

1. Description

1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: **Kikuyu, Gikuyu, Agikuyu (pl.), Mugikuyu (s).** (1)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): **ISO 639-3 (3)**

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): of Kikuyu, Kenya **1° 15' 0" S / 36° 40' 0" E (5)**

1.4 Brief history: **The Gikuyu share common historical roots with the Kamba, Embu, Mbere, Tharaka, and Meru. All of these groups date back to a prototype population known as the Thagicu which settled in the Mt. Kenya region from the northeast sometime between the 12th and 14th centuries. From the Thagicu, splinter groups formed. One migrated south. Subsequent migrations, followed by periods of settlement, intermarriage with other groups, and further splintering in the 15th and 16th centuries led one of the groups to settle at the convergence of the Thagana (Tana) and Thika rivers. It is from this splinter group that Gikuyu trace their descent.** (1)

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: **Education is held very highly in Kikuyu culture, and it is very important that children receive proper education as they grow up. Theatre and literature play major roles in Kenyan and Kikuyu culture. Much of their history has been passed on from generation to generation in the form of songs and stories.** (14)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: **7,180,000 and increasing (3)**

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): **In most homes Kikuyu homes, typical traditional Kikuyu food includes githeri (maize and beans), mukimo (mashed green peas and potatoes), irio (mashed dry beans, corn and potatoes)** (6)

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: **roast goat, beef, chicken (6)**

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns: **The weapon of choice is the panga, a broad-bladed machete commonly used to hack a path through a thick jungle vegetation. The society appeared to favor bloody and brutal attacks as a means of striking fear into the hearts and minds of all who might oppose them, but their choice of enemies seemed often difficult to comprehend.** (15)

2.4 Food storage:

2.5 Sexual division of production:

2.6 Land tenure:

2.7 Ceramics: **The Wedding is an all day (and night) affair. The day starts when the groom and his "train" of cars go to the girl's home to pick her up. They then go to the church and after the ceremony, they go to the field or hall where the reception will be held. Since the whole community gets involved, it is not uncommon to have 5,000 guests. The more a family is known, the more people attend the wedding. After church (which last about 2 hours) they go for a photo shoot. They go to the reception where the whole community is fed. The food is served by the girls on the bride's side. The people in the community then bring gifts to the couple. The father's bride buys the bed. The rest of the furniture is given as gifts by friends, and the community in general. By the end of the day, the couple usually has their whole house furnished and they don't need to buy anything.** (13)

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):

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: **Divorce is very rare with the Kikuyu's in spite of all the problems that women endure. Re-marriage is even more rare even after the death of one spouse. In the olden days, any woman who was "returned lived with the "stench" of being a divorced man.**

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

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

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: **In the Kikuyu tribe, homosexuality (then and now) was not done, let alone imagined.** (13)

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?

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

- 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?
- 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? **Gikuyu ceremonies often were celebrations of an age group's passage from one life stage to another: mambura ma twana when a child was removed from his/her mother's bed, matu , Irua . unhiki (marriage), and kumanda , when a new mother took vegetables to cook in the house she would live in with her husband, nyumithio , linked to a child's initiation which allowed a man or woman to be recognized as an elder and join the kiama . Others were to celebrate a particular agricultural season; for instance, mugoiyo , a dance held on a moonless night when the beans had been planted, or the celebration for successful harvests. Still others involved dancing, such as mweretho , where young men tossed their female partners in the air as they twisted their bodies in the firelight, and ndumo , a dance for youth of both sexes in preparation for Irua . Such ceremonies gave young people of the opposite sex a chance to meet one another, and spend the night together without becoming involved in sexual intercourse, which was taboo and strictly enforced by the mariika of both sexes, and was made more difficult by the wrapped skirts that the girls wore and the communal context in which they enjoyed one another. The missionaries criticized the dances as "erotic" and "distasteful." As a result, the ceremonies were held in secrecy. As schooling gave youth a way of meeting and getting to know members of the opposite sex, the older ceremonies gradually died out as new ones, often school-related, took their place. (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)?
- 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): **N/A. From what I gathered, the Kikuyu's usually partner with someone in their tribe.**
- 4.18 Cannibalism? **No details about cannibalisms in the Kikuyu tribe.**

