,000, the Dogon tribe occupies the Bandiagara Escarpment, a sandstone cliff fortress located in the Mopti region of Mali near the Burkina Faso border. Referred to as Dogon Country, the territory remained isolated for centuries (both physically and culturally) until the 20th century brought tourism and exposure to the outside world. Having maintained a uniquely indigenous culture, Dogon tribesmen perform rituals in the context of their animistic religious practices (see *Religion & Spirituality*) and are renowned for their mythical masked dancers (a popular tourist event). The cult of masks (*awa*) plays a major role in Dogon tradition, with masked male dancers representing various mythical creatures, both human and animal. During the prominent Dama rite-of-passage ceremony, dancers wear the renowned Kanaga Mask and are believed to create a bridge into the supernatural world for deceased tribal members. Without the Dama dance, the deceased are unable to cross over into the ancestral realm.

Social Relations

Malians value interpersonal relations and are generally very friendly and approachable. They admire small talk, whether with close friends or new acquaintances, and to a Malian, it is imperative to get to know his colleagues personally prior to conducting business with them (see *Time & Space*).

Status

Prior to colonization, Malian society was stratified into 3 hereditary-based social classes to include nobles, professional craftsmen, and slaves (most people married within their social class). Following independence, Malian national identity initially became a by-product of its pre-colonial class structure, whereby the educated elite defined the needs of the generally illiterate population (Photo: Members of different ethnic groups – Bambara, Songhai, and Arab – work together amicably in a bakery in the city of Gao, UN Photo/Marco Dormino).

However, with Western influence, social boundaries have become blurred in contemporary society, particularly in urban areas where the general populace has redefined traditional professions (see *Family & Kinship* and *Sex & Gender*). Today, access to premium resources such as land and water has become a significant indicator of status.

Favoritism

Favoritism in the workplace is customary in West Africa, with people from the same ethnic background or close friends generally promoting each other over outsiders. This practice may be problematic when performance becomes an issue.

Sense-of-Humor

Good humor is foundational to Malian social relations and traditionally grounded in what is commonly referred to as “joking cousin” relationships. When interactions occur across ethnic boundaries, it is usual practice to include light-hearted “teasing”

or mocking of particular ethnic groups. While this approach may appear offensive to an outsider, to a Malian it is a subtle way of defusing ethnic tensions, particularly when approaching a sensitive subject, and helps to seal long-term social relationships known as “cousinages.”

Social Etiquette

Visiting: In most kin-based societies, visiting is fundamental to maintaining social harmony within the family unit and the community at large. Malians visit each other regularly and oftentimes unannounced, particularly in rural areas where telephones are not widely available. Evening visits are known to continue for several hours. Similarly, houseguests are known to remain for several weeks and will bring gifts of kola nuts (a traditional symbol of respect) and food from their home region.

Invited guests: When invited to a Malian’s home, guests commonly remove their shoes before entering, with the host offering them water and the most comfortable seat. Hosts usually serve refreshments, a generosity a guest is obligated to graciously accept as to decline could be offensive. Although many Malians live in poverty, they are charitable people whose hospitality is a genuine gesture.

In rural areas, guests bring their hosts inexpensive gifts such as tea, sugar, or kola nuts. Hosts appreciate compliments on their home, although they modestly acknowledge praises in an effort not to appear arrogant. Should a visitor arrive while the family is eating, he will likely be invited to share the food, although unexpected guests may politely decline the meal.

There is a traditional tea-drinking ceremony that is common among men (see *Sustenance & Health*).

Greetings: Socially, greetings express genuine respect for the other person (see *Language & Communication* and *Time & Space*).

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Mali is predominantly a Muslim nation (94%) with the remaining 6% consisting of indigenous religions (3%) and Christianity (3%). Malian religious groups are not specifically classified by region, although Christian communities tend to congregate in urban areas and generally to the south, while traditional indigenous religions exist primarily in rural areas.

Mali's constitution provides for freedom of religion and defines the country as a secular state that liberally allows religious practices as long as they do not pose a threat to social stability. Consequently, missionary groups, both Muslim and non-Muslim, are allowed to operate without government interference.

Similarly, adherents of a variety of faiths are known to coexist within the same kin group, with followers of different religions participating in inter-religious activities – particularly weddings, baptisms, and funerals. Among more fundamental Muslims, religious blending is prohibitive.

Islamic Faith

Origins of Islam

Islam dates to the 6th century when God's final Prophet, Muhammad, was born in Mecca in the current country of Saudi Arabia. Muslims believe that while Muhammad was meditating in the desert, the Archangel Gabriel visited him over a 23-year period, revealing the Qur'an, or the "Holy Book," to guide their everyday life. (The Qur'an represents a core belief that helps shape Muslims' lifelong values and is comparable to Holy Bible for Christians and the Torah for Jews).

Meaning of Islam

Islam means "submission to the will of God" and acceptance of

His wisdom. It is more than a religion to its adherents – it is a way of life.

Muslim Sects

Islam is divided into two divisions: Sunni and Shi'a. Malian Muslims are predominantly Sunni and distinguished by their belief that the leader (*Caliph*) of the Muslim community (*Ummah*) should be elected. Conversely, the Shi'a believe the Muslim leader should be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.

Sufi Tradition: Characterized by mysticism and ritualistic prayer, the Sufi tradition of Islam is common in West Africa. Many Sufis belong to religious brotherhoods (*tariga*) whose members adhere to teachings from their spiritual leaders. Adhering to Sunni tradition, Sufis are not fundamentalists.

Five Pillars of Islam

There are five basic principles of Islam that all Muslims accept and follow.

- **Profession of Faith (*Shahada*):** "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger."
- **Prayer (*Salat*):** Pray five times a day facing toward the Ka'aba (pictured) in Mecca. The Ka'aba is considered the center of the Muslim world and a unifying focal point for Islamic worship.

- **Charity (*Zakat*):** Involves an obligatory tithe or donation to the poor.
- **Fasting (*Sawm*):** Involves abstaining from food, drink, and sexual relations from sunrise to sunset during the holy month of Ramadan (30 days).
- **Pilgrimage to Mecca (The *Hajj*):** Every adult Muslim who is physically and financially able is expected to perform at least one in a lifetime.

Shared Perspectives

Many Islamic tenets parallel the other two major world religions, Judaism and Christianity. In fact, Muslims consider Christians and Jews "people of the Book," referring to biblical scriptures, because they share their monotheistic belief in one God.

Abraham: All three faiths trace their lineage back to Abraham, known as *Ibrahim* in Islam. However, Christians and Jews trace their line back to Abraham, his wife Sarah, and their son Isaac; while Muslims believe that they descend from Abraham and his Egyptian concubine, Hagar, and their son Ismail.

Scriptures: Much of the content of the Qur'an is similar to teachings and stories found in the Christian Bible's Old and New Testaments, and Muslims view Islam as a completion of previous revelations to Jewish and Christian prophets. However, Muslims believe Christians distorted God's word and that Muhammad received the true revelation of God.

Jesus: The three religions differ significantly regarding the role of Jesus. While Christians consider Him the divine Messiah who fulfills the Jewish Scriptures, Jews are still waiting for the Messiah to come. Muslims recognize Jesus as having been a prophet, but do not acknowledge the Christian view of His divinity. They do not believe in the Christian Trinity.

