

# Kikuyu

also known as “Gikuyu”

Data source: eHRAF

Secondary source

Entered by Emily Pitek, Human Relations Area Files

*\* Data Source entry, prepared based on data sourced from an external project.*

*\* Secondary Source entry, prepared from a literature review by a Ph.D. RA*

Entry tags: African Religions, Religious Group

The Gikuyu refer to themselves as the “Gikuyu” or “Agikuyu”; “Kikuyu” is their spoken language, and also the name used by British Colonial administration and anthropologists (Davison, 2010). The Gikuyu live in central Kenya in the administrative districts of Kiambu, Fort Hall (Murang'a), Nyeri, Embu, and Meru (as defined in the 1920's). This entry focuses specifically on the Gikuyu living in the Fort Hall District of Kenya around the time of 1920. By this time, British colonialists held political control over the Gikuyu, and Christian missionaries had arrived in the area. Despite such contact, the Gikuyu culture and religious beliefs at the specific time and place this entry focuses on remains largely traditional. Gikuyu socio/political organization centers around three factors: the family group (mbari/nyomba), the clan (moherega), and an age-grading (riika) system that unites the whole society. The family, led by a patriarch, is the main social, economic, and religious unit. No full-time religious specialists (such as priests or shamans) are present. Rather, "in religious ceremonies, and in political and social gatherings, the elders hold supreme authority" (Kenyatta, 1953:263). Elders serve as intermediaries between Ngai (the high god) and ancestral spirits, and maintained communication with these beings (especially through the form of sacrificial ceremonies). The highest status for a Gikuyu man is the religious or sacrificial council (Kiama Kia Maturanguru), which is reached after passing through and being initiated into all age-grades. The religious and sacrificial council are considered “holy men” who are charged with leading all religious and ethical ceremonies. For the Gikuyu, religion is interwoven with all aspects of life; this entry considers the religious group to be coterminous with the society itself.



Date Range: 1895 CE - 1930 CE

Region: Fort Hall or Metume District, Kenya, ca. 1920

Region tags: Africa, Eastern Africa, Kenya

Fort Hall or Metume District, Kenya, ca. 1920

## Status of Participants:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources

Print sources for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Divale, W. 2004. Codebook of Variables for the Standard Cross-Cultural Sample. World Cultures: The Journal of Cross-Cultural and Comparative Research.
- Source 2: Murdock, G.P. & Wilson, S.F. (Jul., 1972). Settlement patterns and community organization: Cross-Cultural Codes 3. Ethnology, 11(3), 254-295.

– Source 3: Tuden, A. & Marshall, C. (Oct., 1972). Political organization: Cross-cultural codes 4. *Ethnology*, 11(4), 436-464.

#### Online sources for understanding this subject:

– Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=f110-003>

– Source 1 Description: Leakey, L. S. B. (Louis Seymour Bazett). 1952. "Mau Mau And The Kikuyu." London: Methuen & Co.

– Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=f110-002>

– Source 2 Description: Lambert, H. E. 1956. "Kikuyu Social And Political Institutions." London: International African Institute.

– Source 1 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=f110-004>

– Source 1 Description: Kenyatta, Jomo. Facing Mount Kenya: The Tribal Life Of The Gikuyu. Secker and Warburg, 1953

– Source 2 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=f110-001>

– Source 2 Description: Middleton, John. "Central Tribes Of The North-Eastern Bantu: (The Kikuyu, Including Embu, Meru, Mbere, Chuka, Mwimbi, Tharaka, And The Kamba Of Kenya)." *Ethnographic Survey Of Africa: East Central Africa*, International African Institute, 1953, pp. i - x, 11-71, 96-106

– Source 3 URL: <https://ehrafworldcultures.yale.edu/document?id=f110-000>

– Source 3 Description: Davison, Jean. 2010. "Culture Summary: Gikuyu." New Haven, Conn.: Human Relations Area Files.

