



CULTURAL ORIENTATION

# FRENCH-MALI



*Great Mosque of Djenné  
Flickr / Baron Reznik*

Ti  
2017



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DEFENSE LANGUAGE INSTITUTE  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE CENTER

# CULTURAL ORIENTATION | French-Mali



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*Songho's Village with the Traditional Architecture of Dogons' Houses and Granaries  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

## Chapter 1 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

# Profile

## Introduction

Mali is a large, landlocked country in West Africa that is relatively flat and arid. The country is home to many ethnic groups. French is the official language of Mali, but over 50 languages are spoken, and 13 of these are designated national languages.<sup>1, 2, 3</sup> Approximately 80% of Malians speak Bambara, and it is a prominent lingua franca.<sup>4</sup>

Mali's economy depends on agricultural production and mineral extraction—activities that are sensitive to natural disasters and price fluctuations in world markets. Mali was one of the least-developed countries on the United Nations Human Development

Index.<sup>5</sup> Income distribution is highly unequal; approximately half the population lives on less than USD 1.25 per day.<sup>6, 7, 8</sup>

## Important Elements of Geography

### Climate



*After the storm near Sélingué Lake  
Flickr / Xavier Ceccaldi*

Yearly cycles of rainfall combine with annual temperature changes to produce three seasons. The weather is dry and hot from February to June, wet and relatively mild from June to November, and dry and cooler from November to February.<sup>9</sup> These weather patterns produce three climate zones in Mali. The northernmost Saharan zone has almost no annual rainfall, mean daily temperature highs of 48°C (119°F), and lows of 5°C (41°F). In the Sahelian Savanna, the continent-spanning

transitional region between the Sahara and equatorial Africa, annual rainfall averages 100-200 mm (4-8 in) and a mean daily temperature of 29°C (84°F). The third, the Inner Niger Delta flooded savanna, has rainfall averages of 700-1,300 mm (28-51 in) each year, with a mean daily temperature of 27°C (81°F).<sup>10, 11</sup>

## Geographic Divisions

### Sahara

The Sahara in northeastern Mali includes the shifting sand dunes of Erg Chech, the salt deposits of Taoudenni, and the rocky plains of the Tanezrouft reg.<sup>12, 13</sup> To the east and north is the Iforas Massif with an elevation of about 600 meters (2,000 feet); the eroded sandstone plateau extends from the Ahaggar (Hoggar) Mountains of the central Sahara (a massif is a large mountain mass or a group of connected mountains).<sup>14, 15</sup>



*Malian Sahara  
Flickr / Emilia Tjernström*

This region is home to the Tamasheq-speaking Tuareg people. Tamasheq speakers are predominantly nomadic people, and their encampments are scattered throughout northeastern Mali.<sup>16</sup> The region is vast, underdeveloped, and comprises about 65% of Mali's total area—1,240,192 sq km (480,000 sq mi).<sup>17</sup> Northeast Mali shares borders with Mauritania to the west, Algeria to the northeast, and Niger to the east and south. The area is divided into three administrative regions—Timbuktu, Kidal, and Gao—named after the major cities in those regions.<sup>18</sup> Gold was once the most important trade industry in Mali's ancient empires. Caravans transported gold on trade routes crisscrossing the Sahara in northern Mali as it made its way to North African markets.<sup>19</sup>

### *Sahelian Savanna*



*Sahel's dry and sandy soil*  
Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

Known as the inland delta of the Niger River, the Sahelian Savanna is part of the semiarid transition zone on the southern edge of the Sahara Desert.<sup>20</sup> In Arabic, sahel literally translates to “shore” of the great sand ocean.<sup>21</sup> Overall, this savanna is vast, stretching across the entire African continent from the Red Sea to the Atlantic Ocean—between the Sahara and the rainforests near the West African coast. In Mali, the Sahel is located south of the Sahara Desert and Southern Sahara

Steppe in northeastern Mali, and northeast of the Inner Niger Delta flooded savanna in southwestern Mali. This ecoregion once supported vast and diverse herds of large game, but these have been severely reduced due to unregulated hunting and habitat loss.<sup>22</sup>

For centuries, the Sahelian Savanna was home to some of Mali's most influential civilizations.<sup>23</sup> Supported by seasonal flooding, the Sahelian Savanna has also attracted cattle herders and farmers growing millet and sorghum. This region is currently one of the poorest and most environmentally damaged places in Mali and the world. In the 1970s, drought and famine killed nearly 200,000 people, and while conditions have since improved, it continues to face vicious cycles of soil erosion, deforestation, drought, desertification, and overpopulation. These conditions have hit Mali's legendary Timbuktu the hardest.<sup>24, 25</sup>

## Flooded Savanna

For four months each year, during the rainy season, floodwaters spill over the banks of the Niger and Bani rivers, causing the inner Niger Delta to swell to an area of about 20,000 sq km (7,722 sq mi). This annual flooding produces numerous swamps, lakes, and channels that provide critical habitat for migrating birds and manatees.<sup>26</sup> Located in the semi-arid Sahel region of central Mali, this area of floodplains and lakes is one of Africa's largest. One million Malians derive their livelihood from this ecosystem, mainly through fishing and agriculture.<sup>27</sup> The Niger River Basin is fragile and vulnerable to ecosystem change brought on by drought and flooding; livelihoods and food security are often negatively impacted. The UN Human Development Index ranks Mali 179 out of 188 countries for food insecurity.<sup>28</sup>



*Flooded Savanna*  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

## Plateaus



*Hombori Tondo*  
Wikimedia / Timm

Near the center of the country is Hombori Tondo (1,155 m, 3,800 ft), Mali's highest point. From the southwest border with Guinea, the Futa Djallon Massif extends into the Mandingue Plateau. This diverse region has highlands up to 640 m (2,100 ft) and deep river valleys.<sup>29</sup> Also in this region is the Bandiagara Plateau and Escarpment (Land of the Dogons), where people dwell in sandstone cliffs that rise to 1,000 m (3,300 ft). Estimates seem to suggest that round 600,000 Dogons to live in this area.

The Dogons are primarily farmers, while some are metal and leatherworkers.<sup>30</sup>



## Bodies of Water

### *Niger River*



*Niger River, Mali's most important water source  
Flickr / fous\_djikine*

Mali's most important water source is the Niger River and its inland delta system. After entering Mali through its southwestern border with Guinea, there are three dams: the Selingué, Sotuba, and Markala. The navigable course of the river runs some 1,600 km (1,000 mi) from Bamako's neighboring port near Koulikoro, northeast past Timbuktu, then east and south toward Gao.<sup>31, 32</sup>

From Mopti to Kabara, the river meanders, but its course is relatively straight.<sup>33</sup> Its current is slow, and it expands into a great system of lakes and wetlands. Lake Faguibine, once the largest of the system's lakes, nearly dried up in the 1990s.<sup>34</sup> About 400 km (250 mi) east of Timbuktu, the river narrows dangerously, preventing navigation during dry seasons.<sup>35</sup> Turning south, the river widens upstream of Gao and may be navigated up to the rapids south of Ansongo. Near the border with Niger, the river becomes passable again.<sup>36</sup> Mali is a member of the Niger Basin Authority created in 1980 to manage the water resources of the Niger River.<sup>37</sup>

### *Senegal River*

The Senegal River is the other major river in southwestern Mali. It begins at the confluence of the Bakoye and Bafing rivers near Bafoulabé and flows northwest past Kayes to become the border between neighboring Mauritania and Senegal. The Manantali Dam, 90 km (56 mi) upstream and southeast of Bafoulabé, forms a large reservoir, which supplies water and hydroelectricity. Since 1972, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal, through the Organization for the Development of the Senegal River, have cooperatively developed the Senegal River resources.<sup>38</sup>



*Senegal River going through the Kayes  
Flickr / Erwin Bolwidt*

## Major Cities

### *Bamako*

Bamako, the nation's capital, is located on the Niger River in southwestern Mali.<sup>39</sup> By some accounts, its name comes from the Bambara words bama-ko, “crocodile-river.” Oral tradition describes Bamako as the site of Sundiata Keita’s 13th century defeat of the Ghana Empire and his rise to power as the “lion prince” of the Mali Kingdom. The French declared Bamako the capital of colonial French Soudan (the colonial territory of Mali, part of French West Africa) in 1908. Bamako houses many government, higher education, and business organizations, as well as residential districts.<sup>40, 41</sup>



*Bamako City*  
Wikimedia / Arensond

### *Djenné*



*The Great Mosque of Djenné*  
Flickr / Ralf Steinberger

Djenné is the oldest known city in sub-Saharan Africa. Remnants of the original trading center, Jenne-Jeno, date from 250 BCE. The current city, on an island at the confluence of the Niger and Bani rivers, was settled in the 11th century. The city was a key hub of the gold and salt trades; the Songhai, Fulani, and Tukulor peoples conquered the city, which was subsequently occupied by France. This UNESCO World Heritage site is known for its Great Mosque, the world's largest adobe building, which is replastered each spring in a citywide celebration.<sup>42, 43</sup>

### *Timbuktu*

Located where the Niger River meets the Sahara, Timbuktu is the Malian city most famous to the outside world. Arabs wrote of its wealth in the 14th century, and

19th-century Europeans died while exploring its environs. Tuareg tradition says that “Timbuktu” means “mother with a large navel,” which refers to a disfigured woman who was left to guard a seasonal camp. Timbuktu became an important center of trade and learning by the 14th century. It is a regional capital today. Portions of the historic city center were designated as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 1988. More recently, international aid agencies have been helping to preserve thousands of ancient manuscripts. The region has been hit hard by drought; shifting sands threaten to bury its ancient structures.<sup>44, 45</sup>



*Timbuktu City  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

## *Gao*

Founded in the 7th century, Gao is on the southern course of the Niger River in the east of Mali. Called Kawkaw in early Arab histories, it was the capital of the kingdom of the Songhai, the last of the ancient empires of Mali. In the 14th century, its ruler, Askia Mohamed, returned from Mecca and converted his people to Islam. His tomb at the great mosque of Gao is a UNESCO World Heritage site. Contemporary Gao is a regional capital. Roads link Gao to Algeria, Timbuktu, Mopti, and Bamako.<sup>46</sup>

## *Mopti*



*Mopti Port  
Flickr / Jurgen*

The regional capital of Mopti lies at the confluence of the Niger and Bani rivers in the Macina region of central Mali. It is a city built on islands, sometimes called the “Venice of Mali.” It is a busy port, a center of fishing, and raising livestock. The population of Mopti is a diverse mix of peoples including Fulani, Bambara, Dogon, Songhai, Bozo, Bwa, and Tukolor.<sup>47, 48</sup>



## Important Elements of History

The Republic of Mali is a young nation with an ancient history. Humans have lived throughout the desert region for more than 7,000 years and settled on the Niger River over 2,000 years ago.<sup>49</sup> The West African empires—Ghana, Mali, and Songhai—controlled much of the area in modern-day Mali and neighboring countries from the 7th to the 16th centuries. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many smaller kingdoms arose and competed for ethnic, economic, and religious dominance.<sup>50</sup>

### *French West Africa*

In the 19th century, Europeans explored the area, and the French staked a colonial claim over the region, establishing French West Africa. In 1958, the colony became an autonomous republic within the French community. The republic fractured as pieces of the former colony formed independent states; in August of 1960, Mali became independent. Since independence, Mali has experienced military and civilian regimes, three constitutions, and single-party and multi-party political representation.<sup>51, 52</sup>

### *The Republic of Mali*

The Republic of Mali declared its independence from France on 22 September 1960. Modibo Keita, proclaimed Mali to be a one-party socialist state. In 1967, he launched an unpopular, Maoist-style cultural revolution, but he was deposed by Lieutenant Moussa Traoré in a military coup the following year. Mali experienced many domestic problems during Traoré's rule, which lasted until 1991. Prolonged droughts displaced tens of thousands of Malians to migrate from their homes into cities and other countries. In March of 2012, amid the conflict with Tuareg rebels and the ensuing humanitarian crisis, President Toure was overthrown by soldiers dissatisfied with the government's handling of the conflict; a civilian transition government was established.



