

## 1. Description

### 1.1 Name(s) of society, language, and language family: (1)

- Names: Suku or Kisuku
  - “Just before and after 1900, they were often referred to as "Yaka" or, more specifically, "Yaka of MiniKongo" (the title of the Suku king)—in contrast with their neighbors, the Yaka proper, who are ruled by the king titled kasongo lunda.”(2)
- Language: “The Suku language is part of the Kongo Cluster within Central Bantu, closely related to Yaka and the various Kongo dialects.”(2)
- Language Family: Niger-Congo

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

### 1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): (1)

- -5.30/17.60
- South Bandundu Province, west of Feshi, Moanza and Mwela areas
- “The Suku occupy an irregularly shaped, roughly rectangular area, approximately 60 to 80 kilometers east to west and 180 kilometers north to south, between 5° and 7° N and 17°30' and 18°15' E, in the Kwango subregion of the Bandundu region.”(2)

### 1.4 Brief history:

- “The Suku polity was founded by refugees from the middle Kwango River area, which was being conquered by Lunda invaders in the seventeenth century. Although the Suku are culturally akin to the Kongo peoples, their political organization and nomenclature carry a distinct Lunda imprint. After shallow and sporadic contacts with the Portuguese in the nineteenth century, in the 1890s the Suku came under the control of the Congo Free State (eventually the Belgian Congo). European traders appeared early in the twentieth century; serious missionary (Catholic and Protestant) and government presence commenced in the late 1920s. From the 1930s, the Suku economy, lacking local resources, became progressively dependent on labor migration to plantations and urban centers.”(2)

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

- “The ancestors of the Suku, like those of many neighboring groups, appear to have occupied this area some one hundred and fifty or two hundred years ago in an eastward migration which originated in the Kwango river valley and which is related to the imposition of Lunda hegemony over the region. According to tradition, the Suku paramount chief, known as the MeniKongo, led his subjects into the largely empty lands in the east. The population that remained in the Kwango valley under Lunda control is at present known as the Yaka. Many of the Suku and Yaka lineages belong to the same clans and some maintain occasional contacts... Similarly, the eastern Suku resemble the Sonde, their neighbors to the east, who, like the Yaka, are ruled by chiefs of Lunda origin. The Suku have successfully resisted Lunda encroachment and have their own independent paramount chief.”(3, p. 84)

### 1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

- “Located at an elevation of about 750 meters, the area consists of rolling savannas and savanna-woodland, cut by swift rivers and streams. A May-to-September dry, cool season alternates with a rainy season.”(2)

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

- “At the mid-twentieth century, the Suku numbered about 80,000, with a population density of 5 to 6 persons per square kilometer. At present, the population may be approaching 150,000, about one-third of it residing more or less permanently in urban centers, particularly Kinshasa.”(2)
- “Traditionally, settlements were small (rarely with more than fifty inhabitants) and scattered. Colonial authorities regrouped them into larger clusters of several hundred inhabitants. Traditional houses are rectangular (2.4 to 3.0 meters by 4.5 to 6.0 meters), usually of two rooms, and consist of a wooden framework covered with grass. The colonial period introduced the typical pan-African modern house of wattle-and-daub or clay-brick walls and a tin roof.”(2)

- “Their territory measures roughly fifty by one hundred miles...Population density is, thus, relatively low—some fourteen of fifteen persons per square mile.”(3, p. 83)

## 2. Economy

### 2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

- “Swidden gardens supply manioc, the staple food, supplemented by sweet potatoes, yams, pumpkins, beans, peas, maize, and peanuts, with occasional bananas and "European" vegetables. Several varieties of palm are tapped for "wine.”(2)

### 2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

- “Grubs and caterpillars are collected, and there is fishing and hunting and trapping of antelopes, monkeys, rodents, and birds.”(2)

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

- “Houses, furniture, bows, and simple utensils are usually made by the users. Artisans supply the more specialized objects, such as baskets, mats, fishing nets and weirs, mortars, drums, hoes, knives, arrows, axes, adzes, and ritual objects.”(2)

