

The Bijagos Religions



- Approximately **30% of the people are Muslim**. Predominantly in the larger and more populated cities of Guinea.
 - Less than **10% are Christians**.
 - The remaining **60% retain their animist indigenous religion**.
- Animist Beliefs remain strong among the coastal islands and have not been influenced by outside religions, though Christians and Muslims incorporate many of the animist beliefs into their religions.

Definition of animism

1. The belief in the existence of individual spirits that inhabit natural objects and phenomena.
2. The belief in the existence of spiritual beings that are separable or separate from bodies.
3. The hypothesis holding that an immaterial force animates the universe.

A Story of Creation

In 1882, M. M. Barros, a native priest of Guinea suggested that Bijogo culture had been shaped by a warlike life and a deep faith in the transmigration of their souls. Scantamburlo proposed that the various island groups have distinct cultures, traditions, and origins. He suggested four divisions, possibly correlating with the four distinct Bijogo clan origins. Scantamburlo described,

According to many inhabitants on the islands of Bubaque, nobody knows for sure when and from where all the Bijagós derive. One informant told me: 'they only saw the sacred stool and the guardian spirit already there'. Neither report much about the time and how the world started. It is a common belief among them, however, that it was Orebok, an intermediary between the Supreme Being, and the Bijagós, who began the world. The first human being was a woman, called Maria. This name originated from the first word her son told her, while lying hopeless and naked on the seashore, 'come, take me'. Maria had four children, called Urácuma, Oraga, Onoca or Ogubane, and Ominca. They are the four mythological ancestors of the four matrilineal clans of the Bijagós. Most Bijagós can usually agree on these traditions. When asked, however, to specify more particulars, a variety of opinions, according to the provenance of the informants may be heard. (1978)

The Elders



Religion is embedded so much into their culture and tradition that there is no separate between their beliefs and their daily lives. They live each day according to strict traditional guidelines passed down to the younger generations from the elders of the villages. The elders dictate most religious practices and traditions and keep the entire community unified in common thought. The elders have a direct connection with the Gods and if disobeyed it is said that you will be killed by magical means. They command respect and have almost all the privileges in the village.

Women also play a large role in most villages, as the elder women enforce the religious sanctions placed on the chief or king. Some of the tribes have kings while most have chiefs. The main difference is that the King inherits his position while the chief is chosen by the people and a group of elders.

Dance and Ritual



Dance and music is usually incorporated into most community rituals where the drums sounds are a medium in which the people can communicate with the Gods.

Words like Spirits, magic, gods, and fate are common within the Bijogos people and connect each person with the spirit world in a unique way.



The coastal groups believe that ancestor spirits exercise power over their living descendants, and those spirits are recognized in household shrines at which periodic offerings are made. In every village, there are dozens of shrines to tutelary or guardian spirits. These spirits are recognized at public ceremonies in which food and alcohol offerings are made and animals are sacrificed. Such spirits are thought to protect the community against misfortune. Individuals visit the shrines to request personal favors. Certain shrines have gained a transethnic reputation for reliability and power. Guineans abroad continue to return to those shrines and send money to pay for sacrifices and ceremonies.

The rites or ceremonies are commonly divided by gender and are in place for almost every major point in a man or woman's life which are overseen by the village elders. The main rites are coming of age, Marriage, gaining the acceptance of the elders, and death.



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Kolam, the Mirror of
Tamil Culture
from: *WOMEN ALOUD*

<http://www.cultureunplugged.com/play/4479/Bissagos--Just-Another-Lovestory>

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- <http://www.sacredland.org/bijagos-archipelago/>
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