## General Variables

### Membership/Group Interactions

Are other religious groups in cultural contact with target religion:

– Yes

Notes: Despite having contact with missionaries, the Gikuyu religion at the specific time and place this entry focuses on remains largely traditional. "...the Kikuyu were a deeply religious people for whom life without religion was unthinkable. It was to such a people that the missionaries, Protestants and Catholic alike, came towards the closing stages of the nineteenth century, bringing with them the many variations of the Christian doctrine and dogma" (Leakey, 1952:44). "The coming of the first Europeans of the British East Africa Company to Kikuyu land, and especially to the Kiambu district, was followed by the arrival of Christian missions, of which the first were the Church of Scotland Mission which established a station at Thogoto; the Church Missionary Society, which started work at Kabete; and the Catholic White Fathers, who placed their first mission to the Kikuyu at St. Austin's, not far from where Nairobi now stands. All these first three mission stations were in the Kiambu district of Kikuyu and their positions are not without significance, for it will readily be realized that the sites chosen for such mission work were in the middle of the Kikuyu people whom the missionaries wished to evangelize and not on the extreme outskirts of their country" (Leakey, 1952:58).



Is there violent conflict (within sample region):

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 1649, Frequency of Internal Warfare (resolved rating), indicates that internal warfare seems to be absent or rare among the Gikuyu (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

↳ Is there violent conflict (with groups outside the sample region):

– Yes

Notes: SCCS Variable 1650, Frequency of External Warfare (Resolved rating), originally coded the Gikuyu as 2.5, which is between "external warfare seems to occur once every 3 to 10 years (original code 2)", and "external warfare seems to occur at least once every two years (original code 3)" (Ember and Ember, 1992; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

Does the religious group have a general process/system for assigning religious affiliation:

– No

Notes: Religion is coterminous with Gikuyu society; there is no process for assigning religious affiliation aside from being born into a particular family (the family is the primary religious unit).

Does the religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members:

– No

Notes: "In Gikuyu religion there is no provision for official priesthood, nor is there any religious preaching. Converting campaigns are, of course, a thing unknown. This is due to the fact that the religion is interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people. Thus all members of the community are automatically considered to have acquired, during their childhood teachings, all that it is necessary to know about religion and custom. The duty of imparting this knowledge to the children is entrusted to the parents, who are looked upon as the official ministers of both religious ethics and social customs" (Kenyatta, 1953:241).

Does the religion have official political support

– Yes

Notes: The Gikuyu religious group is coterminous with the society at large. For this reason, the religion is considered to have political support. "...the religion is interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people" (Kenyatta, 1953:241). "When we come to religion, we see again that Gikuyu religion is integrated with the whole of Gikuyu life" (Kenyatta. 1953:316).

↳ Are the priests paid by polity:

– No

Notes: Full-time religious leaders (such as a priest) are not present among the Gikuyu.

↳ Is religious infrastructure paid for by the polity:

– No

Notes: Religious infrastructure is not present.

|

↳ Are the head of the polity and the head of the religion the same figure:

– No

Notes: Neither the polity nor the religion are headed by a singular individual.

↳ Are political officials equivalent to religious officials:

– Yes

Notes: Elders are informal leaders. "In religious ceremonies, and in political and social gatherings, the elders hold supreme authority" (Kenya, 1953:263). "The function of an elder, both in his own family group and in the community, is one of harmonising the activities of various groups, living and departed. In this capacity of mediator his family group and community in general respect him for his seniority and wisdom, and he, in turn, respects the seniority of the ancestral spirits. This is because he realises that his present elevated position is due to the care and guidance rendered him by his departed ancestors, and whatever he gives them, he gives them not in form of a prayer but in gratitude and to hold their memory green" (Kenya, 1953:265).

Is there a conception of apostasy in the religious group:

– No

Notes: Because religion is coterminous with Gikuyu society, there is not a conception of apostasy.

## Size and Structure

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (estimated population, numerical):

– I don't know

Notes: The principal ethnographic source (Kenya, 1953) does not specify the Gikuyu population figure for Fort Hall District. "The country of the Gikuyu, whose system of tribal organisation will be described in this book, is in the central part of Kenya. It is divided into five administrative districts: Kiambu, Fort Hall (Murang'a), Nyeri, Embu, and Meru. The population is approximately one million" (Kenya, 1953:xv).

Number of adherents of religious group within sample region (% of sample region population, numerical):

– I don't know

Notes: Not specified by the principal ethnographic authority.

Are there recognized leaders in the religious group:

– No

Notes: "In Gikuyu religion there is no provision for official priesthood, nor is there any religious preaching. Converting campaigns are, of course, a thing unknown. This is due to the fact that the religion is interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people. Thus all members of the community are automatically considered to have acquired, during their childhood teachings, all that it is necessary to know about religion and custom. The duty of imparting this knowledge to the children

is entrusted to the parents, who are looked upon as the official ministers of both religious ethics and social customs" (Kenyatta, 1953:241).