*Equestrian Ceramic, Djenne, 12-16c*  
Flickr / Jonathan Dresner



*The Republic of Mali stamp*  
featuring President Modibo Keita  
Wikimedia Commons



Elections took place in August of 2013, and Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta was elected president of Mali.<sup>53, 54</sup>

## Government



*Inauguration ceremony of the President of the Republic of Mali  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Mali is a semi-presidential republic with three branches of government: an executive branch, a legislative branch, and a judicial branch.<sup>55</sup> The executive branch consists of an elected president, who is the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces; the president appoints a prime minister, who in turn appoints the cabinet. Presidential elections are held every five years. The legislative branch consists of the 147 elected members of the unicameral National Assembly; members of the National Assembly serve five-year terms. The judiciary consists of a Supreme Court and a Constitutional Court.<sup>56</sup>

## Media

Mali has more than 300 radio stations operating across the country, and roughly 60 newspapers are printed and circulated on a limited basis. Foreign broadcast media, including the BBC and Radio France, are on FM radio in Bamako and other areas. The only domestic state television station is ORTM, with a general manager appointed by the president based on the recommendation of the minister of communication. The executive branch tightly regulates ORTM content, which has national reach.<sup>57</sup>

As of 2015, only around 10.3% of Malians were able to access the internet via computer. Most Malians use a cell phone to access internet content. There are an estimated 134 mobile phone subscriptions for every 100 residents.<sup>58</sup>



*A boy showing his mobile device  
Flickr / Baron Reznik*

## Important Elements of Economy

### *Current Socio-Economic Climate*

Mali is one of the poorest countries in the world. Approximately 50.4% of the population lives below the poverty line.<sup>59</sup> While the poor in wealthy countries often have government-provided safety nets, most Malians must depend completely on informal social networks when they need economic assistance. Malians help one another survive through a traditional gift economy called *dama*. In *dama*, giving stems from *maaya*, “being human.” A person gives help without expecting anything specific in return, and a gift helps not only the recipient but also the community.<sup>60, 61</sup>



*Residents of a poor community*  
FFlickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Subsistence farming is the most important economic activity. Approximately 80% of the workforce is employed in agriculture. In drought years, Mali requires food aid to feed its people. Processing agricultural products, including food (meat and sugar), textiles, plant oils, and soaps, is the primary economic activity. Mining has been the second-most productive economic activity, accounting for 80% of export revenue.<sup>62, 63</sup> In addition to gold, the mining industry also mines for rock salt, sand and gravel, phosphates, and gemstones for export.<sup>64</sup>

In 2016, tourism accounted for 10.2% of Mali’s gross domestic product (GDP).<sup>65</sup> The “Festival au Desert” has become a major world music event since 2001, but security concerns leave the future of the event in question. Other prominent tourist attractions include Mali’s four UNESCO World Heritage Sites, as well as local cultural events festivals throughout the country.<sup>66, 67</sup>

## Ethnic Groups / Languages

The greatest variety of ethnic groups live in the population centers of the southern and western Mali. These darker-skinned peoples include the descendants of Mali's ancient empires. They often live near historical centers of power, or in areas that support an occupation (such as farming or fishing) traditionally associated with their group. In the desert north are lighter-skinned peoples whose ancestors traveled the Maghreb (from Arabic, "west")—the area of northwestern Africa between the Atlas Mountains and the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts—and brought Islam to the region.<sup>68</sup>

### *Mande*



*Mande*  
Flickr / Clément Girardot

About half of Mali's population is Mande, who mostly live in the southwest and speak related dialects. The Bambara are the largest Mande subgroup and constitute a majority in the capital, Bamako. Descendants of the Bambara and Kaarta kingdoms of earlier centuries, the Mande are traditionally farmers and craftspeople. Bambara is the first or second language of 80% of Malians and is spoken throughout West Africa. Other Mande people include the Malinke and the Soninke, now known

as traders and migrant workers. The Bozo, possibly descendants of Soninke who migrated out of the Ghana Empire, are traditionally fishermen.<sup>69</sup> Mande occupational castes include leatherworkers, blacksmiths, and potters.<sup>70</sup>

### *Fulani*

Descendants of the historical Peul, Macina, and Tukulor kingdoms, the Fulani peoples are about 15% of Mali's population. They speak Maasina Ffulfulde. Cattle herding is their traditional way of life, and many of them have settled throughout the grazing range extending north and south from the Niger River. Their annual cattle-crossing



*Fulani Women*  
Flickr / Mark Abel



festivals may include initiations, matchmakings, and other social events.<sup>71, 72</sup>

### *Senufo*

The Senufo constitute about 10.5% of the population and include the Mamara Senufo-speaking Minyanka and the Bomu. They live mostly along the border with Burkina Faso and Côte d'Ivoire where their ancestors ruled the historical kingdom of Kenedougou. They are farmers and retain strong traditional religious beliefs.<sup>73, 74, 75</sup>



*Senufu People*  
Wikimedia / Mkwadyo

### *Dogon*



*Dogon People*  
Flickr / Yann F

Although they number only 8.9% of the population, the Dogon are familiar to many in the West due to the work of ethnographers. Dogon architecture in the Bandiagara cliffs and its ethnic traditions have received World Heritage status from UNESCO. International collectors prize Dogon artifacts, such as ritual masks and granary doors. The Dogon speak over 40 different dialects, some so unrelated that they could be considered separate languages. Although the Dogon do not have

any centralized system of government, their villages are based on patrilineal descent in which the most senior male is the descendant of the extended family's common ancestor.<sup>76, 77</sup>

## Songhai

The Songhai are 1.6% of the population and live mostly in eastern Mali along the Niger River where they have traditionally pursued fishing and farming. The Songhai are descendants of the last ancient West African Empire, the Songhai Empire, which controlled much of present-day Mali and parts of Niger.<sup>78</sup>



Songhai

Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

## Tuareg



Tuareg Man

Flickr / Kevin Sharp

The Tuareg inhabit Mali's Sahara region; combined with other peoples of Berber origin, they consist of about 5% of Mali's population.<sup>79</sup> They are traditionally nomadic and span several countries across northern and western Africa. They are known in the region as the "blue men of the desert," due to their distinct blue clothing, but they refer to themselves as Kel Tamasheq, "speakers of Tamasheq," a Berber language distinct from other languages spoken in Mali. In 2012, Tuareg rebels and allied militant groups seized control of Northern Mali; the French military intervened, and a shaky peace was established in 2015.<sup>80, 81, 82</sup>

## Endnotes for Chapter 1: Profile

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- <sup>12</sup> A reg is a plain of sand and black, red, or white gravel.
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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 1 | Profile

### Assessment

1. French is the language of government and academia.
2. Timbuktu is the capital of Mali.
3. Mali gained independence from France after a long insurgency.
4. The Malian economy relies heavily on mining.
5. The tourism industry of Mali revolves around safari tourism.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False*



*Djingarey Berre Mosque  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

## Chapter 2 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

# Religion

## Introduction

Mali's constitution defines the country as secular; the constitution allows Malians to engage in any religious practice that does not threaten peace or social stability. All religious institutions, except traditional religions, must register with the state. Investigation and prevention of violent extremism is a government priority. Historically, religion and politics are inseparable in Mali. Although about 95% of Malians are Muslim, most continue to incorporate the beliefs and practices of traditional religions into their practice of Islam.<sup>1, 2</sup>

## Major Religions

Approximately 95% of Malians are Sunni Muslim adherents to Sufism. Others adhere to a variety of traditional beliefs that typically emphasize animism, especially in the south and along the Dogon Cliffs in central Mali.<sup>3</sup> About 2% of the population is Christian, the majority of which are Protestants and Catholics.<sup>4, 5</sup> Europeans introduced Christianity to Mali during the colonial period.<sup>6, 7</sup>

These numbers, however, mask the blending of traditional beliefs and practices with Islam or Christianity, common to most Malians. A well-known saying states that Mali is “98% Muslim, 2% Christian and 100% animist.”<sup>8</sup> Approximately 52% of Malians who identify as Muslim or Christian simultaneously adhere to beliefs and practices of traditional African religions.<sup>9</sup>

### Islam

Islam is a monotheistic religion, meaning its followers profess faith in a single God. In the Muslim community, or ummah, God is known as Allah (the Arabic term for God). The Arabic term *islam* means “to submit” or “to surrender” to one you trust more than any other. A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of Allah. Muslims believe that Allah revealed his message through the angel Gabriel to the Prophet Muhammad, a merchant who lived in Arabia from 570 to 632 CE. They consider Muhammad to be the last of a long line of prophets that included Abraham (Ibrahim), Moses (Musa), and Jesus (Esa). In this way, Muslims share some of the basic elements of the Judaic and Christian traditions. However, they believe that the message relayed by Muhammad is God’s final and definitive revelation to humankind. This message is recited in the Quran, which is the sacred scripture of Islam. Additional sacred texts include the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of Muhammad, and the Sunnah, which describes the practices of Islam by way of Muhammad’s example.<sup>10, 11, 12</sup>



*Prayers at the Djoulabougou Mosque  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

▶ **What time do you pray?**

Visitor:	What time do you pray?	voo pRiey aa kehl uhr?
Local:	I pray at noon.	zhE pRee aa meedee

*Exchange 1*

Islam has two major branches: Sunni and Shi'a. The two sects formed shortly after the initial spread of Islam in the 7th century CE. They divided over disagreements about the selection process for the successor, or caliph, to the Prophet Muhammad, who died in 632 CE.<sup>13</sup>



*Entering Djingarey Berre Mosque  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

The essential beliefs and rites of the Islamic faith are encapsulated in the five pillars of Islam. The first and foundational pillar is the sincere recitation of the shahada, or Islamic creed: “There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is the prophet of Allah.” The remaining pillars are: the performance of ritual prayers five times per day; the giving of alms to the poor and needy (traditionally, through a tax on income); fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and the undertaking

of a pilgrimage to the Islamic holy city of Mecca to perform religious rituals.<sup>14</sup> Muslims believe that Allah will judge them for their actions on earth, with the consequences of spending their afterlife in heaven or hell.<sup>15, 16</sup>

▶ **What religion do you practice?**

Visitor:	What religion do you practice?	kehl eh vohtR Ruhleezheeon?
Local:	I am a Muslim.	zhE swee mUzUlmaan