### 2.4 Food storage: No evidence of such found.

### 2.5 Sexual division of production:

- “Traditionally, except for miniscule tobacco and medicinal gardens and the tapping of palm wine, cultivation was entirely in the hands of women, who also made pottery. All the other crafts were men's, as were such professions as diviner, judge, kingroup and political chief, and the majority of ritual specialists. Men also hunted the larger animals, did most of the fishing and trapping, and kept dogs, pigs, and goats. All specializations were part-time, and every Suku was engaged in a range of activities. The modern economy expanded men's choices primarily; it brought laboring jobs, mostly in distant towns and plantations, and some new occupations, such as domestic servant for expatriates, clerk, driver, policeman, medical assistant, and teacher, and, since independence, higher political, bureaucratic, and professional positions.”(2)

### 2.6 Land tenure:

- “Traditionally, ownership rights in land (as in everything) belonged to kin groups. The open bush was subdivided into large sections bounded by streams, usually of a score or more square kilometers. Control over such a section had primarily to do with hunting: a leg of any large game caught in it was owed to its owner's lineage, and only the owners were entitled to fire the bush for the large collective hunts of the dry season. Installing a new village also required the permission and ritual sanction of the owner's lineage. Land was free for cultivation, involving only a very minor ritual tribute. Separate usufruct rights were held over palm trees (tapped for wine), fishing sites, and small patches of rich soil used for peanut planting. This system had remained intact during the colonial period and has undergone no fundamental changes since Zairean independence.”(2)

### 2.7 Ceramics:

- “Pottery is made by women. These items are (and were traditionally) sold for shell money by the artisans. Importation of many largely nonutilitarian items began with the colonial period.”(2)

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

- “The hunting tribute is subdivided between all the adult members who are present and a certain amount is also sent to those who live in the vicinity. When a person taps trees for wine, the major portion of the produce is shared with those members of the lineage who are there to make good their claim; if the wine is sold, the revenue must again be shared.”(3, p. 93)
- “Most of the domestic property, necessary in everyday living, remains under individual control...But a certain portion of such property does continuously circulate within the lineage. A Suku cannot for long refuse the request by another member of his lineage for any object unless he can show that he cannot do without it; even such valuable articles as bicycles and sewing machines, unless actively used, tend to make the round of lineage members who believe they need them at various times. When a migrant worker returns

from town or plantation with money and goods, these are shared out within a few days, voluntarily and in satisfying the insistent demands by lineage relatives.”(3, p.93)

#### 2.9 Food taboos:

- “At the grave...[they] 'feed' the dead certain foods considered to be their favorite: particular kinds of forest mushroom and wild roots, palm wine, and sometimes even manioc, the Suku staple. A small hole is dug in the ground and the food is put into it.”(12)
- “...fowls and eggs, or indeed any food cooked in a pot which has been previously used to cook fowl, are forbidden to women. Even men must observe certain restrictions with regard to the eating of fowls; if the bird is a hen it may be shared by several, but a cock must be eaten by one man alone or illness results; he may however give some to his son if not yet circumcised.”(14, p.42)

#### 2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

- There is no evidence of canoe use or watercraft.

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f): Not available.

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f): Not available.

### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

#### 4.1 Age at menarche (f):

- Though the age of menarche is not given, “females are permitted to have intercourse at a very early age, even before menstruation.”(14, p. 51)
- “Although no ritual marked the onset of menarche (or of menopause) in the female, she became a “woman” in the narrower sense of adult woman (*muketu*, pl. *baketu*) with the onset of menstruation.”(15, p.81)

#### 4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

- The specific age is not provided in the literature; however, it suggests the female would be significantly younger than the male at the time of giving her first birth.

#### 4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

- “On the average a woman bears three children; families of more than four are rare.”(14, p. 51)

#### 4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

- Mother abstains from sexual intercourse no more than two years after giving birth. (11)

#### 4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): Not available. (See 4.2 above.)

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

- “Suku divorces are frequent; a rough estimate is that some 50% of middle-aged women have been divorced once. The economic and social autonomy of the wife correlates in this case with her individual behavioral and psychological independence which makes divorce a relatively easy matter.”(3, p.115)
- “...the Suku marriage bond is unstable.”(8, p.79)

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

- “Some 20% of married Suku men have more than one wife, but about three quarters of these have no more than two. Thus, large polygynous families are characteristic of some 5% of married men. A second wife is seldom acquired until middle age; consequently, among the older men the incidence of polygyny is higher...”(3, p.99)

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

- “Traditional marriage involves a transfer of rights from a woman's lineage to the groom's, in exchange for money and a sacrificial goat. Included are rights of sexual possession and exclusion; rights to her domestic and agricultural labor; and eventually, rights to a son's lifetime assistance and to a portion of a daughter's bride-wealth as compensation for rearing her. Lineage filiation rights remain with the wife's lineage.