– Yes

Notes: Elders are informal leaders. "In religious ceremonies, and in political and social gatherings, the elders hold supreme authority" (Kenyatta, 1953:263). "The function of an elder, both in his own family group and in the community, is one of harmonising the activities of various groups, living and departed. In this capacity of mediator his family group and community in general respect him for his seniority and wisdom, and he, in turn, respects the seniority of the ancestral spirits. This is because he realises that his present elevated position is due to the care and guidance rendered him by his departed ancestors, and whatever he gives them, he gives them not in form of a prayer but in gratitude and to hold their memory green" (Kenyatta, 1953:265).

## Scripture

Does the religious group have scriptures:

Scripture is a generic term used to designate revered texts that are considered particularly authoritative and sacred relative to other texts. Strictly speaking, it refers to written texts, but there are also "oral scriptures" (e.g. the Vedas of India).

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of scripture. Cultural and historical traditions are passed down verbally, but not in a strict manner to be considered an oral scripture (see Kenyatta, 1953:xvi).

## Architecture, Geography

Is monumental religious architecture present:

– No

Notes: "There are no structures in the community that are appreciably larger or more impressive than the usual residential dwellings" (Murdock and Wilson, 1972; Column 6: Large or Impressive Structures).

Are there different types of religious monumental architecture:

– No

Notes: "Apart from the official abode of Mwene-Nyaga [high god] at Kere-Nyaga [Mount Kenya] on the north, there are minor homes such as Kea-Njahe (the mountain of the Big Rain) on the East; Kea-Mbiroiro (the mountain of Clear Sky) on the south; Kea-Nyandarwa (the mountain of Sleeping Place or Hides) on the west. All these are regarded with reverence as great places and mysteries symbolic of God, Manage na oriro wa Ngai. The Gikuyu, who has no 'temple made with hands,' selects huge trees, generally Mogumo or motamayo and Mokoyo trees, which symbolise the mountains. Under these trees he worships and makes his sacrifices to Mwene-Nyaga. These sacred trees are regarded in the same manner as most Christians regard churches—as the 'House of God'" (Kenyatta, 1953:236).

Are there specific sites dedicated to sacred practice or considered sacred:

– Yes

Notes: "The mountain of brightness [Mount Kenya] is believed by the Gikuyu to be Ngai's [high god's] official resting-place, and in their prayers they turn towards Kere-Nyaga and, with their hands raised towards it, they offer their sacrifices, taking the mountain to be the holy earthly dwelling-place of Ngai" (Kenyatta, 1953:234).



Are sacred site oriented to environmental features:

"Environmental features" refers to features in the landscape, mountains, rivers, cardinal directions etc...

– Yes

Notes: "Apart from the official abode of Mwene-Nyaga at Kere-Nyaga on the north, there are minor homes such as Kea-Njahe (the mountain of the Big Rain) on the East; Kea-Mbiroiro (the mountain of Clear Sky) on the south; Kea-Nyandarwa (the mountain of Sleeping Place or Hides) on the west. All these are regarded with reverence as great places and mysteries symbolic of God, Manage na oriro wa Ngai. The Gikuyu, who has no 'temple made with hands,' selects huge trees, generally Mogumo or motamayo and Mokoyo trees, which symbolise the mountains. Under these trees he worships and makes his sacrifices to Mwene-Nyaga. These sacred trees are regarded in the same manner as most Christians regard churches—as the 'House of God'" (Kenyatta, 1953:236).

## Beliefs

---

### Burial and Afterlife

Is a spirit-body distinction present:

Answer "no" only if personhood (or consciousness) is extinguished with death of the physical body. Answering yes does not necessarily imply the existence of Cartesian mind/body dualism, merely that some element of personhood (or consciousness) survives the death of the body.

– Yes

Notes: "The three groups of the spirits [spirits of parents, clan spirits, and age-group spirits], composed of young and old men, women, and children in their respective age-groups are joined in a wider group. This grouping corresponds to a tribal organisation of the spirit world" (Kenyatta, 1953:267). "...the Kikuyu believed that a person had two kinds of spirit, one of which on his death passed into the company of the family ancestral spirits, while the other was a sort of communal family spirit which was both single and yet multiple" (Leakey, 1952:41).