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

- 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: **around 5,000 people (13)**
- 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):
- 5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): **The kiama , or elders' council, composed of both men and women, was the predominant legislative/judicial body in pre-colonial Gikuyu villages. It heard complaints and settled disputes in a public space. With the advent of British occupation, the kiama came to be dominated by male elders. A "headman" was appointed by the kiama , at the instigation of the British or by the colonial administration, to be the village's leader. These headmen reported to a "chief," where none had previously existed, who was appointed by the colonial government in keeping with the British Crown's policy of in-direct rule. In some cases where a Gikuyu headman came into conflict with the colonial administration, he was marginalized or removed and the British appointed a sympathetic, pliable headman in his place. Resentment against the British over this practice led to several skirmishes. Other protests, beginning in the 1920s, against land alienation, the odious hut tax, and increased colonial criticism of Gikuyu cultural practices such as Irua and the Gikuyu's "provocative," "immoral dances," came to a head, first in the protest led by Harry Thuku over the hut tax in the 1920s and continuing through the 1940s and into the 1950s with the liberation movement. In the post-colonial period, the Kenyan government adopted a system of sub-chiefs and chiefs that acted as liaison between Gikuyu locations, districts, and the central government. In addition, the Gikuyu have been successful in catapulting two of their own into Kenya's highest office, with one becoming the first elected president of Kenya, Dr. Jomo Kenyatta (1963 – 1978) and more recently, Mwai Kibaki (2002 – present). Kibaki sought re-election in 2007 and won after a delay in announcing the results and cries of foul play. The election results were disputed by Kibaki's opponent Raila Odinga and his party. Violence erupted across Kenya in early 2008, putting Gikuyu living in Rift Valley and elsewhere outside Central Province at great risk and loss of life. In 2009, with the intervention of an international negotiation team, Kibaki retained his position as president and Raila Odinga became Prime Minister in a power-sharing arrangement. (1)**
- 5.4 Post marital residence:
- 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):
- 5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): **Extended families, lineages and clans, communities and kiama all acted to ensure security, order, and social justice. With colonial occupation these institutions continued, but others such as the introduction of**

British common law, in-direct rule, and formal schooling competed with indigenous institutions for control over people's lives, relationships, and livelihood. University-educated Gikuyu are highly respected to help solve family and community problems. (1)

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:

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): **Ugo** is the name for Gikuyu medicine. The **mundu mugo** or medicine man, was the person who practiced it. He had the power to heal people, free them of curses, and to predict their futures, using the **kirira**, secret knowledge, he learned from other healers during his special initiation. He used a collection of gourds. The divination gourd, or **mwano**, was filled with small animal bones, sticks, pieces of glass, and special stones that he rolled out in various patterns and analyzed for answers to social and physical problems. In cases of physical illness, such as food poisoning or poisoning as the result of a curse by someone in the community, the **mundu mugo** would call for **kubibo**, which meant that a specialist came who made cuts in the sick person's body using a short-handled knife, and sucked up the sick person's blood, spitting it out to get rid of the illness or evil. In the case of a curse, he divined the causes, and gave the afflicted person a set of steps s/he must take to overcome the power of the curse. Increasingly, educated Gikuyu have turned to Western medicine, which has proved to cure or control some diseases such as pneumonia, diarrhea, tuberculosis, malaria, STDs and HIV/AIDS. (1)

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): **Traditionally the Kikuyu held a worldview that has been referred to as ancestor worship. They believed spirits of dead can be pleased or displeased like a living individual. The ancestors were honoured as intercessors with God and spiritual powers. They were honoured in the naming system, and people often explain the traditional belief that the actual spirit of the grandparent on other ancestor comes into the new child named after them. This has now changed due to acceptance of a more scientific worldview, Christian faith and longer life spans. (The grandparents are often still alive when the grandchildren are born!) (9)**

6.4 Other rituals: **The Kikuyu traditionally worship one god whom they call *Ngai*. This is the Maasai name for the One Creator God and was borrowed by both the Kikuyu and the Kamba. They believe *Ngai* is the creator and giver of all things. They thought *Ngai* lived in the sky. Yet they also thought of *Ngai* as living on Mt. Kenya. When the cloud was on the mountain, *Ngai* was said to live there. This name of God is used in the Kikuyu Bible and Christian worship and confessions. A common blessing is "*Ni Ngai arogocwo*" *May God bless you.* (9)**