View of Death: Muslims believe that the time of death, like birth, is determined by Allah. Thus old age, illness, or accident are not considered the real causes of death. While people grieve the loss of family members or friends, they do not view death itself as a negative event, as Muslims believe that a person who lived a good life goes on to live in Heaven.

Concept of Jihad

The concept of Jihad, or inner striving, is a fundamental element within Islam. Traditionally, it is the principled and moral pursuit of God's will to lead a virtuous life. It should not be confused with the publicized violence often associated with Jihad. Most Muslims are strongly opposed to terrorism, considering it contrary to Islamic beliefs.

Ramadan

Ramadan is a month-long time for inner reflection, self-control, and focus on God. During this time, Muslims who are physically able are required to fast from dawn to sunset. Many Muslims believe that denying their hunger tempers them to learn self-control, appreciate the difficulties of the poor, and gain spiritual renewal – by fasting, one learns to appreciate the good in life. It is common for Muslims to break their fast at sunset with a light meal of dates followed by prayer and then dinner.

Ramadan occurs during the 9th month of the Islamic calendar (see *Time & Space*) and observes 3 Islamic holy days.

- **Lailat ul-Qadr:** Known as "The Night of Power," it commemorates Muhammad receiving the first verses of the Qur'an.
- **Eid-al-Adha (Tabaski):** It is the "Festival of Sacrifice" and commemorates Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son, Ishmael (Isaac according to the Christian faith), as proof of his loyalty to God. It is celebrated the same day the Hajj ends.
- **Eid-al-Fitr (Korité):** It is a 3-day "Festival of Fast-Breaking" celebrated at Ramadan's end.

Islam in Mali

Islam was introduced to Mali during the 11th century as part of the trans-Saharan trade industry (see *History & Myth*). While most Malian Muslims are loyal to basic Islamic principles, traditionally, their adherence has been moderate and adapted to local conditions. Unlike the more conservative fundamentalists, Muslims in Mali, particularly women, enjoy many social freedoms. For example, women participate in a variety of professional and public activities and generally do not veil.

Muslims of the more puritanical sects believe it is imperative for women to live in seclusion and wear a full body covering when in public to protect their honor and purity. Conversely, Muslim women in Mali do not conform to this traditional practice. Similarly, while fundamentalist Muslims typically prohibit alcohol consumption, Malians are known to drink socially.

Dawa Fundamentalists

Dawa is an Islamic fundamentalist group that seeks to preserve traditional Islamic customs. Located primarily in the capital city of Bamako and the Kidal and Mopti regions, Dawa adherents typically are found among the Bellah (former slaves of Tuareg nobles) and also among unemployed youth. For the most part, this group pursues its aim by peaceful means.

Great Mosque

The Great Mosque (pictured) located in the ancient city of Djenné is the world's largest mud-brick building and considered the greatest Sudano-Sahelian (common to the Sahel and Sudanese geographic regions of West Africa) architectural design.

Indigenous Religions

Many Malian tribes, such as the Dogon, among others (see *Political & Social Relations*), blend their indigenous African

religious beliefs with fundamental Muslim or Christian customs, resulting in what is commonly referred to as “Africanized” practices. Prior to the influx of Islam into Mali, most inhabitants practiced animism, a belief that spiritual forces inhabit natural objects such as trees and rivers and influence human existence. Animism is rarely based on sacred doctrine but mostly on oral traditions passed through several generations. Malian animists believe natural objects such as trees and animals are sacred and must be respected – a conviction that closely connects them to the natural environment.

Consequently, their reverence towards nature drives their methods for adapting to their surroundings. For example, some animists suggest that nature spirits use their divine sense of the cosmos to guide their agricultural lifestyle and thereby enhance crop growth. Similarly, most traditional African religions also promote the notion of a supreme being who is creator of the universe. Embodied in this faith is the conviction that ancestor spirits have great power and influence on the daily lives of family members, who seek mediation with the spirit world through ordained ministers empowered with mystical insight. Other ethnic groups look to the village chief as the secular religious head of the community, who earns favor from the spirit world by virtue of his honorable position.

Christianity

Despite Mali’s support for religious tolerance, only a small Christian population exits (predominantly in the smaller Bozo and Dogon tribes), primarily as a result of French influence during the 19th-century colonial period. Malian Christians are mostly Roman Catholic, with Protestantism increasing as a result of recent missionary influence.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Family Organization

The family remains the singularly most important institution in Mali, with the extended family unit generally comprised of two or more nuclear families to include parents and offspring plus their families, grandparents, aunts, and uncles. Mali is a kin-based society, which implies that group wellbeing takes precedence over individual achievement, with decision-making reached through group consensus.

Rural family units are known to be large, consisting of 10 or more persons, and considered a benefit in agrarian societies. They are the foundation for providing a dependable work force and building cohesive communities. Conversely, in urban areas families tend to be smaller and physically segregated from extended family – a lifestyle that generally reflects the urban environment's wage labor, educational opportunities, and entrepreneurship.

Despite geographical separation, kinship ties remain strong, with extended families contributing substantially to its members' financial wellbeing regardless of location. Traditionally, the Malian family unit functions as an informal welfare system that ensures all its members are sustained to include cousinages or close inter-ethnic relationships (see *Political & Social Relations*). It is common for a Malian to offer food and shelter equally to blood kin or to a "cousin."

Male Authority

Mali is a patrilineal and patrilocal society, which means authority and inheritance occur through the male bloodline and the extended family resides near or with the elder male head-of-household. However, for the Tuareg (see *Political &*

Social Relations) inheritance and social status are determined through the matrilineal (mother's) lineage, with men rather than women veiling their faces (see *Religion & Spirituality*). In Muslim societies, the elderly (both male and female) generally enjoy great respect. Similarly, it is common for two or more lineages to share a common ancestor, collectively forming a clan. Clans within a village exist as clusters of single-family households sharing a compound (described below).

Motherhood Reverence

Motherhood is revered in Malian society, where a woman's status is determined by the number of children she bears, especially sons (see *Sex & Gender*). Symbolizing peace and harmony, Malian mothers, particularly the elders, are consulted regarding communal decisions. Among the Mandé (Mali's largest ethnic group – see *Political & Social Relations*), the relationship between mother and child is highly affectionate, with siblings sharing a special bond throughout their lifetime.

Dating

Courtship is uncommon in Muslim societies, particularly in rural areas where arranged marriages remain customary – a couple typically accepts parental judgment in coordinating their union. Conversely, in urban areas Western-style dating and choosing one's spouse are more popular practices, particularly among the youth.

Marriage

As in most collective cultures, marriage in rural Mali traditionally has served as a social contract to ensure the continuation of family heritage. It represents the alliance of two families, with individual choice of spouse limited.

Similarly, arranged marriages typically occur at a young age, and consequently, Mali has one of the highest underage marriage rates in the world – a situation

considered problematic because of the health risks it poses for physically immature females (see *Sex & Gender*). With most rural marriages occurring by age 16, it is common for rural women to have their first child by the time they are 19. Some girls have married and given birth by age 15.

