

1. Description

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

- Bukusu, BaBukusu of the Bukusu Language

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

- BXK-j31c

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

- Latitude .06 Longitude 34.70

1.4 Brief history:

- The migratory history of Babukusu is intertwined with that of other Luhya sub nations. The Bukusu believe they came from Egypt and their Adam-Eve equivalent was Mwambu and Sera. The Babukusu predominantly occupy Bungoma County in western Kenya. Part of the larger Luhya commune enlisting 18 sub nations and priding in the fact that they are the largest, Babukusu have a stubborn nature that has been manifested in their political and religious affiliations. They resisted colonial rule ruthlessly; they are strong believers in the spiritual self hence the emergency of the 'Dini ya Musambwa' [The Babukusu are believers in cultural traditions. They religiously followed the advice of their elders strongly influenced by the 'Diviner Priests' who formed an integral part of the mentoring system. The Babukusu hold fast on cultural practice. Among the most recognised Babukusu personalities are warriors and diviners. Political icons came late in the day for the Babukusu.

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

- As is the case in most Kenyan communities, the traditional culture is under heavy pressure. Development and modernization have a strong impact on most parts of traditional life. However, quite a number of traditional customs have been maintained, some with adaptation. For instance, initiation rites still take place among virtually all sections of the population, but the timing has been adapted to coincide with school vacations, so that they do not interfere with the child's education. Traditionally there was resistance against modern influence among the Bukusu. This was most vividly expressed in the Dini ya Msambwa movement, led by Elijah Masinde. This movement is a mixture of traditional religion with some Christian elements. It manifested itself clearly as a protesting movement against colonial authorities. Its leader was detained several times, mainly in relation to the attacks carried out on administrative institutions. A ban was reinstated even after independence, because of an anti-establishment attitude in word and deed. As for religion, sacrifice was the basic ritual for the movement, just as for the traditional religion. Ancestor worship also played an important role. Despite Masinde's death several years ago, the movement still commands some following.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The Bukusu reside in the Western Province of Kenya. The area is very wet and tropical. The high volume of rain makes it perfect for farming, which is area's main economic force. There are two rainy seasons in which the bukusu plants and harvest crops twice a year.

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

- The structure of populations is determined by rate of mortality, fertility and migration, which in turn are determined by complex biological, cultural, and social factors. The bukusus live in relatively small communities because of limited and shared resources.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- In addition to keeping livestock communities were very agricultural and grew crops. Cash crops included, maize, cotton, sunflowers, and Arabica coffee (they were also main sources of substance.) Secondary crops included, sweet potatoes, beans, millet, bananas, sorghum, green-grams, groundnuts, and sim-sim. Woman also forage when needed collecting wild mushrooms, roots and herbs.

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- Like many of the Bantu tribes the Bukusu are a cattle rearing people. Cattle are used as currency and slaughtered to mark celebrations and sacrifices. Chickens are also popular among the Bukusu. In the past keeping them alive was a problem due to the large number of hyenas surrounding many homestead, but over time with urban sprawl and increased deforestation the number of hyenas has decreased making chicken production fruitful. Chickens are the main meat eaten within the community. Pigeons are also raised for both food and fertilizer. The most interesting protein is termites, which are considered a delicacy. In heavy downpours the termites will be forced out of their slumber becoming easy prey for the Bukusu. The Bukusu because of their peanut-butter taste and crunchiness covets them. The termites provides much needed protein to local diets and are an excellent source of protein, vitamins and minerals.

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

- They are avid hunters and use spears as well as bow and arrows. They often hunt birds and use dogs to aid with hunting.

2.4 Food storage:

- Short term food storage consists of ceramic pots. For long term food storage large wooden boxes with opening for air circulation. Because they live in such a volatile climate they must build them off the ground to ensure they stay dry.

2.5 Sexual division of production:

- Within the tribe men and women have clear expectations for each sex. Traditionally men herded cattle, built homes, granaries, and fences, dug wells, cultivated lands, engaged in wood carving and the making of drums and the like. Females are confined to the domestic sphere and engaged in sustenance occupations: farming, collecting firewood, foraging for vegetables, fetching water, and raising children. Being a patriarchic society the man is the head of the family. In the past, the father's authority arose from the ownership of land and cattle, which gave him power over the family. It is taboo in bukusu culture for children to fight with their parents making the father's word is law. Male household heads possessed exclusive rights to the means of production, land and

cattle, as well as the labor of women and children. Women have no rights to property. In polygamous families, each wife's portion of the homestead technically belonged to her male children. Women also have no say in the sale of animals and crops even though it is their responsibility to care for them. A Bukusu woman is appreciated in a limited sphere of agricultural and domestic work.

