

## 1. Description

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

Kamba, Akamba; “The Kamba speaks one language, but there are considerable differences of vocabulary and construction between the dialects of Machakos and Kitui, the latter dialect sometimes being called Daisu or Thaisu. There are minor differences between Kitui and Mumoni, and between Ulu and Kibwezi. (1.p68)

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

kam

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

Kenya -1.40/38.00

“...Machakos and Kitui, the River Athi being their common boundary...” (1p.67)

### 1.4 Brief history:

“The Kamba were apparently once a compact group occupying the region now called Ulu, and they consider the Mbooni Mountains as the point from which they settle Kitui and the other areas. [...] They consider themselves to have been a hunting and agricultural people who leant about cattle on trading expeditions and bought them with ivory. [...] Lindblom dates the crossing of the River Athi and the settlement of Kitui from Ulu in the first half of the eighteenth century. They expanded throughout all Ulu and into Kikumbuliu during the nineteenth century” (1p.68)

“Kambas were involved in the long distance trade during the pre-colonial period. In the mid-eighteenth century, a large number of Akamba pastoral groups moved eastwards towards the Tsavo and Kibwezi areas along the coast. This migration was the result of extensive drought and a lack of pasture for their cattle. The Kambas settled in the Mariakani, Kisauni and Kinango areas of the coast of Kenya, creating the beginnings of urban settlement. They still reside in large numbers in these towns, and have become absorbed into the cultural, economic and political life of the modern-day Coast Province.” (2)

“History has it that the Kamba migrated into Kenya in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century and settled in the Taveta area before migrating northwards to the Nzaui Hills in the present day Makueni district. A dispersal of the community occurred in the 17th century, with some moving to Mbooni and others to Kitui, Mwingi and the fringes of Central province. The Mbooni group later moved to present day Machakos and Kangundo districts.” (4p.4)

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

“The Imperial British East Africa Company opened a station at Machakos in 1892 and a few years later the first Indian-owned stores was opened and the use of currency was introduced. The company laid down its charter in 1895 and a protectorate over British East Africa was declared, the administration being taken over by the Foreign Office and later by the Colonial Office. A police post was set up at Kitui in 1893, its main purpose being to check slave caravans, but European administration did not begin till 1898.” (1.68)

“The building of the Kenya and Uganda Railway, which was a great factor in establishing effective control and has obviously influenced economic affairs, was begun in 1896. The first white settlers received grants of land in 1903, chiefly British and Dutch from South Africa, and in 1948 there were 313 Europeans living in Ukamba. Many Kamba work on European farms and in the towns. [...] Missions working among the Kamba are Seventh Day Adventists and the Africa Inland Mission.” (1p.68)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

“The Kamba live on the eastern slopes of the Kikuyu highlands, which fall gradually from a height of about 5,000 feet at Machakos to some 1,500 feet on the eastern boundary, where the country joins the northern part of the Nyika desert., inland from the coast. Ecological factors vary widely. In Machakos it was estimated in 1932 that a total of 1,400,000 acres, about 140,000 were cultivated, 70,000 lying fallow, and 200,000 or 300,000 acres uninhabited owing to tsetse. Of the non-tsetse areas, much consists of steep hill-sides, rocky and sandy country; to the east the country is almost waterless, and in Kikumbuliu the only sources of water are a few streams in the Chyulu Hills and the taps at railway stations, which are used for humans and livestock as well as for the railway engines. Large parts of the country have been described as “little more than scrub-covered desert, slowly deteriorating through over-population”. In Kitui most of the population live along the few river and Dundas states that he se villages as much as seven hours’ march from water.” (1.69)

### 1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density

District	Population	Tribe
Machakos	350,866	Kamba
Kitui	203,035	Kamba

In Kenya as a whole in 1948 there was a total of 389,777 Machakos Kamba and 221,948 Kitui Kamba. Others include Nairobi, 7,829; Thika, 21,395; Mombasa, 5,137; Kwale, 2,243; Kilifi, 2,189; Kajiabo, 1,034. (1p.68)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

“Traditionally the main crops are sorghum, maize and millet. The most popular legume is pigeon pea, and there are other types of beans and peas. Sweet potatoes, yams and manioc are common. Sugar-cane is grown on low ground, in some parts in pits in valleys, and bananas are grown in several varieties. Crops are usually grown in mixed stands. [...] The diet is mainly vegetarian” (1p.69)

“Kambas are farmers and their staple food is *isyo* also known as *githeri*, maize(corn) mixed with beans or peas - as these can be dried, stored and eaten during the frequent droughts. Corn is also ground to make ugali, a popular Kenyan food. During the rainy seasons and along the riverbeds, Kambas grow fruits and vegetables such as cabbage, collards, bananas, mangoes, oranges and other tropical edibles.” (2)

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

“The Kamba have considerable numbers of cattle, sheep and goats, the cattle being a short-horned zebu type. Hers are usually dispersed for grazing among widely separated kraals. There is some seasonal cattle movement in to the semi-desert areas of the east from Kitui.” (1p.69)

“Goat meat, chicken and beef are also popular food choices among the Kamba people.” (2)

