

PHOTOGRAPHIC ESSAY ON AN AFRICAN COMMUNITY

THE KIKUYU

The Kikuyu, also known as Gĩkũyũ, are the largest ethnic group in Kenya, making up about 22% of the country's population. They primarily inhabit the central region of Kenya, an area characterized by fertile highlands, conducive to agriculture.

According to Kikuyu mythology, the community traces its origins to Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi, the first man and woman, who were created by the god Ngai (also known as Mwene-Nyaga or Mogai).



The Kikuyu speak Gĩkũyũ, a Bantu language which is closely related to other Bantu languages in the region, such as Kamba, Meru, and Embu. Gĩkũyũ has several dialects, reflecting the diversity within the Kikuyu community. The Kikuyu society is organized into clans, each believed to descend from one of the ten daughters of Gĩkũyũ and Mũmbi. Each clan (mũhĩrĩga) is further subdivided into sub-clans, and families play a significant role in maintaining social order and cultural continuity. These nine tribes are the Anjirũ, Agacikũ, Ambũi, Angũi aka Aithiegeni, Angechi aka Aithĩrandũ, Aacera, Ambura aka Aakĩũrũ aka Eethaga, Airimũ aka Agathiigia, Angarĩ aka Aithekahuno and Aicakamũyũ and all clans and families emanate from them perpetually, through patriarchy.



Traditionally, the Kikuyu are farmers, growing crops like maize, beans, potatoes, and bananas. Coffee and tea have become significant cash crops in the region. Tradewise the Kikuyu have historically engaged in trade with neighboring communities, exchanging goods and services.



Art and Music

- **Crafts**

The Kikuyu are known for their beadwork, pottery, and basketry.



Traditional clothing, such as shukas, is adorned with colorful beads and patterns.



Music and Dance

Music is a vital part of Kikuyu culture, with traditional songs and dances performed during ceremonies and festivals.

Instruments such as drums (kĩhĩĩna) and stringed instruments (kĩambũ) accompany the dances.



Marriage the Kikuyu way

When a young man found a suitable woman to marry, he was expected to pay bride wealth *ruracio* to her family. The parents of both the bride and groom engaged in discussions, exchanged gifts, and assessed whether the couple were a suitable match. Afterwards, the elders and fathers of the groom and bride drank locally brewed beer *muratina* together as they negotiated for bride wealth (sheep, goats and cattle). A man could marry as many wives as he could afford. A traditional Kikuyu marriage ceremony *nguracio* is characterized by a great feast, songs, dance and merry-making.



Iron-working

Kikuyu blacksmiths (*muturi*) made knives and weapons from iron ore, which was dug out of the ground and smelted. In most markets, tobacco, vegetables, skins and gourds were exchanged for iron, pottery, leather garments, salt and red ochre.

This is a traditional digging knife (*kahiu ka irima*) with a wooden handle made by a blacksmith at *Kirwara*. The handle was carved from *Murembu* wood.

It was used by women for cultivating fields, clearing bushes, weeding and harvesting cassava and sweet potato.

