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# Foreword

As the custodian of the country's rich national heritage, the National Museums of Kenya (NMK) is delighted to have been involved in the "Anthropological research on the flexibility and certainty of African marriage laws" project from 2016 to 2020. NMK plays a key role in research and education, with researchers across several disciplines, from social to pure sciences. I note, with considerable appreciation, that the project is currently expanding its horizons from Meru to other areas of our country, such as Murang'a and Kisii.

*Family Dynamics and Memories in Kenyan Villages* is an interesting read. Kenya is home to over 42 ethnic communities, endowed with diverse and rich cultural heritage. The role of the family as the basic unit of any community is imperative to the discussion on the preservation of culture. Culture is promoted by appreciation and observation of, and respect towards, cultural practices from individual family members, thereby facilitating younger generations to learn and appreciate both their own culture and others'. This book tackles a variety of common but vital aspects in village life, such as death and spirits of the deceased, particularly as perceived by the elderly. It also discusses traditional marriage practises, their transformation, and challenges facing the institution today. Furthermore, it addresses personal names, showing that names do not only represent individuals, but also have many meanings and social contexts. The book exhibits how family memories are held and passed down to succeeding generations through various means—photography being one such avenue. The creative role played by skilled photographers adds to the process of cultural preservation.

The team comprises researchers from Japan and Kenya based at NMK and the Indigenous Knowledge Writers Association, making it unique. The members interact frequently during quarterly and annual meetings/seminars in Meru County. These meetings promote a sense of ownership of the materials produced by the entire team. Their exchange of notes during these seminars enriches their collective work as they learn from and train each other in informal settings. I have also taken note of the commitment demonstrated by the project team over the last 15 years. At the end of every project cycle, NMK receives the publication demonstrating the team's work and celebrates their achievements. We wish to assure this team that NMK will look forward to supporting and collaborating with the Japanese researchers and their respective institutions.

August 2020

Mzalendo Kibunjia, *EBS, PhD*

Director General, National Museums of Kenya

# Contents

# Preface

The authors of this book come from different ethnic, educational, and social backgrounds. Four of them are anthropologists from different institutions in Japan, and Tokyo Metropolitan University (TMU) serves as the lead institution, coordinating the implementation of this project. The local community is represented by a cross-section of people with a passion for research. This local group operates under the auspices of the Indigenous Knowledge Writers Association (IKWA). Their collaboration started about 15 years ago, and so far, they have delivered three publications on traditional knowledge and cultural expressions of communities in Central Kenya—*The Indigenous Knowledge of the Amîîrrû of Kenya* (2016), *Culture in Peace and Conflict Resolution within Communities of Central Kenya* (2014) and the current: *Family Dynamics and Memories in Kenyan Villages* (2020). All three books focus on the cultural heritage and social life of the Amîîrrû or Amîîrû, spelt Ameru in previous publications, and their neighbouring communities.

The introductory chapter of this volume by Njũgũna Gĩchere describes the ethics and prohibitions in Agĩkũyũ customary marriage in both traditional and modern settings. The stories about the origin of the Agĩkũyũ offer insight into how the marriage and family relationships of their first ancestor serve as a social microcosm. This is then reflected in the importance of family life in the social macrocosm. The paper, based on interviews and case studies in Mũrang'a, observes social facts that seem common to different communities, and reveals key topics concerning family dynamics.

The following three chapters focus on memory work in and against socio-economic uncertainties among family members in the Nyambene region. Makio Matsuzono's paper presents a collection of interviews with elderly people in an Îgembe community concerning death, last words, and inheritance. Customary obligations over land, changing beliefs about the afterlife, and gendered roles of family members shape people's attitudes towards ghosts, God, and the living. People address disputes and obligations over land by leaving, remembering, or interpreting verbal, or sometimes written, wills. Shin-ichiro Ishida's paper on personal names in an Îgembe village community illustrates how personal names inform and reflect the Îgembe concept of personhood, finding that they reveal significant details about matrimonial/affinal, inter-generational, inter-familial, and friendship bonds; they also embody collective/structural immortality and the perpetuation of shared personhood. Jun Baba's paper explores the relationship between photographs that faithfully preserve images of individuals and Amîîrû culture that tends to adhere to so-called structural amnesia, describing localised ways of using modern devices among Tigania people. From case studies of 33 households in Athwana, the paper shows that while keeping photographs is a part of everyday practice, the impact of photography on culture is still moderate.