6.5 Myths (Creation): **Kenyatta (1938), Cagnolo (1933), and Gathigira (1933) have all narrated the story of *Gikūyū* and *Mūmbi*. It is a story that was told to every Kikuyu child in the past as part of the tribe's history. God made *Gikūyū* and placed him near Mount Kenya at a place called *Mūkūrwe wa Gathanga*. God saw that he was lonely and gave him a wife, *Mūmbi*. *Gikūyū* and *Mūmbi* were blessed with nine daughters, but no sons. The daughters' names, arranged from the eldest to the youngest were as follows: *Wanjirū, Wambūi, Njeri, Wanjikū, Nyambūra, Wairimū, Waithīra, Wangarī*, and the last one was *Wangūi* (Leakey 1977). There was a tenth daughter (who was not mentioned by Leakey) who according to tradition was not counted due to an incestuous relationship (Kabetu 1966, p. 1-2). The daughters were always said to be 'nine and the fill' perhaps to imply that the tenth daughter was known but was unmentionable. The Kikuyu were averse to counting people to the exact number because it was believed that a curse would befall them. *Gikūyū* had to sacrifice to god (*Mwene Nyaga* or *Ngai*) to get husbands for the daughters. (17)**

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): **The Gikuyu have no unique written language; therefore, much of the information on their traditional culture has been gleaned from their rich oral traditions. The oral literature of the Gikuyu consists, in part, of original poems, stories, fables, myths, riddles, and proverbs containing the principles of their philosophy, system of justice, and moral code. An example of Gikuyu music is the *gicandi*, which is a very old poem of enigmas sung by pairs of minstrels in public markets, with the accompaniment of musical instruments made from gourds. (1)**

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: **There were many causes of death among early Gikuyu, including accidental death from drowning or falling from a tree, death in an encounter with a wild animal (be it a leopard, lion, or elephant) or through inter-group warfare as the Gikuyu came into contact with other tribes or lineage groups and fought with them over land and other environmental resources (streams, trees), animals, and women. Pre-colonial Gikuyu, when they knew a raid by Maasai was eminent, would hide their women and girls up in the storage areas between the rafters of the houses to avoid their being stolen by the Morani. Maasai warriors. Pre-colonial Gikuyu did not bury their dead. They wrapped them in hides or cloth and took them to a sacred resting place in the forest or a stand of trees, and left them there for the wild animals as an offering, so that the**

body would be devoured and would not come back and trouble the homestead. If the individual had led a good life, being hospitable and kind to others, his or her spirit became an ancestor and was honored for their advice and wisdom. If the dead person had been niggardly and troublesome, people feared the spirit of this person, who had the power to cause harm to members of his family in the form of illness, psychosomatic problems, or misfortune, which were viewed as an imbalance in the community. Thus, the Gikuyu belief in afterlife was connected to their belief that the ancestral spirits were a part of their everyday lives, with the power to monitor their actions and exact punishment for bad behavior. As such, ancestors played an important role in Gikuyu social control. Even though Christian Gikuyu practice burial in a family compound in rural locations, or in a community cemetery in urban areas, to a certain extent the belief in the wisdom and power of unseen elders continues to be an unspoken part of the Gikuyu belief system in the 21st century. (1)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? The Kikuyu observe a unique ritual pattern of naming children, still followed strongly today. The family identity is carried on in each generation by naming children in the following pattern: the first boy is named after the father's father, the second boy after the mother's father. The first girl is named after the father's mother, the second after the mother's mother. Subsequent children are named similarly after the brothers and sisters of the grandmother and grandfather, from eldest to youngest, alternating from father's to mother's family. As refugees are accepted into a clan the naming pattern will incorporate new lineages and integrate them into Kikuyu society and history. A Kikuyu marrying a non-Kikuyu will follow this naming pattern. Because of the rapid changes in the social and material culture, this naming pattern is an extremely strong and important factor of Kikuyu identity. This practice also has the positive value of ceremonially and literally incorporating a non-Kikuyu into the tribal lineage. Thus the names of the parents in the other ethnic group will be added to the next generation of Kikuyu descendants. This mechanism incorporates the "mixed" children into one of the existing Kikuyu lineages, while allowing the Kikuyu social structure to grow incorporate new lineages. This facilitates the introduction whole new family lines while maintaining the same core structure and organization of Kikuyu identity. (9)

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) Today, most Kikuyus are Christians, however, like the Maasai and Kamba tribes, Kikuyus traditionally worshipped a single god, *Ngai*, who was known as the provider and lived at the top of the mountain. Kikuyus believed it was their traditional god who started the Kikuyu tribe by putting on earth a man and woman named *Kikuyu* and *Mumbi*. The couple had nine daughters who later married and brought the Kikuyu tribe to life. (6)

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint: I could not find the reason why the Kikuyu tribe wear body paint, but they do wear it during song and dance rituals with very bright and elaborate colors.

