

1. Description

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

Somali Bantu, language: Af Maay and Af Maaxa, family: Cushitic (2)

1.2 ISO code (3 letter code from ethnologue.com): SOM (11)

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): (Roughly) 2 degrees N 43 degrees East – Somali Bantu peoples inhabit much of Southern Somalia.

1.4 Brief history:

The first records of the Somali Bantu people come from around the 1400s. The Swahili people began expanding their influence, trading with more inland and Southern African tribes, including the early tribes of the Somali Bantu. The Portuguese arrived and began colonizing Africa in the 15th century. However, the Portuguese did little to affect tribes like the Somali Bantu because their primary influence resided in the East coast, disrupting the Swahili economy and society. By 1730, the Portuguese rule came to an end by the Omani Arab dominion. Slavery became economically prosperous to the Sultanate, causing many Somali Bantu tribes to be forced into slavery.

As the industrial revolution took shape in the 1800s the need for slavery increased around the world, causing many Somali Bantu to be sold into slavery and resettled in North America. Many of those forced into slavery, remained in Africa working on plantations. Many Somali Bantu people attempted to escape from slavery, often with success. Around 1895, slavery began to become abolished by the Italian colonial authority, following suit with Belgium protocol.

After the emancipation of slavery, many resettled to the lower Juba River valley and the Shabelle River valley where many still reside today. After the abolition of slavery, the Somali Bantu began farming, but due to economic necessities, eventually returned to work on the Italian plantations for very little pay. This practice was hardly any different than slavery. A British official of the time period, “The conception of these agricultural enterprises as exploitation concessions engendered under the [Italian] fascist regime a labour policy of considerable severity in theory and actual brutality in practice. It was in fact indistinguishable from slavery.”

British occupation followed and treatment of the Somali Bantu was less harsh than previous regimes and the proceeding independent Somali government in 1960. The Somali government attempted to abolish tribalism in the 1970s, however this did little to effect the Somali Bantu. Many Somali Bantu were forced into the Somali military to fight Ethiopia from the 1970s through the 1980s.

In 1991, civil war erupted after the collapse of Siyaad Barre. The civil war broke down Somali Bantu society. As an agricultural people, they were often victims of pillaging and robbery. As many as 10,000 Somali Bantu attempted to resettle in Tanzania. The Somali resided in various refugee camps. Life in these refugee camps was tough, and other clans often attacked or raped the Somali Bantu. Since 2002, more than 12,000 Somali Bantu were moved to the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya to be interviewed in hopes of immigrating to the U.S. The Somali Bantu that have remained in Somalia have returned to farming, but is still barely disingenuous from slavery. Many other Bantu clans also extort money in exchange for protection from attacks.

(2, History)

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

Early Somali Bantu clans practiced “indigenous ceremonies and beliefs prior to their abduction into slavery.” At the hands of their Muslim slaveholders, they were often freed by converting to Islam because Muslims cannot own Muslim slaves. Over the past hundred years many others have converted to Islam. A small portion of Somali Bantu that lived in the Dadaab refugee camps converted to Christianity. Despite the recent conversions to Islam and Christianity, many tribes of the Somali Bantu still retain old religious customs including magic, possession dances, and curses. Somali Bantu are often persecuted by neighboring clans and are a minority in Somalia. Over history the Somali Bantu have been forced to relocate because of powerful neighbors, colonialism, and their own government. “The lack of schools in Bantu residential areas, along with an unfamiliar language used as the medium of instruction, are among the obstacles to education faced by the rural Bantu.” However, some have had the opportunity to attend schools, despite discrimination from neighbors. “IOM officials report that while some Bantu children in the refugee camps attend primary and secondary school, only an estimated 5% of all [Somali] Bantu refugees have been formally educated.”

(2, History, Religion)

1.6 Ecology (natural environment): Somali Bantu live in various regions, but primarily reside in Southern Somalia. The land near rivers such as the Juba River, is fertile and the Somali Bantu take advantage of that as an agricultural people.

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: The Somali Bantu live in small villages in rural areas.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): The Somali Bantu make a thick porridge known as soor, made from maize. They also make flat bread, similar to tortillas, and from outside influences also eat rice and spaghetti.

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Fish, beans, and sorghum. (2, Diet)

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?: Since European intervention in the country traditional customs, including ancient forms of warfare have well since died out over the past 100 years.

2.4 Food storage: When crops are ready to harvest, “The heads of the sorghum or millet grains were cut off and removed for storage. Cassava or yams would be dug from the ground. The stalks, of the plans, would be left in the fields to dry. Dry stalks would be collected and woven into floor matting. Sometimes the stalks would be allowed to rot into fertilizer. The top growth of yams and cassava would eventually be burned and mixed into the soil, to increase its’ fertility.” (8, Bantu Farming)

2.5 Sexual division of production: Males primarily farm and fish, while women take care of infants but this is not always the case.