*Exchange 2*

Although Mali is a secular Muslim nation, 63% of the population favors making Sharia law the official law of the land. The mingling of traditional religious beliefs with Islam does not fit into the framework of popular sects and movements within Islam. In Mali, there are tensions between the followers of Sufi and Salafist movements of Islam. During the 2012-2013 conflict in Northern Mali, Tuareg rebels were allied with Islamic extremist; Sufi shrines and tombs were damaged and destroyed.<sup>17, 18, 19</sup>

## Traditional Religions

Though the traditional religions of Mali have no formality, most of them profess a belief in a spiritual being or power that animates the universe and all things on the earth. Many beliefs are passed down through oral traditions, which are central to the culture of its adherents. Special spiritual abilities accrue to certain social identities, such as storytellers, healers, or religious leaders. Deceased ancestors and spirits can play a critical role in religion, as well as the connection between violating social norms and misfortune. Traditional religions are practiced throughout Mali but are most prominent in rural areas. Many Christian and Muslim believers integrate aspects of traditional religions in their religious beliefs and ceremonies.<sup>20</sup>



*Crocodile Totem worshipped by Binou sect in Dogon society*  
Wikimedia / Senani P

## The Role of Government in Religion



*Ancient manuscripts of Quran destroyed by jihadists during the occupation*  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Although Mali is as a secular nation, religion and politics are inseparable. Traditional religions gave leaders the divine right to rule. The Malian government is cooperating with international investigations and prosecution of those responsible for the destruction of religious sites and other crimes perpetrated by Islamic extremists during the Northern Mali conflict.<sup>21</sup> The High Council of Islam, the most senior Islamic authority in Mali, has significant political power, though it is not directly linked with the Malian government.<sup>22</sup>

The Ministry for the Promotion of Women, the Family, and Children is the government office with the responsibility for ensuring that the rights of women and children are protected. The Family Code is the law used by the state to govern family issues. In 2009, the National Assembly considered an update to the code that raised the marriage age to 18 for women; revised marriage, divorce, and inheritance statutes; and introduced new domestic protections for women as well as property ownership.



The law was opposed by the High Council of Islam, and after significant backlash, the law was tabled. A revised update to the Family Code was passed and enacted in 2011, but reforms fell short of the intended goals.<sup>23</sup> The government continues to introduce piecemeal gender equality reforms.<sup>24, 25, 26</sup>

Even though a peace agreement was signed between the Malian government and the Tuareg rebels in 2015, terrorist organizations such as Ansar al-Dine and al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) were not part of the agreement and continue to operate in Northern Mali.<sup>27</sup> As a consequence, extremist organizations based in Northern Mali impose harsh punishments on the local population and have the ability to carry out attacks on targets throughout the country. Prominent incidents have inflicted casualties among UN Forces, the Malian military, and civilians. In November 2015, AQIM and al-Mourabitoun militants based in Northern Mali attacked the Radisson Blu Hotel in Bamako.<sup>28, 29, 30</sup>



*Militant Islamist organization, Ansar al-Dine  
Wikimedia / Anne Look*

## Influence of Religion in Daily Life



*A man praying at the Djoulabougou Mosque  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Religion strongly influences the daily lives of Malians. Predominantly Sunni Muslim, mosques are the center of social and cultural life. Many Muslims continue to incorporate traditional beliefs and practices of ancestor worship in their practice of Islam. The majority of Malians commonly attend religious ceremonies outside their own religion, especially baptisms, weddings, and funerals.<sup>31</sup> The Malian people interact cross-culturally every day, and the Muslim majority are tolerant of and respectful toward religious minorities.<sup>32, 33</sup>

▶ May I take photographs?

Visitor:	May I take photographs?	zhe pE pRendR dey fohtoh?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 3



Dogon religious rituals  
Flickr / Erwin Bolwidt

Intertwining Islamic practices with traditional practices include wearing *grigri* charms (amulets used to protect a person from harm or illness) and the use of masks or totem animals during religious rituals.<sup>34</sup> The Bambara also believe that their ancestral spirits will be reincarnated. During special ceremonies, a mediator presents an offering of flour and water to ancestral spirits. The mediator is the oldest member of a lineage, whose purpose is to bridge the divide between the living and the dead.<sup>35</sup>

## Religious Conventions and Gender Roles

Mali is a hierarchical society in which men and women are treated according to their social class or caste, age, and sex. These traditions of social inequality weigh heavier on women, who must obey their fathers and husbands, exacerbating the unequal distribution of quality healthcare, access to education, and financial resources. The rural majority, especially in the north, are worse off than the urban minority concentrated in the south.<sup>36</sup>



A spiritual leader of Dogon Village  
Wikimedia / Senani P

Islamic conventions impose strict gender roles daily life, which were incorporated into Mali's 2011 Family Code. The long awaited Family Code failed to bring what was promised—equal rights between men and women. The Code states that a woman must obey her husband, that men are heads of their families, that the legal age of marriage is 18 years old for males and 16 for females, and that in certain cases a girl can be

married at 15, with authorization. It also states that religious marriages are legal.<sup>37</sup>

Although many of Mali's ethnic groups are matrilineal, they are also patriarchal in terms of men making critical decisions that affect the lives of their daughters and wives. Men also are responsible for the religious care of their communities. The role of ineslemen or marabout—religious holy man—is reserved for men alone. Some men become marabout through religious birth while others achieve marabout status through Quranic study and devotion to Islam.

Animist beliefs also illustrate gender roles. Communities often feature blacksmiths, who are members of a special male caste entered by birthright.<sup>38, 39</sup>

## Religious Events and Holidays

### *Tabaski (Eid al-Adha)*



*Malian family dressed for Eid ul-Adha  
Flickr / Emilia Tjernström*

Tabaski, also known as Eid al-Adha, commemorates the willingness of Ibrahim to sacrifice his son Ishmael to Allah. Tabaski is one of the most important religious holidays in Mali and takes place over the course of two days. Fathers slaughter a sheep and buy new clothing and shoes for their wives and children. Portions of the slaughtered sheep are shared with neighbors and those who are unable to afford a sheep.<sup>40</sup>

#### **▶ Please join us for a Poulet yassa meal!**

Visitor: Please join us for a Poulet yassa meal!

vEneh manzhey dU pooley yaasaa aaveyk noo!

Local: I'd be honored.

aavehk pleyzeer

*Exchange 4*

After slaughtering and eating the sheep, families remove themselves to sacred grounds for prayers. Many nomadic Tuareg drive sheep to the cities in northern Mali to sell their animals for the holiday slaughter.<sup>41, 42</sup>



## Mouloud

Mouloud celebrates the birth of the Muslim prophet Muhammad. Malian communities celebrate by attending mosque, reading the Quran, performing both sacred and secular songs, dressing in the finest clothes, and holding celebratory meals and attending street carnivals.<sup>43</sup>



Camel racing to celebrate Mouloud  
Flickr / Jonah Horowitz

## Ramadan

The month of Ramadan on the Islamic lunar calendar is the month of holy fasting. Devout Muslims commemorate Ramadan as the month in which the prophet Muhammad received the Quran from the angel Gabriel.<sup>44</sup> Fasting during Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam and is observed by all devout Muslims, except in the case of illness or another condition, such as pregnancy.

### ▶ When does Ramadan start?

Visitor: When does Ramadan start?

kan kohmens lE Ramadan?

Local: It starts on May 27.

saa kohmens lE vintE seht may

Exchange 5

In recent years, a number of Malians were not able to observe this holiday because of extreme hunger brought on by food shortages.<sup>45</sup> Those who do celebrate Ramadan end the holy month of fasting by slaughtering an animal, distributing a portion to those who are hungry, and holding a communal feast, prayer, and dancing.<sup>46</sup>

## Buildings of Worship

Although the specific design of mosques varies, all typically have some common elements. Most have four walls, with a qibla wall facing Mecca. In the qibla there is a small niche called the mihrab, which helps the congregation to identify the direction to face during prayers. To the right of the mihrab stands a pulpit, or minbar, where the imam stands when giving his sermon.

▶ **May I enter the mosque?**

Visitor:	May I enter the mosque?	zhE puh entRey dan laa mohskey?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 6



Great Mosque of Djenné  
Wikimedia / Senani P

Mosques often have a tower called a minaret from which the calls to daily prayers are issued. Many mosques also have an ablution fountain in the center of an outside courtyard (sahan). Muslims are invited to conduct ritual washing in the ablution fountain before prayers.<sup>47, 48</sup> The mosques in the cities of Timbuktu, Gao, Ménaka, and Kidal are built in the traditional mud architecture of Mali.<sup>49, 50</sup>

Some of the oldest mosques in Timbuktu are the Dyingerey Ber Mosque, Sidi Yahiya Mosque, and Sankoré Mosque. The mosque-tomb of Askia in Gao is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that was built at the end of the 15th century.<sup>51</sup> One of the most unique religious buildings the world is the Great Mosque of Djenné. This mosque is the largest adobe structures in the world, but the mud-brick construction leave the building vulnerable to erosion. To protect the mosque, local residents hold a festival to replaster the entire structure.<sup>52</sup>

## Behavior in Places of Worship

Mosque etiquette is simple, and rules differ for men and women. Modest, clean clothing that is free of images of living creatures is expected. Women should wear pants or ankle-length skirts that are neither tight fitting nor transparent. Shoulders must be covered, the arms must be covered to the wrists, and the neckline should fit up to the neck. Tops should not be tight fitting or transparent.

▶ **Do I need to cover my head?**

Visitor:	Do I need to cover my head?	zhe dwaE mE koovReer laa teht?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 7

A woman must also cover her hair completely while she is in the mosque. For men, pants are preferred, but shorts that cover the knees are acceptable. Shirts should have sleeves no shorter than a standard T-shirt. Men and women should avoid shaking hands with members of the opposite sex.<sup>53</sup>



*Leaving shoes outside the mosque  
Flickr / Rebecca*

If prayers are in progress, visitors should remain silent; otherwise, speaking softly is permissible. One should silence or shut off electronic devices, and refrain from bringing food or drink into a mosque. Shoes should be removed before entering a mosque.<sup>54, 55</sup>

▶ Should I remove my shoes?		
Visitor:	Should I remove my shoes?	zhE dwaa enEvey mey shohsUr ?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 8*

Visitors should request permission before taking photographs inside a mosque. Do not photograph worshippers while they are praying or performing their ablutions. Do not walk in front of someone who is praying as this invalidates the prayer.<sup>56, 57</sup>

## Endnotes for Chapter 2: Religion

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## Cultural Orientation | French-Mali

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 2 | Religion

### Assessment

1. The constitution of Mali defines the country as a secular state.
2. The Great Mosque of Djenne is susceptible to the elements.
3. Beliefs in supernatural powers are considered heresy and evil by most Malians.
4. Tuareg rebels and allied militants protected Sufi Islamic shrines and tombs during the 2012-2013 conflict in Northern Mali.
5. The Family Code passed in 2011 by the Malian legislature made advances in securing and protecting women's rights.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False*





*Malians in Traditional Costumes attending the Official Inauguration  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

### Chapter 3 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Traditions

### Introduction

Malians take pride in the peaceful coexistence of dozens of ethnic and language groups in their country.<sup>1,2</sup> Although there are distinctions between the desert peoples of the northeast and those of the verdant southwest, their social practices are deeply rooted in extended family relationships and kin groups.<sup>3</sup> In the ancient empires, kin and clan became caste and class memberships that still define occupational specialization, social rank, and sometimes, ethnic tensions. Ancient spiritual beliefs and rituals shaped the worship practices of Islam that dominate the country and the region.<sup>4</sup> French colonization and Christian missionaries introduced new ideas and institutions that still

influence traditional attitudes about family and gender, healthcare, education, and work. Mali is known worldwide for its many cultures’ artistic products—music, dance, puppetry, ceramic, wood and ironwork, jewelry and textiles, and adobe architecture.<sup>5</sup>

## Formulaic Codes of Politeness

Greetings are an important aspect of Malian culture. Greetings allow people to identify one another, their social status, and their tribal affiliations. Men and women greet each other with a handshake, clasp each other’s right hand and bowing slightly. Men of power, such as village elders or village chiefs, usually initiate a handshake.<sup>6</sup> When a group of people gathers, expectations are that those joining the group will initiate a handshake with everyone in the area, beginning with the oldest or most senior person. Touching one’s own right elbow with the fingertips of the left hand while shaking hands, or touching the right hand to the forehead or the heart after a handshake, demonstrates special respect toward the other person.<sup>7, 8</sup>



*Force Commander Major General greeting Kidal Governor Colonel Adama Kamissoko  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

▶ Good morning!		
Visitor:	Good morning!	bonjoor!
Local:	Good morning!	bonjoor!