The last two chapters remind us that family is a social institution through which people access socio-economic resources for everyday livelihood in both modern and traditional

contexts. Shiori Itaku's paper on a single family involved in the Kisii soapstone industry examines the family dynamics and social interactions that govern individual career and life choices. The last chapter by Eliud Mûtwîri and S. A. Mûgambi Mwithimbû observes the family ethics of the Amîîrrû in broader contexts of traditional life, and their roles in the protection of sacred sites and the natural environment.

The authors of this volume use seven vowel graphs (a, e, i, o, u, î, û) in Kîmmîîrrû, or Kîmîîrû, orthography to ensure clarity of meaning. Edward Steven Mwiti in his book, *Kimeru 1200 Proverbs*, expressed concern for difficulties that readers would experience in differentiating the meanings of words spelt the same in colonial orthography, such as "*nkuru*", which can mean "tortoise", "older", or "pancreas of a bird or an animal reserved only for elders' consumption". As John Kobia Ataya wrote in his paper 'Orthography and translation of Kîmîîrû Bible' (*International Journal of Professional Practice* 2 (1), 2011), further study on orthography should include research on consonants as well as tone markings. This underlies the importance and significance of using correct phonology and phonetic alphabet to elucidate the meaning of words through orthography, allowing readers to arrive at the intended meanings without relying on the context only.

The National Museums of Kenya is the host institution and one of the key stakeholders in this project. It ensures that the necessary research permits have been granted by the National Commission for Science Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) before the commencement of research.

This project has a life cycle of four years. The authors hold several meetings during each life cycle to review and discuss various stages of their individual research. The first meeting focuses on the collective understanding of the project's theme, an in-depth interpretation of the theme, and further exploration of related sub-themes. The second key meeting focuses on the presentation of individual abstracts to reach consensus, constructive criticisms, and any other input that may enrich each paper. Each author is given ample time to present their data collection tools and methodology during the second meeting. The third step is individual data collection, analysis, and compilation of draft papers. The drafts are then passed to the editors for review, followed by a meeting to share views on each paper and decide which papers will be accepted. Thereafter, each author is asked to edit and then finalise their paper(s) before publication. The current project was expected to end with publication by 31 March 2020. However, due to the challenges posed by the novel coronavirus pandemic, the publication was delayed, and some manuscripts originally intended for this publication remain uncompleted.

The authors are grateful to the Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Japanese Society for Promotion of Science (JSPS), without whom this project could not have existed. The grant was given under the theme: "Anthropological research on the flexibility and certainty of African marriage laws."

Editors, May 2020

# Authors

**Njũgũna Gĩchere** was born and brought up in Kiharũ, Mũrang'a County. He has a postgraduate Diploma in Care and Management of Heritage and Museum Collections and a Bachelor's degree in Education. He is an experienced museum educator and curator having worked with the national museums of Kenya (NMK) for the last 25 years. Currently, he is a research scientist with the same institution. He has carried out many field studies to collect data in order to facilitate gazettement of sites and monuments. He has vast experience in working with rural communities in ecological governance (CEG) and cultural heritage issues. He has participated in a number of national and international workshops in areas relating to conservation of heritage. He has authored a number of papers and is a co-editor of the books; *The indigenous knowledge of the Ameru of Kenya* and *Culture in peace and conflict resolution within communities of central Kenya.*