Divorce (which is not infrequent) and a wife's death reverse these transfers, but the amount of returned bride-wealth is discounted for each child and the length of the wife's services. No reimbursement is due if the widow remarries within the husband's lineage.”(2)

#### 4.9 Inheritance patterns:

- “The property-owning unit being the matrilineage, all the wealth of a deceased person reverts to his or her lineage's control, being effectively allocated to its elders. The one exception is the inheritance by the sons of the father's hunting paraphernalia. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a tendency to expand the portion of goods inherited by sons.”(2)
- ...individual need is an important factor in the redistribution. If the dead has left several goats, the person without any will insist upon a greater share than someone who already has several animals himself.”(3, p.94)

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

- “The birth of a child does tend to fortify the tie between the parents...But another consequence is the increased interference by the mother's lineage in the life of the family...A child's sickness may be taken as an indication of [sexual and ritual] breaches of conduct and the threat of further prohibitions of sexual relations between the parents is increased. A child's death immediately results in such a taboo and conflict.”(3, p.103)

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

- “...the Suku sex code is not at all loose, but very rigid legally, and attitudes to sex are, ethnocentrically speaking, prudish.”(8, p.78)

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

- “Although lineage exogamy is not a cultural requirement, most Suku marriages do occur between members of different lineages.”(3, p.96)

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

- “In effect, the father's legal role with respect to his children is that of a trustee for their lineage. With a daughter, this trusteeship lasts until her marriage, when the father collects the major portion of the bride-wealth and she is thereupon legally ‘reclaimed’ by her lineage...With a son, trusteeship gives way to a more lasting legal relationship. The father has a claim to a portion of all the game that the son kills and to periodic gifts...After the father's death, [this claim] is transferred to the father's lineage as a whole, more specifically to its current elders.”(3, p.104)

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

- “Legally, the [mother] is entirely responsible for [the child's] acts and [she], not the father, must furnish compensation and fines if the child commits a crime.”(3, p.103)

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

- “...the physical role of the father is believed to be limited to the quickening of the fetus already formed in the uterus.”(13, p.207)

#### 4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape:

- “When a husband commits adultery... his continued sexual relations with his wife may affect not only her health but that of other members of her lineage...her lineage imposes, in such an event, a blanket prohibition of sexual relations until the husband ritually repairs such transgressions and pays the appropriate fines.”(3, p.102)

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

- “There is ‘some preference for patrilateral cross-cousin marriage, which brings back into the village the daughters of women married elsewhere’.”(7, p.62)

#### 4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

- “The rights connected with a woman, which are subject to transfer, are the following: those to her domestic labor and to part of her labor outside the purely domestic sphere; sexual rights, paternal rights to her children, always excluding their filiation.”(3, p.96)
- “Women may be seen as having a kind of ‘polyandrous’ attitude: Suku women do have passing affairs rather easily.”(8, p.78)

#### 4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring:

- “[A man’s] father’s entire lineage are [his] collective ‘fathers’...He must give his father portions of game and gifts; after his father’s death, and especially if he moves away, these gifts to the father’s lineage diminish in frequency.”(8, p.75)

#### 4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

- “...the husband’s lineage may demand a return of all the bride-wealth, thereby renouncing its paternal rights over the children, and these rights are then transferred to the children’s own lineage; the children’s legal position from then on is like that of children born to an intra-lineage marriage (that is, both paternal and maternal rights are vested in the same lineage).”(3, p.99)

#### 4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females: Not available.

#### 4.22 Evidence for couvades: None.

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

- “...the relationship among brothers is not entirely one between equals. An older brother is an “elder,” with an elder’s formal authority over a younger brother.”(8, p.75)