*Exchange 9*

▶ How are you?		
Visitor:	How are you?	kohmen aaley voo?
Local:	Fine, very well.	byen, mehRsee

*Exchange 10*



## Male/Female Interactions



A Malian couple  
Flickr / Crossroads Church

Malian society is strongly patriarchal. Women are subject to their husbands and must receive permission even for simple activities like leaving the house. A new family law passed in 2012 further deteriorated women’s rights by limiting their choices and protections in the areas of child custody and marriage.<sup>9</sup>

In recent years, more Malian women have started pursuing employment outside the home, mostly as small business owners.

Female-run businesses typically focus on selling everything from produce, milk, and shea butter, to art. Women in urban areas also work in stores, salons, fabric workshops, and government offices. Despite these small economic advancements, women remain underemployed and have limited access to education.<sup>10, 11</sup> Most Malian men will not accept a woman supervisor, so very few women hold leadership positions. Although domestic violence is not socially acceptable in Malian society, 41% of women were the victims of violence from spouses or family members in 2014.<sup>12, 13, 14, 15</sup>

### ▶ I would like to buy one jar of shea butter please.

Visitor:	I would like to buy one jar of shea butter please.	zhe voodRay aashEtey uhn poh dE buhr dE kaareetey, seel voo pley
Local:	Sure.	byen sUr

Exchange 11

## Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Hospitality is intricately woven into Malian culture. It is a way to secure and maintain friendships and kinship bonds. Malians treat guests with great respect and rarely refuse a request for hospitality. In rural areas, friends and relatives frequently visit one another, usually unannounced. Few or no visits between friends can indicate a frayed relationship. While an evening visit might last several hours, houseguests might stay several weeks. When staying in someone’s home, it is a traditional sign of respect to bring kola nuts and food that represents the houseguest’s home region.<sup>16, 17</sup> However, when invited for dinner, the host is responsible for providing everything, and it is considered rude if dinner guests bring gifts.<sup>18</sup>

► I really appreciate your hospitality.

Visitor: I really appreciate your hospitality.

zhaapReysee bohkoo vohtRE ospeetaaleetey

Local: It's my pleasure.

sey uhn pleyseer dE voo REsEvwaar

Exchange 12

Malian society, in large part, centers on gift-giving and sharing resources. Consequently, Malians have developed a complex grammar central to gift giving.<sup>19</sup> Malians often greet someone new with a kola nut. In some rural villages, men give three kola nuts to a prospective bride's father when asking for his daughter's hand in marriage. Once the marriage is agreed upon, a gift of another 10 kola nuts or so may be given to "seal the deal." On the wedding day, the groom presents a basket of kola nuts to the bride's parents.<sup>20</sup>



Children welcoming the Prime Minister with traditional gifts  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

## Eating Habits / Types of Food



A woman grinding flour, Dogon  
Flickr / Erwin Bolwidt

Cooked grains—traditionally millet, corn, sorghum, and more recently rice—are staples of the Malian diet. Fonio, a type of grain, is used to prepare couscous, porridge, cakes, bread, or a doughy pancake.<sup>21</sup> Typically, this is served with a sauce made from plants, such as leaves, onions, or okra, or with a protein such as peanuts or fish that is dried, then smoked or fermented. *Tigadegen*a (peanut butter sauce) is also a popular accompaniment.<sup>22</sup> Vegetables and fruits include squash, baobab, yam or sweet potato, melon, and mango. Milk and cheeses from goats, camels, or cows are important products, especially for herding peoples. Meats are rarely affordable, but sometimes fish, poultry, goat, or sheep are prepared on special occasions.<sup>23, 24</sup>

► What is the name of this dish?

Visitor:	What is the name of this dish?	kehl eh lE non dE sE plaa?
Local:	It is called tigadéguéna.	sey dU teegaadeygeynaa

Exchange 13

For dinner guests, the host might prepare *zamè*, which is cooked red rice served with beef and vegetables. Another popular dish to serve guests is *juka*, which is a brown, couscous-like grain that is grilled with peanut powder. *Juka* is typically served with an onion, eggplant, and beef soup. Drinks include teas such as hibiscus or lemon grass and watered fruit juices such as guava or tamarind.<sup>25</sup> In Bamako and other city settings, a wider variety of dishes are common, including fried fast foods, such as fish, potatoes, beef, and pork. Muslims, especially the Maure in the northwest, may observe dietary restrictions prohibiting alcohol and pork.<sup>26</sup>



*Zamè, red rice served with egg and vegetable*  
Wikimedia / Segunfamisa

► The food tastes very good!

Visitor:	The food tastes very good!	laa nooReetUhr eh tRey bawn!
Local:	Thank you for the compliment!	zhe voo REmehRsee

Exchange 14

Most Malians eat breakfast between 7 a.m. and 8 a.m., lunch between 11:30 a.m. and 1 p.m., and dinner between 7 p.m. and 8 p.m. For meals, families traditionally eat together from communal bowls using their right hand. Wealthy families often use large spoons. There are typically several communal bowls to eat from, with the male head of the family determining which group will eat from which bowl. Adult men and women rarely eat from the same bowl. Rather, men and boys typically share one communal bowl and women and children share another.<sup>27, 28</sup>

## Dress Codes

Physical appearance is important to most Malians, and modest, neat clothing is highly valued.<sup>29</sup> In urban areas, both women and men commonly wear Western clothing. Men mostly wear long pants with a shirt. However, urban women also wear traditional clothing. The wearing of shorts is associated with childhood.<sup>30</sup>



*Malians in traditional dresses*  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Regardless of where they live, Malian men might wear a boubou, a long, flowing wide-sleeved robe. Malian women also wear the m'boubou, which similar to the male boubou but falls to the ankles. Appearing everywhere in Mali, the boubou may have originated in Arabia.<sup>31</sup> Muslim Malian women typically wear a long pagne (wraparound skirt), loose blouse, sandals, and a matching headdress. Muslims do not cover their faces, but Tuareg men veil their faces at puberty. Foreign women are advised to cover their shoulders and knees, particularly when outside of cities.<sup>32</sup>

### ▶ What is this garment called?

Visitor:	What is this garment called?	kehl eh lE non dE sE vehtEmen?
Local:	This is a boubou.	sey uhn booboo

*Exchange 15*

## Non-Religious Celebrations (Holidays)

Malians observe several secular and religious holidays. The first holiday on the calendar is New Year's Day (1 January).<sup>33, 34</sup> For many Malians, especially young people, it is a day of festivities. Revelers often stay awake all night and wish one another happy new year at midnight. In rural areas, young people often gather for meals, parties, and dancing to usher in the new year. Women often prepare chicken and plantains or potatoes.<sup>35</sup>

Independence Day (22 September) is an important holiday. It marks the day in 1960 when Mali gained independence from France.<sup>36, 37</sup> To celebrate, the government pays for the decoration of city streets around the country. Decorations include Malian flags and tree trunks painted white.<sup>38</sup>



▶ Happy Independence Day!

Visitor:	Happy Independence Day!	bawn jooRney dE lindeypendans
Local:	We are happy to celebrate with you.	noo sawm uhRuh dE seyleybrey aavek voo

*Exchange 16*



*Malian soldiers marching at the ceremony for the Independence Anniversary, Bamako  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Independence Day celebrations take place in the capital, Bamako, along the Boulevard of Independence. The festivities are broadcast on television and include a military parade. In villages across Mali, people watch parades, visit cultural exhibits, and listen to traditional music in public spaces. Cultural exhibits compete for prizes. Young people collect money to pay for parties held the night before Independence Day. Such parties include music, dancing, eating, and staying up all night.<sup>39</sup>

## Do's and Don'ts

### *Do's*

- **Do** wear clothes that cover your knees.
- **Do** engage in small talk—say hello and ask people how they are doing—before you ask for help, directions, or other information.
- **Do** remove shoes before entering a room or stepping on a mat.
- **Do** offer to share the refreshments you receive upon arriving at someone's home; it is impolite to eat or drink in front of others.
- **Do** feel comfortable remaining silent while eating a meal.
- **Do** visit people without an invitation; you are usually welcome.

### *Don'ts*

- **Don't** wear shorts.
- **Don't** eat, shake hands, offer food or money, or accept anything with your left hand—Mali is a Muslim country and the left hand is considered unclean.
- **Don't** gesture with the index finger; it is considered impolite.
- **Don't** look an elder in the eye during a conversation; it is rude and threatening.
- **Don't** speak while in the bathroom; if someone else is coming, make a noise to let them know the bathroom is occupied.
- **Don't** smoke in public if you are a woman; you might be mistaken for a prostitute.