7.2 Piercings: One very characteristic feature of Kikuyu adornment is the enormous size of their ear appendages—they cannot be called earrings. When the children are quite young, a hole is made in the lobe of the ear, similar to the fashion in Europe of piercing the lobe for earrings. (12)

7.3 Haircut:

7.4 Scarification: They use the hides from the cattle to make bedding, sandals, and carrying straps and they raise the goats and sheep to use for religious sacrifices and purification. (11)

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.): Another fascinating aspect of the Kikuyu's is their taste for art and artifacts, that are manually crafted using materials from local craftsmen and artists. Many of these precious artifacts, such as hand carved statues, beaded jewelry, and beautiful Kikoyas, or African sarongs, are sold to both local and international tourists. Another art of Kenyan culture is music and dance. Instruments such as guitars and drums are used to create harmonious beats and rhythms, essential for traditional Kenyan style dancing. (14)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Gikuyu ceremonies often were celebrations of an age group's passage from one life stage to another: *mambura ma twana* when a child was removed from his/her mother's bed, *matu*, *Irua*, *unhiki* (marriage), and *kumanda*, when a new mother took vegetables to cook in the house she would live in with her husband, *nyumithio*, linked to a child's initiation which allowed a man or woman to be recognized as an elder and join the *kiama*. Others were to celebrate a particular agricultural season; for instance, *mugoiyo*, a dance held on a moonless night when the beans had been planted, or the celebration for successful harvests. Still others involved dancing, such as *mweretho*, where young men tossed their female partners in the air as they twisted their bodies in the firelight, and *ndumo*, a dance for youth of both sexes in preparation for *Irua*. Such ceremonies gave young people of the opposite sex a chance to meet one another, and spend the night together without becoming involved in sexual intercourse, which was taboo and strictly enforced by the *mariika* of both sexes, and was made more difficult by the wrapped skirts that the girls wore and the communal context in which they enjoyed one another. The missionaries criticized the dances as "erotic" and "distasteful." As a result, the ceremonies were held in secrecy. As schooling gave youth a way of meeting and getting to know members of the opposite sex, the older ceremonies gradually died out as new ones, often school-related, took their place. (1)

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):

The current (and third) president of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki, is a member of the Kikuyu tribe just like first president after the country became independent from Britain, Jomo Kenyatta. The Grammy-winning American guitarist, Tom Morello is also of Kikuyu descent. He played in bands such as Rage Against the Machine and Audioslave. His father was Mau Mau guerrilla Ngethe Njoroge. (16)

Numbered references

1. *Gikuyu* By Jean Davison. <http://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/ehrafe/cultureDescription.do?profileSelect=0&cultureDescription=1>
2. <http://www.travelmath.com/cities/Kikuyu,+Kenya>
3. http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=kik
4. <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Japan-to-Mali/Gikuyu.html#b>
5. <http://www.travelmath.com/cities/Kikuyu,+Kenya>
6. <http://www.kenya-information-guide.com/kikuyu-tribe.html>
7. <http://www.bluegecko.org/kenya/tribes/kikuyu/beliefs.htm>
8. <http://stmarys.ca/~wmills/course316/12Kikuyu.html>
9. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/484066>
10. <http://strategyleader.org/profiles/kikuyu.html>
11. <http://www.kenyaspace.com/Kikuyu.htm>
12. Boyes, John. *King of the Wa-Kikuyu: A True Story of Travel and Adventure in Africa*. London: Frank Cass & Co. Limited, 1968. Print
13. <http://www.theafricantribes.com/samples/>
14. <http://fsuworldmusiconline.wikidot.com/kora>
15. <http://www.unexplainedstuff.com/Secret-Societies/The-Mau-Mau.html#b>
16. <http://www.kenya-advisor.com/kikuyu-tribe.html>
17. <http://emmanuelkariuki.hubpages.com/hub/Kikuyu-Other-myths-of-Origin>