

For a Man Who Never Dies and Who Eats His Own: Revival of Clan in Local Communities of the Îgembe in Kenya

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I. Introduction

On Thursday, 11 August 2016, I observed a collective cursing ceremony (Case 1) in Mwithûne village¹⁾ of the Kîrîmampio Location in the northeastern part of the Îgembe Southeast Division²⁾ of Meru County in the Kenyan central highlands. The event was organised by the Antûambui clan³⁾, and attended by its members, their neighbours, their *îchiaro* men⁴⁾, and administrative officers. People in the clan community had experienced various misfortunes and problems they thought were caused by unknown ill-wishers or sorcerers hiding in their neighbourhood. The aim of cursing was to remove all these sources of harm from the village.

The cursing ceremony involved killing and burning a sacrificial sheep (ewe) of a single colour (*mwîîri yûmwe*)⁵⁾, after which every person in the neighbourhood was required to prove his/her innocence of bringing harm to the village by jumping over the body of the dead animal. This ceremony was called *ûtaara ngeere* in the Kîmîîrû language. On 11 August, I watched as a small nulliparous ewe (*kamwati*)—all of whose orifices (*tûkutho*) had been stitched up⁶⁾—was wrapped in dried banana leaves (*ndaara*), tied with grass fibre ropes (*mîrii*), and placed in a fire in front of the people who were attending the ceremony. Some people cursed the body in the fire, while others sang and danced in groups. While the corpse was being burnt to ashes, *îchiaro* men interrogated every person in attendance (see note 4) as to whether he/she practiced witchcraft. After replying ‘no’, each person was required to jump over the sheep’s remains, to prove his/her innocence in the presence of the *îchiaro* men.

All the people who lived in the neighbourhood were informed in advance that with the exception of pregnant women or young children, everyone was obliged to attend the ceremony, and any person who failed to attend might be regarded as a suspect responsible for misfortunes and damages that had been reported in the community. They were also required to surrender, bring, or report any suspicious items known to be in someone’s personal possession or found in their neighbourhood, to elders designated as *îchiaro* men, before jumping over the sheep. Interestingly, some people did bring different items such as accessories or animal horns that they thought might be regarded as something harmful to themselves and their neighbours.⁷⁾

As I describe in this paper, the *ûtaara ngeere* collective cursing is an organised event that must involve all members of a concerned clan community, and thus requires strong leadership.

It may only work temporarily for remedial purposes, or it may entail the clan's revival, after which it is eligible to become a permanent welfare group. This paper observes that the above Antûambui clan community experienced a revival of clanship while organising the collective cursing, and after it had been completed. On the other hand, the Anjarû and Antûambeti clans in the neighbouring Athîrû Gaiti Location in the same Îgembe Southeast Division organised two cases of *ûtaara ngeere* in May 2016 (Case 2) and September 2015 (Case 3) respectively, but only for remedial purposes.

In my previous paper on homicide compensation in Mûringene village⁸⁾ (Ishida 2017), I observed that the agnatic clan of Athimba had continued to develop its clanship over the previous fifteen years—while other people in the Îgembe community had become less conscious of their clanship after the land distribution process was completed in the early 2000s—and in this regard the Athimba clan in the Mûringene village was, in my observation, an exception. However, as this paper illustrates, other clans in the Îgembe Southeast Division began to enhance their governance arrangements in the changing socio-political environment that developed under the new leadership of the Mîrîti age group⁹⁾. The revival of clanship in Mwithûne village was consonant with the community-policing programme initiated by the government, which aimed to enhance security at the grass roots, and also, it seems, to foster political autonomy in local communities. This paper shows how the Antûambui clan would be 'a man who never dies', and 'a man who eats his own'—with reference to the common greeting used to address all members of a clan community as one¹⁰⁾. For comparative purposes, this paper also observes another revival attempt in the Akachiû clan in the same Kîrimampio Location (Case 4).

II. *Ûtaara Ngeere* on 11 August 2016: Case 1

At the cursing meeting on 11 August 2016 in Mwithûne village, the host Antûambui clan invited sixteen elders, called '*îchiaro* men' hereafter in this paper, each of whom had reciprocal *îchiaro* counterpart(s) living in the clan community, such as Antûambui clan agnates, their wives, or migrants from a clan with a different clan origin. In another case of group cursing observed in Mûringene village in September 2012 (Ishida 2014), the host invited six *îchiaro* men to attend the meeting. The two cases were not only different in terms of the number of *îchiaro* men who were invited, but in their purposes; While the Mûringene's case was intended to solve problems within a single family, the Antûambui's case was intended to restore peace in the entire village of Mwithûne—which had many more inhabitants. Nevertheless, the two cases were similar in the sense that *îchiaro* men were selected with due consideration given to the biological status of every member of the community in question. Theoretically speaking, every woman who had married into the Antûambui clan of Mwithûne village, for example, should ideally be interrogated as to whether or not she had any harmful items by her biological (her natal clan's) *îchiaro* man,

rather than by her husband's *îchiaro* counterpart. This local theory of biological determinism (Ishida 2014) was also applied to migrants in the community.

People of the Antûambui clan consulted well-informed elders, who figured out the biological status of every member in the village, to help them decide who should be invited to attend in the capacity of *îchiaro* men. Table 1 provides the list of the *îchiaro* men who attended the 11 August ceremony, which was slightly different from an earlier one made in the consultation with the elders. Two men from the Akinying'a clan visited the village as *îchiaro* to Antûambui, while the others were invited to serve as *îchiaro* for their wives and migrants with different clan origins.

Table 1. *Îchiaro* men invited on 11 August 2016

No	Invited <i>îchiaro</i> men (age-group)	Clan (village)	<i>Îchiaro</i> counterparts in Mwithûne village
1	Kilaku (Lubetaa)	Akinying'a (Gitûra)	Antûambui
2	Kibwî (Ratanya)	Akinying'a (Kîrimene)	Antûambui
3	Ntuala (Lubetaa)	Anjarû (Anjarû)	Akachiû
4	Mûroki (Lubetaa)	Naathû (K.K)	Akachiû
5	Francis (Mîrîti)	Antûamboa (Anchenge)	Akinying'a
6	Ntonjira (Lubetaa)	Antûamboa (Anchenge)	Akinying'a
7	M'Mauta (Ratanya)	Akachiû (Nthare)	Anjarû, Airi [Antûanthama]
8	M'Kiarao (Ratanya)	Akachiû (Nthare)	Anjarû, Airi
9	Mûrukû (Lubetaa)	Ankûrani (Kîthetu)	Antûborii
10	M'lkîara (Michûbû)	Antûamauna (Antûbochiû)	Airi
11	Karea (Lubetaa)	Andûune (Gitûra)	Athimba
12	Kabeeria (Ratanya)	Antûamûti (Antûbakîiru)	Antûambeti
13	Nchûngi (Michûbû)	Andaarû (Amung'enti)	Antûamûti
14	Kobia (Mîrîti)	Antûbakîthoro (Amung'enti)	Amwari, Antûambeti
15	Kairui (Michûbû)	Antûamwai (Antûbochiû)	Bwethaa, Atunebaarûu, Anjarû
16	Mûkumu (Ratanya)	Antûamwai (Antûbochiû)	Amwaa

According to James, the clan secretary, the Antûambui clan had accommodated and initiated a migrant family with Antûborii clan origins into its village/clan community in the 1950s. The father of the Îthaliî age group from the Antûambui clan had been the assistant chief of the then Thaichû Sublocation (the present Îgembe Southeast Division) under colonial administration in the late 1950s, while his successor was from the migrant family just mentioned with the Antûborii origin. The federation of the two clans under the Antûambui name has grown over the years to form the current political leadership of the village and the surrounding area.

Three out of sixteen invited *îchiaro* men, Kibwî [2] of the Ratanya age group from the Akinying'a clan, Francis [5] of the Mîrîti age group from the Antûamboa clan, and Mûrukû [9] of the Lubetaa age group from the Ankûrani clan, assumed leading roles in the day's events. While Kibwî [2] and Francis [5] were members of the Njûriincheke council of elders¹¹⁾, Mûrukû [9], on the other hand, was not. Francis and Kibwî led collective cursing in

the *kwiita rwii* style to conclude the day's events, as described below. Mûrukû refused to be involved in any cursing, because of his Christian faith and profession as a Methodist preacher. He was, nevertheless, invited as an *îchiaro* to the Antûborii clan, and also as one of the above three *îchiaro* leaders, because of his reputation as an upright man and an excellent speaker. Mûrukû only made remarks at the opening ceremony, and then led a prayer to bring back the people who had left the community. He left the village before the other *îchiaro* men started the cursing ceremony by placing the sheep on the fire.