2.6 Land tenure: As a minority they are often denied land tenure. Often work on other farms as sharecroppers. “Since Somalia’s independence in 1960, the [Somali] Bantu people were increasingly denied land tenure.” (12, Who are the Somali Bantu?)

2.7 Ceramics: Much like most other African tribes, Bantu use ceramic pottery for cooking (16)

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: Most Somali Bantu are not allowed to eat pork. This can be correlated to many of their Muslim religious beliefs, or to their ancestry of once being owned by Muslims.

2.10 Canoes/watercraft? A primary food source for many of the Somali Bantu is fish. Somalis living near the Jaba River use canoes in order to make their catch.

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): Often varies, malnutrition can cause late onset of menstruation cycle.

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f): males and females usually marry during their teens and have children soon after. (14, Marriage)

4.3 Completed family size (m and f): The Somali Bantu have medium size to large families. Older children typically look after younger children. Most Somali Bantu families have between 4 to 6 children. (4, Introduction)

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f): Women do not practice birth spacing. Because of their strong Muslim faith, Somali Bantus often have 4 to 8 children. (7, Reproductive Health)

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Often depends on social status; usually between the ages of 15 and 20, with majority occurring between 16 and 18. (14, Marriage)

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce: Divorce is acceptable among the Somali Bantu society, however it is rare. Families work together to mediate disputes at attempts to fix problems. If no agreements are met a divorce may follow.

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: A majority of Somali Bantu practice polygamy. It is men who have up to four wives. The odds of a male marrying polygynously depend on the amount of wealth or land he possesses.

“Somali Bantu practice polygamy. Men marry up to four wives at a time in accordance with the Islamic faith. Relatives and family members are determined by the father’s family.” (14, Marriage)

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?: Wives are not purchased in Somali Bantu. Most marriages are arranged by the parents, but not always. “Marriage among the [Somali] Bantu people can be divided into two types. The first, known as aroos fadhi, is not approved by the parents and involves the couple running away together to the house of a local sheikh to be married. Before performing the wedding, however, the sheikh calls the children’s parents to ask them whether they give their blessings to the marriage.”

4.9 Inheritance patterns: Sons inherit land from their fathers. Often when Somali Bantu men are married they remain living with the male’s family until he is around the age of 17. This often coincides when he and his wife or wives start having their own family. The father generally gives him land to farm on. This is often dependent on how much money the family possesses.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: Relations between parents and offspring are generally good. Children are expected to take on adult roles as early as 13. Especially with poorer Somali Bantu, it is likely that families will live together due to lack of land, money, and resources.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals: Homosexuality is not accepted in Somali Bantu society. Laws regarded homosexuality, depend on the country the particular tribe resides in. In Somalia, homosexuality is punishable by law. Most sentences result in prison time.

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): Because they are a persecuted Bantu culture, most marriages occur within their own social groups. Due to the hostility, marriage outside of social groups is a rarity

“Intermarriage [between Somali Bantus and other groups] is extremely rare, and typically results in ostracism the few times it does occur.” (13, Contemporary Situation)

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized? Other fathers are not recognized. Women are usually circumcised and commit to one husband. Therefore, when a woman gives birth it is to be her husband’s child. Although there are polygamous marriages, males have multiple wives. Women cannot marry multiple men.

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”) Due to acculturation, Somali Bantus no longer possess independent ideas about procreation.

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)? Due to acculturation and interaction with Europeans, Somali Bantu no longer possess recognized independent ideas about procreation.

