

1. Description

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

Kwaya (AKA Abakwaya), Kwaya language of the Bantu language family

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

kya

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude):

1° 30' to 1°40' S and 33°40' to 33°50' E (Modern day Tanzania)

1.4 Brief history:

The Kwaya draw their name from the name mukwaya, which is what they call the fish eagle. According to Kwaya lore the fish eagle saved a child from starvation by bringing him food during famine. The people have traditionally moved to the hilly regions during times of war or other dangers. They now make their homes in the lower lying valleys. They are said to have originated from other tribes such as the Kwiregi, Kanadi and North-Mara. They continue to follow many of their traditional methods of livestock raising and agriculture, despite visits from Christian missionaries.

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

Europeans brought many of their own cultural and religious characteristics. Kwaya now participate in Christian weddings at a much higher rate. They also wear traditional European dress for the events. They enjoy increased access to metal cookware and other technologies previously unattainable.

1.6 Ecology (natural environment):

The Kwaya inhabit a narrow strip of land along the eastern shore of Lake Victoria that extends from the Mara Bay to the Nariobo River. It consists predominantly sandy soil that is poor in organic material. The coastal plain rises eastward toward the Indian Ocean with low ridges, and exposed granite. It reaches 1000 feet in height. There is a long dry season punctuated by short rainy seasons from February-May and November-December, with total rainfall around 26 inches. Temperatures range from 55°F-84°F. As a result, vegetation includes coarse grasses, thorn trees, small bush acacia, and other shrubs.

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

102,000 (1987 Census); Between 2 and 5 huts make up each compound, with a maximum of around 8; This includes anywhere from 10-30 people per compound/village, with villages often in close spatial arrangements with each other.

2. Economy

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s):

Maize, millet, sorghum; Ugali is the staple meal, it consists of maize meal in boiling water that is allowed to thicken into a porridge

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources:

Chicken; Cattle and goats for their milk, sometimes for their meat; in other instances the Kwaya would kill antelope; fish play a large role in their diets, as access to Lake Victoria and Mara Bay provide many opportunities

2.3 Weapons: Bow and arrow, blowguns?:

Spear is the choice weapon for hunting and/or violence; slings used to defend crops from wildlife

2.4 Food storage:

Meat is either shared and consumed on the spot or cured for short-term storage; Each compound has separate huts created with the sole purpose of storing carbohydrates. These are called granaries and the head of each compound will first build one for his initial wife, followed by the building of individual granaries for his other wives as they give him children. He will sometimes build one for himself.

2.5 Sexual division of production:

Men are responsible with every aspect of livestock; they lead the animals to pasture for grazing, handle reproductive endeavors, give protection, sell them at market, butcher them, and even milk them. They are also responsible for what have become cash crops (sugar, tobacco, coffee, cotton). Women are responsible for the cultivation of food crops; keeping an elaborate garden with their co-wives and daughters.

2.6 Land tenure:

Passed down in patrilineal fashion; remains with patriarch's brothers and then down to the eldest son indefinitely

2.7 Ceramics:

Not found in literature

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

Men served their food first by their wives. Each compound shares all supplies, including between a man's multiple wives

2.9 Food taboos:

Imongo (species of antelope) is never to be eaten by any Kwaya. The first origin story for this taboo arises from the tale of a man holding a feast for his relatives. His wife prepared various meats and served them to the guests, but kept the imongo meat and served it to her husband only after his relatives had left. Appalled at her greed, the man called back his relatives and informed him of the transgression, thus forbidding Kwaya to eat this cursed meat. The second story states the first ancestor of the Kwaya witnessed an imongo fornicating with a baboon, and decided never again to eat imongo after this shameful sight

2.10 Canoes/watercraft?

Not present

3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

Not found in literature

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

Not found in literature

4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

Not found in literature

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

Not found in literature

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

The traditional nuclear family usually consisted of a man, his wife, and 3 or so of their children; however, other wives (if the husband had them) lived in the same compound, meaning 10-15 people could live in one compound.