## Endnotes for Chapter 3: Traditions

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 3 | Traditions

### Assessment

1. Touching the right elbow with the fingertips is an offensive social gesture in Mali.
2. Malian women's possibilities to be on equal footing with men remain limited.
3. Domestic violence is a rare phenomenon in Mali.
4. Kola nuts play an important role in Malian hospitality customs.
5. Meat is affordable in Mali, and Malians eat it on a regular basis.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False*



*Malian Migration to Urban Areas in Search of Job  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

## Chapter 4 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

# Urban Life

## Introduction

Mali is among the 25 poorest countries in the world, with more than 49.3% of the population living below the poverty line in 2009.<sup>1</sup> Poverty in the country's interior has increased in recent years, causing a great number of people to move to the capital city, Bamako, in search of work. This has led to the growth of unplanned neighborhoods, further deteriorating living conditions in cities.<sup>2</sup> Once in the city, the economic reality of urban life sets in. There are simply too few jobs for the number of people in Bamako, leading many men, women, and children to take up begging.<sup>3</sup>

## Urbanization Issues



A poor community in Bamako  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Traditionally, during dry periods, rural Malians have migrated long-term to the country's cities.<sup>4</sup> The 2012 and 2013 fighting in the north of the country between government forces and Tuareg secessionists, a French-led military intervention, and chronic food shortages have increased the displacement of Malians.<sup>5</sup> The majority of those displaced sought refuge in urban areas, except pastoralists and nomads, who simply abandoned their traditional trade routes

and dispersed into the Sahara Desert. A number of those fleeing violence and hunger also sought refuge in neighboring Mauritania, Niger, and Burkina Faso.<sup>6</sup>

Population migration to urban areas has created job shortages, unplanned neighborhoods, and deteriorating living conditions.<sup>7</sup> Between 1970 and 1995, Mali's annual urban growth rate was about 5.2%. By 2015, over seven million people—about 40% of the population—was living in urban areas.<sup>8, 9</sup> Bamako, the nation's capital, is one of the fastest growing cities in Africa.<sup>10</sup>

▶ How many people live here?		
Visitor:	How many people live here?	konbyen dE pehrsawn aabeet eesee?
Local:	30.	tRent

Exchange 17

Air and water pollution are worsening, especially as cities are increasingly unable to deal effectively with waste management. Many do not have sewers, and residents often dump their sewage into the Niger River, which is dangerously polluted.<sup>11</sup> The government is working to address these challenges.<sup>12, 13</sup>



Burning trash being a major part of the pollution in Mali  
Flickr / Baron Reznik



## Work Problems in Urban Areas



Malian children working  
 Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

In 2015, Mali's unemployment rate stood at 30%, due in large part to the uncertainty of agricultural work brought on by drought and war.<sup>14, 15</sup> Mali's tumultuous history has made emigration a common survival strategy. In 2014, Malians living abroad sent home over USD 877 million in worker remittances.<sup>16</sup>

Slavery has a long history in Mali, and forced labor continues in some areas. Malian women and children are frequently

forced to labor as field hands, domestic servants, miners, beggars, or prostitutes, often far from home and frequently in neighboring countries.<sup>17</sup>

## Healthcare and Health Issues

Medical care is limited and concentrated in urban areas. Even in regional capitals, hospitals lack equipment.<sup>18</sup> A lack of safe drinking water and sanitation contribute to the high percentage of deaths from communicable diseases.<sup>19</sup>



Gabriel Touré Hospital in Bamako  
 Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

### ▶ Where is the hospital?

Visitor:	Where is the hospital?	oo ey lohpeetaal?
Local:	In the center of town.	en pluhn sentR veel

Exchange 18

Some Malians view Western medicine with suspicion and turn to traditional healers instead. Traditional healers, including male and female herbalists, diviners, and

shamans, are found throughout the country. Their local knowledge of treatment with medicinal plants often helps their clients. Mali’s government formally recognizes and supports traditional medicine.

## Education and Schools in Cities



Students from different ethnic groups attending a class, Gao  
 Flickr / Mission de l’ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

International education aid has declined since 2007, resulting in fewer funds for public education. Educational funds are concentrated in Bamako, resulting in money being disproportionately distributed to secondary and higher education.<sup>22</sup> Producing textbooks in Mali’s 13 national languages, as well as training teachers and offering them better wages and working conditions, remains a challenge. Without adequate funding, Mali’s youth remain at a disadvantage.<sup>23</sup>

## Restaurants

Because eating out is prohibitively expensive for average Malians, families tend not to frequent restaurants. However, Mali’s dining out options are as rich and diverse as the Malian people, with regional food offerings reflecting a wide variety of cuisine.<sup>24</sup>



Jumbo Restaurant  
 Flickr / Ralf Steinberger

▶ <b>May I have eating utensils?</b>		
Visitor:	May I have eating utensils?	zhe puh aavwaaR dey koovehr, seel voo pley?
Local:	We eat with our hands.	on manzhE aavek ley main

Exchange 19

Bamako, the nation’s capital, has the most international restaurants in the country, mostly in hotels.<sup>25</sup> Most of Mali’s nightlife is also found in the capital, where the country’s wealthiest socialize. Many restaurants offer beer and a wide variety of drinks, as well as music. In addition to regional dishes, some highly-ranked Bamako restaurants serve three-course French meals. Street food is typically cheap, diverse, and widely available. Standard street fare includes beef or chicken served with salad and french fries. Street vendors typically serve fruit juice, a favorite among locals.<sup>26</sup> Local hangouts in Timbuktu also offer foreign tourists and expatriates an opportunity to dance while enjoying a cold beer and a cheap meal.<sup>27</sup>

▶ Is there a restaurant around here?		
Visitor:	Is there a restaurant around here?	eel yaa uhn Reystohran dan ley zenveeRon?
Local:	Yes, down the street.	wee oh fon dE laa rU

*Exchange 20*

## Marketplace and Street Vendors

Malians shop at a variety of venues, such as an open-air markets, small stores, tiny neighborhood boutiques, bakeries, and butchers. Haggling is expected in open-air markets, but stores and boutiques generally have fixed prices. In Bamako, boutiques are typically open between 9 a.m and 1 p.m. They open again at 4 p.m. and close again around 10 p.m. Almost all other types of shops are usually open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Some shops are typically open only in the morning.<sup>28</sup>



*Market in Djenné  
Flickr / Kehitys Lehti*

Bamako’s main market is Le Marché Rose, which can be intimidating due to the aggressive bartering tactics used by vendors. Also, there are cyclists, motorbikes, donkeys, and sheep weaving through the marketplace.<sup>29</sup> Many vendors make their handicrafts in front of customers, which can add to congestion. Some vendors offer ancient masks or jewels, but most of their wares are not authentic and are usually recently made. Additionally, such artifacts are not permitted to leave the country. Some entrepreneurial vendors offer to take photographs with customers and then insist on money in return.<sup>30</sup> The markets of Bamako, Ségou, and Djenné offer a variety

of goods, including musical recordings, instruments, bogolas (blankets), and bazin riche (African cotton), Tuareg leather goods and silver jewelry, Bambara pottery, and elaborate Fulani wedding blankets.<sup>31, 32</sup>

▶ May I examine this closer?		
Visitor:	May I examine this closer?	zhe puh REgaaRdey sEsee dE pU prey?
Local:	Sure!	byen sUr!

*Exchange 21*



*Street vendors  
Flickr / benkamorvan*

Travelers can find a variety of fruits and vegetables in Mali’s open-air markets.<sup>33</sup> Street vendors also sell fruits and vegetables door-to-door, but quality and price depend on the season.<sup>34</sup> Many fruits and vegetables, like peanuts, are available year-round; others are seasonal. Almonds, hazelnuts, and pistachios are usually only sold in stores and are more expensive.<sup>35</sup>

Mali is the leading producer of beef in West Africa, and fresh beef is inexpensive by US standards. Chicken is a seasonal meat and is available in the winter months only, due to the intense heat during the springtime.<sup>36</sup>

▶ Can you give me change for this?		
Visitor:	Can you give me change for this?	voo poovey mE fehr dE laa mohney?
Local:	No.	non

*Exchange 22*



## Money, Credit Cards, and ATMs

Mali's currency is the West African Financial Community (CFA) franc, which is divided into 100 centimes. During colonial times, the CFA was linked to the French franc. The West African CFA franc (XOF) is not interchangeable with the Central African CFA franc (XAF) used in Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, and Gabon.<sup>37</sup> As of April 2017, USD 1 bought 6111.6 CFA francs.<sup>38</sup>

Most Malians only use cash. ATMs are typically only found in Bamako and only accept Visa cards. Credit cards are generally not accepted anywhere, except in Bamako's hotels and restaurants.<sup>39</sup>



Five hundred francs CFA  
Wikimedia / Nicholas Gemini

## Urban Traffic and Transportation



Travelling by river boat  
Flickr / Global Music Culture

Most Malians outside Bamako do not own cars or motorbikes. In southern Mali, people tend to travel by river boat; camels are typically used in the north. The nation has a colonial-era railroad, as well as airports and roads built and maintained with foreign funds and expertise. Government-operated buses are the most common form of transportation, providing service from Bamako to other major towns. Due to security concerns, buses travel in convoys with police and military protection.<sup>40</sup>

### ▶ Which road leads to the airport?

Visitor:	Which road leads to the airport?	kehl root mehn aa laaeRohpawr?
Local:	The road heading east.	laa root vehr lehst

Exchange 23

Rental cars are available at the Bamako airport and at other locations in the city. Since renting a car without a driver can be dangerous, the major car rental agencies offer driver services. Foreigners are strongly discouraged from driving in remote areas, especially around Timbuktu or near international borders, due to the ongoing threat of kidnapping and terrorism.<sup>41</sup> It is recommended that vehicles travel in convoys and avoid driving after dark.<sup>42</sup> Travelers should be prepared to repair their own vehicles if they break down.<sup>43</sup>

▶ Where is Le Marché Rose?		
Visitor:	Where is Le Marché Rose?	oo sE tRoov lE maarshey Rohz?
Local:	In Bamako.	aa baamakoh

*Exchange 24*

Most of the roads leading from Bamako to other major cities in the south are paved. During the rainy season from mid-June to mid-September, most unpaved roads become impassible. Due to road conditions, four-wheel-drive vehicles are recommended.<sup>44, 45</sup>



*Malians crammed into a taxi  
Flickr / Baron Reznik*

Another option is to hire a West African “bush taxi,” which typically seats about seven passengers.<sup>46</sup> These taxis have cheap fixed fares and they go just about anywhere. Luggage typically adds an extra 5% to 10% to the fare. In urban areas, collective taxis are also available. Collective taxis charge standard inexpensive fares, regardless of the distance travelled.<sup>47</sup>

## Street Crime and Solicitations



Carrying a gun  
Flickr / Bradley Watson

Much of the street crime prevalent in Mali stems from extreme poverty. Great caution should be taken as criminals can be violent, often threatening their victims with firearms or knives. Physical assault is not uncommon. Carjacking has also increased in recent years, and there have been multiple reports of false traffic stops made by individuals posing as police officers.<sup>48</sup>

### ▶ Give me money!

Visitor:	Give me money!	dohney mwaa dE laarzhen!
Local:	Sorry, I don't have any.	deyzohley, zhe neh paa daarzhen

*Exchange 25*

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 4 | Urban Life

### Assessment

1. Poverty and conflict have driven rural migrants to Mali's cities in search of security and employment.
2. Mali stopped practicing slavery by the mid-20th century.
3. Traditional healers provide an alternative to the health care system.
4. With the help of international aid, Mali has established a successful country-wide public education system.
5. Quality restaurants and nightlife are concentrated in Bamako.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True*



*A village festival  
Flickr / Rebecca*

## Chapter 5 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

# Rural Life

## Introduction

Mali is primarily a rural nation; approximately 60% of the population lives outside of urban centers.<sup>1</sup> Life in rural communities is difficult and many people live in extreme poverty. The 50% poverty rate in rural areas remains higher than the average across the nation.<sup>2</sup> Households headed by women are especially at risk. The causes of poverty are a combination of political, environmental, and social factors.<sup>3</sup>

Most of Mali's agricultural production is subsistence farming, sufficient only to feed one's family.<sup>4</sup> Even with these limitations, rural farmers have intensified cereal production over the past 20 years, feeding an ever increasing rural population.