Conversely, urban marriages generally occur between two consenting adults who have reached a more mature age. While the couple chooses to marry, they normally seek parental permission to maintain extended-family unity.

While traditional Islamic custom remains influential on Mali's marriage institution, Malian women enjoy some additional freedoms within the marriage arrangement. For example, Malian women have more leverage for dissolving marriages than in most other Muslim societies.

Marriage Types: Mali consists of three marriage types to include traditional (based on ethnic customs), civil (legal), and religious (predominantly Islamic doctrine). Particularly in urban areas, Malians may combine marriage types to exploit an advantage. By doing so, a couple will secure its civil rights to acquire social benefits, while retaining the privileges of its family heritage, and obligations of its religious beliefs.

Bridewealth: Unlike a dowry, in which the woman would bring material value to the marriage, a bride price is compensation from the prospective groom to the bride's family for loss of her and her forthcoming children's labor. Because it is reimbursable in a divorce, bridewealth tends to discourage dissolution.

Polygyny: It is customary in some Muslim societies to practice polygyny, whereby a man may have up to four wives, with Islamic law requiring him to equally provide for them all. This tradition is anchored in the notion that historically, men had a higher mortality rate than women, many of whom remained unwed or were widowed. Consequently, polygyny became a

necessary means of providing for women and producing large families (work force). Similarly, having multiple wives reflects class, as only the wealthy can afford large households. Rivalries between wives and children of different mothers are common.

Once a common practice, polygyny is less popular primarily due to the cost of sustaining multiple households and because many contemporary urban women refute the status of secondary spouse. However, in rural areas, women tend to appreciate the mutual support from multiple wives.

Divorce

In Islamic societies, grounds for divorce are based primarily on adultery, mutual incompatibility, and the husband's failure to meet the wife's basic needs. Traditionally, the man retains most of the property and the children.

Housing

Extended family members usually live close to one another, often within a shared compound. In rural areas, the compound is surrounded by a wall and consists of mud-brick houses for each nuclear family and additional cooking and storage huts.

In polygynous households, the husband may share a house with all his wives, with each wife and the husband having their own rooms, or each wife may have her own house, all within the same compound. With this latter arrangement, the husband usually resides with each wife on a rotating basis or, if affordable, he may receive them in his own residence.

House designs vary by region. In the South, they tend to be square-shaped, while in the North they are round. Most rural homes have thatched roofs, although the wealthy generally have corrugated tin roofs. Each home contains a central living room and two - three bedrooms.

In urban areas, a compound may consist of several apartments surrounding a central courtyard holding a communal well. An

apartment normally is built with concrete and a corrugated tin roof. Access to electricity is rare, with slums becoming more common among urban perimeters.

Rites-of-Passage

Rites-of-passage are ceremonies recognizing life's transitions and are known to differ by ethic group.

Birth: Newborns in Malian society represent the family's future and are traditionally the primary interest in a marriage. Following a birth, the mother usually carries the child on her back during her daily activities.

Naming Ceremony: Due to Mali's high infant mortality rate (see *Sustenance & Health*), parents usually do not name a child until confident it will survive. Because most given names are of Islamic origin, the naming ceremony also serves to welcome the child into the Islamic family. In urban areas, the naming convention may be combined with a simple circumcision usually performed on the 8th day after birth.

Adulthood: Traditionally, male and female passage from childhood to adulthood has been marked by initiation, which typically involves marriage and the symbolic passing of knowledge from the old to the new generations.

Among some indigenous animist groups (see *Religion & Spirituality*), boys are circumcised between the ages of 5 and 12 and thereafter wear pants instead of shorts to demonstrate their transition into adulthood. Likewise, female circumcision is a common method for recognizing womanhood, although this practice is known to be medically risky and is less popular in urban areas (see *Sex & Gender*).

Death: Deceased ancestors are revered among all Malian religious groups. Muslims customarily bury their dead within 24 hours (Christians within 48 hours), with the deceased body untouched until a blessing has been offered and the family has mourned. Thereafter, the body is washed, wrapped in cloth, and carried through the village in a celebratory procession to honor the deceased. The body is buried after the first day, with festivities continuing at the family's house.

Similarly, the size of a funeral usually is determined by the deceased person's status. For example, if the deceased was the village elder, there would be a week-long celebration, with distant family members attending to pay final respects.

Crossing of the Cattle

A unique rite-of-passage popular among Fulani nomads occupying Mali's south-central Mopti region is the annual "crossing of the cattle" ceremony. Basically held in honor of cattle, which are the foundation for Fulani subsistence, it also serves to recognize a Fulani boy's transition into manhood.

Each year when the Niger River reaches flood stage, a select group of boys guide their herds to remote grazing lands, where they tend them for a year or until the river recedes and the resident pasturelands dry. Upon their return, usually in December, the young men prepare for marriage and are officially initiated into manhood.

Their initiation, known as *Deegal*, occurs during the boys return and involves Niger River cattle crossings at several waypoints, most notably at Diafarabé village (where the ceremony originated with the village's founding in 1818). The festival climaxes with the unmarried couples participating in the festive *Promenade des Jeunes* (Parade of the Youth) through the community. As part of the celebration, the townspeople typically decorate their houses by painting the doors with white clay and the floors with dark clay.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Sexual Relations

Largely as a result of Western influence, sexual perspectives are changing in many African societies including Mali. In this traditionally male-dominated culture, sexual relations primarily have served to produce offspring, although gradually as gender roles have altered, so has the perspective regarding romance in a marital relationship (see *Family & Kinship*). Similarly, urbanization and education have stimulated a rise in monogamous marriage patterns, particularly among youth and the elite who view status as professional achievement rather than family size.

Gender Roles

In traditional Malian families, labor generally is divided by gender, with both men and women having a significant role in sustaining the family unit. In addition to their household responsibilities, many women assist in agricultural activities and help earn significant portions of the family income. Elderly women who have retired from manual labor typically manage the household duties performed by the younger women and become active in farm produce sales.

In general, women are less represented than men in professional occupations, although urban women have more opportunities to gain an education and advance professionally, particularly in government.

Children

Young children are assigned duties, with girls typically caring for younger siblings and performing household chores, while boys work as farm laborers and tend livestock. Traditionally, only males received and education as females were considered to be mentally inferior (see *Learning & Knowledge*).

Female Freedom

Compared to the more conservative Islamic cultures, most Malian women enjoy a degree of freedom, where they are permitted to influence family decisions and openly conduct business in the marketplace. (see *Religion & Spirituality*). As they age, women gain greater respect and authority, both at home and within the community.

Gender Issues

While Mali's constitution prohibits sexual discrimination, in practice, Mali remains a male-dominated culture, where a variety of social prejudices work to undermine enforcement of gender equality.

Childhood marriages: While many African countries have enacted laws to limit marriage to a minimum age of 16-to-18 (depending on jurisdiction), traditional customs allowing children to marry at a premature age remain widespread (see *Family & Kinship*).

In many African tribal systems, particularly in Muslim societies, a man pays bridewealth (see *Family & Kinship*) to the girl's family in order to marry her, oftentimes before the girl reaches puberty. Many of these forced marriages involve polygynous relationships and are poverty-related, with parents needing the bridewealth to help support the extended family. Unfortunately, these practices commonly lead to serious medical and social issues, most notably complicated pregnancies and sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Despite the gravity of this situation, many African governments tend to ignore the implications.