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

Birth intervals were generally enforced by a family's ability to care for and nourish a child; this often meant birth intervals could grow to as large as 5-6 years.

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f):

Females marry for the first time between 14-16 years old

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

The marriage bond in the Kwaya people is especially weak. Some data suggests that almost 50% of marriages end in divorce. One man had had 26 different wives, of which only 3 had married him as their first husband; 17 of the 23 previous divorcees had left this man within 3 years

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously:

Exact data was not collected, but it is clear that the vast majority (>75%) of males are involved in polygynous relationships

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

The average bride-wealth for Kwaya marriages is 10 heads of cattle and either a few goats or shillings. In many instances this agreement is not totally fulfilled, as many marriages are quite short and do not provide ample time for payment. Only in circumstances where the woman fails to provide a child to a man that has children with other wives can the bride-wealth be completely repayed.

4.9 Inheritance patterns:

The deceased's belongings would often be spread out amongst his relatives. Outstanding debts would be paid first, while his spear would go to the first born son. His land would go to his brothers, who would allow his wives to remain in the compound.

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict:

A Kwaya man can often have multiple wives. It is not altogether uncommon for his older sons to have sexual contact with his other wives. In cases such as this, the father is justified in killing his son, however, he is more often sent away to start his own compound or to live with his maternal uncle.

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

Not found in literature

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy):

Marriages are often blurred between in-groups and out-groups. In some instances, they occur between two members of different villages. However, it is considered ideal if a man marries his paternal cross cousin. Marriages between Kwaya and other tribes do not appear to be common at all.

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

The Kwaya views have not been clearly outlined, but it appears they believe that the fetus comes from the father and begins its growth in the mother. There is only one father, however, as females often divorce and remarry, their female children often move with them. These girls can often call their mother's new husband a variation of the term for father.

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

The mother receives the infant from the father and provides nourishment.

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

It is viewed as being possible from one encounter; however, for ritualistic reasons the husband must consummate the birth 3 days after it occurs

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

Occurs very infrequently

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

Cross cousins were indeed viewed as perfect and desirable spouses. This was because it offered an opportunity of occurring between closely related partners without the stigma of incest. The stigma was removed because often times the two marriage candidates would be from different clans. In the case of a male marrying his father's sister's daughter, he would have the added advantage of "making one's group to grow" because resulting children would belong to the groups of the father's father and the mother's mother.

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms?

Yes; extramarital sex is allowed and female partners are expected to consent to any marriage before they enter it

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring

Gifts between extramarital lovers must be discrete, but do exist. This could include a garment of clothing or fine feathers.

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

Generally that responsibility lies on the other wives of the widower. A father would not be likely to resume full care for the child, who would likely be raised by his mother's sister.

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

Not found in literature

4.22 Evidence for couvades

The father of the recently born child is not to have intercourse with the mother or any of his wives for 3 days. After this period of time he is required to first have sex with the mother in order to "complete" the child's birth. Failure to adhere to this rule could result in the child being exposed to curses.

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

Women who divorced and took along their children would remarry. This new husband would be called an inferior variation of the term father.

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect?

Sons show immense respect for their fathers. They are to keep a "respectful" distance at all times and are not to interrupt their fathers under any circumstances. On the occasion that their father returns from a trip away from the village, the son is expected to immediately grab his father's walking stick and bring him a stool and water. In a strange twist, half-siblings are often shown more respect than full-siblings.

4.24 Joking relationships?

Cousins have especially comfortable relationships. They are able to play and joke throughout their lives.

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

Bilateral

4.26 Incest avoidance rules

Apparently cases of incest have occurred between brother and sister, and between father and daughter. These instances are rare and induce great shame for the entire family group. The offenders are then socially outcast and treated with contempt. The family also must hold a cleansing ritual.