#### 4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

- “By the time the ceremonial sacrifice of the goat makes possible the cohabitation of husband and wife, some of the material base for the new family has already been laid...The house has been built in advance by the husband. Though in the same village, it is set at some distance from his father’s compound. This is to avoid the ‘shame’ of being too readily observed by his parents in the intimacies of day-to-day married life and to make it [easier] for the wife to practice in-law avoidance.”(3, p.101)

#### 4.24 Joking relationships?

- “The relationship between brothers can thus be defined as only mildly authoritarian and constraining; on the whole, it tends to be solidary, pervasive of many adult activities, and potentially competitive.”(8, p.75)
- “[A man’s] authority over his sisters increases with age, as he becomes a lineage elder, but this authority is generally suffused with protectiveness; before middle age, the relationship is characterized by ‘shyness,’ formal avoidance, and great warmth.”(8, p.75)

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

- “The basic unit of social life is the autonomous matrilineage, seldom of more than forty members, which functions as a very strongly corporate, property-holding, marriage-arranging, and bride-wealth-collecting unit. Traditionally, it was jurally responsible for all its members’ actions, and it held life-and-death and selling rights over its members. It is also the unit of all mystical and ritual functions.”(2)

#### 4.26 Incest avoidance rules:

- “Within the lineage, sexual relations between persons of the same generation (classified as ‘siblings’) are incestuous and prohibited; the same applies to classificatory siblings who are not members of the lineage; that is, patrilateral parallel cousins. Inter-generational marriage within the lineage is, however, allowed; between such close relatives as a man and his sister’s daughter, marriage is frowned upon, yet it does occur, and a with a classificatory sister’s daughter it is not uncommon.”(3, p.96)

#### 4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

- “Marriage is a contract between lineages, in which reciprocity prevails. Bridewealth is given by the groom’s lineage to the bride’s (which, in turn, and as a matter of its own contractual relation with the bride’s father, hands over to the groom a large portion of the bridewealth).”(8, p.73)

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

- “Personhood is achieved a few weeks after birth at a coming-out and naming ceremony...Groups of adolescent boys are taken into adulthood through circumcision rites, lasting for weeks and involving the acquisition of new adult names. No comparable rites of passage exist for girls.”(2)

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

- “A slight preference is expressed for a man to marry his father's sister's daughter.”(2)

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

- “Marriage involves an arrangement among three lineages: those of the groom, of the bride’s father, and of the bride herself.”(3, p.96)

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

- “Lineages show different degrees of preference for one marriage over another. Thus, in one lineage, over half the marriages are within it, while in another the figure is less than a fifth. Generational differences are also important. Older men, in marriages subsequent to their first, show a tendency to marry within the lineage women who are themselves often divorcées from a first inter-lineage marriage. At present, younger people tend to marry more consistently outside of the lineage, partly under the influence of missionaries who...feel that the ‘traditional African’ pattern is for lineages to be exogamous.”(3, p.96)

### **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare: Not available.

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

- “The sources of interlineage conflict lie in a real or imagined imbalance in the system of reciprocity, and the initiative toward the restoration of the balance belongs to the offended lineage and to no one else. A further consequence of the conception of reciprocity is that since it defines clearly the claims of every side in every given situation and the exact compensations involved, a conflict between lineages develops from a disagreement over the events held to be responsible for the imbalance, and it will be so phrased.”(7, p. 63)

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

- “Between lineages, most conflicts were conditioned by the need of every corporate lineage to redress any imbalance in its relationship with every other lineage. Any lasting indebtedness upset this balance. Most conflicts arose from theft, property destruction, homicide, marriage-payment obligations, and infringement of sexual rights. The aggrieved party frequently resorted to violent self-help or to an attack on a third party, forcibly involving it in the settlement process. Conflicts between lineages could also be taken to independently practicing arbitrators who relied on argument or divination. Since the colonial period, customary courts, with powers of enforcing decisions, have been dealing with civil and minor criminal cases, and government courts have been dealing with serious crimes.”(2)