### 2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

“The Kamba use many kinds of traps, both for animals and birds. [...] Kamba weapons are bow and arrow, sward and clubs; they do not use spears or shields. Arrows are of various types, and in Ulu bear clan marks; poison is used. The bow is the plain straight-staved bow.” (1p.70)

### 2.4 Food storage:

“Kambas are farmers and their **staple food is *isyo*** also known as *githeri*, maize(corn) mixed with beans or peas - as these can be dried, stored and eaten during the frequent droughts.” (2)

### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

“In a rural Kamba community, the man, who becomes the head of the family, undertakes an economic activity such as trading, hunting or cattle herding. He is known as Nau, Tata or Asa. The woman works on the land she is given when she joins her husband's household. She supplies the bulk of the food consumed by her family. She grows maize, millet, sweet potatoes, pumpkin, beans, pigeon peas, greens, arrowroot and cassava. Traditionally, it is the mother's role to raise the children.” (2)

Men: Clearing the fields, breaking up the surface for the women, cutting drains and water-furrows, Planting certain crops, scaring birds, cutting and bringing home sugar-cane for beer, and straining the juice; collecting honey, building fences and granaries; among other responsibilities. (1p.21)

Women: in addition to taking care of the children; planting maize, millet, beans and other crops, hoeing and weeding, harvesting crops; storing and caring for the food supply, cooking, fetching water and fire-wood, grinding grain and pounding sugar-cane for beer; tending hives and making honey; among other responsibilities. (1p.21)

#### 2.6 Land tenure:

Land is shared by multiple families, also called joint family. "A man who wishes to sell cultivation rights must first offer them to other members of his mba in the same utui, and he cannot sell them to an outsider without permission of the other direct agnatic descendants of the man who first claimed the land. [...] The piece of land worked by a woman in either ng'undu [Land acquired by inheritance used for cultivation] or kisee [grazing area of a joint family] land is termed mbee. A young wife usually shares the plot of the senior wife and is not allotted her own mbee until she has borne children. She will then be shown her first plot and the direction in which she is to work, for each new garden must be above the site of the last in a line parallel with those of her co-wives. [...] Beehives are frequently hung in trees in the weu, and the owner has certain rights over the ground immediately surrounding the trees: no one who is not a member of the owner's joint family may encroach upon it in any way which might disturb the bees." (1p.77,78)

#### 2.7 Ceramics:

"Potter (used only for cooking) is made by women specialists; there is one clan whose women are prohibited from pot-making. The material used is a mixture of black and red clays. Pots often bear the "trade-mark" of an individual potter; they are made by the coil method and are fired. There are certain observances with regard to new pots and pot-making." (1p.70)

#### 2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

#### 2.9 Food taboos:

#### 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):

"Girls are married between 12 and 18 years of age, men later." (1p.82)

#### 4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

"Divorce is said to be uncommon; grounds for a husband sending his wife back to her father include lack of industry, unfaithfulness or witchcraft on her part. A wife's barrenness is not a reason for divorce, but sterility or cruelty on the part of a man gives his wife a reason for leaving him. Sterility is not a common reason since a woman may have intercourse with the half-brother corresponding to her husband in seniority within each house. The bridewealth is not usually returned until the wife has remarried, but a husband may refuse to accept the bridewealth, in which case her future children are his." (1p.82)

#### 4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

"The Kamba are polygynous" (1p.82)

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

"There is an elaborate sequence of gifts of goats and beer made by the suitor to the father of the girl, leading up to negotiations as to the amount of bridewealth, which consists of cattle and goats; transfer of bridewealth may be spread out over many years. In addition, a suitor must give preliminary gifts to the girl's mother and other close kin, and he also works in her father's fields." (1p.82)

#### 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

"The principle of inheritance is by matri-segmentation; this applies both to land and other possessions. A man divides his land among his wives; on his death they become the nominal heirs and each works her fields until her death, when they pass to her sons. However, Lambert states that the youngest son of a wife stays on the land, the elder sons mobbing away from their paternal home and founding new homesteads; but the youngest son has no rights in this land as against his brothers, who can come back and claim their shares at any time. If the sons are minors, the next heir acts as trustee: the order of heirs is given as son, father, brother, father's brother. No distinction is made between legitimate and illegitimate children." (1p.78)

#### 4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

#### 4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

#### 4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

"The A - kamba are divided into a large number of exogamous clans, [...] Two classes of clans are distinguished, namely A-kamba. The original clans and the subdivisions of them. For example, Mu-tui is an original clan and there are three subdivision so fit, namely MuSii, Mu-Mui, and Mwa- Ithangwa. Originally members of these subdivisions were not allowed to marry each other, though curiously enough they might marry back into the original stock. Thus a Mu-Sii might not marry a Mu-Mui, but either of them might marry a Mu-Tui. But this custom is not rigorously enforced nowadays; for they say that the numbers of each clan are becoming so great that the intermarriages in question are no longer regarded as a serious offence. A man may marry more than one wife from one clan or subdivision of a clan, but he may not marry two sisters." (5)

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

No evidence found on partible paternity.