At 10:40 on that day, one hour before beginning the opening ceremony, Kîbwî, together with several other members of the Njûriîncheke council, began stitching up the orifices of the sacrificial sheep. While this was happening out of public view, Francis and some other *îchiaro* men reviewed all the troubles that had been reported by residents to identify which were caused by sorcery or witchcraft, and which were not, since only those caused by witchcraft were to be solved by collective cursing on that day. Table 2 shows the list of 155 alleged cases of witchcraft brought forward by 63 residents. The list had been compiled in advance by clan officials, who interviewed the residents, and then took it to Francis and other *îchiaro* men for inspection. They examined all the claims to identify witchcraft-related cases, and established that 127 cases out of the 155 total complaints were witchcraft-related. Among 27 cases of family member's deaths, for example, they established that 25 cases were witchcraft-related deaths, while the other two were not, since they had been caused by alcoholism and suicide, respectively. Of the five alleged cases of family breakdown caused by alcoholism, four were dismissed. It seems that alcoholism was not viewed as the outcome of a malicious attack by sorcerers, but as a problem that each one had a responsibility to overcome independently. Most cases of theft were not considered as issues that could be solved by cursing, because stealing or unauthorised use or consumption of *mîraa*, livestock, utensils, and other items of daily use most likely occurred within the same neighbourhood. Accordingly, Francis and other *îchiaro* men concluded that they should not curse the ones who 'stole' those missing items. Otherwise, people might curse and harm, without their knowledge, their own family members or close relatives, who might just have 'borrowed' the missing items in question.

The opening ceremony began at 11:40 a.m. with the clan chairman's greetings, which were followed by remarks made by administrative officers that included the chief and assistant chiefs. Mûrukû [9] began speaking as an *îchiaro* representative at 12:10 p.m. His speech lasted about fifteen minutes. He explained his understanding of the purpose of the meeting from his Christian point of view, and at the same time explained that he would not take part in the cursing work. The following quotation is taken from his greetings and speech. The speech was an on-going dialogue, as every comment received either a verbal response or clapping from audience, as shown below.



Figure 1. *Íchiaro* men inspect the list of complaints
[All photos taken by the author, unless otherwise noted]

Dialogue 1. An *íchiaro* man's opening remarks with responses from the audience

Mûrukû [9]: Greetings, all our chiefs, and all the members of this clan. We are in a place for sacrifice (*tûrî kiongwane*), and we are blessed. [All: Yes] Praise the Lord. [All: Amen] We want to praise God because he's the one who makes us to be alive. So, we are supposed to be praising God when we go for sacrifice (*kiongwana*). Now I have come, but there was something I told my brothers (*atanoba*) who called me. I told them this. I won't jump over the sheep, because I am a Christian and I do preach. I told them this. I won't hold any cursing plants (*maroo*) before going back to the dais to preach. But all other things like witchcraft and the one who will be left within the bush, let him stay with it. We shall stay because we don't want people to die, children to refuse school, or their works to become bad. If you build a house that becomes smart, then the sorcerer comes at the night and he goes around the house, and it becomes dormant and then rats (*mbîa*) start staying there. Would you like it? [All: No] Now children of our people want to be educated more. Look like our leaders here. If they didn't go to school as they were destroyed by sorcerers, who shall be with us to teach us a good thing like this? [All: Nobody] If you are taken to an office, a computer is kept there, you are told to operate it, and you're thought to be the one who knows about it, but you don't know, can you do it? [All: You can't] Now sorcerers are doing a very dirty job (*ngûi imbû*). Let's get united today. If you're a sorcerer, even if you throw our witchcraft today, you will get it back again. All those we shall curse. [All clapping] You have come today, but if you have

hidden something, and later you do the same kind of work, we shall curse, even if you are not here. We shall curse that useless work (*ngûi chia ûtheri*). [All clapping] Because God is not seen, Balaam used to curse witches, and he didn't do any other kind of work. Balak saw the people of Israel being blessed very much and he was left jealous of them, and he told Balaam to come and curse the Israelites without no course, and they have done nothing. Now the sorcerer feels jealous of someone's child, feels jealous of leaders, jealous of those blessed with business. He (she) is always a servant of the devil (*mûraika wa nkoma*). [All clapping] Now we could do this kind of work. God is helping us. The children shall go to school and God will open their job because God gives every person his presents, but the devil of witchcraft is always interrupting people. Now my name is Joseph Mûrukû. Now respect has got a good reputation, but sorcerers don't have respect. They have good talks and very clean mouth. [All clapping: It's true!] Sorcerers look like prostitutes, because they don't hate any person, but in their hearts, there is a total darkness (*nkorone ni kiundu*). [All clapping] They will come at night for you. [All clapping] (...) At three o'clock there are two types of people. The ones who wake up with a drum (*ndarama*) is to fight against those who wake up naked, who are devil. Devil walks naked without clothes. (All laughing and clapping) For sorcerers, there're magic medicines for people, which they usually have within their pockets. Now for young men, there's a thing they are familiar with¹²⁾. There's a competition in business, but don't go and look for that to protect you with. It's only God who protects you. Let you be protected by God from today. [All clapping] I am saying this. I won't jump over the sheep or hold cursing plants. [His speech continues]

After Mûrukû's speech, clan officials assembled all the *îchiaro* men, except those who assumed responsibility for the sacrificial sheep, to stand in line, and asked all the people to face the sacred mountain of Nyambene in prayer, to bring back the people who had left the community. This prayer was also led by Mûrukû. All the people who followed him raised their hands, beckoned, and addressed each of the missing persons by saying 'just come' (Fig. 2). All the *îchiaro* men stood on one leg during the prayer¹³⁾. The prayer began at 12:26, and continued for about ten minutes.



Figure 2. The prayer to take back missing people

Dialogue 2. An *ichiaro* man leading the audience in prayers

Mûrukû [9]: The God (*Ngai*) of Israel. The God of Isaac. The God of Jacob. We are praying on this day today. The one who did great things and sent his sons and he was crucified in the cross because of us. [All: God (*Ngai*)] This is a clan, those who have gathered here. [All: God] Because of the people who are making others mad, [All: God] witchcraft, [All: God] and they make children of other people mad so that they can't be able to get education. [All: God] Now God, as for us here we don't have strength (*inya*). [All: God] God, you are there from the beginning. [All: God] You are the one who created this clan. [All: God] You're the one who created *ichiaro*. [All: God] But for witches you fight with them from heaven. [All: God] Even if you sent devil down here, [All: God] but you sent a winner down here. [All: God] He was Jesus Christ, who fought for us. [All: God] We don't have any debt. [All: God] That's why we have gathered here as clan to curse this act. [All: God] Give us strength. [All: God] Some of our people have gone. [All: God] That's why we are gathering here and felt mercy. Now we know it's you alone, you have strength. [All: God] Now we are calling them back to come to the clan. [All: God] Strong people can be seen in this clan. [All: God] Let them not get lost far and even the offspring of the clan not get lost far. [All: God] Now, Kathure, we shall call her twice. Ooh Kathure... [All: Ooh Kathure, ooh Kathure] Kathure, you are being called by the clan. Just come, even if it is for your richness (*înoru*)¹⁴. Just come, even if you're in a shop. Just come, even if you were kidnapped. Just come. Don't lose your way.

Just come. Now come by the strength of God. The clan is waiting for you. Just come. Now, Kathure is coming. [Ululation (*nkemi*) by all the people]

After the above prayer, Mûrukû left the village. At 12:37 the other *îchiaro* men placed the sheep on fire that had been lit in the middle of the road. People began to throw cursing plants on the body of the animal in the fire, and one after another uttered cursing words against unknown sorcerer(s) such as, 'Let him/her die like that!' 'Let him/her burst like the sheep!' or 'Let him/her be burnt like the sheep!' while others sang in groups. When the flames began to ebb, people poured paraffin on them to keep the fire going. Some people argued that sorcerers were the ones who tried to kill the fire.



Figure 3. People throwing cursing plants into fire

- Song 1: *Yîi múroi arîbwaa ngeere akaúra yîi múroi arîbwaa ngeere...*
When the sorcerer hears of a sheep, he gets lost. When the sorcerer hears of a sheep...
- Song 2: *Yîi múroi tí weetù ní mpangaa eteerwe. Tûmwîtîra lûrûngû arîwêe mûthûmba jwa maúrú. Yîi, oo îîi, yîi íooí...*
Yes, the sorcerer is not ours, is a bad omen, which was thrown away. We have judged and cursed him to be loitering with his own legs.
- Song 3: *Aroi nîi beerwe bakaura rûûi nîrûkunda. Nî beerwe naa ngeere. Mûroi nî eerwe akaura rûûi nîrûkunda. Nî eerwe na ngeere. Nî eerwe na Baibû.*
Let the sorcerers be told if they cross a river, I won't take. Let them be told by use of sheep. Let the sorcerer be told if he crosses a river, I won't take. Let him be told by use of sheep. Let him be told by use of Bible.



Figure 4. The sacrificed sheep being exposed in the abated fire

At 13:13 the people were told to stop cursing and singing and to form a queue for individual interrogations by the *îchiaro* men, after which they would jump over the sheep. One after another, every person was asked to hold the piece of a cursing plant given to them by the *îchiaro* men, and then asked questions such as those noted below. After declaring before the *îchiaro* men that he or she never possessed witchcraft or any harmful items, each person was finally allowed to step over the remains of the sheep. A group of invited *îchiaro* men assumed the roles of interrogators, but their number was not large enough to fulfil the preferred requirements for biological determinism; theoretically speaking, Antûborii people, for example, should be interrogated by their proper or biological *îchiaro* from Ankûrani (see Table 1). However, since Mûrukû [9], the representative of his clan, had already left the village, *îchiaro* men with a different clan origin had to interrogate Antûborii clan members. It seemed, however, that the people did not rigidly adhere to the notion of biological determinism. The *îchiaro* men did interrogate people one by one, without identifying the clan affiliation of each individual. That is, each interrogator did not necessarily represent a proper *îchiaro* to a particular clan(s) in a narrow sense, but rather an *îchiaro* in a generalised sense. The process of interrogating individuals took about one and one-half hours, and the last person was interrogated at 14:48.