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

- “The only armed conflict with a neighboring group in Suku history lay at the foundation of the Suku polity, with the defeat of the Lunda-Yaka attempt to subdue the fleeing Suku king. Since then, conflicts with neighboring groups occurred locally at the level of lineages, the methods of settlement being the same as those between Suku lineages.”(2)
- “The corporate unity of the lineage appears clearly in its relations with other lineages. Here, reciprocity is stringently maintained by both sides. Obligations contracted by any member bind the lineage as a whole; individual transgressions become the responsibility of all the members; self-help may be resorted to indiscriminately against any one of them by a wronged lineage. Debts between them never lapse; even a borrowed basket of peanuts is remembered for two or three generations and sooner or later reclaimed. Homicide, be it accidental or not, must be compensated with the payment of two persons by a reciprocal murder; a theft is canceled only by the return of an equivalent object, plus a fine, or by a counter-theft.”(3, p. 91)

4.18 Cannibalism?

- “Cannibalism is never found, and is regarded as something quite abhorrent.”(14, p.42)
- “For those who hailed from West Central Africa...cannibalism and other atrocities represented a small facet of a larger social critique of all forms of economic and political exploitation...connected to a complex series of beliefs that are often dubbed ‘witchcraft’.”(5, p.278)

## 5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

### 5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

- “According to the earliest available administrative records, dating back to the middle 1920’s, Suku villages normally varied in size between fifteen and seventy-five inhabitants; only the villages of important chiefs were larger. Since then, the Belgian administration has grouped villages into bigger clusters within which, however, subdivisions corresponding in structure and size to the old villages persist.”(3, p. 84)

### 5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

- “Spatially, villages are relatively stable; some have not changed their general location for thirty years and when changes occur, the village moves within a radius which is seldom more than a mile long.”

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

- “The political organization of the Suku kingdom was pyramidal. The royal lineage (whose current head was the king) stood at the apex and also ruled directly its own immediate region. The rest of Sukuland was divided into about a dozen regional chieftaincies (of unequal size and occasionally subject to fission), each controlled by a specific lineage holding the right to its chiefship. The larger of these were subdivided into several smaller subordinate chieftaincies; the smaller ones were not. Below this, the political organization was coterminous with relations among the local matrilineages. The main concerns of the formal political system were prestige and tribute. Tribute flowed upward through each successive level to the king. The political system was also formally concerned with ensuring public order, but it lacked effective institutionalized means (such as police or standing troops) for doing so, and the chiefs' order-keeping roles were played out capriciously, sporadically, and often reluctantly.”(2)

### 5.4 Post marital residence:

- “Residence at marriage is virilocal and the male children of a man reside with him, patrilocally, at least until his death and often thereafter with his brothers or other older members of their father’s matrilineage.”(3, p. 85)
- “Upon marriage, a woman joins her husband. A man resides near his father at least until the father's death and usually with the father's brothers after that. As they grow older, the men trickle into the lineage headquarters. Several such autonomous but related matrilineages recognized their common identity through occasional actions such as a symbolic sharing of bride-wealth receipts. They regard themselves as chapters of a larger kin group: thus, a member of one lineage, moving into the neighborhood of another, will be incorporated into the latter.”(2)

### 5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

- “The primary groups of loyalty are one's own matrilineage and the village, which involves the patrikindred and the father's matrilineage. Given male patrilocality and household virilocality, one's everyday life tends to focus on the village, whereas one's economic, jural, and ritual obligations focus on the dispersed matrilineage. Although this sometimes leads to conflicts of loyalty, it also provides a certain relief from the near-totalistic demands of one's lineage.”(2)

### 5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):

- “Breast-feeding, eventually supplemented with food, lasts until the age of 2 or 3, during which there is a taboo on sexual intercourse. Children continually experience casual close body contact with adults and other children. Boys are left very free until late adolescence, learning routine skills by participation and imitation; by contrast, girls from an early age are an indispensable part of the household's labor force.”(2)

### 5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

- “The Suku often compare the relationship with one’s lineage elders to that between an animal and its owner. This metaphor is used to explain not only the corporate right of the lineage, as represented by its elders, to the labor and wealth of its younger members but even the *sub rosa* right of elder witches to ‘eat’

their juniors... In pre-colonial times, the elders had the right to sell junior members as punishment for repeated and costly breaches of conduct or simply because of financial need.”(3, p. 91)

#### 5.8 Village and house organization:

- “Newlyweds set up in a separate compound near the man’s father. In terms of lineage affiliation (and therefore economic, jural, and ritual interests), the domestic unit is divided between the husband and the wife-and-herchildren cluster. Polygyny simply adds more such independent clusters to the compound.”(2)