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

The ceremonies begin with what can best be described as a bachelorette and bachelor parties. The women and men take part in a night-long ceremony of calling out to each other. The women show modesty and shyness until finally the two parties meet for a dance. The bridal feast is next, and is put on by the bride's maternal aunt. She is responsible for preparing the bride's garb, while the paternal aunt sacrifices and prepares a goat. Meanwhile the groom prepares a new hut for his bride and after the marriage ceremony, carries her there on his back.

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

Not found in literature

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

Within community is preferred

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

In the past, parents or sometimes grandparents have arranged all marriages. With the advent of Christianity and other European influences, young adults are increasingly taking on this responsibility.

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

Does not appear to be common

Warfare/homicide

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

Not found in literature

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

Murder does occur between the Kwaya sub-tribes. In these instances, a judicial body is convened. This body has the opportunity to grant the victim's family the right for blood retribution.

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

Disagreements over livestock theft are common. Arguments over outgroup infidelity by wives can also cause violent retribution. Small-scale warfare has broken out after land disagreements or perceived alliances between Kwaya sub-tribes.

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

There exist 6 sub-tribes of the Kwaya people. They have historically been peaceful with each other. During great difficulties, each tribe sends representatives to a council of elders to resolve issues before they become dangerous.

4.18 Cannibalism?

No

5. Socio-Political organization and interaction

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

Each compound averages between 2 and 5 huts, each containing a woman and her children, along with their father

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality):

Relatively stable seasons and intricate compounds mean the Kwaya stay put from year to year

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

The eldest male of each compound can join together to form councils in times of emergency; otherwise the Kwaya are known for their lack of chieftains, dating back to the roots of their culture

5.4 Post marital residence:

Males will traditionally stay in their father's compound until the circumcision ritual of their first son, which can occur as late as the father's 35 year; once a woman is married she will move into the compound of her new husband

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

Each compound has a defined boundary marked by its fence; a small gate exists as the only entrance; boundaries of grazing and crop land are not as clearly demarcated

5.6 Social interaction divisions? (age and sex):

As expected from a culture that divides labor based upon sex, the men spend the majority of their time together just as the women do. This does not prevent the opposite sexes from interacting during leisure time.

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships:

Aunts and Uncles from the maternal or paternal side often take on large responsibilities for children, and as such this relationship becomes more parental in nature; however first cousins often enjoy close relationships with cousins. Grandparents are able to joke and play with their grandchildren

5.8 Village and house organization:

Hexagonal compound; head of compound has his first wife's hut directly across from the gate against the fence; the second wife has a hut adjacent; his eldest son, if married, will have a hut on the other side of his; each granary lies in between the huts; grown daughters who are unmarried have their own huts; common fireplace exists in center of compound

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

Granaries, daughter's huts, compound leader's brothers can have their own huts

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere?

The Kwaya traditionally sleep on the ground

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

6 sub-tribes of Kwaya; each sub-tribe is made of separate compounds led by one elder male who lives with relatives of the same lineage

5.12 Trade:

Inter tribal trade not apparent; the woman of each household is entitled to trade whatever she grows from her garden; it is custom for individuals to approach the woman, as she is seen as the sole possessor of these goods

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies?

Only indications are of period elder councils; otherwise age is the primary factor in this patrilineal society. As for females, a man's first wife is always served first but is not to be recognized above his other wives

6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)

6.0 Time allocation to RCR:

Rituals can last days at a time on special occasions; on an average day the Kwaya spend up to an hour preventing witchcraft

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine):

Certain family members (i.e. maternal aunts) perform specific rituals (i.e. bridal feast); diviners are responsible for thwarting witchcraft and applying medicines

