

# **SECRET TRAILS OF MY COUNTRY**

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**MUKURWE WA NYAGATHANGA**

**ORIGIN OF THE AGIKUYU PEOPLE OF KENYA**

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The Photographs incorporated in this essay were taken on my digital camera

## The Origin of Gikuyu and Mumbi



*The entrance gate to Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga*

In the town of Gatari, lies 'Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga', the origin of the native Agikuyu people. A researcher wanted ideas on places he should visit before leaving the country. I suggested this site to him. His opinion: "This is a unique and superb place. It is a great tourist attraction although it is very shocking that not many know of it, even the Agikuyu themselves." Lack of awareness is one of the major reasons that prevent tourists from visiting this cultural and historical site.

Thus, I saw it necessary to educate people about Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga. Why study the origin of the Agikuyu is a question that is bound to arise.

First, Gikuyu is spoken by 22% of Kenya's population (approximately thirty-five million). It is therefore the most dominant language second to Swahili, the national language. The rich history of the Agikuyu, especially their part in the struggle for Kenya's independence, has aroused the interest of many who have heard names like Jomo Kenyatta, and 'Mau Mau'.



*Huts Where Some Cultural Practices Were Carried Out*

Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga lies in present day Murang'a East District, Kiharu Division (constituency) in Gatari location. By September 2005, Kiharu constituency had 91,203 inhabitants and of these, 15,331 were from Gatari location, the home of Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga. The area has an equatorial climate which consists of mostly cool and wet conditions though it also experiences sunny intervals from time to time. This type of condition is highly suitable and attractive to tourists. According to a recent study, Murang'a district, which has not had a vibrant tourism, is sitting on the potential of Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga, an area said to

be the first settlement of Gikuyu and Mumbi (the forebears of the Agikuyu). Although it is gazetted as a national monument, people want it promoted as a cultural and heritage centre where Kikuyu customary activities like dowry payments, engagements, cultural rights and family outings can be held. Also it would serve well as a tourist attraction.



*One of the Historic Buildings Still Standing At Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga*

Currently, the Mt. Kenya Tourism Association wants to unlock the potential of more than forty undocumented tourist attractions to boost the Mt. Kenya Tourism Circuit. The sites were identified by a recent survey commissioned by the Association to find new ways of tapping the region's potential which could contribute as much as one third of the country's tourism earnings. This is important especially during this crucial time, when our country is undergoing a financial crisis. Among the sites are Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga, 33 lakes on Mt.

Kenya, the Mau Mau caves, churches such as the one where the first Consolata Missionaries celebrated the first mass in 1902, traditional shrines and landscapes.

In addition to this, Central Kenya is one of Kenya's main granaries; with the good climatic conditions and fertile soils, crops flourish there. Also farming has been the main economic activity of the Agikuyu people since time immemorial. The land being the foundation on which the Agikuyu tribal economy stands, and the only effective mode of production that the people have, there is a great desire in the heart of every Gikuyu man to own a piece of land and make it flourish. This means that food would certainly not be an issue to the potential tourists as the area provides food enough to accommodate the whole country and more.

The Agikuyu people maintain a close and vital relationship with spiritual entities. Their daily lives both as individuals and groups are influenced at all points by the supernatural. These beliefs are of vital importance to them. The Agikuyu myth of the origin of man states that Ngai, (God) placed a man named Gikuyu on Kere-Nyaga (the Gikuyu name for Mt. Kenya). After a while he realized that the man was lonely and so he created a companion (woman) for him and named her Mumbi. Gikuyu and Mumbi lived happily but they still lacked something; children. As God had instructed them, whenever they needed anything from Him, they were to offer a burnt sacrifice facing Kere-Nyaga. So, they offered a sacrifice. Ngai kept His word and placed nine handsome men on Kere-Nyaga. Later, when the men were old enough, another sacrifice was offered so that Ngai would provide nine daughters to be married by the nine men. These formed the nine Gikuyu clans.

That is how the Agikuyu community originated. It is believed that they lived at Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga for a long time until the coming of the Europeans.

This unique site offers a rich African culture and many photographic opportunities.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

The idea was inspired by my loving parents Dr. Paul Mbatia and Mrs. Jane Nyaga who strongly believe that people should not forget their origins. They are both Kikuyu and have done their level best to ensure that my siblings and I learn as much about the Kikuyu culture and other African cultures as we can.

My sincere gratitude goes to Ngai, the Almighty God, my parents, teachers, students and every one who has supported me in this work.

### References:

1. *Kenyatta Jomo, Facing Mount Kenya (Vintage 1962).*
2. ***Mukurwe Wa Nyagathanga*** - Google searches.
3. My parents.