#### 5.9 Specialized village structures (mens’ houses):

- “The lineage is localized within an area of convenient communication (some twenty kilometers across), its membership dispersed among the villages of this neighborhood; the lineage owns one of the villages, which serves as its headquarters, and in which its head (its oldest male) resides.”(2)

#### 5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

- The father sleeps in a different room or even a different building; the mother may sleep in the same bed as her baby. (11)

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

- “By the rule of matrilineal descent, every Suku belongs to a series of kinship groups of different magnitude. All these groups are called by the same term *kikanda*... Analytically, the following matrilineal units may be distinguished: the presumptive clan, the operative clan, the major lineage, and the autonomous lineage.”(3, p.86)

#### 5.12 Trade:

- “In the nineteenth century the Suku profited from a trade that channeled oil and raffia from the forested areas to the north in exchange for cloth, beads, guns and gunpowder, and shell money from the Angolan coast. With the imposition of colonial boundaries, this trading network lapsed, and Sukuland became an economic backwater, with only migrant labor as its main resource.”(2)
- “Owing to the distance from markets, there are no food exports of any commercial importance. Cash to pay for imports has come from local employment, mainly at the missions and with the government, and the savings and remittances of migrant labor.”(2)

#### 5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

- “Status achievement was traditionally a matter of aging: for both males and females, eldership (from middle-age on) brings with it an ever-increasing involvement in the affairs of one's lineage, surrounding community, and region. Nowadays status is also bolstered by education, position in the larger Zairean society, and wealth. Traditionally, there was little wealth differentiation among lineages; the main variable in social power lay in the size of the lineage.”(2)

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

#### 6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

- RCR plays a big part in the lives of the Suku; the literature does not place a number on it.

#### 6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

- “Traditionally, aside from diviners, there were no fully engaged religious specialists. All lineage heads performed the basic lineage rituals (such as marriages, burials, appeals to dead elders, curses), and all political chiefs performed the basic chiefly rituals (harvest, hunts, installation of chiefs and villages). Circumcision rituals were conducted by part-time ritual entrepreneurs. Lineage medicines were maintained by lineage members initiated for that purpose. At present, religious specialists are found in the Christian churches and in Afro-Christian movements.”(2)

#### 6.2 Stimulants:

- “Herbalism, which is the basis for treatment of minor diseases, is a part-time specialty. Other methods of curing by ritual specialists are inextricably bound with "mystical" notions of "medicines" that bring misfortunes and provide the ritual means of curing them. Misfortunes as a class incorporate both disease

and unfortunate events (such as bad luck or poor hunting), and both could also be brought about by witchcraft and magic.”(2)

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

- “Personhood is achieved a few weeks after birth at a coming-out and naming ceremony... Groups of adolescent boys are taken into adulthood through circumcision rites, lasting for weeks and involving the acquisition of new adult names. No comparable rites of passage exist for girls.”(2)

#### 6.4 Other rituals:

- “In addition to circumcision, the outstanding public rite was Kita, a periodic rite of revitalization of the society as a whole involving all men and women not previously initiated. Other public rituals included the founding of a new village, the chiefly first-fruits ritual, and the initiation and installation of new lineage and regional chiefs and the king. The most frequent rituals were those having to do with medicines: acquiring them for a lineage, curing their victims, or renovating their force, but these were private lineage rituals.”(2)

#### 6.5 Myths (Creation):

- “The creator who inhabits the sky (ndzamyaphuungu) is responsible for life, death, and all unanswerable questions. There are no religious practices that actively pay homage to this god. Instead, religious celebrations focus on honoring the elders and ancestors (bambuta). The death of an elder is cause for a public ceremony performed by other elders. Bambuta may be honored by recognizing and practicing the traditional ways and through offerings and gifts. The offering place is usually a clearing in the forest (yipheesolu). This place is off-limits to outsiders and all women. Offerings may otherwise be made at the grave site of the ancestors.”(4)

#### 6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

- “The outstanding nonspecialist performing arts included singing, dancing, telling of parables and tales, and playing drums and thumb pianos. Decorative artistry finds expression in hairstyling and in mat, basket, and gourd making. More specialized artistic elaboration appears in the manufacture of pottery, tobacco mortars, drinking cups, bowls, axes, adzes, knives, bracelets, and stools and in the carving of ritual figures and dance masks.”(2)