6.2 Stimulants:

None found

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

Rituals to prevent and cure barrenness are commonplace and performed by a diviner. The mother must bury the afterbirth, and must do so in an upright fashion, as an upside down burial results in sterility from that point forward. After a child's birth, it and the mother are secluded in the same hut for 3-4 days; during this period the father must abstain from intercourse with the mother and his other wives. After the seclusion, the mother ritually brings out the child, effectively introducing him to the world and vice versa. During the funeral of an elder, the man's family will sleep in his hut for differing amounts of time; children sleep there 2 nights, women 4, and men 5

6.4 Other rituals:

Menarche indicates an important event in female's lives; she is to be isolated by her close relatives for 3-6 days, eating her own food and drink, and is not to cleanse herself until the end of that isolation; at this point the elder females take her to a large tree and help her cleanse her garments. Circumcision of males occurs only after their fathers had celebrated the elder feast; this meant that many times children aged 10-15 would undergo the ritual. Boys would try to hide their pain as a sign of their foray into manhood

6.5 Myths (Creation):

Not found in literature

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games):

Songs for each ritual exist and are passed down through generations; knife handles are often designed with geometric shapes

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

Females and males often perform the rites on their own sexes; however, male or female can take on the role of diviner who battles witchcraft

6.8 Missionary effect:

Christian missionaries were astounded at the high divorce rate present in the Kwaya culture. Their main influence has been to Christianize the marriage ritual while placing more emphasis on monogamy and denouncing divorce.

6.9 RCR revival:

Many Kwaya still practice polygyny as they see it as a sign of social status as well as a means to gain more resources and expand their lineage

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs:

In ancient lore, the Kwaya believed that death was succeeded by rebirth into the same world and the same body. Due to the treachery of a second wife, who killed the first wife as she reemerged from the ground, death is now seen as a final result. The dead are buried and are said to go to Nyombe, which is the spirit realm that exists in the ground.

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people?

No, often children are named after their deceased grandparents

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

No

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

A form of deism, whereby spirits are ubiquitous and often malicious; ancestors are believed to move on to another realm and not play a significant role in this world; charms are placed outside the home and carried on the person to prevent these malevolent entities from entering and causing harm

7. Adornment

7.1 Body paint:

None

7.2 Piercings:

None

7.3 Haircut:

Men keep very short hair; women keep similarly short hair, some young girls braid their hair

7.4 Scarification:

None

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

Necklaces are the most common kind of jewelry; most women wear tight necklaces made of white orbs; bracelets are common and can have small charms attached

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

Diviners adorn themselves with feathered headdresses and often come equipped with shakes and rattles

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

Males tend to wear simpler clothing, often devoid of jewelry but packing a knife in a holster around their waist

7.8 Missionary effect:

Most Kwaya now wear European style modern clothing or loose fitting dresses homemade from cloths

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

The Kwaya are traditionally a modestly dressed people and the advent of European missionaries simply modernized their clothing. Many Kwaya still maintain their charms and totems, however, they are often more concealed.

8. Kinship systems

8.1 Sibling classification system:

All the offspring of one man live in the same compound until they reach adulthood or marry. Due to the volatile nature of many Kwaya weddings, the children of each wife are often classified together as well. The eldest siblings hold priority in terms of land and livestock.

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

The Kwaya do not acknowledge a strict system of sororate, but it is common. If a woman does not bear children or dies before giving birth, then her brother is likely responsible for returning her bridewealth. Many times this is not possible, so the brother decides to offer another one of his sisters to the widower.

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

Nothing else notable uncovered

9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):

Information on the Kwaya has essentially been limited to a single work of literature. They are a peaceful group who survive upon livestock and crops. They have been fairly isolated from surrounding tribes and from European influences. They place great emphasis on lineage and the family group. Their compounds are surprisingly standard across the region, with a general layout being able to describe almost every one. They are particularly promiscuous, allowing great sexual freedom, barring pregnancy or marriage.

Numbered references

1. Huber, Hugo. Marriage and the Family in Rural Bukwaya (Tanzania). The University Press Fribourg Switzerland, 1973.