Reincarnation in this world:

– I don't know

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses:

– Yes



Cremation:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cremation.

↳ Mummification:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mummification.

↳ Interment:

– Yes

Notes: "Only persons who have reached a high grade of elderhood may be buried...The grave is dug in the bush near the dead man's village by the man's first-born sons by different wives: they must be initiated. The corpse of a man is buried on its right side, doubled up and with hand under head, that of a woman on its left side. It is placed either in or on an ox hide, according to guild. The man's intimate personal possessions are buried with him, the others put on the grave with the material from his dismantled hut on top of all; the site is then left" (Middleton, 1953:65).

↳ Cannibalism:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of cannibalism.

↳ Exposure to elements (e.g. air drying):

– Yes

Notes: "The bodies of other persons [those who have not reached a high grade of elderhood] are dragged out into the bush and left for the hyenas, or the body may be left in the hut, a hole being made for the hyenas to enter. A person who is sick and likely to die may be exposed in the bush before death" (Middleton, 1953:65).

↳ Feeding to animals:

– Yes

Notes: "The bodies of other persons [those who have not reached a high grade of elderhood] are dragged out into the bush and left for the hyenas, or the body may be left in the hut, a hole being made for the hyenas to enter. A person who is sick and likely to die may be exposed in the bush before death" (Middleton, 1953:65).

Are co-sacrifices present in tomb/burial:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of co-sacrifices.

Are grave goods present:

– Yes

Notes: "Only persons who have reached a high grade of elderhood may be buried...The grave is dug in

the bush near the dead man's village by the man's first-born sons by different wives: they must be initiated. The corpse of a man is buried on its right side, doubled up and with hand under head, that of a woman on its left side. It is placed either in or on an ox hide, according to guild. The man's intimate personal possessions are buried with him, the others put on the grave with the material from his dismantled hut on top of all; the site is then left" (Middleton, 1953:65).

↳ Personal effects:  
– Yes

↳ Valuable items:  
– I don't know

Are formal burials present:

– I don't know

Notes: Burial practices are not described in substantial detail by the principal ethnographic authority (Kenyatta, 1953).

## Supernatural Beings

Are supernatural beings present:

– Yes

Notes: "The Gikuyu people, it is certain, maintain a close and vital relationship with spiritual entities. Their daily lives, both as individuals and groups, are influenced at all points by belief in the supernatural" (Kenyatta, 1953:231).

↳ A supreme high god is present:  
– Yes

Notes: "The Gikuyu believes in the God, Ngai, the creator and giver of all things" (Kenyatta, 1953:233).

↳ The supreme high god is a sky deity:  
– Yes

Notes: "The creator lives in the sky" (Kenyatta, 1953:233).

↳ The supreme high god is chthonic (of the underworld):  
– No

Notes: "The creator lives in the sky" (Kenyatta, 1953:233).

↳ The supreme high god is fused with the monarch (king=high god):

– No

Notes: There is no monarch among the Kikuyu.

↳ The monarch is seen as a manifestation or emanation of the high god:

– No

Notes: There is no monarch among the Kikuyu.

↳ The supreme high god has deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "The creator lives in the sky. Ngai eikaraga matuine, but has temporary homes on earth, situated on mountains, where he may rest during his visits. The visits are made with a view to his carrying out a kind of 'general inspection,' koroora thi, and to bring blessings and punishments to the people" (Kenyatta, 1953:233).

↳ The supreme high god can reward:

– Yes

Notes: Kenyatta, 1953:233

↳ The supreme high god can punish:

– Yes

Notes: Kenyatta, 1953:233

↳ The supreme high god has indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "Ngai, who is not visible to mortal eyes, manifests himself in various ways. The sun, the moon, the stars, rain, rainbow, lightning and thunder are looked upon as manifestations of his powers. Moriro na mahinya ma ngai. Through these signs he can reveal his love or hatred" (Kenyatta, 1953:236).

↳ The supreme high god possesses hunger:

– I don't know

↳ Is it permissible to worship supernatural beings other than the high god:

– Yes

Notes: Ancestral spirits are not worshiped in the same formal manner as the high god, but they are very important in the everyday lives of the Kikuyu (more so than the high god). See Kenyatta, 1953: 265).

↳ The supreme high god possesses/exhibits some other feature:

– Yes [specify]: Cannot be seen by ordinary mortal eyes

Notes: "The Being thus described cannot be seen by ordinary mortal eyes" (Kenyatta, 1953:234).