**Makio Matsuzono** is Professor Emeritus, Tokyo Metropolitan University and the National Museum of Ethnology, Japan. He studied social anthropology at the graduate schools of Tokyo Metropolitan University and the University of Michigan. His fieldwork was done first in Southeast Asia and East Asia including the Philippines, Okinawa (Japan), and Taiwan in 1965–1973. His African research was first conducted in Ethiopia in 1974, then in western Kenya since 1977 mostly among the Gusii. His Meru research started in 2011. He has taught social anthropology at numerous universities in Japan. His publications include: 'A Note on the Enshrinement of Ancestral Tablets at Zamami Island, Okinawa', in W. H. Newell, ed., *Ancestors*, Mouton Publishers, pp.231–240, 1976; 'Adjacent Generations and Respect Attitudes among the Gusii', in N. Nagashima, ed., *Themes in Socio-Cultural Ideas and Behaviour among the Six Ethnic Groups of Kenya,* Hitotsubashi University, pp.71–87, 1983;*The Gusii: Life and Ethics of Farming People in Kenya*, 1991 (in Japanese); 'Rubbing off the Dirt: Evil-Eye Belief among the Gusii', *Journal of Nilo-Ethiopian Studies*, 18, pp.1–13, 1993; 'Male Involvement in Family Planning in Gusii Society: An Anthropological Overview', *African Study Monographs*, 18 (3, 4), pp.175–190, 1997;and 'International Cooperation Activities and Anthropology: Problems in Japan's Context', *Technology and Development,* No.14, Institute for International Cooperation (JICA), pp.5–11, 2001.

**Shin-ichiro Ishida** is a Japanese anthropologist, currently associate professor in the Department of Social Anthropology, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Japan. He received a BA in history from Keio University in 1998, and a PhD in social anthropology from Tokyo Metropolitan University in 2005. He has published a variety of journal articles and book chapters on legal pluralism and alternative justice systems in Papua New Guinea and Kenya. His publications include: Homicide compensation in an Îgembe community in Kenya, 2001–2015: Fifteen years of clan making in a local context, *African study monographs*, 38 (4): 173–220, 2017. A confluence of alternatives: The merging of Mennonites and peace projects in Kenya, *Senri ethnological studies,* 79: 63–79, 2012.

**Jun Baba** is a Japanese anthropologist, currently associate professor in the Faculty of Human Sciences, Wako University, Japan. He received a BA in Law from Meiji Gakuin University in 1998, and a PhD in social anthropology from Tokyo Metropolitan University in 2008. Before his research in Meru, he has conducted ethnographic fieldwork on family, gender, traditional culture, and legal pluralism in Papua New Guinea since 1999. He is the author of the monograph, *Ethnography of marriage and family maintenance: gender and tradition in contemporary Papua New Guinea* (Tokyo: Sairyu-sha, 2012 in Japanese), which is his doctoral dissertation. He has also published a variety of journal articles and book chapters, including: 'The making of legal subject in Papua New Guinea: support agents and situated learning for the modern lawsuit in Manus Province' *People and Culture in Oceania* Vol. 31 (2016); 'Homosociality evoked: adult video of "bukkake" genre and social agency of semen' *Bulletin of the Faculty of Human Sciences* Vol. 10 (Wako University, 2017 in Japanese).

**Shiori Itaku** is a doctoral student in the Department of Social Anthropology, Tokyo Metropolitan University, Japan. She received a BA in Language and area studies from Tokyo University of Foreign Studies in 2012 and an MA in social anthropology from Tokyo Metropolitan University in 2014. Her professional field is anthropology of art and material culture. She has been conducting ethnographic fieldwork on Gusii culture and the production and sale of soapstone carving.