Agricultural pressures and desertification are significant threats to the quality of farmland.<sup>5, 6</sup>

## Rural Migration

Malian farmers and herders have traditionally engaged in seasonal migrations, but typically these were of short duration. Such seasonal migrations have now been replaced by more permanent rural to urban migration.<sup>7</sup>

▶ Where do you work, sir?		
Visitor:	Where do you work, ma'am?	oo tRaavayey voo, maadam?
Local:	I am a farmer.	zhe swee fehRmyehr

Exchange 26

Several factors have led to this situation. The conflict in northern Mali led an estimated 475,000 Malians to flee to southern cities and surrounding countries.<sup>8</sup> As of 2014, 61,627 people had not found a permanent solution to their displacement.<sup>9</sup> Drought and population growth have amplified the issue of food insecurity.<sup>10</sup> Another factor centers on the perceived economic opportunities in Mali's cities; Malians aged 15-39 typically migrate to find work. Once employment is obtained, remittances help support rural families and local economies.<sup>11</sup>



Farmers harvesting okra in the village of Loulouni  
Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security

## Land Distribution/Land Ownership

Most farmers and herders practice “customary land tenure,” in which rights to land use are held collectively by indigenous communities. While there are some variations in customary land tenure across Mali, the law recognizes the right of the clan and community to access and use the land, either for building or farming.<sup>12</sup>



► Is this your land?

Visitor:	Is this your land?	sE son voh tehr?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 27

There are multiple tiers of land rights in Mali. The process for establishing ownership is long and bureaucratic, involving local and national governments. Claims can be made by groups or individuals. The government can also lease land to applicants, or allow the limited use of land. There are also lands that are open-access for anyone to use. The legal process makes ownership difficult for women, the illiterate, and the impoverished. Government administration of land rights supersedes traditional land claims held by rural communities. Herders moving their livestock in search for water and grazing often encroach on private lands. Poor recordkeeping of land claims at the individual, local, and national levels creates additional difficulties.<sup>13, 14</sup>



Farm plotting along the banks of the Niger  
Flickr / Frank in Guinea

Further complicating this issue is land fragmentation, a practice by which families subdivide collective land into smaller plots for the next generations. Consequently, individual land ownership of these smaller plots has become more common, fundamentally changing traditional land tenure and the management of land rights. This has also had a profound effect on land use rights for women and young men who are most likely to be excluded from farming activities because their help is not needed on small plots of land.<sup>15</sup>

► Are you from around here?

Visitor:	Are you from around here?	voo aabeetey eesee?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 28

Poor land management and a lack of irrigation infrastructure has prevented Mali from reaching its full potential of agriculture productivity. Nearly 30% of the population is malnourished, despite the fact that the majority works in agriculture. Although cereal

production has increased, overall agricultural output is insufficient to provide the nutritional needs for many Malians. In recent years, armed conflict and desertification have contributed to agricultural problems.<sup>16</sup>

## Rural Economy

Since agricultural output needs water resources, most agricultural activity is limited to the vicinity of the Niger and Senegal Rivers in southern Mali. Nearly 80% of the workforce is employed in the agricultural sector, including the 10% of the population that is nomadic. Yet most of their labor is at the subsistence level.<sup>17</sup> Subsistence farming is especially vulnerable to drought, locusts, and certain types of weeds, making it nearly impossible to produce any food surpluses.<sup>18</sup>



*Small scale gold mining  
Flickr / Global Environment Facility*

Gold mining is another major source of revenue for rural Malians. In 2015, Mali exported over 70 tons of gold, 23.7 tons of which came from a million unskilled miners. Because not all gold mined by unskilled miners is declared, that figure may actually be as high as 36 tons. Gold exports account for 80% of Mali’s export revenue, and Mali is the third largest exporter of gold in Africa, behind Ghana and South Africa.<sup>19</sup>

The use of child labor is a significant problem in the informal mining industry. Children have been doing dangerous jobs such as digging mine shafts, crushing ore, working in underground tunnels, and processing ore with mercury. Rice and cotton producers have also been known to use child laborers and forced labor. In Northern Mali, rebel and Islamic extremist militias have recruited and kidnapped children to use as child soldiers. Despite laws prohibiting the use of child labor, the government’s limited capacity and lax enforcement of these laws has led to little progress against child labor.<sup>20</sup>

▶ What do you grow?		
Visitor:	What do you grow?	keysE kE voo kUlteevey?
Local:	I grow millet.	zhE kUlteev dU meeley

*Exchange 29*

## Rural Transportation Issues

Mali has 22,474 kilometers (13,964 miles) of roads, approximately 75% of which are unpaved.<sup>21</sup> Most paved roads connect Bamako to other population centers. There is a railroad line linking the Niger River and Bamako with Dakar in Senegal, providing rural Malians with some access to domestic railroad travel. Construction is underway to improve Mali's railroad infrastructure.<sup>22</sup> Mali does not have commercial domestic air travel, but charter air service is available. There are 25 airports in Mali, including two international airports in Gao and Bamako; eight domestic airports have paved runways and the remaining 17 have unpaved runways. The UN provides periodic air service for humanitarian workers. US citizens are advised not to travel on the Dakar-Bamako railroad and warned about hazards associated with flying in, out of, and through Malian airspace.<sup>23</sup>



*Malian family in a carriage from the village Bouwéré  
Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security*

Road conditions deteriorate during the rainy season, from mid-June to mid-September, leaving some rural roads unsuitable for travel. A four wheel drive vehicle with emergency provisions and a spare tire is strongly encouraged for rural travel. Gas stations are not common in rural Mali.<sup>24</sup> In northern Mali, the Tuareg are known to travel by camel.<sup>25</sup>

Traveling by car can leave passengers vulnerable to carjacking; criminals commit extortion or armed robbery via illegal checkpoints. Enforcement of traffic laws is rare; police are slow to respond to traffic accidents and routinely request bribes. Most vehicles lack safety features or headlights and most roads lack illumination. In the event of a traffic accident, drivers usually agree on an amount of money to cover damages. Payment for injuries by an able party is expected immediately according to local custom and the law, regardless of who was at fault; Westerners are viewed as an able party. A crowd can gather at the scene of an accident and escalate the situation, making the aftermath of a traffic accident even more dangerous. Vigilante justice is common in Mali. Improvised explosive devices (IEDs) placed on roadsides and ambushes perpetrated by militias are a critical hazard in northern and central Mali.<sup>26</sup>

▶ Are you carrying any weapons?

Visitor:	Are you carrying any weapons?	voo pohtey dey zaarm?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 30

▶ Do you know this area very well?

Visitor:	Do you know this area very well?	voo kohneysey byen seht zohn?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 31



Traveling by Sotrama  
Flickr / Erich

Buses that link major cities are available, as well as more affordable pickup trucks and van-taxis called sotrama. The US Department of State has warned US citizens to avoid using all public transportation, including sotramas, and to refrain from driving motorbikes. If a taxi is hired, it is best to negotiate a rate ahead of time and give the driver very specific directions to the destination.<sup>27, 28, 29</sup>

▶ Did these people threaten you?

Visitor:	Did these people threaten you?	ehsE kE sey pehrson voo on mEnaasey?
Local:	No.	non

Exchange 32



## Rural Health Issues



*Cholera Hospital run by MSF, Soumassou  
Flickr / European Commission DG ECHO*

Health in rural areas remains a great concern due to the lack of medical facilities and trained medical staff. Areas outside Bamako lack Western standards of medical care does. Access to healthcare in northern Mali is very limited due to the security situation.<sup>30</sup> Western medicines are nonexistent and counterfeit medicines available at local pharmacies are dangerous. Most medical facilities and local doctors demand payment for services, usually cash only and paid up front.<sup>31</sup>

### ▶ Is Dr. Glondé available?

Visitor:	Is Dr. Glondé available?	ehsE kE dawktuhr glonday eh deespohneebE?
Local:	No.	non

*Exchange 33*

Traditional medicine remains the primary health resource for most Malians. Local healers use their extensive knowledge of medicinal plants, socio-cultural norms, religious beliefs, and witnessed experiences that are handed down from generation to generation to diagnose and treat physical, social, or spiritual imbalances.<sup>32</sup> A high percentage of illnesses and deaths in Mali are attributed to communicable diseases and parasites transmitted through unsafe drinking water and inadequate sanitary conditions.<sup>33</sup>



*Traditional Regional Medical Center  
Flickr / ILRI*

Malians living in urban centers have a 2.5 times higher rate of access to sanitation facilities than rural Malians. Rural women are half as likely to have access to a medical professional during childbirth as urban women. Approximately 40% of Malians live more than 5 kilometers (3.1 miles) away from a medical treatment facility.<sup>34</sup>

▶ Do you know what is wrong?

Visitor: Do you know what is wrong?

kehl eh lE pRohblehm?

Local: You have an infection.

voo zaavey uhn infehksyon

Exchange 34

The US Center for Disease Control reports that Mali is a high-risk area for food or waterborne diseases such as bacterial or protozoal diarrhea, hepatitis A, and typhoid fever. High-risk mosquito borne diseases include malaria, yellow fever, and dengue fever. There is also a high risk of contracting the parasite schistosomiasis, also known as bilharzia or “snail fever,” from contact with contaminated fresh water. Meningitis is a widespread respiratory infection and there is always a threat of contracting rabies from contact with animals. Mali has the second highest infant mortality rate in the world.<sup>35, 36</sup> During the Ebola virus epidemic of 2013-2016, there were eight cases of infection in Mali, resulting in six fatalities.<sup>37</sup>

## Rural Education



Malian students in the class  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Educational opportunities remain a challenge in rural Mali where only an estimated 38.7% of the population is literate.<sup>38</sup> Underlying factors include living conditions related to extreme poverty, the high cost of education, distance from home to rural schools, the reliance on child labor during the agricultural season, and negative perceptions about the value of education. Unfortunately, access to primary and secondary education for young girls in many rural Malian communities is restricted due to social, cultural, and

financial constraints; girls are 4% less likely to enter school by the age of seven and 24% less likely to complete primary school; girls are also 30% less likely to participate in secondary education.<sup>39, 40</sup>

The Malian government decentralized education in 2003, placing responsibility on local governments. Due to the extreme poverty in rural areas, rural schools lack the infrastructure needed to provide a safe and reliable educational environment. Less than one in 10 schools has adequate sanitation facilities for students. Additionally,

many rural schools report adequate teaching materials and unqualified teachers.<sup>41, 42</sup> Schools and curriculums vary widely across the country, and class sizes range from 30 to over 100 students.<sup>43</sup> Rural children often fail their primary school exams because of malnutrition, illness, and absence during days they have to care for family members.<sup>44</sup> In northern Mali, the ongoing conflict has led to a 50% dropout rate among children enrolled in school.<sup>45</sup>



Students attending a class in Taliko  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Primary school consists of six grades; students begin their education at the age of seven. Lower secondary school is grades seven to nine, and upper secondary school is grades seven to 12. Access to higher education is limited to urban centers. Only 37% of children enter school at the age of seven, and only some 60% complete primary school. The University of Timbuktu, also known as Sankore University, is organized around three mosques-Sankore, Jingaray Ber, and Sidi Yahya. This university is one of the world's oldest higher education institutions; its libraries hold hundreds of thousands of ancient manuscripts covering religious and secular topics, as well as historical records.<sup>46</sup>