↳ The supreme high god communicates with the living:

– Yes

Notes: "[Ngai] is a distant Being and takes but little interest in individuals in their daily walks of life. Yet at the crises of their lives he is invariably called upon. At the birth, initiation, marriage, and death of every Gikuyu, communication is established on his behalf with Ngai" (Kenyatta, 1953:234).

↳ Only through monarch

– No

Notes: There is no monarch among the Kikuyu.

↳ Previously human spirits are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The soul in life is ngoro. The spirit after death is called ngoma. Kenyatta states that there are three classes of spirits: (i) those of the father or mother which communicate directly with the living children; (ii) clan spirits; (iii) age-set or 'tribal' spirits, concerned with the activities of their particular age-set" (Middleton, 1953:66).

↳ Human spirits can be seen:

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits can be physically felt:

– I don't know

↳ Human spirits have deliberate causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "The communion between the smith and the ancestor spirits in this respect is considered to be of great importance, for the spirits of ancestors are said to be very closely connected with ironwork, and especially male spirits. It is believed that unless these are appeased they can render the ironwork unsuccessful by causing the tools or weapons which are made of the iron to break, and thus reduce the popularity of the smith" (Kenyatta, 1953:74).

↳ Human spirits can reward:

– I don't know

Notes: Not specified.

↳ Human spirits can punish:

– Yes

Notes: Kenyatta, 1953:74

↳ Human spirits have indirect causal efficacy in the world:

– Yes

Notes: "When misfortune or illness befalls a homestead or a member of a family group, the service of a medicine man (mondo-mogo) is sought, in order to ascertain the cause, which is almost invariably assumed to be the work of a spirit or spirits" (Kenyatta, 1953:267).

↳ Human spirits have memory of life:

– Yes

Notes: "The spirits of the father or mother (ngoma cia aciari), which communicate directly with the living children and which can advise or reproach the children in the same way as they did during their lifetime..." (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ Human spirits exhibit positive emotion:

– Yes

Notes: "The Gikuyu believe that the spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or a family group, or an age-group. In order to establish a good relation between the two worlds the ceremony of community with the ancestral spirits is observed constantly" (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ Human spirits exhibit negative emotion:

– Yes

Notes: "The Gikuyu believe that the spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or a family group, or an age-group. In order to establish a good relation between the two worlds the ceremony of community with the ancestral spirits is observed constantly" (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ Human spirits communicate with the living:

– Yes

Notes: "The spirits of the father or mother (ngoma cia aciari), which communicate directly with the living children and which can advise or reproach the children in the same way as they did during their lifetime..." (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ In waking, everyday life:

– I don't know

↳ In dreams:

– I don't know

↳ In trance possession:

– I don't know

↳ Through divination processes:

– Yes

Notes: "When misfortune or illness befalls a homestead or a member of a family group, the service of a medicine man (mondo-mogo) is sought, in order to ascertain the cause, which is almost invariably assumed to be the work of a spirit or spirits. The mondo-mogo is asked to make some divination by the casting of lots, so as to find out what spirit or spirits are responsible. When the mondo-mogo finds out the particular spirit he proceeds then to find what reason caused it to act in such an unfriendly way; also, what the spirit would accept to appease its anger and thus restore the individual to health" (Kenyatta, 1953:267).

↳ Only through monarch:

– No

Notes: No monarch is present among the Kikuyu.

↳ Non-human supernatural beings are present:

– Yes

Notes: "The third pattern that can be discerned in the fabric of Kikuyu religious practice is that which is connected with the belief in certain spirits that are not in any way 'human', nor yet linked with the concept of God—the spirits of such things as trees, large isolated rocks, waterfalls, and also epidemic diseases. Possibly this animistic religion was the oldest of the three superimposed and often interlocked patterns of religious belief" (Leakey, 1952:43).

↳ These supernatural beings can be seen:

– No

Notes: Leakey, 1952:43

↳ Mixed human-divine beings are present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of mixed human-divine beings.

↳ Does the religious group possess a variety of supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: Among the Gikuyu, there is a belief in a high god (Ngai), ancestral spirits, as well as non-human spirits.

## Supernatural Monitoring

Is supernatural monitoring present:

This refers to surveillance by supernatural beings of humans' behaviour and/or thought particularly as it relates to social norms or potential norm violations.