Industriousness and submissiveness are qualities that men look for when they want to marry. These are qualities that mothers advise their daughters to follow and mothers-in-law repeat to them.

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics:

- Ceramics and crafts are a big part of the Bukusu tribe. Clay pots are used for everything from cooking to food storage, to decoration and gifts. Ceramic pots are used as containers during the brewing and drinking of ritual and non-ritual beer. Potshards on the other hand are used as receptacles for food and medicine. Women of the tribe spend much time crafting and decorating pots. Men also participate in wood carving.

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos:

- Bukusu communities prohibit women from eating certain parts of a chicken or animal food (typically what men like) on the basis of some taboos. Older Bukusu women warn younger generations of the danger of chicken meat and eggs to a developing fetus. In some areas pregnant women are prohibited from consuming milk, bananas, fatty meats and animal tongues as they were thought to block the birth canal. Young girls feared a loss of fertility if they consumed too much milk. Pregnant women refrain from eating meat from the ribs and back as well as the back of a cow to avoid difficulties during delivery. Male twins or men who begot twins avoided recently harvested millet at the risk of getting ill. Culprits sacrificed a goat or sheep to ward off the threat.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- n/a

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- Roughly 13-15

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- As soon as possible. A wedding was not official until the arrival of the first child

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- 21

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- N/A

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

- Men- 18-27
- Women: 16

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

- No clear number. Divorce is allowed, but extremely frowned upon. In the Bukusu marriage was often the goal of life, with men not being able to own property or cattle until a wife was secured. Also, marriage bonded the tribe together making divorce a force of division. Divorces are more common in present times due to colonial influence. The Bukusu accredited this to the women's discontent and volatile nature

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

- Within the Bukusu society polygyny draws legitimacy from its functional purposes and economic factors. Agriculture and domestic work done primarily by women are labor intensive and extra wives and children provide the required assistance. Bukusu sanctioned polygyny because of the centrality of children as a guarantee to immortality as well as economic assets of labor and dowry. A man could marry more than one wife and a large family was a tribute to the man and his tribe. Men are also encouraged to acquire another spouse if his current one is barren.

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

- Dowry negotiations are strictly male prerogatives. In the exchange of wives livestock is the expected currency. Wealth in livestock demonstrates a man's reliability, diligence, responsibility and propriety. While brides expect generous concessions from the groom's family because they are losing a pair of working hands. While the dowry can be viewed as both a gift and a payment, it creates an alliance between two lineages. The husband and his family acquire a wife for the sum of 10 to 15 cattle, one which goes to the uncle, including a goat to lead the livestock, blankets, sheets and clothing. The standard bride wealth is 13 head of cattle, regardless of the women's education. What people haggle over is the money. Some parental demands are outlandish and extravagant. Bride prices can be exorbitant, approximating four times the average Kenyan's yearly income. In fact some bridegrooms pay installments to the bride's parents well into the fifth or sixth year. Some argue that this is a symbolic attempt of extending reciprocity between the two lineages. A husband's payment of dowry seals the marital union.

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- Women cannot inherit property or land, given the patrilineal and exogamous culture. The land and good is passed to deceased father's sons and is divided evenly. Inheritance in the Bukusu has always been patriarchal, despite policy intervention. The 1972 Law of Succession Chapter 160 Laws of Kenya, granted widows and daughters equal inheritance rights, but was wide ineffective. An attempt was made again in 1981, but it had the same influence. One interesting aspect of Bukusu inheritance is

what happens with the wife. Once the dowry had been paid he belong to her husband's family. As a result, the wife's obligations to her marital kin extend beyond the physical death of her spouse. The Bukusu consider her married to the deceased, watch over and influence the living. She may remarry a new spouse in her husband family but a cleansing goat must be sacrificed as a symbol of the ownership transfer.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

- Parents are the main source of education in the Bukusu. Before the age of six children are cared for by the women of the family. Here they learn through observation and family participation. Between six and ten, children participate in simple agricultural activities like weeding and the planting of various vegetables. Between the ages of ten and fifteen, children begin to take a more active role in the family's social life. At this age gender roles and expectations become more distinct. Girls begin spending most of their time with their mothers, learning domestic responsibility preparing to be a wife. The boys spend all their time with their fathers learning trades like hunting and cattle. No real conflict between the two. Bukusu children are taught to respect and be obedient to their parents.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

- N/A

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

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

- N/A

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

- N/A

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

- N/A

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

- A common custom within the Bukusu is a ritual reconciliation regarding a husband's assault on his wife. Incidents of physical or sexual abuse rarely make it to the courts and is viewed a necessary to assert dominance over his wife. It was a common attitude that a man has to punish his wife during the first year of marriage to break her in.