Dialogue 3. Interrogation by *mwîchiaro* (an *îchiaro* man): Example 1

Mwîchiaro: Bring the witchcraft. Have you seen love potion? Bring the strong witchcraft (*ithitû*¹⁵). Don't you have something to say? Even your eyes have not seen it?

Examinee: No.

Mwîchiaro: Throw your cursing plant and pass.

Dialogue 4. Interrogation by *mwíchiaro*: Example 2

Mwíchiaro: Bring charms, even your love potion. Have you seen it? Even the one for your business?

Examinee: No.

Mwíchiaro: Are you fearing God?

Examinee: Yes.

Mwíchiaro: Just pass over here.



Figure 5. People being interrogated by *íchiaro* men



Figure 6. People in a queue waiting for their swearing before *íchiaro*

At 14:50, by which time the sheep had been reduced to ashes, all the *îchiaro* men again assembled near the remains of the animal, which by then was surrounded by all the people who had already been tested. As noted above, Francis, who was now representing all the *îchiaro* men, led the collective cursing against all the unidentified perpetrators in the *kwiita rwîi* style¹⁶ to conclude that day's meeting. James, the clan secretary, read the list of victims in the alleged cases of witchcraft that had previously been approved as reasonable claims by Francis aloud, after which the three *îchiaro* men—Kobia [14], Kîbwî [2], and Francis [5]—uttered cursing words together (see Table 1).

Dialogue 5. Collective cursing in the *kwiita rwîi* style

James: Greetings, clan. Greetings, a person who never dies. Greetings, a person who eats his own. Greetings, a person who shoots without causing any harms.¹⁷ Now listen. I believe, as we wrote down (the claim list), we can't leave them behind. Now what we are going to do is this. We won't read each and every person's name, because we would not sleep (spend the night) here. It is because we know the issues of our people like our people who were killed, and because we don't know the course of death. As our advisors have heard everything from us, we shall follow what they say. Then, for those who go round our homestead with wicked ways, we shall leave them here. Those who plant harmful items in our shamba, we shall curse them. That's the way we should go and also those who throw witches into our homestead also shall be cursed. The first thing we want to start with... Where are the elders we were with?

An elder: Where are our brothers, please?

Îchiaro men: We are here.

An elder: Let them come in front here.

Another elder: Please give space for them. [Addressing people]

Francis [5]: Greetings, clan. Greetings again. Now we shall lead you like this. We are your *gîchumi*¹⁸ who have come to kill those who kill you. Do you see us? Do you know us? [All: No] Have you ever seen us in your place again? [All: No] Now we are coming for [cursing] the one who kills a person with a stolen club (*nchuuma ya wamba*)¹⁹ and witches, or the one who hides oneself in darkness. Now it's the person we have come to kill. Now for ourselves, we shall start with those ones who are killed completely then you meet a person already dead. We shall start cursing the secrecy of killing others in the darkness. Now, Mr James, start telling us!

James: Let's start with the ones who were killed... [James carefully read out the list of the victims in alleged cases of witchcraft] The one who killed husband to A (name of a person), the one who killed husband to B, the one who killed C, the one who knows what killed D, the one who killed children of E, and the one

who killed two children of F.

- An elder: My two children were killed in the year 2013. One was known as G and the other killed in July was known as H. The one who killed eight people of I's family and also others, we don't know. Now we should put them together and curse them. We also curse the one who killed children of J, K, L, and M.
- Kobia [14]: Don't I see nobody rubbing palms?²⁰ [The speaker and all the attendants start rubbing their palms] I will know you belong to that team, the ones who finish the clan. Yes, let him go round with the sun, the one who doesn't want to see the prosperity of this clan and who hides himself at night. [All: Yes] Yes, his seeds of boys and girls, let them finish there. [All for a single clap (*kwiita rwii*; see note 16)] Now step him on the ground. [All: Uuii] Now we finished that.
- James: Greetings, clan. Greetings again. Now we have come for the one who goes round other people's homesteads at night with witchcraft or what? [All: With witchcraft] Now rub your palms. [The speaker and all the attendants start rubbing their palms] Now the one who goes round other people's homesteads at night, or plants witches at other people's homesteads at night, or plants witches at other people's shamba, or hides himself at night to cause harm or hides himself at night to harm advisor, his seeds, his cows, boys and girls, his beehives, his millet, let it be cut like this! [All clap]
- Kibwī [2]: Greetings, clan. Greetings again. Where we are going now is the one who makes other people mad. [All: Yes] Now I want everyone to rub his (her) palms. [The speaker and all the attendants start rubbing their palms] Now let someone else say. The one who goes round other people's homesteads at night, and the one who confuses children of other people when being at school, his seeds of boys and girls should perish here! [All clap]
- Francis [5]: There're some people who make other people to live in hospital because of sickness. Now listen, here we are going, we are going with two things. The one who feels jealous of someone's cow, he goes and meets it on the road grazing, or he sees where the grasses are cut, and he goes and plants something bad so that cow can die, or the one who looks for some witches and hides, so that he takes back because we have left here, so that he can make people sick and always on the hospital way because of sickness. He is fearing to die and we want to finish him here. Let us finish him. Rub your palms. [The speaker and all the attendants start rubbing their palms] The one who finishes people and makes them live in hospital and making them get lost, and the one who feels jealous of the neighbour's cow, and the cow doesn't talk, or he cuts the rope of a cow, so that it can go to the neighbour's shamba so that they can have cases, his seeds, his cows, his girls and boys, his beehives, let them finish here. [All clap]
- Is there anything? Those who do business with witches so that they destroy other

people's business. Do you want the person set with the sun and this animal which is here? The one who gives the children bhang so that they can destroy the school instead of the child getting education and the father goes hungry. Now I say, let him take his item (bhang) alone. I want us to rub our palms for anyone with his witchcraft to be put down and we should kick him. When we finish rubbing our palms and clap, we shall step on him twice the way we do against the devil with our legs. [All clap once and step twice]

Now, Mr. Chairman, you know why we are called. We don't leave a person with a problem. The reason why we came here is to unify the clan and we want the clan to stay with peace. Chairman, there's something which has come and I don't want to be disturbed again. Every child is here or even thieves are here. The one whom we shall leave in the bush is the thief without eyes. No members of the clan shall guard *mĩraa* shamba. Do you hear me, *gĩchumi*? [All *ĩchiaro* men: Yes, we shall guard.] We have been told when we leave here every person here who have seen with eyes. If there's a feeling (*mwithũa*) you feel, don't feel it for seven days from today²¹). I want us to clap the last clap. The last clap and that's the end. Now let me show you I want all the *gĩchumi* to come forward here. Now the clan wants to clap against the one who might go back and get witches when we leave here. [All: Yes] Now rub your palms. The one who has refused to give us witchcraft, and if he (she) get it back, his seeds of boys and girls, his cow, his millet, his sorghum, let it be like this! [All clap]



Figure 7. Collective cursing in the *kwiita rwĩ* style

The collective cursing in the *kwiita rwii* style was concluded at 15:20, and all the invited *ichiaro* men identified themselves by name, clan affiliation, and village of residence. I was also asked to introduce myself and explain why I was observing the ceremony. Then, the meeting was over. Some of those who attended proposed a closing prayer, but they were told that cursing (*kuruma*) and blessings (*kutharima*) should not occur together, because prayer was for purposes of blessings, and any prayer would adulterate the power of their curses.

III. Clan Revival in Mwithûne village

The Antûambui clan that organised the *ûtaara ngeere* meeting just described had its first meeting on 1 July 2016, with 55 people in attendance, at the homestead of one of the clan members. Since then, the clan has continued having general meetings on the last Friday of every month, and committee meetings every Thursday, during which time they share knowledge with each other, address different agenda items that include settling disputes and other problems in their neighbourhood, and share information. The clan's revival as an organised social group no doubt requires administrative competence from its officials to achieve sustainable management. The massive effort of recording minutes—a prerequisite for having the clan registered as a welfare group at a relevant government office—has been assumed by James, the secretary. Since its first meeting on 1 July 2016, they have heard various dispute cases that include land boundary disputes, family disputes, *mîraa* theft cases, property damage, assaults, incriminations of neighbours, and insults. James, the secretary, records the proceedings of case hearings, including statements by the complainants, the defendants, and their witnesses, as well as the rulings made by the clan's committee members. The records are all written in English using a standardised format, which is only possible due to his devoted efforts and competence in this line of work.