– Yes

Notes: "...if there is strife or dissention in the family the spirits can intervene and punish the wrongdoer" (Kenyatta, 1953:114). "The Gikuyu believe that the spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or a family group, or an age-group. In order to establish a good relation between the two worlds the ceremony of community with the ancestral spirits is observed constantly" (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ There is supernatural monitoring of prosocial norm adherence in particular:

Prosocial norms are norms that enhance cooperation among members of the group, including obviously "moral" or "ethical" norms, but also extending to norms concerning honouring contracts and oaths, providing hospitality, coming to mutual aid in emergencies, etc.

– Yes

Notes: "...if there is strife or dissention in the family the spirits can intervene and punish the wrongdoer" (Kenyatta, 1953:114). "The Gikuyu believe that the spirits of the dead, like living human beings, can be pleased or displeased by the behaviour of an individual or a family group, or an age-group. In order to establish a good relation between the two worlds the ceremony of community with the ancestral spirits is observed constantly" (Kenyatta, 1953:266).

↳ Supernatural beings care about taboos:

– I don't know

↳ Supernatural beings care about non-lethal fighting:

– Yes

Notes: "If after a quarrel one party or his child falls ill, it is said that his ancestors are angry with him and that they have sent the 'spirits of wind' to punish him" (Kenyatta, 1953:114).

↳ Supernatural beings care about disrespecting elders:

– Yes

Notes: "...nothing disturbs the dead more than an offence against family unity and loyalty" (Kenyatta, 1953:115).

↳ Supernatural beings care about other:

– Yes [specify]: Family unity and loyalty

Notes: "...nothing disturbs the dead more than an offence against family unity and loyalty" (Kenyatta, 1953:115).

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment:

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more information regarding supernatural punishment.

↳ Is the cause or agent of supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

Notes: Kenyatta (the principal ethnographic authority) describes ancestral spirits (1953:74) as well as the high god (1953:233) as the agents of supernatural punishment.

↳ Done only by high god:

– No

Notes: Kenyatta, (1953:74) describes ancestral spirits as the agents of supernatural punishment.

↳ Done by many supernatural beings:

– Yes

Notes: Kenyatta, (1953:74) describes ancestral spirits as the agents of supernatural punishment.

↳ Done through impersonal cause-effect principle:

– Yes

Notes: "...there is an automatic supernatural readjustment when the laws of natural justice have been disregarded" (Lambert, 1956:120).

↳ Is the reason for supernatural punishment known:

– Yes

↳ Done to enforce religious ritual-devotional adherence:

– Yes

Notes: "The communion between the smith and the ancestor spirits in this respect is considered to be of great importance, for the spirits of ancestors are said to be very closely connected with ironwork, and especially male spirits. It is believed that unless these are appeased they can render the ironwork unsuccessful by causing the tools or weapons which are made of the iron to break, and thus reduce the popularity of the smith" (Kenyatta, 1953:74).

↳ Done to enforce group norms:

– Yes

Notes: "If after a quarrel one party or his child falls ill, it is said that his ancestors are angry with him and that they have sent the 'spirits of wind' to punish him" (Kenyatta,

1953:114). "Many forms of sickness and ill-health, many of the minor disasters of daily life, were explained not by natural causes, nor yet as acts of vengeance by God, but by the disapproval of the ancestral spirits for some act of commission or omission which had displeased them. It was therefore incumbent upon all members of the family to abide closely by the rules of behaviour and code of morals of the tribe in order to avoid the displeasure of the departed" (Leakey, 1952:43).

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in the afterlife:

– I don't know

↳ Supernatural punishments are meted out in this lifetime:

– Yes

Notes: "Many forms of sickness and ill-health, many of the minor disasters of daily life, were explained not by natural causes, nor yet as acts of vengeance by God, but by the disapproval of the ancestral spirits for some act of commission or omission which had displeased them. It was therefore incumbent upon all members of the family to abide closely by the rules of behaviour and code of morals of the tribe in order to avoid the displeasure of the departed" (Leakey, 1952:43).

↳ Supernatural punishments in this life are highly emphasized by the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "Many forms of sickness and ill-health, many of the minor disasters of daily life, were explained not by natural causes, nor yet as acts of vengeance by God, but by the disapproval of the ancestral spirits for some act of commission or omission which had displeased them. It was therefore incumbent upon all members of the family to abide closely by the rules of behaviour and code of morals of the tribe in order to avoid the displeasure of the departed" (Leakey, 1952:43).