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

- Marringae is viewed as a tool of bring to

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

No woman is property of husband. In some areas female circumcision is practiced.

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

no

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

- If there are other wives children go to their care and remain with the father. If not the children are property of the male so they stay with his family

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

- N/A

4.22 Evidence for couvades

no

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

- Like in many cattle herding Bantu tribes fathers are often older. The reason is simple economic. Older bukusu men have had more time to acquire wealth (i.e. cattle, land and money) thus can afford more wives increasing their reproductive chances.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

4.24 Joking relationships?

- There is a daily practice of Bakulo, or joking enemies, who engage in a socially sanctioned vicious banter. This establishes a diminishing lineage among families within a physical proximity, whose blood line is tenuous

4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations

- patrilineal

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

- Is frowned upon.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

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

- At birth, children were usually named after grandparents or famous people, or after the weather. Male and female names were different: male names frequently began with 'W', while female names usually began with 'N'. Thus, for example, a boy born during a famine would be named 'Wanjala', while a girl would be named 'Nanjala'. Both names share the same root word, 'njala', from 'eNjala', the Bukusu word for hunger.¹

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

- Marriage was allowed, ethnic intermarriages, were tolerated among friendly neighbors like the Gishu, Wanga, Marama, Tachoni, and Kabras. Families avoided marital unions to materially lacking communities. They required that the neighboring tribe be in the same language family. Marriages between clansmen was encouraged because it strengthens the community and family ties.

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

- As late as the 1930's bukusu men acquired wives through abduction or elopement. The eligible bachelor would gather his mates and go in to another village and come home with a wife. Parents also have a large say in who someone marries within the clan. There are even instances where they choose mates for their child at a very young age. Before the male's circumcision the two families will participate in a bonding rite called, Khunua Chinyinja, which solidifies the impending marriage.

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

- I could not find a clear number. But it is understood that men were allowed to enter battle between the ages of eighteen to forty. These men were expected to know basics of combat and weapons. In some areas of the bukusu men were not allowed to interact with women while a warrior.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- Ingroup: Being that the Bukusu is 21 politically independent sub-tribes loosely knit together it is natural for conflict to arise. It was common that the clans were relatively autonomous and engaged in warfare and cattle raiding.
- Outgroup: The bukusu was constantly migrating until they finally settled in present day Kenya. Because of their migratory nature the tribe often engaged in war over territory and resources. Through these wars they would increase their population from the bahuii (war captives), an example is the baKimwei of Tolometi. They also battle colonialism

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

- Here are some examples of wars and why they were fought: the war with the Abarwa, they fought with them in Egypt and in Sirikwa, the reason for this was cattle raiding. The war of Teso, which was caused by a land dispute and cattle raids in the late 1800's "homes were razed, crops destroyed, cattle looted and entire villages abandoned". And finally, the war with the Abalaku (bok). The reason for this conflict was a struggle for food in a time of famine.

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

4.18 Cannibalism?

- The Bukusu normally prohibited the union of immediate family and first cousins. Though they do not practice cannibalism, but it was the source of a great conflict. They were clashing with the nearby Sabaot tribe over land. The conflict reached its pinnacle when the Sabaots accused the Bukusu of decimating the Sabaot population through cannibalism. This created an uproar that ended with government intervention and the creation of the Mt. Elgon District, which separated the two populations.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- A good percentage of the bukusu has migrated to major business centres like Nairobi, Kisumu and Mombasa. There are various migration traditions among the different bukusu groups. Some believe they migrated from Egypt. Other Bantu peoples as well as Nilotic peoples, have a tradition of origin in "Egypt." Referring to a northern area from the Sudan or Ethiopia farther north. In their early history the Bukusu were a highly migratory people. They traveled eventually settled in Western Kenya marking a transition from a nomadic to a sedentary lifestyle.