▶ Do your children go to school?		
Visitor:	Do your children go to school?	voh enfan vontaa leykohl?
Local:	No.	non

Exchange 35

There are private schools in Mali, typically operated by non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Some private schools, including Islamic schools, can also be funded by individuals. The Malian government does not permit the instruction of religion in public schools or funding of religious schools. Islamic schools, locally known as medersas (madrassas) or Quranic schools, offer religious and secular education; some are strictly for religious instruction.<sup>47</sup>

## Village Life

Rural villages consist of large extended families that tend to be patrilocal; the husband is the decision maker of the household. This family structure is upheld by Mali's Family Code law, which stipulates that women are to obey their husbands.<sup>48</sup>

▶ Does your leader live here?		
Visitor:	Does your leader live here?	vohtR shehf aabeet eesee?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 36*



*Village gathering*  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Malians are divided among ethnic, tribal, and caste lines. Relationships between ethnic groups and communities can be complex. Each ethnicity has a unique lifestyle, culture, and societal structure; village life is dictated by the norms of the predominant culture. Because most of the rural population is engaged in agriculture, mostly subsistence farming, family life is dominated by working on family farms, tending to family herds, or activities that enable others to work in agriculture.<sup>49, 50, 51</sup>

▶ Can you take me to your leader?		
Visitor:	Can you take me to your elder?	enmEneymwaa shey vohtR sheyf
Local:	OK.	daakohr

*Exchange 37*

▶ Respected leader, we need your advice.		
Visitor:	Respected leader, we need your help.	ohnohRaable shehf, noo aavon bEzwooin dE vohtR ehd
Local:	OK.	daakohr

*Exchange 38*



## Border Crossings and Checkpoints

Mali shares borders with seven countries: Algeria, Niger, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Senegal, and Mauritania. Though Mali is landlocked, a railway link with Dakar, Senegal allows Malian goods to have freight and port access. Future rail and port upgrades will provide more avenues for Malian exporters to expand their market reach.<sup>52</sup>



A checkpoint in Kidal  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali

Border crossings are intermittently closed by Mali or neighboring nations due to political crises, violent extremist activity, and to prevent the spread of disease. The lack of government capability to secure porous borders and the security situation in Northern Mali allow illegal activity to flourish.<sup>53, 54, 55</sup> Although the Malian armed forces border patrol units, those units have been ineffective. Bordering nations have increased their border security measures to counter the threat of violence and illegal activity originating in Mali.<sup>56, 57, 58</sup>

### ▶ May I see your ID?

Visitor:	May I see your ID?	montRey mwaa vohtR pyehs deedenteetey
Local:	Yes.	vwaasee

Exchange 39

Police checkpoints are commonplace throughout the country; these checkpoints are operated by two or more officers. Checkpoints are especially prevalent near major intersections and infrastructure. There is police corruption throughout the country and police can request bribes for even routine services. Uniformed police and individuals posing as police have stopped motorists, led them to isolated areas, and robbed them. Providing photocopies of passports and visas is advisable, rather than showing the originals for inspection at checkpoints.<sup>59, 60</sup>

### ▶ Would you step out of the vehicle please?

Visitor:	Would you step out of the vehicle please?	dohrtey dU veyeeKUl seel voo pley
Local:	Yes.	daakohr

Exchange 40

▶ **Where is the nearest checkpoint?**

Visitor:	Where is the nearest checkpoint?	oo sE tRoov lE pwoin dE kontRohl lE plU pRawsh?
Local:	It's about two kilometers from here.	aa enveeRon duh keelohmehtR deesee

*Exchange 41*

## Land Mines



*Demining  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

In 1997, Mali signed the Mine Ban Treaty. It was ratified the following year and Mali filed its initial report on the destruction of mines in 2001. In 1998, the government destroyed 7,127 stockpiled antipersonnel mines and 5,131 antivehicle mines. For training purposes, Mali retained 600 antipersonnel mines in 2003.<sup>61</sup> Mali has never produced antipersonnel landmines.<sup>62</sup> In 2013, there were reports of renewed landmine use by insurgent groups in the north.<sup>63</sup> There has been a significant

increase in the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) in northern and eastern Mali, to include vehicle-borne and personnel-borne IEDs.<sup>64</sup>

▶ **Is this area mined?**

Visitor:	Is this area mined?	ehsE kE seht zohn ey meeney?
Local:	Not at all.	non, paa dU too

*Exchange 42*

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 5 | Rural Life

### Assessment

1. Drought, political instability, and climate change have all contributed to a historic low in Malian cereal production.
2. The Malian government relies on foreign mining companies to mine the country's vast deposits of gold.
3. The Ebola virus reached Mali during the 2013-2016 Ebola outbreak and claimed several victims.
4. In rural Mali, a gathering crowd at the scene of a vehicle accident can create a dangerous situation.
5. The Malian government continues to lay minefields along the border to stop the infiltration of al Qaeda and ISIS fighters.

*Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False*



*Malian family  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

## Chapter 6 | French-Mali Cultural Orientation

# Family Life

## Introduction

Family life in Mali is determined by factors such as geography, ethnicity, economic activity, and religion. For example, the Tuareg live a nomadic lifestyle, but the Dogon have remained stationary since the 15th century. The Family Code is heavily influenced by Islam, which is the predominant religion in Mali. A man may marry multiple women as long as he can take care of them; this practice is widely accepted in Mali. Many Malian families revolve around agriculture, the country's primary economic activity.<sup>1</sup>

# Typical Household and Family Structure

## Traditional Households/ Families

The concept of family is different than in Western countries. The nuclear family is just a subset of the extended family, which plays a major role in daily life. Extended family members typically live in a single household, and each family member has a defined role. Single parent and female-headed households are more common in urban than in rural areas. Polygynous marriages are also more common in rural Mali than in urban centers; nearly 47% of families in rural Mali are polygynous.<sup>2</sup>



*Malian extended family  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Both civil and religious marriages are practiced in Mali. A government official performs civil marriages, and a religious official performs religious marriages. Religious marriages are more common than civil marriages, especially in rural Mali. Local religious leaders also mediate religious divorces. The state grants civil divorces; the court handles decisions such as custody, alimony, and the division of mutually held property. Low literacy rates and a lack of legal knowledge hinder women who seek relief from marital problems.<sup>3</sup>

Status within an extended family has significant impact on family life. Family elders routinely make major family decisions, including the settlement of disputes or marriage arrangements. Mali's Family Code stipulates that men are the head of the household and women must obey their husbands. Women do not typically own land; a woman is often excluded from inheriting land or property from her birth family or her husband's family.<sup>4, 5</sup>

### ▶ Is this your wife?

Visitor:	Is this your wife?	sey vohtR faam?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 43*



Malian parents often send their children away to work in agriculture fields, mines, or in the homes of the wealthy as domestic workers, in order to contribute to the family’s financial standing. Subsistence farming requires labor contributions from all family members, but drought conditions have increasingly caused parents to send their children away to earn money for the necessities of life.<sup>6, 7</sup>

▶ Do you have any siblings?		
Visitor:	Do you have any siblings?	voo zaavey dey fRehr ey suhr?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 44*

## Male and Female Interactions in the Family



*A Malian man with his two wives  
Flickr User: Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Under Malian law, a man is permitted to marry up to four wives, but his first wife must consent before he marries any additional wives.<sup>8</sup> A man must be able to provide for any additional wives and all of his children. Marrying an additional wife has been a major cause of divorce in Bamako. Wives typically share food preparation and other chores, but some men often maintain separate households for their wives.<sup>9</sup> High-income urban families often employ live-in domestic workers. Working

conditions for these domestic employees are poor, and many are young girls who come from rural Mali with few employment options.<sup>10</sup>

There are no specific laws against domestic violence, but abusive husbands can be prosecuted under related crimes such as assault, battery, attempted murder, etc. Informal authorities such as family elders, religious leaders, and community leaders can be called upon to settle major marital disputes. This type of mediation is favored over settling matters legally because the informal process is convenient, matters are settled according to local customs, and those involved are typically close to the disputing parties.<sup>11</sup>

▶ Are you the only person in your family who has a job?

Visitor:	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?	voo eht laa suhl pehrsawn kee tRaavaayE dan vohtR faameeyE?
Local:	No.	non

Exchange 45

The patriarch who heads the family is usually the oldest male; his responsibilities include providing food, clothing, and shelter. The Family Code legally upholds this family structure. In rural areas, both men and women are involved in agricultural activities, but women primarily take care of the children and household chores.<sup>12,</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Malian women assist with activities supporting subsistence farming; many women also sell home-made goods or gather local commodities, such as firewood, to sell in the marketplace for extra income.<sup>14, 15</sup>



*Malian women working in the field  
Flickr / Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security*

Throughout history, outsiders have remarked upon the progressive dress standards and independent behavior of Malian women. These observations often stem from the fact that Muslim Malian women do not veil. During the Northern Mali Conflict, Islamic extremists and Tuareg rebels imposed Sharia law on the inhabitants of territory they captured and forced women to wear loose-fitting clothing and black veils.<sup>16, 17</sup>

▶ Does your family live here?

Visitor:	Does your family live here?	ehse kE vohtR faameeyE aabeet eese?
Local:	Yes.	wee

Exchange 46

## Status of Elders, Adolescents, and Children



*An elderly couple*  
*Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Age brings power and respect among Malians; elderly members of a family or community have a position of authority, and their seniority within the society is honored. Elders in Mali tend to protect and transmit traditional inequalities to younger generations, making social change slow and difficult.<sup>18</sup> The role of elders in urban areas is diminished due to the influence of the Malian government.<sup>19</sup> When children are often forced out of school at a young age to work or get married, they lose almost all opportunity for an education, leaving them with few options to improve their future economic situation.<sup>20, 21, 22</sup>

Just over 50% of Malian children complete primary school; social and economic pressures keep children out of school. Although the government has reopened most schools that were closed due to the Northern Mali Conflict, the security situation and damaged schools have kept students and teachers from returning to the classroom. Some Quranic schools force their pupils to beg to raise money or work on their teachers' or schools' lands. Rebels in northern Mali recruited and kidnapped children who were then used as child soldiers; upon capture, some child soldiers were held by the Malian government as enemies of the state. Many parents are not issued birth certificates for their children, especially in rural areas, making it difficult to obtain government services.<sup>23, 24</sup>



*Malian children playing*  
*Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Female circumcision, also called female genital mutilation (FGM), or female genital cutting, is widespread across Mali. The procedure is believed by some to reduce sexual desire, curb promiscuity, and provide supposed health benefits. Many parents face social pressure from older relatives or their community to continue the practice, and some believe that not undergoing FGM will harm their daughters' marriage prospects.