The first meeting on 1 July 2016 lasted three hours. First, an election was held to appoint clan officials who included the chairman, vice chairman, secretary, and treasurer. Then, participants discussed all the agenda items for that day. They were very concerned about the security improvements needed in their neighbourhood, such as enhancing the role of the local security committees appointed by administrative chiefs to prevent *mîraa* theft, terrorism, drug abuse, the production of illicit brew, and child abuse. Clan members also discussed their plan to organise *ûtaara ngeere* to enhance unity within the community, and to heal 'victims' psychological wounds, as some people understood that their misfortunes and losses had been caused by witchcraft practiced by their neighbours. To organise a *ûtaara ngeere*, the clan decided to require each adult male to contribute 200 shillings and each female to contribute 100 shillings.

The second meeting was held on 15 July, and 167 members attended. It also lasted about three hours. First, the treasurer reported that they had so far collected 25,290 shillings from clan members. Second, an election of clan committee members was held to strengthen the

clan's executive body. Ten committee members elected on that day included three women, two men of the Bwantai age group, five men of the Mîrîti age group, and two men of the Lubetaa age group. Third, the clan decided to punish those who did not attend the meeting. Fourth, two invited advisers from the Anjarû clan described their experiences of *ûtaara ngeere*, which was organised on Saturday, 28 May 2016 (Case 2). One of the two advisers said that many of their community members did attend the clan meeting to surrender charms in their possession. The other advisor added that the clan should work together with the government administration. Receiving this advice, the clan chairman of Antûambui told the members that anybody who had used witchcraft or any harmful items could surrender these items on the night before their *ûtaara ngeere*. The next clan meeting was scheduled for Friday, 29 July 2016, with a committee meeting set for Friday, 22 July 2016. The day for the committee meeting was later changed to Thursday, 21 July.

The fifteen clan-committee members—including chairman, secretary, and treasurer—attended the committee meeting on Thursday, 21 July to discuss their plan to organise a *ûtaara ngeere*. Three elders, including M'Imaana [17] (see the following two sections), M'Mauta [7] (also see the following sections), and Nchebere of the Lubetaa age group from the Akinying'a clan, were invited as advisors on the indigenous law of the Îgembe regarding the process. The first agenda item was to make a list of the *îchiaro* clans to be invited to the *ûtaara ngeere* collective cursing. The advisors found that people of thirteen clan origins lived in Mwithûne village, and that they should consider all the residents' biological affiliations to confirm the complete list of *îchiaro* clans to be invited. The clan treasurer reported that the clan had so far collected 31,090 Kenyan Shillings from clan members, and the committee tallied their budgetary allocations as follows. A he-goat for the clan was to be slaughtered for a feast with clan members and invited *îchiaro* men on the day previous to the collective cursing. Allowance for the messengers shown below was made for clan members who were going to visit *îchiaro* men to convey a formal invitation.

A he-goat for a clan	10,000 (Kenyan shillings)
A sheep for sacrifice	4,000
Allowance for advisors	200 each (600 total for three advisors)
Allowance for messengers	500 each (5,500 total for eleven messengers)
Committee allowance	200 each (3,000 total for fifteen committee members)
Total expenditure	23,100

Prior to the general meeting scheduled for Friday, 29 July, another committee meeting was organised and attended by fourteen committee members. They agreed that every invited *îchiaro* man should be given 700 shillings that included their transportation costs. An elder who had been told to find a sheep for sacrifice reported that the sheep cost 4,500 shillings, which was 500 shillings above the allocated budget. Other members who had been appointed

as messengers reported that they had paid money as honorariums to *ichiaro* men when they visited their homesteads. All those members were refunded the money they had spent. The chairman said that not only clan members who lived in the neighbourhood, but also members who lived in other villages, should contribute money (200 shillings for male members and 100 shillings for female members). The chairman also said that their daughters who been married to men in neighbouring clans should also contribute. The treasurer added that their clan should pay 1,000 shillings to obtain a horn that would be blown and used to summon clan members to assemble²²⁾ on the day of the *ûtaara ngeere*. Another agenda item that was addressed at the meeting concerned clan members who went missing for unknown reasons. The committee members agreed that they should make a list of those missing persons for the *ichiaro* men, who would call them back on the day of the *ûtaara ngeere* (see Dialogue 2 shown above). Two committee members described several cases they had witnessed, in which missing people had come back after being called back by clan members.



Figure 8. A horn blown on 11 August 2016 to summon clan members

At the third general meeting held on 29 July 2016, 364 members attended, of which 172 were male, and 192 were female. The third meeting again lasted about three hours. As the first agenda item of the meeting, some members asked clan officials how many days the *ichiaro* men would stay in the village to enable people with harmful charms to surrender their items, and what other arrangements had been made. A clan official answered that a sheep had been readied for sacrifice, and that the *ichiaro* men would not stay more than two days for various reasons: first, it would not take many days for people to surrender all harmful items; second, a longer stay of the *ichiaro* men would cost a large amount of money; and prolonged and close interaction with *ichiaro* men such as that involved in sharing food and water was

not preferable as it would adulterate their power. The chairman explained that the invited *ichiaro* men would arrive on the day before the ceremony, and that any people who had harmful charms should surrender witchcraft items on the day they arrived. As the second agenda item, the chairman announced that the *ûtaara ngeere* was fixed for 11 August 2016. After addressing the above issues, the meeting was opened up to those willing to speak. One of the elders said that their clan had now broken its long-standing dormancy to reinvigorate, and asked all members to help the clan remain active. Another elder advised that only the designated Njûriincheke elders—who also came to the host community as *ichiaro*—should receive charms from those willing to surrender them, since ordinary people never knew how to handle harmful items in the proper way. The chairman told all the clan members to report the cases they wanted to have cursed to the secretary on the day of *ûtaara ngeere*. This announcement encouraged people to bring the troubles they considered as being witchcraft-related, and the secretary prepared the list of 155 alleged witchcraft cases (see Table 2). The chairman also announced that all the missing people should be identified in advance, as the clan would call them back on that day.

The Antûambui clan performed *ûtaara ngeere* on 11 August 2016 as planned at the clan meeting. The collective cursing aimed to seek remedies for different misfortunes, damages, and other problems caused by unknown ill-wishers or sorcerers hiding in their neighbourhood, and it was not able to solve all the sufferings they had experienced. The community people were, in other words, not only fighting witchcraft, but also problems related to the production and consumption of illicit brew, drug abuse, *mîraa* theft, and gambling. Some of the cases reported by clan members were not addressed in the *ûtaara ngeere* cursing, as they were not considered witchcraft-related matters (see Table 2). Accordingly, the clan heard and settled different cases and claims filed by community members.

Since a detailed analysis of the clan's case hearings requires another paper, I will describe only one case here, to clarify the significance of a clan revival in a local social context. This case involved a dispute between two women, X and Y, both of which lived in Mwithûne village. X (the complainant) stated that Y (the defendant) had unreasonably prophesied the death of one of her children. X then took the matter of Y's unreasonable prophecy to the clan, and the clan summoned Y for investigation. Y, however, failed to appear at the clan meeting. X later read in a public notice that the Njûriincheke council of elders had accepted Y's application for *kithili* against anyone who incriminated her (Y) as a sorcerer. The clan immediately issued a letter addressed to the Njûriincheke council of elders asking them to dismiss Y's case for *kithili*, as it had not been filed using the proper process, nor had it been filed on reasonable grounds. The clan explained in the letter that they had already performed a *ûtaara ngeere* to curse all the ill-wishers in the community, and that Y was one of the irresponsible persons who had refused to jump over the sheep. Y's case for *kithili* was then dismissed. Finally, Y accepted the ruling of clan, which was entered after an *ex parte* hearing of X's case, to take an oath before her own *ichiaro*, and to pay a fine called *thiira* and

mukongoro, of about 12,000 shillings, for repeatedly dishonouring the clan's summons, and for filing a case for unlawful *kithili* at the Njûriincheke council.

Even before this case had occurred between X and Y, there had been rumours in the neighbourhood that associated Y with witchcraft. It was said, for example, that one day a suspicious woman was found prowling around the village. People in the neighbourhood asked her where she was from. She answered that she came from Kíegoí, but she could not properly name the area chief in her reply to another question. Neither did she have any documents to confirm her identity. They decided to escort her to the main road that led to her destination. On the way, however, she suddenly disappeared at a certain place, just in front of Y's residence. People presumed that the woman was a ghost associated with Y, a 'sorcerer'. To make matters worse, on the day of the *ûtaara ngeere* in their village, as noted above, Y did not turn up to jump over the sheep. Then, a rumour began circulating among community members that Y had refused to jump over the sheep because she secretly possessed witchcraft items.

As this case and Case 1, which was described earlier shows, the clan as a social group can mobilise its knowledge and communication network to take organised approaches to the Njûriincheke council of elders and to *îchiaro* men with different clan origins. The revival of the clan thus meets the local need for accessible doors for claimants, as it instructs people in how to develop their claims. It is also consonant with the mandate of the state government for local or grass-roots administration, which will be discussed in the last section of this paper.

IV. Sharing Knowledge about *Ûtaara Ngeere* in Neighbouring Communities

After the *ûtaara ngeere* in Mwithûne village, another village in Gîtûra, where Karea [11] came from, organised a *ûtaara ngeere*. Some of the officials from the Antûambui clan—together with their chief advisors such as Kîbwî [2]—were invited to attend and share their experiences and knowledge. I have observed that knowledge-sharing of this kind contributes to the development of the Ígembe's common law. This section describes how clans of different origins within the Ígembe region have shared their knowledge and experiences with each other.