Female circumcision: Female genital mutilation (FGM) is widespread primarily in rural Malian society (with the exception of the Tuareg tribe), affecting about 91% of the total female population. Regarded as a rite-of-passage initiation into adulthood, FGM is considered necessary for rendering a young woman an attractive candidate for marriage – which for many women, is their only means of securing a viable future.

Unfortunately, traditional FGM practitioners generally lack medical training, sometimes resulting in severe complications or death.

Domestic Violence: Men are not legally prohibited from physically striking or sexually abusing their wives as long as the contact does not cause permanent injury. While abuses occur, they often go unreported likely because of the wife's financial and social dependence on her husband.

Other Issues: Other concerns include trafficking of persons, notably women and children, and prostitution which is legal in Mali and predominant in urban areas.

Polygyny: (see *Family & Kinship*).

Inheritance Laws

Among many African cultures including Malian, inheritance traditionally has been a privilege reserved for men. While Malian women have a legal right to inheritance, they usually receive little or nothing – a reflection of their forced economic dependence, particularly in polygynous households. Property and wealth are usually passed to the sons. Under Islamic law, wives receive a stipulated portion of the inheritance, with male and female offspring sharing 50%.

Family Law

In August 2009, President Touré vetoed a proposed law that would grant women greater rights, a decision he claimed was made to protect national unity. Touré's administration had been bombarded by protests from conservative Islamic leaders from the moment parliament adopted the proposal. A clause in the proposal that promoted notable Muslim controversy was to establish marriage as a secular institution.

Under the new law, women would no longer be required to submit to their husbands, thereby establishing marriage partners as co-equal and granting them greater inheritance rights. The proposal was returned to parliament for further review.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Official Language

French is the official language used in government, corporations, mass media, and formal education; however, the indigenous Bambara (also known as Bamana) is the national language among a majority (80%) of Malians and is the native tongue of Mali's largest ethnic group (see *Political & Social Relations*). Bambara actually achieved its national reach during 19th and 20th-century French colonization, where it was the language-of-choice for the French army and Christian missionaries.

Mali is classified as a multilingual nation whose residents speak multiple languages. It is noteworthy that French is spoken as an alternative to English, not in parallel, and therefore, most Malians do not speak or even comprehend the English language.

Native Languages

There are 32 spoken languages in Mali, most of which belong to the Niger-Congo language family (Africa's largest indigenous language group). Traditionally, ethnic groups occupying territories along the Niger River established remote villages having little if any external contact. Consequently, a variety of customs and dialects (speech variations) emerged as these groups adapted to their diverse lifestyles. For example, the traditionally agrarian Dogon tribe alone embodies nearly 50 different dialects (see *Political & Social Relations*).

Arabic

Since the 9th or 10th century, Berber traders from the North introduced their Arabic language and alphabet, along with their Islamic faith (see *History & Myth*), to Mali's indigenous cultures. Arabic eventually was used to record Mali's first written history,

which traditionally had been passed orally through the generations. Similarly, since Arabic is the language of the Qur'an (holy book of Islam), it continues to be used in Islamic worship practices (see *Religion & Spirituality*) and among some inhabitants along the Mauritanian border.

Communication Style

Malians generally are outgoing and friendly people who enjoy engaging in conversation, both with acquaintances and strangers. Infinitely patient, they avoid confrontation and display of emotion, especially anger. They commonly express themselves using a variety of both verbal and non-verbal gestures, using a calm yet somewhat direct manner.

For example, when making a suggestion or asking someone for assistance, they commonly use the French phrase, "Il faut" which translates as "(it) should be..." While this comment could be interpreted as demanding, to a Malian it simply serves as a request. Conversely, they also have an indirect manner known as "musalaha," which refers to avoiding a straightforward response when unsure of the other person's intent, particularly a stranger's.

Greetings

Malians value greetings and neglecting or rushing the welcoming process is considered disrespectful. While a simple "hello" is usually adequate in Western cultures, throughout Africa and Mali in particular, the greeting process is more elaborate and lengthy.

When meeting, Malians commonly shake hands gently while touching their right elbow with the left-hand fingertips as a gesture of respect. An alternative method is to touch their right hand on their forehead or over their heart following the handshake. While customary in some Muslim cultures, kissing on the cheeks is not part of the Malian salutation.

However, like most Muslim cultures, members of the opposite sex do not normally shake hands and typically remain publicly segregated. In more contemporary urban areas, it is more common for a woman to extend her hand to a male counterpart, particularly in professional settings. Rule of thumb for a male Airman in this situation: respond in kind with reserve and modesty.

It is proper protocol for the elderly or a person of status, such as a village chief, to initiate the handshake. In response it is proper to slightly bow the head as a sign of respect. In some locations, particularly in the south, women commonly bend their knees when greeting an elderly person. Additionally, when joining a group, the person typically approaches and shakes hands with each member, beginning with the most senior.

Greeting Etiquette

- The handshake is the most common form of greeting.
- It is proper for the elderly or person of status to initiate the handshake.
- Greetings should include inquiries about the health and wellbeing of the person and his family.
- In formal situations, using an academic or professional title is expected.
- Malians normally use their first names only among family and close friends.
- They usually greet new acquaintances by using title and surname.
- It is proper to wait for an invitation from your host-nation counterparts before using only their first name.

Titles

While friends normally converse on a first-name basis, new acquaintances exchange greetings using title and surname (last or family name). It is noteworthy that traditionally, a Malian's family name represents his social status and ethnicity (see *Political & Social Relations*). Depending on their situation, some Malians may appear cautious when using their family names, particularly when meeting outsiders.

When introducing yourself as an Airman to a host-nation counterpart for the first time, it is appropriate to use rank along with first and last name, for example, Major Shawn Smith. Thereafter, use rank and last name. Similarly, when establishing a social relationship with the local people, it is best to wait until invited before using only their first name.

Gestures

- In Islamic societies, the left hand is reserved for hygienic purposes and considered unsanitary (although with Western influence, this restriction has declined in importance in urban areas).
  - It is best to use the right hand in social settings.
  - It is customary, however, for family members or close friends to shake with their left hands when separating for an extended period.
- Pointing with the index finger is perceived as impolite – it is proper to point with the entire hand.
- As a gesture of respect, it is customary not to establish direct eye contact with an elder or person of status.
  - Direct eye contact is appropriate among members of the same status or age and friends.
- Belching during a meal indicates the person has finished eating and is considered a compliment to the host.

Discussion Topics

After the initial greeting, Malians will often inquire about each other's health, job, or family; thereby spending a few minutes in "small talk." Asking about family members indicates sincerity and is an important part of the greeting process. For a newcomer, it is considered proper to show interest in your counterpart's background. Malians are proud of their heritage and honored to share their history, which they are known to convey using oral traditions, riddles, and proverbs (see *Aesthetics & Recreation*).

It is best to avoid discussing potentially sensitive topics such as politics, religion, status, and sex-related themes. While some Malians are open to discussing some of these topics, it is difficult to gauge in advance their views about them.