#### 6.7 Sex differences in RCR: See 6.3 above.

#### 6.8 Missionary effect:

- “Western medicine has been widely accepted as a way of dealing with physical systems, but not the deeper causes of disease.”(2)
- Major Religions: (9)
  - 96% Christianity
  - 4% Ethnic Religions

#### 6.9 RCR revival:

- “[The] conceptual system of dealing with misfortunes was not always satisfactory in practice, resulting in periodic revitalization-type movements that predate colonial control. These movements and Christianization have gradually undermined the integrity of the traditional system. At present, what is left are discrete bits and pieces of it, operating in conjunction with various Western Christian (Catholic and Protestant) and modern Afro-Christian beliefs.”(2)

#### 6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

- “Burial takes place within a day of death. Traditionally, the corpse is placed in a small subterranean niche; nowadays caskets are also used. The grave site is marked with objects such as glasses, plates, and chairs. There is a firm recognition (coupled with a profound agnosticism about the details) of life after death and of the influence of the dead on the living. Occasionally, one has contact with the dead, in the form of ghosts, but the dead with whom one has a persistent relationship are the dead of one's own lineage. The power of one's dead elders (ancestors) is an enhanced version of their power while alive, and one communicates with them at the grave sites, cajoling them for help in everyday events. As with the living elders in formal matters, the dead elders are treated as a collectivity. These notions have continued among

Christian Suku, who find some measure of support for them in Christian and, especially, Catholic beliefs.”(2)

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

- “[The dead members] of the lineage are referred to as *bambuta*. Literally, *bambuta* means the 'big ones', the 'old ones', those who have attained maturity, those older than oneself.”(12)

6.12 Is there teknonymy? None.

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

- “The key traditional elements were the Creator, medicines, the powers of eldership, witchcraft, and divination. The Creator was akin to a logical postulate of a first cause, with no direct impact on everyday activities. A variety of individually held medicines allowed for magical action, beneficent or nefarious, or both. A lineage-held medicine was one that had brought misfortunes to the lineage and had to be ritually taken in and nurtured to prevent further depredations. Lineage elders had the power to curse their juniors, withdrawing from them the mystical protection of the lineage against misfortunes. Witches (whose power was acquired at birth from other witches) were regarded ambivalently: they could promote lineage interests but had occasionally to "consume" lineage members. Thus, a misfortune, such as a sickness, could arise from one or several of these sources. It was the diviner's role to sort them out and indicate the necessary countermeasures.”(2)

## 7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

- “[They] paint their chests red with powdered *T'ukula*-wood, their object being, confessedly, to increase beauty; the dead are similarly painted before burial.”(14, p.41)

7.2 Piercings: None.

7.3 Haircut:

- “The head is usually shaved so as to leave three ridges of hair running longitudinally from front to back; these are plaited, and anointed liberally with oil and soot. From the center of the forehead, along the temples, and down behind each ear, runs a tress of hair plaited with grass. The beard is allowed to grow, but the moustache is shaved.”(14, p.41)

7.4 Scarification:

- “As a general rule, neither scarification nor tattooing is practiced, though exceptional cases are found.”(14, p.41)

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

- “The Pende chief's bicorn beaded hat, an important item of chiefly regalia was originally appropriated from the Lunda. Whether employing a restrained palette of black and white or blue and white beads or a dazzling array of brightly colored beads, all of these hats have a central knob-like protuberance in the front, a finial at the crown, and horns projecting forward from each side. The distinctive horns are said to represent the strength and power of the buffalo, an allusion to the powers of chieftaincy. The arrangement of the beads in zigzag, lozenge, triangle, and circle designs is consistent throughout the area. More recently Yaka and Suku chiefs have borrowed these beaded bicorn hats from the Pende as part of their own leadership regalia.”(6, p.34)

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

- “The Suku have an initiation, the *n-khanda*. A special hut is built in the forest to give shelter to the postulants during their retreat; the event ends in circumcision, an occasion for great masked festivities including dances and song. The masks fulfill several functions: some serve as protection against evil forces, others ensure the fertility of the young initiate. Their role consists in frightening the public, healing the sick, and casting spells. The charm masks of the initiation specialist do not "dance." Their appearance must engender terror, especially the *kakuungu*, with its swollen cheeks, massive features, and protruding chin. The Suku also used *hemba* helmet masks. These are cut from a cylinder of wood, the hairdo often

surmounted by a person or animal. These masks are supposedly an image of the community of deceased elders, notably the chiefs of the maternal lineage. They are used to promote success in the hunt, to heal, and to punish criminals. They were also worn by dancers during certain initiation ceremonies.”(10)