Two months before the *ûtaara ngeere* in Mwithûne village, the Anjarû clan organised its own *ûtaara ngeere* (Case 2) on 28 May 2016, in a village named after the same clan. The village was close to the largest commercial and administrative centre in the Ígembe Southeast. Furthermore, the Antûambeti clan also organised its *ûtaara ngeere* (Case 3) in September 2015, in another village in Antûbakîrû, as several other clans had done in the past ten years.



Figure 9. A man swearing before the *íchiaro* on 28 May 2016 in Anjarû

[This photo courtesy of Mr. M. Kobia]

I interviewed Kaíyo, the chairman of the Anjarû clan, about their experiences with the *ûtaara ngeere* that had been performed on 28 May 2016, one month before the first clan meeting in the Antûambui community. The Antûambui clan, as noted above, invited him and another elder to attend their second meeting on 15 July, to seek advice based on their previous experiences in the Anjarû community. Kaíyo, who is a man of the Lubetaa age-group and is knowledgeable of his clan's history, has had the experience of organising a *ûtaara ngeere* twice in his community over the past ten years, including the first one he organised in the late 2000s (the date is not clearly remembered), and the second one in May 2016. In his speech at the Antûambui clan meeting, since he was known in the community as the pastor of a Christian church, he first noted that there was no conflict between the Kimîrû customs and Christianity, and gave several reasons for his interpretation. He also noted that many of their community members did attend the clan meeting to surrender charms in their possession before the day on which they jumped over the sheep. He gave the example of a person who was said to have surrendered a harmful item in his possession for which he had paid about 300,000 shillings²³. Kaíyo and another elder also shared their experiences and knowledge with members of the Antûambui clan.

In my interview with him, Kaíyo recalled the names and clan affiliations of the *íchiaro* men invited to their second *ûtaara ngeere* on 28 May 2016 (see Table 3). When they finalized the invitation list for the *íchiaro* men during their preparations for the collective cursing, Kaíyo and other officials of the Anjarû clan had considered the biological status of the people in their neighbourhood, as their followers in Antûambui had done. In other words, they clarified the biological clan affiliations of all the inhabitants in their village community,

including the agnatic members of the clan, as well as their wives, and migrants with different clan origins.

Table 3. *Íchiaro* men invited on 28 May 2016

No	Invited <i>íchiaro</i> men (age-group)	Clan (village)	<i>Íchiaro</i> counterparts in Mwithúne village
17	M'Imaana (Míchúbú)	Akachiú (Nthare)	Anjarú and Aíri
18	Kamundí (Ratanya)	Antúbalínkí (Kíraone)	Anjarú
19	Kabeeria (Lubetaa)	Aíri (Amung'enti)	Anjarú, Bwethaa
20	Kíreere (Lubetaa)	Antúambeti (Antúbakífrú)	Antúamúti
2	Kíbwí (Ratanya)	Akinying'a (Kírímene)	Antúambui
21	M'Múkaria (Míchúbú)	Antúambui (Kírímampio)	Akinying'a
22	Kúbai (Lubetaa)	Athimba (Nkaria)	Andúúne
23	Mbiti (Mírítí)	Andúúne (Gítúra)	Athimba
24	Reuben (Mírítí)	Antúbakíthoro (Kírímene)	Amwari
9	Múrukú (Lubetaa)	Ankúrani (Kíthetu)	Antúborii
25	Ntaamú (Ratanya)	Irotia (Kírímene)	Akíthíí
26	Ntorúru (Lubetaa)	Ncheme (Gíteretu)	Amunjú
27	Kíríambúri (Ratanya)	Amunjú (Ntheuka)	Ncheme
28	Ndatú (Ratanya)	Bwethaa (Ntheuka)	Aíri

Tables 1 and 3 show that Kíbwí [2] and Múrukú [9] were invited to participate by the Anjarú clan in May 2016, and again by the Antúambui in August 2016. Mbiti [23] of the Andúúne clan and Reuben [24] of the Antúbakíthoro clan (both pseudonyms) were among six *íchiaro* men invited to attend another case of group cursing to solve problems observed in a family in the Múringene village in September 2012 (Ishida 2014: 85). These reflected the following two facts.

First, some individuals, such as the above four elders, may be regarded as more powerful *mwíchiaro* than others, and be invited repeatedly to attend these occasions. However, as my previous paper discussed (Ishida 2014: 94-95), any person invited as a *mwíchiaro* should not misunderstand this invitation and think that he is being invited in his private capacity, and that he can use his power for his personal interest. In other words, the power of the *íchiaro* men is attributed only to the person's biological status.

Some individuals such as (...) Mbiti [23], of the Andúúne clan, may be appreciated as more powerful *mwíchiaro* than others. In other words, though everyone is eligible to represent his or her clan as *mwíchiaro*, particular individuals are more commonly invited. However, (...) *íchiaro* men are not supposed to identify themselves as 'experts' in their private capacity. This biological determinism thus serves to depersonalise the *íchiaro*. (Ishida 2014: 99 with some revision added)

Reuben [24] of the Antúbakíthoro clan was killed in a road accident in 2016, soon after the *útaara ngeere* in Anjarû. It had been rumoured in the community that his death was due to his misuse of his *íchiaro* power in the process of performing the *útaara ngeere* in Anjarû²⁴). Some believed that he received cash in exchange for overlooking someone's hidden possession of witchcraft items. It has also been said that one elder in the Antúbalinkí clan, whose brother was invited as an *íchiaro* man on 28 May for *útaara ngeere*, also died, due to his abuse of *íchiaro* power: He had been sent as an *íchiaro* agent by one of the Anjarû clan members to recover a debt from another man of the same clan, who could not refuse the claim, as it had been incurred by the *íchiaro* man on the creditor's behalf. However, the *íchiaro* man received a bribe from the debtor not to curse him, even if he failed to re-pay his debt.

Second, the *íchiaro* men who are repeatedly invited to these ceremonies have shared their knowledge of, and experiences with, the *útaara ngeere* procedure with different clans in other administrative locations and divisions. Those *íchiaro* men can give reasonable advice to those who plan to organise their own events. Such an exchange of personnel enables them to share their knowledge of their indigenous law throughout the Ígembe region, and so nurture both certainty and flexibility in the application of their law. M'Imaana [17] and M'Mauta [7], both of who came from the Akachiû clan in Nthare (See Case 4), for example, were invited as chief advisors to the Antûambui clan in the process of preparing for their *útaara ngeere* in August 2016 (Case 1), and in retrospect, had been invited by Anjarû as two of their *íchiaro* men in May 2016 (Case 2). Furthermore, when the Akachiû clan organised its own event in the late 1990s, both M'Imaana and M'Mauta served as officials in the host community. As another example, Kíbwi [2] and Múrukú [9], who were invited as *íchiaro* men in Case 2, later assumed key roles in the event organised by the Antûambui clan (Case 1): Francis from the Antûamboia clan had attended as an *íchiaro* man in four cases of *útaara ngeere*, before being invited by the Antûambui on 11 August 2016.

Another case of *útaara ngeere* organised by the Antûambeti clan in September 2015 (Case 3) was similar to the case described in the Anjarû clan community, in terms of its purpose and the procedures followed. People in the Antûambeti clan community experienced a number of deaths in 2015. Their neighbours recalled that more than twenty people from the clan community had passed within one year from various diseases. The Antûambeti clan invited Kaiyo, the clan official of the Anjarû mentioned above, to give them advice on the basis of his experience in the first *útaara ngeere* in Anjarû in the late 2000s. An elder from Akûi at the southern end of the Athîrû Gaiti Location, who had twice been invited to the Anjarû clan to stitch up all the orifices of a sacrificed sheep, also visited the Antûambeti clan again in September 2015, for the same purpose.