Criticism and Humiliation

The concept of constructive criticism is not viewed positively in Malian culture. It is therefore best to avoid giving public criticism – if you need to approach an issue critically, it is best to do so privately. Individual criticism in the presence of a person's peers could result in a loss of face – a serious insult to a Malian.

Friendship

It is important for Airmen to understand that forging relationships is a complex and refined process, and it may require several visits to gain mutual understanding and trust (see *Political & Social Relations* and *Time & Space*). Malians value friendships and honor guests with warm hospitality. However, it is important to be mindful that in Muslim cultures, men and women do not normally socialize together.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Translations

English	French	Bambara
Do you speak English?	Parlez-vous anglais?	I bi angèlèkan men wa?
Hello	Bonjour	I ni cè
Good morning	Bonjour	I ni sogoma
Good afternoon	Bon après-midi	I ni tile / I ni wula
Good night	Bonsoir	Ka dugu n'yumanjè
Welcome	Bienvenu	Ao dansey
Yes / No	Oui / Non	Awoah / Aee
OK	OK	A njè na
What is your name?	Comment vous apelez-vous?	I togo?
My name is__	Je m'appelle __	N'togo __
How are you?	Comment vas tu?	I bè tiokodi
How is your family?	Comment va la famille?	Somogo bè di?
I'm fine	Je vais bien	Ne ka kéné
Good-bye	Au revoir	Kan ben
Please / Thank you	S'il vous plait /Merci	--- / Ini tie
I don't know	Je ne sais pas	N'tah don
Yesterday	Hier	Kunu
Today	Aujourd'hui	Bee
Tomorrow	Demain	Sini
Next week	La semaine prochaine	Dogo kunwèrè
Later	Plus tard	Kofeh
Excuse me	Excusez-moi	Haké to
I don't understand	Je ne comprends pas	N m'a faamu
Where is the toilet?	Ou sont les toilettes?	Nyegan be min wa?
Why?	Pourquoi?	Mun ka ma?
When?	Quand?	Uma ju mè
Maybe	Peut-ètre	A ma don
What time is it?	Quelle heure est-il?	Leer jumen be yèn?
How much?	C'est combine?	Joli?

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy: Age 15 and over who can read and write

- Total population: 35.5%
- Male: 46.2%
- Female: 25.7% (2018 estimate)

Historical Development

Islamic schools date back to the 10th century, where centers of learning in the cities of Gao, Timbuktu, and Djenné attracted students from throughout West Africa. Beginning in the 19th-century colonial period, the French government in Mali established schools for the sons of Muslim leaders, where they learned the French language and culture and were groomed for colonial employment following graduation.

In the years following the 1960 independence, the new government spent about 20% of its budget on education, bringing a notable upsurge in enrollments. However, the early 21st century saw a significant decline in school attendance, with only 59% of all children (mostly males) in primary school.

While school attendance is compulsory for ages 7 to 16, primary school enrollment remains low mainly because of overhead costs, even though attendance is free. In rural areas, many children remain at home to help support the family, with a majority of students dropping out of school by age 12.

With the average Malian woman birthing up to 6 children (see *Sustenance & Health*); girls in particular are needed at home to assist with sibling care. There also exists a shortage of both schools and qualified teachers in rural areas. Of note, non-governmental foreign aid organizations have instituted programs to promote literacy throughout the country.

Education System

The system provides for 6 years of primary education beginning at age 7, followed by 6 years of secondary education, generally divided into two 3-year cycles. Private schools, particularly Roman Catholic, have become more attractive for students from the more elite families.

Higher Education

Mali in 1996 incorporated various higher learning institutes into the University of Bamako, which now has over 100,000 students. Instruction is predominantly in French. Advanced institutions similar to 2-year community colleges in the US are available to a small percentage of students who have the financial and political influence to gain admission. Optionally, some Malians study abroad, particularly in France, to acquire their advanced degrees.

Oral History
(See *History & Myth)*

Malian folk legends traditionally were the first media used to reinforce moral values and perpetuate traditions and continue to thrive, particularly in rural areas. A unique occupation popular in West Africa (primarily Mali and Senegal) is that of the *griot (jali* in the Mandé language), which was established during the pre-colonial Mali Empire (14th century) to entertain the royal household (see *History & Myth*). Known as born musicians and existing on the same social status as craftsmen, *griots* recite history through songs, stories, dances, or poems for their community or clansmen. Similarly, the town *griot* records memorable events and is therefore responsible for preserving and teaching history. Typically, there is no official salary for the *griot,* although the townspeople usually account for his financial needs.

8. TIME AND SPACE

Concept of Time and Space

Malians have a relaxed view of time compared to Westerners, whereby they have little regard for time management and punctuality. Conversely, they are more concerned about human interactions and relationship-building and are known to be infinitely patient and tolerant.

Flexibility: Similarly, Malians are very flexible when unforeseen circumstances such as lack of transportation or family illness arise that would cause a delay or extended absence. This attitude does not mean they are not committed to their occupations – it just signifies that in Malian society, most personal issues take precedence over all other commitments.

Personal Space & Eye Contact: When speaking with a casual acquaintance, Malians typically maintain a closer personal space than you may be accustomed to and tend to avoid direct eye contact (see *Language & Communication*). Similarly, it is common for people of the same sex to touch while conversing.

Space between Friends: Typically, friends of the same sex are considerably more affectionate with one another and have closer spatial relations. It is normal for them to hold hands or have their arms around each other while walking. These gestures signal friendship and to back away would likely cause offense. (However, publically holding the opposite sex with intimacy is not proper behavior). They value friendship,

and close friends have great influence on situational outcomes, more-so than in American culture.

Taking Photos: Malians generally value their privacy and expect outsiders to respect that privilege. It is therefore wise to ask permission to photograph local citizens.

Don't Forget Prayer Time: Muslims take time during the workday for prayers, so it is important that you plan your business appointments accordingly. Since Friday is the Muslim day of worship, Malians normally worship at the local Mosque in the afternoon.

Negotiations

- It is best not to expect immediate decisions, as reaching agreement usually requires follow-on discussions and negotiating for mutual benefits.
- Disagreements should be handled in a calm, diplomatic manner and should never involve raised voices and anger.
- It is helpful to find ways to compromise, even if it results in delays, and seek "win-win" outcomes.
- It is good to remember that Malians are extremely patient and tend to consider time on their side.
- If the negotiation involves cost for an item, you may have to bargain (a common practice in shopping markets), so it is advisable to initially name a lower price than you are willing to pay.

Conducting Business

As mentioned earlier, Malians have a relaxed view of time, with few events following a schedule. You can anticipate for appointments to start late, although meetings with government and military are usually prompt. It is imperative that you adjust

to the local lifestyle, approaching the situation with good humor and flexibility.

Initial meetings often involve long greetings and lengthy small talk to establish relationships. You can anticipate being offered refreshments and asked questions about yourself and your family. You will likewise be expected to inquire about the other person (see *Language & Communication*).

Patience is necessary to building effective cross-cultural relations. Reaching consensus or agreement generally takes longer than Americans are accustomed to, and it may require several meetings to accomplish what you would generally handle via a routine phone call.