↳ Punishment in this life consists of sickness or illness:

– Yes

Notes: "If after a quarrel one party or his child falls ill, it is said that his ancestors are angry with him and that they have sent the 'spirits of wind' to punish him" (Kenyatta, 1953:114).

↳ Other [specify]

– Yes

Notes: "The communion between the smith and the ancestor spirits in this respect is considered to be of great importance, for the spirits of ancestors are said to be very closely connected with ironwork, and especially male spirits. It is believed that unless these are appeased they can render the ironwork unsuccessful by causing the tools or weapons which are made of the iron to break, and thus reduce the popularity of the smith" (Kenyatta, 1953:74).

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards:

– I don't know

### Messianism/Eschatology

Are messianic beliefs present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of messianic beliefs.

Is an eschatology present:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of a belief in an eschatology.

## Practices

### Membership Costs and Practices

Does membership in this religious group require castration:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required castration.

Does membership in this religious group require fasting:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required fasting.

Does membership in this religious group require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence indicating the presence of food taboos.

Does membership in this religious group require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations:

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of required permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of adults:

"Adults" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition of a human who is 18-years-old or older and who is legally responsible for his/her

actions, then please specify that difference in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of children:

"Children" here referring to an emic or indigenous category; if that category is different from the popular Western definition, please specify that different in the Comments/Sources: box below.

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require self-sacrifice (suicide):

– No

Notes: No ethnographic evidence for the presence of human sacrifice.

Does membership in this religious group require sacrifice of time (e.g., attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.):

– No

Notes: "In the ordinary way of everyday life there are no organised prayers or religious ceremonies such as 'morning and evening prayers'" (Kenyatta, 1953:237).

Does membership in this religious group require participation in large-scale rituals:

i.e. involving two or more households; includes large-scale "ceremonies" and "festivals."

– I don't know

Notes: "In the ordinary way of everyday life there are no organised prayers or religious ceremonies such as 'morning and evening prayers.' So far as people and things go well and prosper, it is taken for granted that God is pleased with the general behaviour of the people and the welfare of the country. In this happy state there is no need for prayers. Indeed they are inadvisable, for Ngai must not needlessly be bothered. It is only when humans are in real need that they must approach him, without fear of disturbing him and incurring his wrath. But when people meet to discuss public affairs or decide a case, or at public dances, they offer prayers for protection and guidance" (Kenyatta, 1953:237). "Thus are the four main crises of life marked off from its minor difficulties. Religion deals with the former; communion with the ancestors suffices for the latter. Every other occasion again is transcended by crises involving the whole tribe, such as a threatened drought. Then, of course, Ngai himself must be appealed to, and the appeal must be made by the active participation of the whole people" (Kenyatta, 1953:235).

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present:

E.g. special changes to appearance such as circumcision, tattoos, scarification, etc.

– Yes

Notes: See questions below for more details on extra-ritual in-group markers.

|

↳ Circumcision:

– Yes

Notes: "Almost every year, thousands of Gikuyu boys and girls go through the initiation or circumcision ceremony, and automatically become members of one age-grade (riika rimwe), irrespective of mbari, moherega, or district to which individuals belong. They act as one body in all tribal matters and have a very strong bond of brotherhood and sisterhood among themselves. Thus, in very generation the Gikuyu tribal organisation is stabilised by the activities of the various age-grades, of old and young people who act harmoniously, in the political, social, religious and economic life of the Gikuyu" (Kenya, 1953:2-3).

↳ Ornaments:

– Yes

Notes: Brass earrings are worn by men who have passed through all age-grades and initiations (Kenya, 1953:204).

## Society and Institutions

### Levels of Social Complexity

The society to which the religious group belongs is best characterized as (please choose one):

