

## 1. Description

- 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: Society: Ukambani; Language: Kamba; Language family: Bantu (3)
- 1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): KAM (3)
- 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): -1.40, 38.00; central-south region of Kenya (3)
- 1.4 Brief history: The Kamba are an ever-growing tribe living in the central-South region of Kenya. They are very loosely organized, and have very few formal governmental structures or rules. They are very non-dramatic and put a lot of emphasis on individualism and independence. The Kamba were once middlemen in the coastal ivory trade, making them a target for colonialism. Most early accounts (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) of the Kamba were written by missionaries. (2)
- 1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: There were many missionaries in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and they continue to influence this region today. This region of Kenya is a mix between Muslim and Christian, as far as major world religions go (as there are plenty of indigenous religions present as well). (2)
- 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):
- 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

## 2. Economy

- 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Isio (beans and maize boiled together), honey, porridge, bananas
- 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Meat from cattle, goats
- 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Bow and arrow, sword. (1)
- 2.4 Food storage:
- 2.5 Sexual division of production: Apart from childbearing, keeping a clean house is among the women's chief and sole duties (duties to her husband) (1)
- 2.6 Land tenure: There is the Ngelani, the farming community (farmers), and also the Kilungu, which is focused on livestock (herders). (2). Anyone may build and/or cultivate on uncleared or uncultivated land. Sometimes someone wishing to build near a neighborhood/village must buy permission (in the form of a goat) from the council of elders. (1)
- 2.7 Ceramics:
- 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:
- 2.9 Food taboos: During pregnancy, women are not supposed to eat bananas or honey, porridge or milk during the last three months. All of these are thought to make delivery more difficult for the woman. Also, the woman is not allowed to eat the meat of animals killed with poison arrows, or her child will die. Also, if a man marries a woman from another clan, there are certain foods or activities they cannot partake in at certain times. (1)
- 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

## 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):
- 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):
- 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):
- 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):
- 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Females: anywhere from 12-18 years old; Males: considerable later than females
- 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: No exact percentages, but divorces do occur if the man is dissatisfied with the way his wife is performing her duties. Interestingly, an unfruitful woman does not count as grounds for divorce, but an impotent man does. After a divorce any children are left in care of the mother. (1)
- 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: This practice does exist, but no specific percentages. (1)
- 4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: There is a very specific pattern for courting and getting approval to marry. The man's family must send two goats to the father of the woman. If the goats are returned, there is no consent to marry. However, if only the harness that attached the goats is returned, the man and his family know that there is consent for the two to marry. Once the goats are received, the parents of the woman must sleep together, and when a second round of goats is sent they must again have ritual coition. Finally the woman's parents are sent a third round of goats and a buck, and if the father-in-law does not laughter the buck, the goats must be returned. The average total number of goats to be paid by the man's family is 40-50. (1)
- 4.9 Inheritance patterns: Some evidence of matriarchy as the mother's brothers have important roles in many rituals. (1)
- 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:
- 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:
- 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): It is possible to marry someone from another clan, but there are then certain food and activity taboos that go along with that decision. (1)
- 4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these "other fathers" recognized?
- 4.14 What is the belief of the mother's role in procreation exactly? (e.g., "receptacle in which fetus grows")

- 4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?
- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Not sexual, but if the father of a bride takes too long to allow his daughter to go and live with her husband, the women are occasionally abducted by the husband and his friends. This is more symbolic than anything else, and should not be confused with actual “woman-stealing”, which is done with true force and coercion. (1)
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin)
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?: A father cannot sit near his grown-up daughter or daughter-in-law at the hearth so as to avoid improper contact. A grown-up son should not sit too near his grown-up sister, but otherwise sons may sit where they like. (1)
- 4.24 Joking relationships?
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?: No, one night the girl leaves her home with her husband, going to his village where her now mother-in-law smears fat on her neck as a form of welcome. That is the only action that takes place, and the Kamba language doesn't even have a word that corresponds to wedding. (1)
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name?
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?)
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)?: No, women have the right to choose who they marry, and their potential partners usually obtain the woman's consent before asking the father's permission. Most often, the father or eldest brother of the suitor talks to the woman's father as opposed to the suitor himself. However, since there is a very strict dowry practice, the father's opinion on whom his son wishes to marry is very important. (1)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

#### **Warfare/homicide**

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:
- 4.15 Outgroup vs. ingroup cause of violent death:
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:
- 4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): There have been many historical conflicts with the neighboring Kikuyu and Masai tribes. (1)
- 4.18 Cannibalism?

#### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: Autonomous communities know as Utui (2)
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The Kamba have moved to several different territories and ecological situations, and have become much more spread out than they were originally. (2)
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): No chief or tribal council, the Kamba organization is very loose and fluid. Government units are restricted to the community level. There is a Nzama, or a council of elders with a chairman, but the chairman only serves to dissolve disputes, and has no voting power. (2)
- 5.4 Post marital residence: The husband and wife live in the man's mother's hut until the first child is born, when the couple builds and moves into their own hut. (1)
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense): Some evidence of conflict between the Kamba and other tribes such as the Kikuyu and Masai (2)
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):
- 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:
- 5.8 Village and house organization: Ngelani (farmers) and Kilungu (herders) are the two main groups within the Kamba, and there are several differences between the two. However, there is little to no animosity between the two groups, they simply think of themselves as different, yet still all identify as Kamba.
- Ngelani:** Sacred Tree ceremony held every year, but omits the ceremony involving livestock; large-scale meetings of Utui; Weak age-grade structure, and young men rarely dance; only perform the first of three circumcision ceremonies; Shorter lineage
- Kilungu:** Both the Sacred Tree and livestock ceremonies are held every year; strong age-grade structure, dancing is commonplace; three circumcision ceremonies; longer lineage (2)
- 5.9 Specialized village structures (men's' houses):
- 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?
- 5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Kisuka, a social club, one of the only aspects of this culture that extends beyond the Utui. The Kisuka serves as a membership group to define localized lineage (2)
- 5.12 Trade: Before colonialism the Kamba were the middlemen in the coastal ivory trade (2)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?: Very little, the Kamba value independence and individuality over almost anything else. Although the majority of Kamba regard wealth in the forms of land and/or livestock as a life goal, and so there are cases of “haves” and “have-nots”. (2)

## 6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): A medicine man rubs an antelope horn over a woman’s belly after she gives birth in order to help the recovery process. (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Men must sacrifice an animal in order to become a member of the Kisuka and/or the Nzama (usually one animal sacrifice per group is required); some men believe that one or the other group takes precedence. (2)

6.4 Other rituals: Naming ceremonies to name sons (a function of the localized lineage organization); circumcision ceremonies; death rituals, which can only be performed by old men. (2)

6.5 Myths (Creation): The Kamba place much more importance in what the clan can *do* instead of focusing on stories of the past. (2)

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Some ceremonial dancing (2). Also decorative art of carved and painted calabashes (carvings usually consist of animals, namely lizards, serpents, and tortoises), wild mammals are less likely to be depicted, and domesticated animals are almost completely absent; apart from rattles, dolls, and peg-tops, there are few toys of great importance. Any games are thought only to be for children, and the games that are played are normally some sort of imitation of the adults. (1)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: The Kamba believe in the continuation of the soul after death, and that the soul’s existence is “an immediate continuation of the deceased’s experiences (though if that person was unmarried in life, the soul gets married in the underworld). There is not distinction between good and bad, or between men and women. Not surprisingly, animals are also considered to have soul, but their souls die with their bodies. (1)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

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

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: Powdered plants and fats rubbed, as a type of perfume, on the body (especially during ceremonies and ritual dances); Many young people paint their bodies for ritual dancing (circles on the cheeks and rings around the eyes); at ordinary times women may rub red pigment into their cheeks and hair; White zigzag lines drawn on the legs; yellow pollen around eyes and eyelids; occasionally red and/or yellow petals worn (mostly for the contrasting color from the face). Tattooing is not very common, but is almost done on the face and most commonly with figures of the sun and moon. (1)

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification: Most common among women, cicatrization is found on the breast, back, and abdomen, sometimes done with a knife, sometimes a needle (the ones on the front are made by women, and on the back by the men). Men often put a small swelling on the deltoid. The main purpose of this practice is simply for embellishing the body rather than for having some original meaning

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Lots of metal ornaments, they are made mostly by the men who give them to their wives and daughters. These are different for both different sexes and different ages. Both men and women wear metal armlets that are often engraved. Most people deform their teeth by chipping away at them, as a form of embellishment. (1)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Men wear wire spirals around the body and sometimes the neck. When girls dance in ceremonies they will sometimes put strong smelling plants on their neck rings. (1)

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

**Males:** Wire spirals around body and neck, but only in ceremonies

**Females:** Young girls wear red and white beaded belts (similar to corsets), and older/married women wear smaller belts that are made with blue beads. Some women wear wire spirals around their necks, and occasionally neck rings made of blue beads are worn (exclusively by old women). (1)

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## 8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

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):**

- Birthmarks are of great importance, and if a child possesses a birthmark that a deceased family member also has, that is how the child's name is determined. (1)
- Beekeeping is a common and important practice. (1)

**Numbered references**

1. Lindblom, Gerhard, 1887-1969. 1920. *The akamba in british east africa; an ethnological monograph*. Sweden:.
2. Oliver, S.C. 1965. "Individuality, Freedom of Choice, and Cultural Flexibility of the Kamba." *American Anthropologist* 67 (2): 421-428.
3. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=kam](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=kam)