Malian Work Week

As in Western cultures, the Malian work week begins on Monday and ends on Friday. Business hours vary in the summer and during the holy month of Ramadan. (Photo a courtesy of Pro Quest 2010).

The Islamic Calendar

The Islamic calendar is used to determine the proper day to celebrate religious holidays and festivals. It is a lunar calendar and contains 12 months, although it is 11 days shorter than the Western or Gregorian calendar. As a result, from one year to the next, Islamic holidays fall 11 days earlier on the Western calendar than the previous year.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Attire

While attire varies by ethnic group, both traditional and Western-style clothing are fashionable. The Bambara people are known for their distinctively colorful mud cloth (***bogolan***), a traditional art form consisting of symbolic designs on cotton cloth shaped from a natural clay and mineral dye mixture.

Men generally wear Western-style trousers and a shirt, although the traditional ***boubou*** (long and flowing embroidered robe) is worn over the pants and shirt during special occasions. Men also commonly wear embroidered hats.

Rural women normally wear the more traditional long wraparound skirts (***pagne)*** similar to the male *boubou*, along with blouses and a head wrap. The skirts are made of printed cloth with various patterns designed to suit the latest fashions. Urban women, like men, more commonly wear Western styles. Of note, shorts typically are considered inappropriate adult clothing in Mali, as well as most Muslim societies, for both men and women.

Recreation

Soccer: As in many African nations, Mali's most popular sport is soccer, which they call football, with Mali sponsoring a

national football team, the *Les Aigles* (The Eagles). In 2002 Mali hosted the all-Africa soccer tournament, although the Malian team has yet to qualify for world cup finals. Its most renowned player is Salif Keita (same name as Mali's famed afro-pop singer – songwriter).

Other Pastimes: Basketball is also popular, with Mali competing at the national level, and the women's team the only African team participating in the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Similarly, a traditional board game similar to chess (known by a variety of names such as *mancala*, *wori*, and *bau*) is another popular activity for all ages.

In urban areas, movie houses are popular, where the latest international releases are shown with French subtitles. Additionally, Mali has its own small-scale film-making industry. In rural communities, leisure time is a premium where most people are preoccupied with subsistence activities.

The Arts

In Mali and throughout Africa, art of a variety of forms traditionally served a greater purpose – usually ceremonial to impart spiritual power. For example, exquisitely carved wooden masks have been used for centuries during Dogon rite-of-passage ceremonies (see *Political & Social Relations*); whereby masked dancers assume spiritual identities and ensure departed members safely pass into the spirit world.

An architectural marvel, the city of Djenné exemplifies the traditional elements of Malian structural design, where sun-dried bricks covered in a mud-based plaster became more than a standard – it represents a perfected art form (see *Religion & Spirituality*).

Similarly, the nomadic Tuaregs are renowned leather craftsmen who produce saddle bags from goat skins used to transport their personal belongings as they traverse the Sahara environment in camel caravans.

Additionally, Bamako goldsmiths have sustained their simple handcrafting techniques since ancient times. Inspired by mythology, Mali's intricately-designed gold jewelry is a popular item among tourists.

Music

Malian music is presented in a variety of forms, from traditional village ceremonial dances to African pop tunes common in big-city nightclubs. Many of Mali's traditional lyrics are composed by village *griots* (see *Learning & Knowledge*), who combine mythical tales with music to entertain and educate the local people. Griots use the 21-string *kora* to compose their stories, accompanied by a wooden percussion instrument similar to a xylophone known as a *balaphon*. The kora is also played at festive ceremonies such as weddings and child-naming events. Another popular instrument is the *djembe* drum (pictured), made with goatskin stretched over wood.

Mali has promoted a number of internationally-famed musicians to include afro-pop singer-songwriter Salif Keita, legendary blues guitarist and singer Ali Farka Touré, and best female musician Oumou Sangare.

Known as the "Golden Voice of Africa," **Salif Keita** is the most famous contemporary singer and a direct descendent of Sundiata Keita, who founded the 13th-century Mali Empire.

Salif was rejected by family and community because he was born albino. His music is a combination of traditional West African, European, and American styles.

Similar to the "talking blues" genre of Mississippi's John Lee Hooker, **Ali Farka Touré's** blues music was inspired by African-American performers whose themes were anchored in their African roots. Historically, American blues originated in West Africa and was brought to America by slaves in the 19th century, where it was popularized in African-American communities primarily in the Deep South.

Of note, Ali Farka Touré's son, **Boureima "Vieux" Farka Touré**, (whose genres are rock, reggae, and soul) has become one of the most celebrated contemporary African guitarists. Vieux Touré's live concert album released in June 2010 has made him a legend at a time when the Western world is beginning to recognize modern West African performers.

Known as the "Songbird of Wassoulou," which is a testament to her ancestry, **Oumou Sangare** sings to promote women's rights, with her themes steeped in her own childhood.

Literature

Much of Mali's pre-colonial history was preserved originally in oral tradition passed through the generations and first recorded in Arabic, the traditional language of Islam and the Qur'an (see *Language & Communication* and *Learning & Knowledge*).

With colonization came the introduction of the French language, with Mali folklore scholars, such as Moussa B. Travélé, publishing their works in French. Travélé is known for *Proverbes et contes Bambara* (Bambara Proverbs and Tales). One of Mali's best known poets, Amadou Hampate Ba, is popular for his first collection of folk tales in 1955. Likewise, Fily Dabo Sissoko was one of Mali's first poets with his *La Passion de Djimé* (Djimé's Passion).

In most rural areas, it remains a popular pastime to recite ancient poems and ballads. Malian author Baba Wagué Diakité, who grew up listening to these tales, moved to the US in 1985 where he has published children's books, such as *The Magic Gourd* (2003), whose fairytales personify moral lessons.

Traditional Celebrations

Local communities traditionally celebrate agricultural activities, particularly planting and harvesting.

Festival of the Desert: Every January since 1991 the Saharan Tuareg tribe holds a 3-day traditional music festival known as *Festival in the Desert*, staged as a small oasis town, Essakane, about 50 miles northwest of Timbuktu. Besides a time for celebration, the festival also functions as a family reunion for kinsmen residing in remote parts of the Sahara Desert and as an ethnic cultural renewal.

Festival on the Niger: The *Festival on the Niger* is a Malian cultural event held each February in the city of Segou and includes participants from all indigenous ethnic groups. The gathering is designed to promote Mali's cultural development.

Public Holidays

- New Year's Day (January 1)
- Armed Forces Day (January 20)
- Ramadan (Islamic)*
- Democracy Day (March 26)
- Easter Monday (Christian)*
- Mouloud (Birthday of the Prophet – Islamic)*
- Labor Day (May 1)
- Africa Day (May 25)
- Independence Day (September 22)
- Korité (End of Ramadan – Islamic)*
- Christmas Day (December 25 – Christian)

*Dates vary based on Muslim Lunar calendar or Christian Gregorian calendar.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Dining Etiquette

Traditionally, rural Malian families eat from communal bowls, with the male head-of-household determining the seating arrangement. For example, men and boys usually share a bowl, while small children and women share another. Adult men and women seldom eat from the same bowl, while persons of age and status are assigned positions of honor. It is customary for participants to dine from the portion of the bowl directly in front of them.

