

## The Agikuyu People

The Agikuyu people are found predominantly in the central region of modern day Kenya, around the foot of Mt. Kenya, the snow capped second highest mountain in Africa at 17,040 ft above sea level, as well as in many other parts of the world, often in smaller numbers. The Agikuyu are the largest nation in Kenya comprising over 22% of the country's population (2018 estimates.)

We belong to the Bantu family of languages and share a common heritage with many other communities across Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. More specifically, we are more closely related to the Embu and Meru but also shared a lot culturally in trade and inter-marriages with the Maasai, our original neighbors to the South and the Kamba, our neighbors to the South east. We refer to ourselves as the Agikuyu which means or refers to the children of the sycamore (*mukuyu*) tree.

## Origins

Our story starts at the top of "The Mountain of God", *Kiri Nyaga*, now called Mt Kenya. This is where God showed the first Gikuyu man the land below and instructed him to go to a specific spot to the South of the mountain where there was a grove of fig trees, *Mikuyu*. Gikuyu descended the mountain and on arrival at the place found a woman, Mumbi, the mother of our tribe.

The name Gikuyu means a huge fig tree – *Mukuyu*, and Mumbi means Creator. Our God, "Mwene Nyaga" gave Gikuyu and Mumbi 10 beautiful daughters. Their home was in Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga in present day Murang'a county of Kenya. It is from these daughters that the clans that form the core of the Gikuyu community get their names. These names are: Anjiru (from Wanjiru), Anjiku (from Wanjiku),

Ambui (from Wambui), Angari/Aithekahuno (from Wangari), Airimu/Agathigia (from Wairimu), Aceera (from Waceera/Njeri), Angui/Aithiegeni (from Wangui/Waithiegeni), Aithirandu/Angechi (from Wangechi/Waithira), Ethaga/Akiuru/Ambura (Nyambura/Wakiuru), Aichakamuyu (Wamuyu/Warigia/Wanjugu).

### **Political structure**

The Agikuyu have always been a people with a great sense of justice (*kihoto*.) Political power among the Gikuyu people is vested in the council of elders. A very enterprising and self reliant people, the Agikuyu have always relied on a combination of strong family networks and loyal community partnerships (*kamuingi koyaga ndiri*) to build and sustain strong social and economic networks. Economically, the Gikuyu were great farmers, builders, skilled blacksmith and iron chain makers.

### **Our Culture and Religion**

The Agikuyu believe in a supreme being called Ngai or Mwene Nyaga. He is the creator and divider of all. All sacrifices were made to Ngai under the sacred sycamore tree (*mukuyu*) or under the fig tree (*mugumo*). The olive tree (*mutamaiyu*) is considered the sacred tree for women.

### **Miti ya Gikuyu**

The tree of origin for the Gikuyu is the *mukuyu*, (*Ficus sycomorus*), a fig tree with a nice, beautiful and evergreen shade which provides a wonderful shadow as a sanctuary from the African sun. Since these trees grow to a great age and height an old one can be called a *gikuyu*. All major Gikuyu religious sacrifices were done under this tree and the name of the tribe Gikuyu is derived from it.

A fig tree, *mugumo*, (*Ficus thonningii*) grows either independently or through entangling itself around another tree and with roots coming down from branches above. The *mugumo* tree is the second most sacred tree among the Gikuyu and under which sacrifices to Ngai were also done. This tree grows to a great height and age. An old one is truly an awesome sight.

The *Mukurwe* (*Albizia gummifera*), was a common tree found in most parts of Gikuyu land and had a variety of uses. Its trunk was used for building, the branches for firewood and leaves are also feed for goats. The *mukurwe* was a utilitarian tree where the *mukuyu* and the *mugumo* were sacred. The Nyagathanga bird made its nest at this particular tree and hence the name *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga*, the *Mukurwe* belonging to the Nyagathanga bird. The site of the first homestead according to our myth of origin was called *Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga*.

The Gikuyu had four seasons and two harvests in one year.

1. Mbura ya Njahi (season of big rain): March to July
2. Magetha ma njahi (black beans harvest): July to October
3. Mbura ya mwere (short rains): October to January
4. Magetha ma mwere (season of harvesting)
5. Mbura ya kimera.