FGM is typically performed by midwives and other laypersons under unsanitary conditions; the procedure often leads to shock, hemorrhage, illness, and obstetrical problems before and after childbirth. Despite help from international organizations, a government initiative, and awareness campaigns, UNICEF has found that up to 89% of Malian women have undergone FGM. There are no laws in Mali prohibiting FGM, and there is little political will to pass legislation that would criminalize FGM.<sup>25, 26</sup>

Although children are protected under Mali's Family Code and Child Protection Code, authorities lack the capacity to effectively enforce these laws. Though underage marriage is addressed in the updated Family Code, it remains an issue, especially in rural Mali. Child labor, often under dangerous and forced conditions, is condoned by government officials and law enforcement. Children working on family farms receive little to no pay, but work to support the survival of the family. An estimated 1.2 million children between the ages of 5 and 14 are working.<sup>27, 28, 29</sup>

## Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

### *Marriage*

Most Malian ethnic groups are patrilocal, meaning women live with their husbands' families after marriage. During the first years of marriage, a low standing within their new households makes life difficult for women. Daughters usually live with their parents until marriage. Some young women live with relatives or work in wealthy households as domestic employees until they find a spouse.<sup>30, 31</sup>



*A happy Malian couple  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

Mali has one of the highest rates of underage marriages in the world. Early and forced marriages are especially common in rural Mali, and it is suggested that these practices have increased in recent years. As stated in the Family Code, the minimum age a woman can legally be married is 16, or 15 with special permission; Mali's Ministry of Rural Development estimates that 16% of rural Malian women marry before the age of 15, and nearly 67% of women marry before age 18. These underage marriages correlate with poor education, economic, and health outcomes. During the Northern Mali Conflict, there were many instances of forced marriages. Many women, especially in rural areas, find it difficult to receive social or legal relief from abusive marriages.<sup>32, 33</sup>



In Mali, marriage provides a way for men and women to change their social status. On their marriage certificates, couples define their marriage as either monogamous or polygynous. Four in five couples in Bamako elect to have polygynous marriage; this choice is seen as providing flexibility within the relationship. Rural Malians practice polygyny to increase their family’s size, for financial security, and to increase community unity.<sup>34</sup>

▶ Are you married?		
Visitor:	Are you married?	ehtE voo maaRyey?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 47*

Dowries vary by region and ethnicity, and can range from cows or goats to a basket of kola nuts, accompanied by a large sum of money. The marriage certificate states the dowry amount and terms of the payment. The economic benefit of a dowry is one of the driving forces behind early marriages.<sup>35, 36</sup> When proposing marriage, a man will send a griot (a traditional orator or musician) who will outline the marriage proposal to the woman’s family. If the family agrees to the suitor’s marriage proposal, they will negotiate the dowry with the griot.<sup>37, 38, 39</sup>

## Divorce



*A sad woman with her baby  
Flickr / Kristian*

Divorce can be granted on the grounds of mutual consent, a breakdown of marital relations, or due to the fault of a spouse. Family, religious, and local leaders are often called upon to help couples reconcile before divorce is considered. In instances of divorce, these informal leaders facilitate the dissolution of the marriage. Because these informal channels operate outside of the law, the mediators don’t always settle the divorce in a fair manner or in accordance with Malian law; instead,

these mediators rely on local customs and traditions. Interpretations of the Family Code can be unfavorable toward women seeking a divorce or damages as a result of the divorce. Under Malian law, women are awarded up to five years of alimony and a share of mutually held property.<sup>40</sup>

## Birth

The celebration of a child's birth varies by ethnicity, religion, and region. Typically, women will not publically announce their pregnancy for the first few months. Many women give birth at home and do not receive prenatal care due to a lack of medical facilities, especially in rural areas. Many delay medical treatment until there is an obvious emergency.<sup>41</sup> Mali has the second highest infant mortality rate in the world—100 out of 1000 infants die before they reach their first birthday and 1 in 26 women die from pregnancy complications.<sup>42</sup> The high cost of medical treatment, lack of transportation to specialized care, and shortages of blood products and medication make childbirth especially dangerous. Only half of the population lives within 5 km of a medical treatment facility, and not all of those facilities provide specialized care. One factor contributing to the high infant mortality rate is the high birth rate among young women.<sup>43, 44, 45</sup>



*Mother and her infant  
Flickr / Geraldine*

Traditional medicine is widely used, both in urban and rural Mali, to treat ailments experienced during pregnancy. Traditional remedies are more affordable and accessible, and there are far more practitioners of traditional medicine than physicians. There is some integration of traditional medicine and modern medical practices. The knowledge of traditional medicine and the use of medicinal plants has been passed down for generations.<sup>46</sup>



*A tired woman carrying her baby on her back  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

There are significant health disparities in Mali. Infants with less educated mothers are over twice as likely to die within their first month. Women with more education are more likely to receive maternal health services. Urban women are almost twice as likely as rural women to have a medical professional attending to the birth of their children. Women in urban areas are also twice as likely to receive medical treatment after giving birth. Over 90% of

wealthy women give birth in a medical facility and receive follow-up medical care.<sup>47</sup>

After giving birth, the new mother is cared for by a female relative; the new mother's caretaker might also move into her home so that she can help with housework during the recovery period. Friends and relatives visit the new mother and her baby soon after the birth. Malian women are permitted to take 14 weeks of paid maternity leave.<sup>48, 49</sup>

▶ Congratulations on the birth of your baby!		
Visitor:	Congratulations on the birth of your baby!	feyleeseetaasyon por vohtR beybey
Local:	Thank you.	mehrsee

*Exchange 48*

## Family Social Events

### *Weddings*

The Malian government recognizes both religious and civil marriages. Religious wedding traditions vary widely across the country, by region and ethnicity, and are more common in rural areas. Religious weddings are presided over by a local religious leader, and a religious marriage has the same legal rights and protections as a civil marriage. Recordkeeping and documentation of religious marriages aren't as stringent as civil marriages, especially in rural areas. A local government official presides over a civil marriage, and the ceremony typically takes place at a government administration building. Some civil weddings will have a religious component, such as a blessing from a religious authority. A griot plays an important role in a wedding ceremony and ensuing celebrations by providing entertainment, a musical history of the couple's love, and communicating the significance of their marriage to the community through song.<sup>50, 51, 52</sup>



*Malian wedding ceremony  
Wikimedia / Castelung*

## Funerals



“Dama” funeral masks of the Dogon people in Mali  
Flickr / Tomomi Sasaki

Since the majority of Malians are Muslim, most funerals are Islamic. Burials vary according to local customs and interpretations of Islamic law. The burial is to take place as soon as possible after death, typically within 24 hours.<sup>53</sup> The body is to be treated with respect, with as much modesty as possible, and the privacy of the deceased is to be upheld. To expedite burial, the deceased should be buried in the city or region of their death. The deceased is washed in a thorough

manner, by members of the same gender. A clean white shroud is used to cover and wrap the body. A funeral consists of a short service, followed by a procession to the cemetery for burial. Relatives and close friends wear black clothing. It is appropriate and respectful to send flowers and cards to the family.<sup>54, 55</sup>

### ▶ My condolences to you and your family.

Visitor:	My condolences to you and your family.	mey kondohleyans aa voo ey aa vohtR faameeyE
Local:	Thank you so much.	mehrsee bohkoo

Exchange 49

Wakes are not common, and a viewing may consist of a few family members. Except in the instance of a suspicious death or an unknown cause of death, autopsies are to be avoided. Practices that require cutting the body, such as embalming, are forbidden. A coffin is not to be used for burial unless the law requires its use; cremation of the body is also not preferred unless required by law. The deceased is buried with their head toward Mecca. The deceased’s debts are to be paid, and food should be provided to the deceased’s family.<sup>56, 57</sup>

When participating in a funeral service, one should be silent. Afterward, expressions of comfort and condolence are given. After a funeral, Muslim Malians observe a three-day mourning period, during which family and friends offer condolences to the family of the deceased. Widows observe a mourning period lasting four months and ten days.<sup>58</sup>



## Naming Conventions

Naming a baby in Mali is a time for celebration. Because infant mortality is so high, many parents wait until they are reasonably sure the baby is going to survive before giving the baby a name. Muslim naming ceremonies take place seven days after birth. During the ceremony, the imam (religious leader) reads from the Quran and announces the name of the baby. Some parents ask the imam to choose a name from the Quran. A griot can play a key role in a more traditional baby naming ceremony. The griot will speak a name which is significant to Malian or community history several times into the baby's ear. A celebration of the occasion follows. A surname provides information about a Malian's family, such as ethnicity, caste, and geographic origins. Malians generally address their friends by their given name.<sup>59, 60</sup>



*Malian children  
Flickr / Mission de l'ONU au Mali - UN Mission in Mali*

### ▶ Are these your children?

Visitor:	Are these your children?	sE son voh zanfan?
Local:	Yes.	wee

*Exchange 50*

## Endnotes for Chapter 6: Family Life

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

## Chapter 6 | Family Life

### Assessment

1. Muslim women in Mali do not veil.
2. Malian law prohibits domestic violence.
3. Although religious and civil marriages are both practiced, only civil marriage are given legal recognition and protection under the law.
4. Economically disadvantaged Malian parents often send their children to earn money in order to improve the family's financial standing.
5. Underage marriage is still practiced, even though the practice is prohibited by Malian law.

*Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True*



## French-Mali Cultural Orientation

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# French-Mali Cultural Orientation

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## Final Assessment

1. The Islamic High Council controls all branches of government.
2. The Tuareg are a people of Berber decent, distinguished by their bold blue clothing.
3. Mali is an arid country covered entirely by the Sahara Desert.
4. The majority of the population is concentrated in northern Mali.
5. There are more cell phone subscriptions than people in Mali.
6. Islamic extremist groups based in Northern Mali have become a security concern.
7. The majority of Malians favor a secular government over an Islamic-centered government.
8. Beliefs and practices of traditional African religions have been integrated into Christian and Muslim worship practices.
9. Mali's Muslim majority is intolerant of religious minorities.
10. Tabaski, also known as Eid al-Adha, is one of the most important religious holidays in Mali.

11. Peanuts are an important part of Malian cuisine.
12. Owing to the country's French colonial past, Malians use Western-style utensils when eating meals.
13. Malian men and women throughout the country often wear a long, flowing, wide-sleeved robe.
14. Mali was one of the last African nations to gain independence from France, in the mid-1970s.
15. The left hand is considered unclean in Mali.
16. Bamako's main market is called the Mercato.
17. Mali is the leading producer of beef in West Africa.
18. ATMs throughout Bamako typically accept Visa and MasterCard.
19. Visitors to Mali can rent cars with or without drivers.
20. Due to Mali's generally flat landscape, automobile and motorcycle use is widespread throughout the country.
21. Due to Mali's size and the condition of most rural roads, domestic flights are the preferred method of cross-country travel for Malians.

22. The University of Timbuktu is one of the oldest institutions of higher education in the world.
23. The Malian government has started funding Islamic schools, or madrassas, to provide students with basic religious education.
24. Mali does not have a rail service.
25. International aid and education reforms have nearly eliminated illiteracy in Mali.
26. A griot is a Malian magistrate judge who presides over a civil marriage.
27. In Mali, women do not have maternity leave.
28. Polygamy is prevalent across Mali.
29. Mali has one of the highest infant mortality rates in the world.
30. In 2012, the Malian government passed a law banning female genital mutilation (FGM).

29. True; 30. False

True; 20. False; 21. False; 22. True; 23. False; 24. False; 25. False; 26. False; 27. False; 28. True; False; 10. True; 11. True; 12. False; 13. True; 14. False; 15. True; 16. False; 17. True; 18. False; 19. True; 9. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True; 6. True; 7. False; 8. True;