Diet

Staple foods in Mali are predominantly starches such as rice and a variety of grains (millet, corn, sorghum, and root vegetables) mashed into porridge. Milk, dates, and wheat are popular in the north. A typical meal consists of a starch with vegetable or meat, and a spicy sauce made from peanuts, okra, hot chilies, or baobab leaves (native African plant). Common meats include chicken, lamb, and fish and popular vegetables and fruits are tomatoes, onions, eggplant, bananas, mangos, watermelon, and lemons. Malians typically consume the same types of food at each meal, with grains popular in rural communities and rice in urban areas (Photo a courtesy of Pro Quest 2010).

Malian Cuisine: Malian cuisine still retains notable French influence (see *History & Myth*), with French baguettes (bread loaves) and classic salad vinaigrette popular in urban areas. While popular dishes and preparation techniques vary by ethnic group, some of the more common entrees include:

- ***Riz*** (plain rice)
- ***Larho*** (millet porridge with ground peanuts)
- ***To*** (millet porridge with sauce)
- ***Nsaamé or Riz au gras*** (rice dish with meat & vegetables)

- ***Poulet kedjennou*** (chicken with vegetables)
- ***Poulet yassa*** (chicken with onions)
- ***Diabadji*** (meat with onion sauce)
- ***Fakoye*** (lamb in herb sauce)
- ***Naboulou*** (meat with baobab leaves in peanut sauce)
- ***Tigé tigé or Sauce d' arachide*** (meat in peanut sauce)
- ***Tcheke*** (fish with plantains, which are hybrid bananas)
- ***Aloko*** (fried plantains)
- ***Ragout d'igname*** (yam stew)
- ***Goyo*** (Eggplant)
- ***Meni-meniyong*** (Malian dessert made from sesame seeds, honey, and unsalted butter)

Tea Ceremony

The brewing and serving of tea in Mali involves a large degree of pomp and ceremony, particularly in the north among Tuareg nomads, and is considered a dignified way to welcome a newcomer or socialize with close friends. It is common for tea-drinking associations, known as *grins*, to meet and savor the three-course event.

Traditionally, three glasses of very sweet tea follow the evening meal, with the same teabag used to brew all three servings. The freshly brewed first glass is said to be "strong as death," the second "mild as life," and the third "sweet as love."

Malians serve tea by suspending the tea pot high above the cups (the size of shot glasses), allowing the hot tea to flow through the air and form a froth when it reaches the cup. This action also serves to cool the tea for drinking.

Beverages: Popular drinks include soft drinks, fruit juice, and tea, along with indigenous ***jinjinbere*** (drink made from water, sugar, lemon, and ginger) and ***dabileni*** (combination of water, sugar, and a sour leaf known as sorrel). Coffee is not so popular

and is mostly instant. While Islam prohibits alcohol consumption, homemade millet beer is popular.

Health Issues

As with many developing countries, Mali suffers from extreme poverty, widespread disease, and a poor health care system. While malaria is the most common cause of death in Mali, other parasitic infections and childhood diseases such as measles and malnutrition are rampant throughout the country. Of note, less than 1.4% of the adult population is infected with the HIV/AIDS virus, which is among the lowest rates throughout Sub-Saharan Africa (although on the incline).

Infectious Diseases: Because of poor sanitation and an insufficient potable water supply, infectious and parasitic diseases are common. These include meningitis, cholera, tuberculosis, hepatitis, typhoid fever and malaria.

Malaria is widespread in central and southern Mali, as well as the drier Sahel during the rainy season (see *Political & Social Relations*). It contributes significantly to mortality among children under age 5 and pregnant women and further contributes to high incidences of periodic illness and adult absenteeism especially during the rainy season.

Mali has one of the world's highest fertility (average woman births 6 offspring) and infant mortality rates (64 in 1,000 children die prior to age 5 – only about 44% of births are attended by skilled medical personnel). The average adult life expectancy rate is 59 for men and 64 for women, with almost half of the population less than age 15.

Inadequate Facilities: Concentrated primarily in urban areas, medical facilities are understaffed and void of modern equipment and treatment. Therefore, a majority of the population does not have access to proper healthcare.

Traditional Medical Practices: Many rural people rely on traditional methods, with local practitioners using a variety of

plants and herbs to treat patients. Most families also have their own secret remedies. While in some cases traditional medicine proves effective with fewer side effects than modern drugs, traditional practices do not adequately treat the more serious conditions.

However, some traditional practices are recognized as universally beneficial and have stimulated an emerging research effort, referred to as *ethnopharmacopeia,* to promote large-scale production of reliable medications. Based on sound medical knowledge, these medicines are an inexpensive alternative already available to a majority of Malians.

Tradition of the Kola Nut

Since ancient times, the kola nut has had social significance throughout West Africa. Renowned as a "quick fix" energy booster, some people describe it as the "poor man's friend" for its high caffeine content. In fact, the first Coca-Cola recipe contained the kola nut thus coining the "cola" label.

Among local tribesmen and even in professional settings, chewing the kola nut is a popular social pastime. Because of its stark bitter taste, the kola nut typically is not swallowed when chewed.

Among some ethnic groups, it is customary for the prospective husband to deliver a few kola nuts to his future in-laws, whose acceptance indicates marriage approval. Similarly, exchanging kola nuts between rivals signifies a peace accord, with the nut halved between the two parties to signify goodwill.

Traditionally, West Africans have used the kola nut as a household remedy for digestive disorders, nausea, and diarrhea. Its high caffeine content is believed to suppress anxiety, migraine headaches, and hunger.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Economic Overview

In 2017, Mali was among the world's 25 poorest countries, with about 50% of its population living in poverty. Its gross domestic product (GDP) is divided among three sectors (2018 est.): agriculture (39%), services (37%), and industry (19%).

With 70% of Mali's land non-arable desert or semi-desert, economic activity is largely limited to processing farm commodities concentrated along the Niger River. About 80% of the labor force (small-scale family enterprises) is engaged in subsistence farming and fishing and another 10% are nomadic. Dependent on foreign aid from a variety of multilateral organizations, Mali historically has been constrained by pricing fluctuations for its primary exports, gold and cotton, and by high transportation costs due to Mali's landlocked position.

Fortunately, the future appears encouraging, as Mali's government has successfully implemented a recommended International Monetary Fund (IMF) structural adjustment program that is promoting economic growth, diversity, and foreign investment. Consequently, promoting private sector development is essential to sustaining substantial economic performance.

Similarly, the GDP growth has remained strong, supported by plentiful rainfall and stable gold exports, although the country remains highly vulnerable to inclement climatic conditions such as drought and flooding (see *Technology & Material*).

Agriculture

Mali is Africa's second largest cotton producer, devoting considerable arable land to this crop. Malians also produce rice, grains (corn, millet, and sorghum), peanuts, sugarcane,

and vegetables and herding livestock (cattle, goats, and sheep) for export throughout the region.

Lacking modern equipment and techniques, farming methods are largely primitive, using a slash-and-burn technique that has existed for generations. Farmers depend on livestock and basic hand tools to cultivate the land.