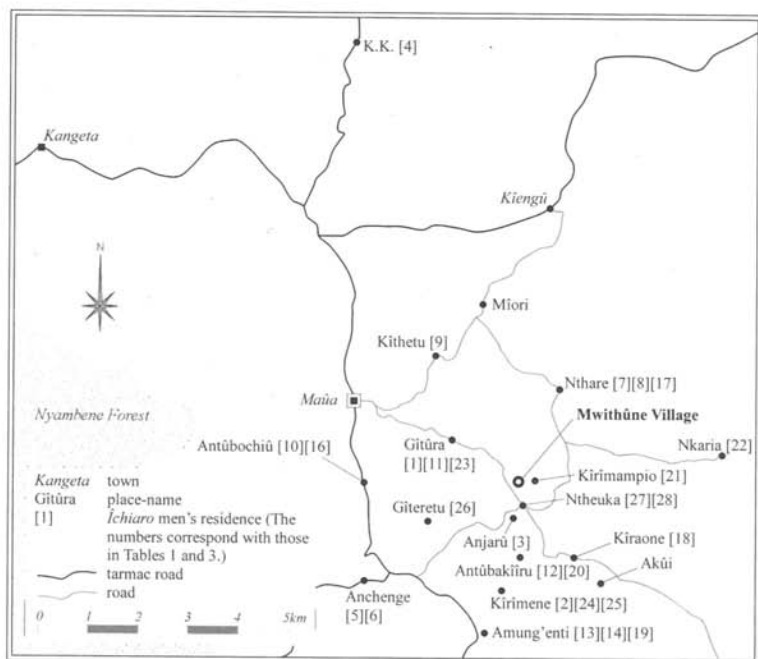


Figure 10. Home communities of the invited *ichiario* men

Experienced elders, however, do not force their host community to follow the same procedures they witnessed in the previous cases, after they have given all the necessary advice to their clients. Accordingly, experienced elders have noticed a diversity in the extent of procedural flexibility in various cases in terms of the nature and contexts of the problems at issue, as well as in terms of the conditions and forms of the ritual process. Comparing the experiences in Mwithüne by the Antüambui clan in 2016 (Case 1) with the other three cases in Anjarü in May 2016 (Case 2), Antüambeti in September 2015 (Case 3), and in his natal clan in the late 1990s (see Case 4), M'Mauta [7] of the Akachiü clan—and several others who were interviewed for this research—noted that the Antüambui case was different from the others in some respects, in that a sacrificed sheep, for example, in the latter three cases had not been placed on the fire until the *ichiario* men had finished interrogating every member of the community who came, and having each swear that he/she had no harmful items; and further, that every person in the latter three ceremonies had literally ‘passed over’ (*ütaara*) the sacrificed animal just after swearing to their innocence before the *ichiario* men, while people in Mwithüne (Case 1) ‘passed by’ the animal, which had by then been reduced to ashes.

While the ceremonial group cursing by invited *ichiario* men described in my previous paper (Ishida 2014) could remedy a series of troubles in a particular family, the collective cursing

by the *ûtaara ngeere* illustrated in this paper is a Kîmîrû way of restoring peace in a local village's entire community, or, in other words, served as a method for removing some of the root causes of suffering from a neighbourhood community. The people in Mwithûne village (Case 1) used the Kîmîrû way to re-organise their neighbourhood under the name of its dominant clan, the Antûambui. The events of *ûtaara ngeere* in the Anjarû and Antûambeti clans (Cases 2 and 3), on the other hand, were not necessarily associated with clan revivals, as the two clans had not so far experienced reforms in their organisation and governance. As the following section shows, the Akachiû clan, which had previously experienced *ûtaara ngeere* in the late 1990s (Case 4), introduced organisational reform and so the revival of their clan in 2013 under the new leadership of the current chairman, by means of a cleansing of their *îchiaro*'s curse, which had claimed a number of victims in the community.

V. Clan Revival in Akachiû

M'Mauta [7] of the Ratanya age group, who was the then-chairman of the Akachiû clan in Nthare, remembered that the *ûtaara ngeere* organised by his clan in the late 1990s was similar to the *ûtaara ngeere* in Antûambui, Anjarû, and Antûambeti clans, even though there were minor differences.

The clan, however, again suffered from a series of deaths in 2013. Mwasimba of the Mîrîti age group, who is the current chairman, took the situation seriously and discussed how they could remedy their suffering with others. They reached the conclusion that a curse of their *îchiaro* was claiming the victims in their community. Some elders—including M'Mauta—remembered that a group of their ancestors from the previous Gîchûnge age group²⁵ had, in their youth, taken a bull from their *îchiaro* counterpart of Anjarû in Athîrû Rûûjîne in an improper way, about one hundred years previously. The Kibire of the previous Gîchûnge age group, who was M'Mauta's namesake (*ntaau*), had then decided to migrate to Athîrû Rûûjîne with some head of cattle from Nthare, where their *îchiaro* people lived. After arriving there, however, those cattle brought by Kibire were taken back home to Nthare by his agnate who was called Nkarichia, and was of the same age group. Though their *îchiaro* men in Athîrû Rûûjîne warned him to keep the bull alive, Nkarichia slaughtered the bull for meat that he shared with his agnates in Nthare, even though disobeying this instruction could lead to a curse. It was thought among the present members of the clan that his disobedience was causing misfortunes among his descendants about a century later.

Under Mwasimba's leadership, the clan members arranged to confess their sin, and return the bull to their *îchiaro*, to remove the old curse. Mwasimba recalled that he had been anxious about the total expenses that would be incurred by contributing the two bulls—one for compensation and the other for an inter-clan feast—as well as some other items for cleansing purposes and blessings. Nevertheless, he and some others decided to proceed.

A horn was blown on 18 April 2013 for their 'first' clan meeting. Then, by the end of June 2013, they had managed to collect enough money to purchase two bulls, and in August of the same year they invited their *ichiario* counterpart of Anjarû to lead the reparation, cleansing, and blessing. Since then, the Akachiû clan has continued having meetings for their own welfare. With Mwasimba as its new chairman, the clan organised itself under the name of the Akachiû Clan Welfare C.B.O. (community based organisation) that could be registered at the appropriate government office. They have clan meetings twice a month, on the fifteenth and thirtieth day of every month, to hear dispute cases, make public announcements, have discussions, and share information, as the Antûambui clan does. Members have been issued with membership certificates. Since membership is open to all willing neighbours regardless of their biological clan affiliation, I was allowed to achieve its ordinary membership when I attended one of their meetings on 30 August 2016.

The Akachiû clan has invited their *ichiario* men from the Anjarû, Airi, and Naathû clans to meet on the thirtieth of every month to curse ill-wishers who cause different misfortunes in their communities. An Anjarû clan member, who was an elder brother to Kaiyo (the above-mentioned chairman of the Anjarû clan in Athirû Gaiti) and Ntuala [3], was one of the *ichiario* men invited to lead cursing at an Akachiû clan meeting on 30 August 2016. During an interview, he told me that he was supposed to attend regularly at the end of every month.



Figure 11. Akachiû clan meeting on 30 August 2016



Figure 12. Author makes an invited speech at the Akachiû clan meeting on 30 August 2016

An Akachiû clan meeting on 30 August began with the sound of someone blowing a horn at 15:00 at the Kaani-ka-Gîchûnge open field in their neighbourhood. I was given a printed copy of the day's timetable, and it showed that coping with witchcraft-related cases reported by clan members was the main agenda item for the day. Three *îchiaro* men, including the above-mentioned brother to Kaïyo and Ntuala who had regularly been invited for the same purpose, performed collective cursing in the *kwiita rwîi* style. As was also noted in the timetable, as a visitor, I was given an opportunity to address the participants.

VI. Decentralised Agencies in Clan Revival: Historical Lessons

This paper has so far illustrated how the Antûambui clan and its neighbouring clans organised the events of the *ûtaara ngeere* collective cursing in their communities to remedy various calamities (Cases 1, 2 and 3). *Ûtaara ngeere* is always an organised event that must involve all the members of a clan community. It thus requires strong leadership, which may only be required temporarily for a remedial purpose, or which may entail the revival of a clan as a permanent welfare group with regular meetings. Accordingly, this concluding section will address the nature of the leadership that informed the clan revivals discussed above for the Antûambui and Akachiû clans.

As I have observed in this paper, the Antûambui (Case 1) and Akachiû (Case 4) clans have managed to reorganise and enhance their clanship under their new leadership. The Antûambui clan successfully materialised its revival through its *ûtaara ngeere* in 2016, while there was no direct relationship between the Akachiû clan's *ûtaara ngeere* in the 1990s and that clan's revival in 2013. The other two clans—Anjarû (Case 2) and Antûambeti (Case 3)—

organised their *ûtaara ngeere* in 2016 and 2015, respectively, only for remedial purposes, which did not necessarily entail reforming their organisations or their governance.

The leaders that organised the three cases of *ûtaara ngeere* in the 2010s (Cases 1, 2, and 3) were no doubt supported by the administrative chiefs in their respective areas. The above three cases, one of which I observed in person, were attended not only by people from the neighbourhood and invited *îchiaro* men, but by administrative chiefs. It was not uncommon to involve chiefs, as people were officially required to seek the chief's permission for any meeting they organised. Nevertheless, I observed that the chiefs were relatively more involved in the above cases of collective cursing than in ordinary meetings.

As he told me in an interview, M'Mauta [7], one of the *îchiaro* men invited on 11 August 2016, understood that the three cases of *ûtaara ngeere* (Cases 1, 2, and 3) were all organised by administrative chiefs or assistant chiefs in cooperation with the members of the clan communities concerned. The cursing meeting organised by the Antûambeti clan (Case 3) was indeed arranged on the initiative of an administrative chief within the Îgembe Southeast Division. The Anjarû clan (Case 2) holds its cursing meetings in an open field in front of its area's assistant chief's office, and in his presence. The Antûambui clan invited its area chief and three assistant chiefs of their own and neighbouring sublocations, of whom only one was absent, to its collective cursing ceremony.

One of the assistant chiefs, who delivered an opening speech in Mwithûne village, told me in an interview that the government administration supported grass-roots initiatives such as this that could contribute to peace-making in local villages, and its purposes were also consonant with the Nyumba Kumi community-policing programme that the Kenyan government had re-introduced in 2013²⁶, in accordance with statutory provisions of the National Police Service Act. The main goals of the programme are the 'elimination of the fear of crime and social disorder, through joint problem solving; and, prevention of crime' (National Task Force on Community Policing 2015: 4). This government initiative was not a new approach, as administrative chiefs, for example, had had a working collaboration with people at the grass roots level for security purposes by appointing their subordinates—called 'sub-areas'—from the local residents. The question is whether or not, and if so, how, the so-called community policing programme is a community-based initiative in the literal sense. Studies in the literature, many of which have focused on programmes such as this in urban settings, have found that various community policing programmes introduced in Kenya since the 1990s may have served only to reproduce or reinforce the undemocratic nature of directed community security (Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003; Matsuda 2016).