- 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape: Somali Bantu women are often raped by hostile tribes. This often occurs when women attempt to gather firewood while in many refugee camps. Agreements have been made between other tribes to limit the occurrence, but it is still a commonality to this day.
- 4.17 Preferential category for spouse (e.g., cross cousin) Preferential category for spouse would be within one's clan. Somali Bantu are a minority in Somalia and are often discriminated against; this has created a tendency for Somali Bantu to remain with close community bonds.
- 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms? Women do not enjoy sexual freedoms. Somali Bantu women are generally circumcised between the ages of five and ten. This is to prevent women from enjoying sexual intercourse.
- 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: Possessing extramarital partners are unacceptable in Somali Bantu culture. However, more leniencies are generally given to men more often than women.
- 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children? Generally, if the children are years beyond infancy the father still raises the children, however, if the children are still very young, other family members will step in to assist. Often, marriages are polygamous, meaning another wife of the husband may take responsibility for the children. Older children typically assume responsibility for raising their younger siblings.
- 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: There is no evidence of a disproportionate number of males to females.
- 4.22 Evidence for couvades there is no evidence that the Somali men practice couvades
- 4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older) N/A
- 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect? Family is very important in Somali Bantu society. Parents do not avoid kid, however, responsibility of taking care of young children is often placed on older children.
- 4.24 Joking relationships? Somali children do not have joking relationships with parents or anyone older. "Children are taught to show respect by not looking their father, mother, brother, sister, and other Somali Bantu elders in the eyes. If children look elders in the eye it's considered disrespectful. Somali Bantu have a strong tradition of telling their children that they should respect anyone who is older than they are." (14, Respect and Behavior)
- 4.25 Patterns of descent (e.g., bilateral, matrilineal) for certain rights, names or associations – Somali Bantu are a Patriarchal society. However, women do not change their last name after marriage but the children do take on the father's name. This is not the case with every Somali Bantu society, however. "Smaller units of societal organization are divided according to matrilineal kinship groups, the latter of which are oftentimes interchangeable with ceremonial dance groupings." (13, Contemporary Situation)
- 4.26 Incest avoidance rules – Incest is taboo; elders closely work to control intermarriage.
- 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony? "In traditional Bantu marriages, the father of the groom pays a dowry to the family of the bride. Bantu weddings are festive occasions where the groom's parents also arrange a large party for the guests after the ceremony. The IOM estimates that while some Bantu marry before the age of 16, it is rare, and that many marry between the ages of 16 and 18." (Marriage and children, <http://www.cal.org/co/bantu/sblife.html>).
- 4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name? Children inherit their father's name but wives keep their father's last name, even after marriage. Somali Bantu are addressed by their first name. A child is named three days after his birth. In recent years, Islamic names are far more common than traditional names. (2, Marriage and Children).
Examples of traditional names: Kolonga, Shaalo, Juma
Examples of common Islamic names: Kabirow, Malik, Mohammed
- 4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community? (m/f difference?) Marriage is generally within the community due the discrimination against Somali Bantu.
- 4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin)? Marriages can be both arranged or not. If it is arranged, it is generally the parents who arrange it. These parental arranged marriages are called aroos fadhi. When the parents do not arrange it, it is referred to as msafa. It is typically still commonplace for parents to offer their blessing even if the marriage is an msafa. (2, Marriage and Children)
- 4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who: No evidence of conflict of interest over who marries who.

Warfare/homicide

- 4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: During the Civil War in the '90s, 400,000 Somalis died while the fighting displaced 45%. (4, Somali Bantu Heath Sheet)
- 4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death: Murders occur by-and-large from outgrouping due to the hostility against the Somali Bantu.
- 4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing: Discrimination against the Somali Bantu causes both murder and rape to occur. Discrimination also occurs in refugee camps in Kenya. In many reported incidents women are raped while collecting firewood for their families. (3, Who Are the Somali Bantu?)

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations): External relations are not good for the Somali Bantu. Rival clans and the current government discriminate against them. "During the Somali Civil War, many [Somali] Bantu were forced from their lands in the lower Juba River Valley, as militiamen from various Somali clans took control of the area. Being visible minorities and possessing little in the ways of firearms, the Bantu were particularly vulnerable to violence and looting by gun-toting militiamen." (13, Post-1991)

4.18 Cannibalism? Cannibalism is not part of the Somali Bantu culture.

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size: "The Somali bantu live together in permanent agricultural villages... they are a sedentary population." (14, livelihood)

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): The Somali Bantu are farmers. "Unlike Somalis, most of whom are nomadic herders, [Somali] Bantu are mainly sedentary subsistence farmers." (13, Contemporary Situation)

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): "Excluded from mainstream Somali society, many bantu have retained ancestral social structures. For many of the [Somali] Bantu from the lower Juba River valley, this means that their east African tribe of origin is the main form of social organization. For these Bantu, smaller units of social organization are broken down according to matrilineal kin groupings, which are often synonymous with ceremonial dance groupings. Bantu village and community composition normally follows the Bantu's east African tribal and kin groupings." (2, Social Structures)

5.4 Post marital residence: A man and his wife may live with his father for some time, but it is usually customary to move out when they start rearing children.

5.5 Territoriality? (Defined boundaries, active defense): As a minority class in Somalia, they often have to pay others for protection of their farms and lands.

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): Most interaction occurs within social groups. Interaction between girls and boys are common, and not all marriages are arranged. "If the groom tells his future father-in-law, 'I want to marry your daughter,' it is seen as offensive. Instead he says, 'I want to have your daughter for bearing young ones in the future.'" (14, Marriage)

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: N/A

5.8 Village and house organization: Men are the head of the household; elders of communities may sometimes be consulted

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses): There are no specialized village structures; families live together

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere? Sleep on straw mats in huts (15)

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: Very clannish due to minority status

5.12 Trade: "The main livelihood of Somali Bantu depend on irrigation and seasonal crop production. They grow both cash and subsistence crops, such as sesame, maize, tobacco, peas, vegetables and fruits." (14, Livelihood)

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies? Elders and wealth are status symbols for the Somali Bantu, however the Somali Bantu are a minority in their country; collectively putting them at the lowest position in Somalia society.