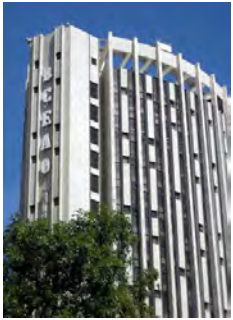
Malians also engage in forestry activities, with fuel wood the primary energy source for most residences. Similarly, the country's rivers produce as much as 100,000 tons of fish annually, 20% of which is exported, with the city of Mopti the country's center for the fishing industry.

Natural Resources

Mali's natural resources (currently mined) include gold (Mali is Africa's third largest gold producer after South African and Ghana), phosphate, kaolin (white clay used to make porcelain), salt and limestone. Unexploited deposits of oil, bauxite, iron ore, manganese, lithium, and uranium are known or believed to exist.

Services

Mali's services sector includes employment in government, healthcare, education, retail sales, banking, and tourism.



Banking and Finance: Primarily government-owned, Mali's banking industry is controlled by a central bank, the Central Bank of the West African States or *Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest* (BCEAO) in French, based in Dakar, Senegal. Mali's banking system consists of seven commercial banks, one agricultural bank, and one housing

bank with financial services heavily concentrated in urban areas. As part of the IMF economic stimulus program, privatization efforts are ongoing and expected to enhance financial services (Photo a courtesy of Pro Quest 2010).

Currency: Mali's unit of currency is the *CFA Franc* (commonly referred to as franc), which includes two currencies used in Africa (the West African CFA franc and the Central African CFA franc) that are guaranteed by the French treasury and also united with the *Euro* currency at a fixed rate. Mali's franc has a USD exchange rate of 1 US dollar equating to about 605.3 francs. The franc is divided further into 100 centimes. Mali's currency is issued by the Bank of West African States, with the capital city, Bamako, offering ATMs for 24/7 service. VISA cards are accepted in urban areas, with Diners Club and Master Cards to a lesser extent.

Tourism: Historically of little economic significance, Mali's tourist industry is beginning to show promise as its once isolated cultural heritage gains international recognition (see "Dogon Country" in *Political & Social Relations*). Of note, Mali's hosting of the 2002 Africa Cup of Nations tournament helped it gain recognition. However, Mali's tourism is hampered by an underdeveloped transportation system and shortage of services facilities (see *Technology & Material*), as well as ongoing terrorist attacks and criminal violence.

Industry

The Malian economy is hardly industrialized despite modernization efforts since 1960 independence. Small-scale manufacturing activities include food processing, textiles,

cigarettes, and metalworking among others. Gold mining accounts for about 80% of the natural resource excavation activity, conducted by two private South African investors – Anglo-American and Randgold.

Geography & Climate (see *Political & Social Relations*).

Salt & Camel Caravans

Since ancient times, camel caravans belonging to the indigenous Tuareg and Moor nomads have traversed Mali's rugged northernmost Sahara Desert to transport mined salt slabs. Within the Taoudenni salt mines, situated some 400 miles north of Timbuktu, Bella tribesmen (formerly slaves to Tureg nomads) carve salt blocks from the ancient lake bed, where they form 100-pound slabs.

With each camel carrying 4 salt slabs, and a single caravan consisting of several hundred camels, the salt is transported to Timbuktu (a 2-week journey), with the teams travelling at night when the desert temperatures drop by about 40 degrees. The camels are unloaded during the daytime and allowed to rest for the next night's journey.

The Tuareg or Moor caravan leader must be intimately familiar with the terrain and enabled to "read the sands" as keenly as a trucker would read a map. He must know precisely how to navigate to each oasis, as a slight mistake could be fatal for the entire team.

Upon arrival at Timbuktu, the salt slabs are then transported by boat via the Niger River to Mopti (a trans-shipment hub), where the slabs are cut into smaller sections and stored in warehouses for distribution throughout West Africa.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Technology

Accounting for 18% of the gross domestic product (GDP), Mali's industrial base employs only about 7% of the total population. The manufacturing subsector (concentrated in Bamako) is relatively insignificant; consisting primarily of food processing, construction materials, and basic consumer goods (see *Economics & Resources*). Similarly, future development prospects are hampered by energy shortages, smuggling, and competition from neighbors with better developed economies.
The one bright spot is the mining industry that provides for 7-11%% of Mali's GDP.

Energy Sources

Mali's energy resources are primitive and unreliable, with energy shortages hampering economic development. While fuel wood and charcoal provide about 78% of the country's energy requirements, hydropower generates most of Mali's electricity. However, during dry periods power outages are regular occurrences.

Transportation

Mali's transportation infrastructure is inadequate, with deficiencies contributing to marginalized economic growth and development. However, there have been recent improvements, most notably in preparation for Mali's hosting of the African Nations Cup football tournament in 2002.

Waterways: From August to December, the Niger River is usually navigable by larger ships, with canoes and small craft in use year-round. A covered watercraft, known as a *pinasse*, is a common mode of public transportation (Photo a courtesy of Pro Quest 2010).

Roadways: Travel by roadway is difficult, since the only paved road connects the regional capitals and Bamako to the Côte d'Ivoire coast at Abidjan, with most other roads unpaved and passable only in the dry season. While buses link major cities, outlying areas are usually only accessible by pickup trucks or passenger vans. People otherwise walk, ride bikes or mopeds.

In general, road conditions outside of urban areas are hazardous, especially at night. Isolation, poor road conditions, and banditry have rendered overland travel to the north of Mali especially dangerous. Similarly, many of Mali's northern thoroughfares are little more than long, isolated desert tracks.

There are planned road construction projects to further connect Bamako to Dakar, Senegal and Kankan, Guinea, as well as a trans-Saharan road linking Mali with Algeria.

Railroads: Mali has only one railroad which connects its capital city, Bamako, and its major port, Koulikoro, to Dakar, Senegal. It also serves as the major trade link for landlocked Mali. Poorly maintained and unreliable, Mali's rail system is mostly inoperable during the rainy season (June-November).

Civil Aviation and Airports: Mali has 8 airports with paved runways, with Bamako (the major air hub) providing intercontinental and European flights. Mali formerly had a national airline (Air Mali), although discontinued in 2003. Air France and Royal Air Maroc are now the major carriers, among others.

Telecommunications

Telephone: Telephone connections are generally reliable in urban areas, although not extensive, with cellular service popular (115 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants).

Radio & Television: Television broadcasts (primarily in French) are available in most regions, although rural access is limited. Radio is the main source of news and transmitted in local languages.

Postal Service: Mail is only delivered to postal and government offices and not to homes. Rural people usually send parcels via travelers to a particular location.

Print Media: With multi-party democracy in 1992 (see *History & Myth*) came a significant increase in print media to include a variety of private newspapers and journals published in French, Arabic, and various local languages. Mali's constitution guarantees freedom of speech and press, with a broad range of viewpoints permitted to include government criticism.

Internet: Since private computers are largely unaffordable, access is most widely available through urban internet cafés. Roughly 13% of Malians used the internet in 2017.

Environmental Issues

Mali's major environmental concerns include desertification, deforestation, soil erosion, drought, and shortages of potable water.

Natural Hazards

A dry dusty wind blows from the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic Ocean during the dry season, while the Niger River is known to flood during the rainy season.

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