#### 7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

- “Women tie down the breasts in order to lengthen them.”(14, p.41)
- “...a man who has killed an enemy wears an iron bracelet.”(14, p.41)
- “At dances women ornament their hair with beads, and men fasten skins to the front of their girdles.”(14, p.41)

#### 7.8 Missionary effect: Not available.

#### 7.9 Cultural revival in adornment: Not available.

### 8. Kinship systems

#### 8.1 Sibling classification system:

- In addition to the matrilineage, the Suku also recognize what might be called a patrikindred or a truncated patrilineage that includes all patridescendants of one's father and his patribrothers.”(2)

#### 8.2 Sororate, levirate:

- “Sororal polygyny is extremely rare; while there are no moral objections to it, it is rejected as unstable, since a quarrel with one wife would, the Suku claim, lead to another with her sister and the same would also apply to divorce. True sororate is also seldom found. The reasons are related to the rules of bride-wealth reimbursement; this being the responsibility of the wife's lineage and not her father's, a true sister will not serve as a substitute for the bride-wealth unless the father is once again compensated in the usual manner. Ordinarily, the dead woman's lineage will provide a woman over whom it has both paternal and maternal rights—that is, a daughter of an intra-lineage marriage, a divorcée, or a widow who, to be sure, is often the dead woman's classificatory sister by virtue of lineage affiliation.”(3, p.100)

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

- “The pattern of the kinship terminological system is Iroquois. It is skewed in a Crow manner in that upon the demise of the father's generation in the father's lineage, the father's sisters' sons succeed to its social and terminological position and all the linked relatives are reclassified accordingly. Beyond the active core of the kin network (including mainly those in one's matrilineage, father's matrilineage, and patrikindred and their spouses, and one's wife's matrilineage), the kin terms are infinitely extendable through successive recognizable links.”(2)

### Numbered references

1. [http://www.ethnologue.com/show\\_language.asp?code=sub](http://www.ethnologue.com/show_language.asp?code=sub)
2. <http://www.everyculture.com/Africa-Middle-East/Suku.html>
3. Kopytoff, Igor (1958-59). The Family Estate in Africa, p. 83-116. Northwestern University.
4. <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/people/suku.html>
5. Thornton, John (2003). Cannibals, Witches, and Slave Traders in the Atlantic World, *William and Mary Quarterly*. 60(2): 273-294. Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture.
6. Arnoldi, Mary Jo and Christine Mullen Kreamer (1995). Crowning Achievements: African Arts of Dressing the Head, *African Arts*. 28(1): 22-35+97-98. UCLA James S. Coleman African Studies Center.
7. Kopytoff, Igor (1961). Extension of Conflict as a Method of Conflict Resolution among the Suku of the Congo, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*. 5(1): 61-69. Sage Publications, Inc.
8. Hsu, Francis K (1971). Kinship & Culture. The Suku of the Congo: An Ethnographic Test of Hsu's Hypothesis, p.69-86. Aldine Publishing Company.
9. <http://www.joshuaproject.net/people-profile.php?peo3=15109&rog3=CG>
10. <http://www.zyama.com/suku/pics..htm>
11. Barry III, Herbert and Leonora M. Paxson (1971). Infancy and Early Childhood: Cross-Cultural Codes 2, *Ethnology*. 10(4): 466-508. University of Pittsburgh-Of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education.

12. <http://lucy.ukc.ac.uk/era/ancestors/kopytoff.html>
13. Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. and Daryll Forde (1950). *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, p. 211- 221. Oxford University Press.
14. Torday, E. and T.A. Joyce. Notes on the Ethnography of the Ba-Yaka, *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*. Vol. 36: 39-58. Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.
15. Sanday, Peggy Reeves and Ruth Gallagher Goodenough (1990). *Beyond the Second Sex: New Directions in the Anthropology of Gender*. University of Pennsylvania Press.