Policing in Africa is 'not a monopoly of government', but rather 'a complex pattern of overlapping policing agencies' (Baker 2004: 218, 205). The strong leadership evident in organising each of the three events of *ûtaara ngeere* for remedial purposes in the three clan communities (Cases 1, 2, and 3), on the one hand, was no doubt facilitated by the authority of the chiefs in the above sense. The revival of the clan in the Antûambui and Akachiû clans,

on the other hand, should not be attributed only to the chiefs' authority, but rather to the continuous everyday efforts and personal competence of new leaders from within the clan communities, and especially those of the Mîrîti age group. In my observation, the revival of the two clans of Antûambui and Akachiû would not have been possible without the commitment of their respective leaders—James and Mwasimba, now in their late forties and early fifties, respectively. As noted elsewhere (Ishida 2017), the Mîrîti age group has been the ruling elderhood in the entire Îgembe community since August 2014. Their leadership was thus also informed by the communities' indigenous age system. It was an important coincidence that the above-mentioned chiefs and assistant chiefs in the Îgembe Southeast Division were also of the Mîrîti age group.

To make clan a self-determining, democratic, and sustainable body for *community* policing, there should be evidence of emerging leadership in the community concerned. The Antûambui and Akachiû clan communities are now enjoying this type of strong internal leadership. It seems that the development of clanship has also been associated with greater political autonomy in the local community. A man from the Antûambui clan community of the Gîchûnge age group in his late twenties was elected as a member of the county assembly (MCA) in the August 2017 general election, where ten candidates put their names forward for election to the MCA in the Athîrû Gaiti ward. It was well known that this man was named after his biological grandfather, who was of the Antûborii clan and was the assistant chief of the then Thaichû Sublocation (the present Îgembe Southeast Division) who succeeded James' father under the colonial administration in place in the late 1950s (see Section II of this paper). Though I did not note this in the above Section II, he was the only person given an opportunity to deliver his speech after Mûrukû [9] and the administrative chiefs at the opening ceremony for the *ûtaara ngeere* collective cursing in Mwithûne village. Though it will require further observation to understand their relationship, it seems that the revival of clanship might have contributed to the rise of political autonomy in the community, and also to his success in the ever-competitive election.

As this paper observed, the Antûambui and Akachiû clans have sought strong clanship for their welfare. Neither the revived clan communities nor their officials, however, have sought socio-political supremacy over their neighbours, whether from outside or inside. Rather, they have re-taught themselves lessons learnt from past experiences in which their ancestors exploited their neighbours, and concluded that these improper behaviours later caused them or even other clan members serious misfortunes—just as the Akachiû clan members remembered their ancestors sin. One might hurt others intentionally or secretly, but also unconsciously or even without knowing that they might share an *îchiaro* relationship. All those harms must cause serious misfortunes to the responsible person and his/her family members, either by *îchiaro* or from any other cursing. People in the clan communities have shared their knowledge about past cases of retribution as valuable lessons for themselves. The following three old stories, which have been shared among members of the Antûambui,

convey such lessons.

One day in the 1970s, the Antûambuï clan invited their *îchiaro* men from Akinying'a to settle a case. They erected a clan house and slaughtered one he-goat as usual in preparation for receiving the *îchiaro* men. However, it was soon observed that one portion of the meat was missing. An announcement was made that anyone who might have stolen the meat would be cursed if he/she would not confess, but no one confessed. Though people were aware that there was a man who had stepped into the clan house where the meat had been kept on the previous night when the *îchiaro* men had arrived, they did not doubt him since he was thought to be a man of high integrity. Then, cursing words against an unidentified culprit who stole the meat were uttered by the *îchiaro* men from Akinying'a. Two days later, the above-mentioned man was found bleeding seriously, as he had been pierced by a tree stump. He was rushed to a hospital in Maûa, but died of excessive haemorrhaging. On the way to the hospital, he confessed that he was the one who had stolen the meat.

A man from the Antûambuï clan visited another man from the Akinying'a clan, one of the Antuambuï's *îchiaro* clans. Though he had mead in his home, the host did not want to share it with his visitor from Antûambuï since there was not enough for both of them. A few days later, a son of the above Akinying'a man developed a mental sickness, and the man sought the advice of the elders from his clan to learn that the sickness had been caused by *îchiaro*. He then admitted that when he received a visitor from his *îchiaro* clan he hid mead, since he did not want to share it with anybody. The elders told him to invite the concerned *îchiaro* man from the Antûambuï clan again to cure his son, and the man slaughtered a he-goat and brewed mead for his guests. The Antûambuï man, when invited to his home, said that he did not want many people to be invited together with him, since he did not want to share meat and mead with many others. He then took the items inside the house so he could feast only with several of his friends, while the people of the Akinying'a clan were excluded. Out of anger they said, 'let the man from Antûambuï remain locked inside the house!' After coming back home, the Antûambuï man locked himself in his house and did not come out for six months. At long last he was brought out by force, but he died within a few months.

A man from the Antûambuï clan visited his friend in the Akachiû clan. On his way home, he suddenly felt the need to defecate, and asked for a latrine key at a nearby local canteen. The owners of the canteen, however, denied him the key, as they regarded him as a man of questionable character. They thought that his intention was to install a harmful charm inside the latrine. As the man's patience wore out at last, he defecated in front of the latrine, and the owners forced him to remove it. Feeling very ashamed as he was carrying the waste, he threatened to bewitch those who had humiliated him. Frightened by the threats, the owners reported the matter to their clan for a solution. The clan summoned the Antûambuï man for interrogation, but he failed to appear. Therefore, the clan invited an *îchiaro* man from Akinying'a to curse the Antûambuï man. He soon developed a mental disorder and finally died.

Appendix: Summary of Zacchaeus Mûrîanki's (2016) research report, 'The ceremony of *kwithiria ng'ondû*: The burning of sheep ordeal/curse'

This ceremony took place in Tigania East (Mikinduri). The elder I interviewed told me that it was similar to another ceremony known as *gukila ng'ondû* (jumping over the sheep). Purpose: (1) To end the poisoning of adults and children in the village, especially poisoning by women; (2) To stop women who are fond of giving their husbands the potion known locally as *kagwiria* (a sort of love potion that makes men act like fools); (3) To explain why there are so many deaths in a village for reasons that people do not understand.

Procedure: (1) The choice of the sheep: The sheep must be a male sheep of different colours to symbolise ill fate, hence, all curses (one colour usually represents simplicity or purity). (2) All its openings are sealed up with thorns. This symbolises death. This ritual was performed secretly in a thicket or a banana plantation by a *mukirira*, a ritual specialist, with a small group of Njuri elders.

Burning of the sheep: (1) The sheep was burnt in a public place such as on a road or in the open field for *gaaru*. Women collected firewood and piled it up. The sheep was placed on top of the fire by a specialist (*mukirira*), while all the village people watched. (2) Every person threw a piece of wood on the animal while cursing the sorcerer, saying 'May he/she die like this sheep'. Children were not involved, and pregnant women were excluded for fear that their pregnancy would be affected by the public curse. (3) This curse, like any other Tigania/Igembe curse, was never performed during the *mambura* (good ceremonies), such as circumcisions, when the boys are in their healing huts, or when the Njuri are conducting initiations.

After the burning of the sheep: (1) All depart except the elders, who wait until the following morning, when the sheep has been fully burnt into ashes. (2) The elders guard the ashes so that they are not wasted in any way, or taken by anybody. Doing so would neutralise the purpose of the intended curse. (3) At night the elders quietly take all the ashes and throw them into the river. (Some people told me that some ashes are taken and placed somewhere in the *nyumba-ya-njuri* for use in the eventuality that someone is caught by the curse, repents, and wants to be healed.) (4) All are given the warning not to engage in sex or any love affairs for three to four weeks. To do so before the time expires means even the innocent ones will be ill affected by the curse. It also means the curse will be neutralised and will have no effect on the guilty ones.

Acknowledgement

This work is financially supported by JSPS KAKENHI, Grant Number 16H05690, Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (B) organised by Shin-ichiro Ishida from April 2016 to March 2020. I would like to thank Makio Matsuzono, Njûgûna Gichere, Stephen Mûgambi Mwithimbû, Joel Mung'athia and Zacchaeus Mûrîanki for their invaluable suggestions. I benefitted also from comments given by J. Mûrûngî Baimuchui on an earlier version of this

paper. My sincere thanks also go to Paul Kĩlmi Mũriũki, who assisted me with the initial transcription and translation work, and to the people in the communities studied who kindly shared their experiences and knowledge with me.