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

- Family institutions have always been central to the social, economic and political organization of the bukusu community. The Bukusu did not have a structure of central authority. The highest authority was the village headman, called Omukasa, who was usually elected by men of the village. Within the Bukusu there is an apparent lack of institutions of authority and are often arranged on a genealogical grid. There were also healers and prophets who acquired great status because of their knowledge of tribal tradition, medicines, and religion.

5.4 Post marital residence:

- The Female leaves her home and joins her new husband's family

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

- There is a clear division of social interaction between the sexes. The social world for a woman is very small. She is tied to her home and expected to constantly be absorbed in domesticity. They are viewed as work horses and baby makers. Men on the other hand enjoy a large range of social interaction. Men can talk and communicate with whomever they desire without free of social disgrace because the blame would be placed on the female.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

Live in fort like structure with mud walls surrounding the complex and in some cases had a mote. Families were organized within the village by family ties.

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

- n/a

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- n/a

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

The most basic and important social unit is the immediate family making up the lineage and then branching out to surrounding families.

5.12 Trade:

- The bukusu are industrious farmers and grow many cash crops for trade. As the surrounding area has caved to colonial pressure it is almost impossible for some areas to exist without the trades.

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Land, wives, and resources show status as well as age

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

6.2 Stimulants:

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

- The bukusu society ceremonies are very important and have different intents for each gender. Women often celebrate their coming of age, marriage and childbirth. Men on the other hand are often about the transition into manhood and proving their worth. During childhood two teeth are extracted to mark the beginning of their transition leading up to the circumcision. As a central rite of passage the circumcision ritualizes the transition from childhood to adulthood, but more than that it indicates sexual maturity. It is a great bonding experience and evokes support and sympathy of kinsfolk and neighbors who play indispensable roles in the ritual

6.4 Other rituals:

- After any incarceration the community would demand a cleansing ceremony. The community would then provide a Kimisango or sacrifice. Amongst youths, this involved staring the culprits in the face-to-face and elder would then hold the chicken by the legs and twirl the chicken around the accused then smash its head on the ground at their feet. With adults the community slaughtered a sheep and allowed the blood to wash over the culprits cleansing them in the process.

6.5 Myths (Creation):

- The Bukusu believe that the first man, Mwambu (The discoverer) was made from mud by Wele Khakaba at a place called Mumbo (which translates to 'West'). God then created a wife for Mwambu, called Sela. Mwambu and his descendants moved out of Mumbo and settled on the foothills of Mount Elgon, known as Masaba from where their descendants grew to form the current Bukusu population.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- The Bukusu had rich oral tradition of folk tales many of which still exist today. They also enjoyed music as a tradition six string lyre

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

- Like in most Kenyan communities Christianity has had an extremely large influence over religious practices. Though some traditional practices still exist the Bukusu practice a blended version of the two. Many aspects of the Christian religion are not fully understood by the Bukusu. And though over 75% are Christian less than two percent dedicate themselves to Christ.

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- Death, like life is a gradual process in the Bukusu culture. As time passes the ancestral link diminishes. When a person dies, he will be buried in a grave with a warrior's weapons if he was an elder. Several functions would be performed during and after the funeral ceremony. Their burial grave ranges from 3–4 feet in depth with people buried facing the East. There are a few clans amongst the Bukusu who bury their people in sitting position. It is still practiced till date. Wild animals sometimes exhume corpses from graves and eat them. When such an incident occurs, people look for the presumed skull of the desecrated body, and when it is found, they hang it in a leafy tree. When the family of the deceased migrates to another place, they brew beer (kamalwa ke khuukhalanga) for the ceremony of transferring the skull with them to the settlement. Funerals are often a large economic burden. The family of the deceased must slaughter precious animals grain stores are depleted to feed the visitor who often complains of not enough food.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

no

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

No

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

- Believe in ancestor worship and that the spirits of the dead never leave the village. They believe that they watch over and effect daily life because of this they often offer

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification:

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

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

- Like in all other aspects of the culture men were placed ahead of women. Aside from gender rank would be as assigned based on age.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

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

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Numbered references

1. <http://blackethics.com/755/the-bukusu-of-kenya/>
2. Florence, Namulundah. The Bukusu of Kenya: Folktales, Culture and Social Identities. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic, 2011. Print. Florence.
3. http://www.abeingo.org/HTML_files/bukusuhistory.html
4. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=10996&rog3=KE>
- 5.