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR: Follow much Islamic religious beliefs and various dance rituals as explained below

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): With interaction with the modern world, much modern medicine is becoming available through intervention, especially in refugee camps (10, Physical health)

6.2 Stimulants: "Somali Bantu believe that people get sick because of invisible creatures locally known as "jinni." This is particularly the case when someone has a mental health problem. When a person appears to be mentally ill, families and relatives will sell animals and use the money to hire specialized Jinni healers." (14, Illness)

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): "The [Somali] Bantu follow the lunar year system while also using the solar year system to determine the timing for crop planting and harvesting. One of the popular and celebrated traditional festivities is the fire festival known as Deb-Shid, in which people dance and sing around a bonfire to celebrate the beginning of a new year." (2, Festivities and Ceremonies)

6.4 Other rituals: Another ritual dance the Somali Bantu engage in is called Masawey. In this dance the participants wear dried banana leaves on their waists, metal anklets on their feet, and bracelets for their wrists. These make rhythmic sounds. Another well practiced dance is Cadow Makaraan. (2, Festivities and Ceremonies)

6.5 Myths (Creation): Majority of Somali Bantus follow the Islam faith.

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): "Artistic woodcarvings are demonstrated during the festivities of Anyakow and other dancing ceremonies. Various carved masks are worn during daytime dances to cover one's face. During these festivities, the artists' mastery of art, literature, and music are said not only capture the audience's attention, but to mesmerize them as well." (2, Festivities and Ceremonies)

6.7 Sex differences in RCR: Men and women both participate in various dance rituals

6.8 Missionary effect: Although religiously speaking, the majority of Somali Bantus have converted to Islam, some of their ancient culture still lives on through various ritual dances, music and art.

6.9 RCR revival: “Somali Bantu observe three Muslim holidays and several important life cycle rituals. The yearly calendar is Lunar and the major holidays are: Idul-fitri, Idul-adha, Mowliid.” (14, Somali Bantu Holidays)

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Their death and afterlife beliefs follow Islamic beliefs. “[Somali Bantu] Community holds the Muslim view that all people or an individual will be judged by Allah afterlife. When someone from [a] society dies, a celebration is held, till the body is buried and people from the neighborhoods or other cities, villages or State come and stay for a period of time.” (9, Death)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people? No taboo of naming dead people

6.12 Is there teknonymy? No teknonymy

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.) “With regard to religious practices, the Bantu are among the more liberal Muslims in Somali society. Evidence of this are the ceremonies performed by the [Somali] Bantu and the roles that women are allowed to play in the community, such as being allowed to work in the fields and, although they dress modestly by American standards, not wearing the hijab [for religious purposes], which some Muslim women wear to cover themselves in public. (2, Religious life)

7. Adornment

Attire of Bantu men and women has become more modernized because of acculturation from both the West and from previous Muslim slaveholders. Somali Bantu women do wear a hijab, but it is not for religious purposes like other Muslims. When Somali Bantu women become married they cover themselves with what’s called a shaash dango, similar to a head scarf, a blouse called a cambuur-garbeet, and a wraparound cloth called a gonfo, which resembles the Indian sari. Traditional Somali Bantu styles of clothing are worn only for weddings, religious celebrations, or other special occasions. As contact increases with the modern world, traditional clothing styles are beginning to die out (6, Dress)

7.1 Body paint: N/A

7.2 Piercings: No evidence of piercings

7.3 Haircut: Following suit with most of the modern world most Somali men have shaved heads, while women have longer hair. (5)

7.4 Scarification: N/A

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

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment: Often wear traditional clothing for special occasions such as weddings and religious celebrations.

7.7 Sex differences in adornment: In the refugee camps, men typically wear buttoned shirts or t-shirts and tradition wraparound clothing around their waste. As mentioned above, women wear hijabs, shaash dango, cambuur-garbeet, and gonfo. (6, Dress)

7.8 Missionary effect: **As contact increases with the modern world, traditional clothing styles are beginning to die out. They have absorbed both modern style of dress from interaction with the West, and traditional Muslim styles of clothing because of their religious beliefs. (6, Dress)**

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Some Somali Bantu still wear traditional Bantu style of clothing for special occasions

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system: standard sibling classification

8.2 Sororate, levirate: Found no evidence to suggest that Somali Bantu practice Sororate

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.): “All Somalis occupy a subjugated caste of their own.” (17)

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

-Story telling

-Singing

-Oral tradition

- Music (drums)

- Dance

Numbered references

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