– A tribe

Notes: "The Gikuyu tribal organisation is based on three most important factors, without which there can be no harmony in the tribal activities. For the behaviour and the status of every individual in the Gikuyu society is determined by the three governing principles which we will categorically enumerate here. The first is the family group (mbari or nyomba), which brings together all those who are related by blood; namely a man, his wife or wives and children and also their grand- and great-grandchildren. The second is clan (moherega), which joins in one group several mbari units who have the same clan name and are believed to have been descended from one family group in the remote past. It is obvious that, owing to the polygamous system of marriage, a family or mbari unit increases rapidly, and in one generation it is possible for a mbari to have a hundred members or more...The third principle factor in unifying the Gikuyu society is the system of age-grading (riika). As we have seen, the mbari and the moherega system help to form several groups of kinsfolk within the tribe, acting independently; but the system of the age-grading unites and solidifies the whole tribe in all its activities. Almost every year, thousands of Gikuyu boys and girls go through the initiation or circumcision ceremony, and automatically become members of one age-grade (riika rimwe), irrespective of mbari, moherega, or district to which individuals belong. They act as one body in all tribal matters and have a very strong bond of brotherhood and sisterhood among themselves. Thus, in very generation the Gikuyu tribal organisation is stabilised by the activities of the various age-grades, of old and young people who act harmoniously, in the political, social, religious and economic life of the Gikuyu" (Kenya, 1953:1-3).

### Education

Does the religious group provide formal education to its adherents:

– No

Notes: "In Gikuyu religion there is no provision for official priesthood, nor is there any religious preaching. Converting campaigns are, of course, a thing unknown. This is due to the fact that the religion is interwoven with traditions and social customs of the people. Thus all members of the community are automatically considered to have acquired, during their childhood teachings, all that it is necessary to know about religion and custom. The duty of imparting this knowledge to the children is entrusted to the parents, who are looked upon as the official ministers of both religious ethics and social customs" (Kenyatta, 1953:241).

Is formal education available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group:

– Yes

Notes: "The vast majority of the boys and girls go to school; to mission schools, to government schools, and to independent schools" (Leakey, 1952:76).



Is extra-religious education open to both males and females:

– Yes

Notes: Leakey, 1952:76

## Bureaucracy

Do the group's adherents interact with a formal bureaucracy within their group:

– No

Notes: There is no formal bureaucracy within the Gikuyu (see question on social complexity, above).

Do the group's adherents interact with other institutional bureaucracies:

– Yes

Notes: "When the British Government took over the administration of what is now Kenya (formerly called the British East African Protectorate), a number of administrative centres were set up in Kikuyu country the chief of which were the Bomas at Kiambu, Fort Hall, and Hyeri, as the administrative centres of these three well-established divisions of the older Kikuyu territorial organization" (Leakey, 1952:62).

## Public Works

Does the religious group in question provide public food storage:

– No

Notes: SCCS Variable 20, Food Storage, indicates that food is stored in individual households (Murdock and Morrow, 1970; Retrieved from Divale, 2004).

## Enforcement

Does the religious group in question provide an institutionalized police force:

– No

Notes: "Police functions are not specialized or institutionalized at any level of political integration, the maintenance of law and order being left exclusively to informal mechanisms of social control, to private retaliation, or to sorcery" (Tuden and Marshall, 1972; Column 10: Police).

Does the religious group in question provide institutionalized judges:

– No

Notes: "Supreme judicial authority is lacking at any level above that of the local community" (Tuden and Marshall, 1972; Column 9: Judiciary).

Do the group's adherents interact with an institutionalized judicial system provided by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: "While the [British] administration laid it down that in such matters as trials for murder and other serious offences in future the British administrator would have the sole judicial authority, there was little if any interference at first with any of the ordinary Kikuyu methods of justice or administration" (Leakey, 1952:62).

## Written Language

Does the religious group in question possess its own distinct written language:

– No

Notes: "The Gikuyu have no unique written language; therefore, much of the information on their traditional culture has been gleaned from their rich oral traditions" (Davison, 2010).

Is a non-religion-specific written language available to the group's adherents through an institution(s) other than the religious group in question:

– Yes

Notes: Reading and writing are taught at mission schools (Leakey, 1952:59).

## Food Production

Does the religious group in question provide food for themselves:

– Yes

Notes: The Gikuyu rely primarily on "intensive agriculture, using fertilization, crop rotation, or other techniques to shorten or eliminate fallow period". Animal husbandry provides a secondary source of subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.



Please characterize the forms/level of food production [choose all that apply]:

– Pastoralism

– Small-scale agriculture / horticultural gardens or orchards

Notes: The Gikuyu rely primarily on "intensive agriculture, using fertilization, crop rotation, or other techniques to shorten or eliminate fallow period". Animal husbandry provides a secondary source of subsistence. Source of information from Ethnographic Atlas (Murdock, 1962-1971), retrieved from Divale, 2004; Variables 203-207, 232.