Note

- 1) The names of the village and all individuals in this paper are pseudonyms.
- 2) For an ethnographic background of the region, see Ishida 2014; 2017.
- 3) The Antũmbui clan is different from Antũmbũi clan, which is an *ichiaro* counterpart to the Athimba clan (see Ishida 2014 for the roles of *ichiaro* men from the Antũmbũi to the Athimba clan members).
- 4) *Ichiaro* refers to an institutionalised inter-clan brotherhood in which the power to impose compulsory social norms operates between 'brothers'. Clans related by *ichiaro* share exogamous rules and reciprocal obligations. They are not allowed to marry a *mwichiaro* (a partner in the *ichiaro* linkage), they are obliged to show mutual generosity, and they are expected to be loyal to their counterparts. The Îgembe people describe the social norms governing this institution in these generalised terms. Any behaviour that violates these norms is thought to engender misfortune, and they often utilise the fear of such consequences to settle their disputes. If an individual is not truthful in word and deed before his or her *mwichiaro* (by making a false statement, for example), it is believed that he or she will be punished by the power of *ichiaro*. See Ishida 2014; 2017.
- 5) There was no agreement over the type of animal, as some elders in the Îgembe Southeast noted that the sheep might be a ram instead of an ewe. Nevertheless, many agreed that there was no choice but a sheep, either a ram or ewe, of a single colour without blemish. See the Appendix of this paper for the description of a case of *ũtaara ngeere* in the Tigania East Division (Mikindũri) observed by Zacchaeus Mũriĩanki, which is useful for comparative purposes.
- 6) This type of operation was found in another cursing method of *kĩringa nhenge* for settling inter-clan land disputes (Ishida 2008). According to Kimĩrũ, some experts in the Îgembe Southeast, however, say that their sewing methods are different.
- 7) I interviewed a man of the Gĩchũnge age group in his thirties, who 'surrendered' a charm in the form of a personal possession in another case of *ũtaara ngeere* in May 2016 (Case 2). Interestingly, he confessed that the item he had used might be harmful to others and be regarded as an item that could be used for *ũroi* (witchcraft). He was a carpenter who had been working in Athĩrũ Gaiti for years. One day he found a necklace in Maĩa town that would bring good luck to his business and he would prosper, according to the explanation provided by its seller. He bought it for 700 shillings (approximately seven US dollars), and had used it for about a year. Though his business had gone well since then, he came to understand that his success in attracting more customers might negatively affect his competitors' businesses since they would get fewer customers. When he came to know that a *ũtaara ngeere* was planned in his community, he feared joining it with the charm in his possession, and decided to relinquish it for his own safety. His action was well received by the elders, and he was never blamed for using the charm until then.
- 8) My previous papers (Ishida 2014; 2017) focused on cases from Mũringene village (also not a real name) in the Athĩrũ Gaiti Location.
- 9) The Mĩriti age group in Athĩrũ Gaiti consisted of men circumcised from 1976 until the opening of the following age group of Bwantai in 1989. Its eldest members were in their late fifties in the 2010s. My previous paper (Ishida 2017) observed the official transfer of power in August 2014 from the preceding Lubetaa age group to the Mĩriti age group in the indigenous political systems of the Îgembe. See Ishida 2017 for further explanations about the age group system of the Îgembe.
- 10) This type of greeting is commonly used, but only applies at clan meetings: 'Greetings, clan. Greetings, a person who doesn't die. Greetings, a person who eats his own'. (*Mweni, mwĩria. Mweni, muntũ ũtikuya. Mweni, mĩria biawe.*) While *mweni* is a general greeting used when addressing many people in an everyday context, the phrase *muntũ ũtikuya* literally denotes 'a single person who doesn't die'. It can be interpreted to mean that one greets all the members present, and at the same time celebrates the well-being of one's clan as one entity or a single socio-legal person.

- 11) The Njûrincheke council of elders refers to the traditional council of elders organised hierarchically for the entire Kîmîrû-speaking ethnic community. The council's headquarters are in Nchîrû; its sub-headquarters include each of its nine sub-ethnic communities (including the Îgembe), under which there are a number of local branches. While the Njûrincheke house in Nchîrû seems to be a symbolic monument rather than the council's working headquarters, many of the local branches, and especially those in the Îgembe and Tigania communities, are active. Athîrû Gaiti also has one branch office. The compound itself is not very large, but a ring of trees and thick brush conceal the interior, so rituals can be performed secretly. The council is indeed exclusive, to the extent that only members are allowed to enter the compound. Anyone who wishes to achieve full membership in the council needs to undergo a secret initiation ritual. Elders of the Njûrincheke council represent themselves as experts in traditions. They speak knowledgeably and pass on their interpretations of rituals to the younger generations. Once a person earns a good reputation as a *mûkîrîra* (knowledgeable person), he is paid a specified amount of *nchooro* (allowance) when his clients consult him. However, people believe that elders are always hiding the 'core' parts of their knowledge to keep their secrets among themselves (Ishida 2017; see Mwithimbû 2014 for a general overview of the Njûrincheke council's present role).
- 12) This referred to a charm that was thought to bring good luck to one's business, and to help it prosper. See note 7.
- 13) Ishida 2014: 90 shows the picture of *ichiaro* men standing on one leg, for purposes of another collective cursing in Mûringene village in September 2012.
- 14) The word *ûnoru* refers to fertility and richness in a socio-economic sense. This sentence meant that the missing woman was called back home to her natal village, even if she might be seeking, or had already achieved, material wealth elsewhere.
- 15) This word, meaning strong witchcraft in this context, is thought to be of Akamba (another neighbouring Bantu-speaking community) origin.
- 16) *Kwiita rwîi* literally means 'to cut something with palms', and refers to a single clap as a conclusion, after continuous rubbing of the palms (*kwikitha rwîi*) while uttering curses.
- 17) The idiomatic expression of 'a person who shoots without causing any harms' (*muntû ûû ûrathaa itii kaimbe*), or 'a person who knows how to take blood from livestock (cattle) by using an arrow without hurting its body' means that the clan is able to find solutions that will not hurt its members.
- 18) The word *gichumi* refers to *ichiaro* men who are called to visit their counterparts, and is often used as polite language. The word *mûtanoba* (brother; literally 'son from the same father') is another reference to an *ichiaro* man (*mwichiaro*); one's biological brother as well as close friend is addressed and referred to as *mûtanochia* (brother; literally, 'son from the same mother').
- 19) 'A stolen club' (*nchuuma ya wamba*) in this context refers to a harmful item that is in the hands of the wrong owner or user, and is also invisible to people in the community since it has been stolen.
- 20) See note 16 above.
- 21) The word *mwithûa* means an itching or uncomfortable feeling on the skin, and in this context an itching sexual desire. Attendants at the collective cursing were required to refrain from sexual behaviour for seven days after the event. It was said that disobedience to that order might cause misfortunes to the person concerned.
- 22) Though it is said that every clan is supposed to have its own horn, the Antûambuï clan does not have one in its possession. Thus, it borrowed one from a neighbouring clan.
- 23) It was said that the person purchased the item, the nature of which had not been revealed, from another person outside Kenya. One of his children, who had been born after he bought the item, suffered from a congenital sickness. Then, as he presumed that the item had harmful power that had caused his child to suffer, he decided to surrender the item to the elders. However, it seems that his prayer went unanswered, and it was said that the child passed away in 2016.
- 24) Another death was reported after a *ûtaara ngeere* in Anjarû. It was said that a woman died because her husband refused to jump over the sheep that was sacrificed on 28 May.
- 25) According to my schematic calculation (Ishida 2008: 176), the previous Gîchûnge age group was first circumcised in 1885.
- 26) According to the 4th Draft Guidelines on Community Policing, the community policing initiative was first launched in

April 2005 by the Kenyan Government. It is worth noting that a government journal, *The Administrator*, includes a review of community policing in its first issue published in January 2008 (Ministry of State for Provincial Administration and Internal Security 2008). According to Ruteere and Pommerolle (2003: 594–595), the concept of community policing had been mentioned in police reports as early as some time in the 1990s. The Kenyan government had begun introducing the local peace committees (LPCs) at the village level in the late 2000s (mainly after the 2007–2008 post-election violence), whose mandates were initially different from, but ‘were increasingly conflated with’, the Nyumba Kumi community policing programmes after its introduction (Kioko 2017: 28).

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Abstract

This paper focuses on clan revival movements in local farming communities of the Îgembe, one of nine sub-groups of the Kîmîrû-speaking people or the Amîrû (Ameru) in the Kenyan central highlands. As this paper describes, the significance of clan organisation in

local contexts was rediscovered to meet local needs for a peaceful life and social unity, while, at the same time, accommodating the Kenyan government's introduction of a community-policing programme in 2013. The two collective cursing meetings I observed in August 2016 and describe in this paper were organised by the two agnatic clans of the Antûambui and Akachiû, respectively. The meetings were aimed at removing unidentified sorcerers from their neighbourhoods, and reorganising their groups into more active clans under the new leadership of the Mîriti age group. The revival of clanships in the two communities was consonant with the community-policing programme initiated by the government, which was aimed at enhancing security at the grass roots, and also contributed to the rise of political autonomy in local communities. The socio-political power that is being achieved in the process, however, is decentralised in the local context.

Keywords

clanship, *ûtaara ngeere* collective cursing, community policing, Îgembe, Kenya