"Every woman has a spirit husband as well as her human one, and he is thought to be largely responsible for her fertility, for the Kamba believe that although sexual intercourse is necessary for conception it is not by itself sufficient. A woman is liable to be possessed by this spirit, who, speaking through her, may announce his name. If she does not become pregnant within six months or so of marriage sacrifice is offered to her spirit husband." (1p.84)

#### 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)?

I have not found evidence that conception is believed to be incremental.

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape. "...if a man raped a woman, he was subjected to capital punishment. The Kamba believed that if a man raped someone's daughter, all the spirits of the dead relatives wrecked havoc on the community." (6p.13)

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 - none

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Since the Kamba lived in joint families/ extended families and since "Very little distinction is made between an individual's own children and the children of their sister or brother. Children address their uncle or aunt as *tata* (father) or *mwaitu* (mother). They often move from one household to another with ease, and are made to feel at home by their parents' siblings."(2)... I would imagine that children would continue to stay in the joint family.

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?

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 formal ceremony, just the tradition of the suitor giving gifts to the family of the girl, showing the value of her in his eyes and wealth of himself.

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

Birth: "The third day a feast of meat and beer is held, and the child's name decided." (1p.80) The third day being after birth.

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 evidence found, just the traditional payment of cattle and goats. Weddings take about two weeks.

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):

4.18 Cannibalism?

No evidence found

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

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

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

5.4 Post marital residence:

"The couple usually lives in the husband's mother's hut until the birth of the first child." (1p.82)

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex):

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

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

"The Kamba are divided into about 25 dispersed patrilineal totemic clans, varying greatly in size and generally name after the founding ancestor, or some distinguishing characteristic or experience of his. A few exceptions, which may be immigrant groups from Meru or Tharaka, are not dispersed. The coherence of the clan may be maintained by inter-visiting even though it is spread over a wide area, and member speak of ties maintained between Kitui, Machakos and Rabai.

There is no specific term for "clan". An agnatic descent group is referred to as *mbai*, regardless of order or size, although *mbai* generally applies to a group larger than the core of the *muvia*, a three- or four-generation joint family. Also a descent group may be designated by the use of a collective prefix *mbaa-*, "the descendants of ---", e.g., *mbaa-Awini* or *mbaa Mbiti*. [...] *Mbaa-* is also used to designate the agnatic core of a *muvia* or joint family, and is also applied to the joint family as a group, e.g., *mbaa-Mbeke*, where *Mbeke* is the name of the founding ancestor." (1p.72)

5.12 Trade:

"The Kamba were famous traders, trade being of great economic importance for them. Low has suggested that their dependence on trade was largely due to their proneness to famine, and points out that the Kamba were the only tribe of Kenya to dominate all the three processes of trade between the interior and the Coast-collection, transporting and final export. The main commodity was ivory, but foodstuffs and sometimes slaves were also traded. Even today, the Kamba organize trade in wood carvings as far as England and the United States." (1p.69)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

### **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):

Birth – “A pregnant woman does not cohabit with her husband for the last six months of her pregnancy and during the last three months she must observe certain food prohibitions: she cannot eat fat, honey, beans or meat of animals killed by poisoned arrows. Lindblom states that pregnant women frequently eat earth from antheaps. They are not regarded as “unclean”. Before the birth, all weapons and iron objects are removed from the hut. There are no special mid-wives, but any women with experience may help at the delivery; the husband may not be present. Hobley states that the woman squats during delivery, Lindblom that she stands. The umbilical cord is cut with a knife, and the placenta buried outside the hut. (1p.79)

6.4 Other rituals:

6.5 Myths (Creation):

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: “The disposal of corpses differs from one area to another, since the method is changed if an unusually large number of deaths occur in one area in a short time. A dying man is watched by elders; only they can touch a corpse. In the less crowded areas, especially in the east, only elders and first wives are buried, other corpses being thrown into the bush. But in the west and in crowded areas all dead bodies are buried. The grave is round and about a yard deep. The grave is round an about a yard deep. The body is laid on its side, hunched up, a man on his right side and a woman on her left, both with the head resting on the hand, man facing east, woman west. The body is naked but for a cloth or blanket over the face to keep earth off it; in Ulu no personal possessions are placed in the grave except that a woman is buried in her personal ornaments, but in the east certain possessions are placed with the corpse.” [...] The women of a village mourn for two to five days and do no field work. The village is ritually unclean and is purified on the third day: an elder of makwa slaughters a goat and sprinkles the feet and legs (1p.82-3)

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:

“The body is perfumed with and decorated with ochre.” (1p.79)

7.2 Piercings:

7.3 Haircut:

“There are also various coiffures; body hair is removed with tweezers.” (1p.79)

7.4 Scarification:

“They practice cicatrization and tattooing, and chipping and extraction of teeth.” (1p.79)

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

“Both sexes, especially women, wear many ornaments, mostly made of wire and beads. Ornaments vary from different age-groups. They consist of belts, collars, necklaces, armllets, leglets, ear- and finger-rings. Necklaces are sometimes made with strongly scented plants. (1p.79)

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:

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):

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