**Eliud Mûtwîri** is an environmental conservationist. Previously, he worked an agricultural field assistant for land and farm management at the Ministry of Agriculture from 1974–1976, and served as an education officer at the Wildlife Clubs of Kenya from 1976 to 1986. In 1980, the WWF, IUCN, AWF AND EWAA sponsored him on an experimental education program carried out in Gloucestershire, United Kingdom, that culminated in the establishment of the International Centre for Conservation Education. He then worked as Information Officer, African Wildlife Foundation from 1986 to 1996, helping to spread the concept of Wildlife Clubs in African Countries and utilizing audio-visual technology to make information accessible to the public. He participated in development of such publications as *Trees for People* and the *Kikuyu Botanical Dictionary*. In 1986 and 1987, he developed a weekly series of wildlife articles, which were published in the *Sunday Nation* newspaper for seventy-five consecutive weeks and also in the *Sunday Newspaper* in Tanzania. These articles were compiled into a book titled *Wild Lives,* describing fifty-one animals in East Africa. He also developed scripts for the slide show series *TheAfrican Elephant, Black Rhinoceros, African Mammals* and *African Birds.* He is an entrepreneur hotelier, the director Nkubu Safari Camp *Amiirru* cultural resource center, currently vice chairman Imenti sub-county *NjuriînchekeyaAmîîrrû* and Vice chairman IKWA.

**Stephen Anthony Mûgambi Mwithimbû** is a retired teacher. He is an ACK Ordained Minister of the Gospel, who has been preaching at various Kenyan Prisons for the last thirty-three years, since 1987. He is currently preaching at Kamiti Maximum and Medium Prisons. His teaching experience spreads from primary schools, secondary schools, primary teachers training colleges, Kagumo Diploma Teachers College, the University of Nairobi – External Degree Program (part-time tutor); and the Kenya Methodist University (KEMU) in Meru County. Since 2010, he has been teaching at Kenyatta University while studying for his doctorate degree in Educational Communication and Technology. He had assumed full-time traditional medicine practice since 1982 while he was doing his M. Ed. (TPE) degree research: *"Initiation Dynamics in Traditional Education: A Case Study of Psychosocial Child Development in Meru, Kenya"* (1984). He was the Chairman of the Meru Central Herbal and Naturopathic Doctors Association (MECHANDA), Technical Advisor for the Eastern Province Traditional Medicine Council, and Chairman of the National Council of Associations for Alternative, Complementary Medicine and Research (NCAACMR) Technical Committee. He holds the following academic and professional qualifications: SI Teachers Certificate (Kenyatta College Teacher Training Division) in 1966; B. A. (Hons.) from the University of Nairobi in 1975; M. Ed. (PTE) from the University of Nairobi in 1985; Certificate in Theology (St. Andrews Theological College, Kabare) in 1998; M. A. degree in Religion from NLCSM & BI-University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, Fuquay-Varina NC, USA in 2002; Diploma in Traditional Medicine Management (Kenya Neem & Herbal Health Awareness Agency) in 2003; and Diploma in Herbal Treatment (Kamugi Herbal Training Institute) in 2003. He is also the current Chairman of IKWA (Indigenous Knowledge Writers Association), the current Secretary General of NATHEPA (National Traditional Health Practitioners Association). He holds a PhD from Kenyatta University (2018). His research was: "*Assessing Instructional Strategies and Practices used in the Training of Herbal Healthcare Practitioners in Machakos County, Kenya"* (2018); and finally he is a co-editor and co-author of *"The indigenous knowledge of the Ameru of Kenya"* and "*Culture in peace and conflict resolution within communities of central Kenya".*

## Chapter 1

# The dynamics of Agĩkũyũ customary marriage

*Njũgũna Gĩchere*

### 1. Introduction

Most African communities have elaborate accounts of their stories of origin and migration. The Agĩkũyũ have several theories/myths regarding their origin, as elaborated by Getonga (2014). Their most popular story states that God created Gĩkũyũ, the ancestor of the Agĩkũyũ. God then took Gĩkũyũ to the top of Mount Kenya (**Kĩrĩnyaga**) and showed him the country below, where He wanted him to live. The country was magnificent, equipped with all manner of foodstuffs. From the top of the mountain of God (**Kĩrĩnyaga**), He directed him to a place where there was a huge **mũkũrwe** tree (*Albizia gummifera*) that had Nyagathanga birds nesting on it. It is from this description that the place got its name, **Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga**. At **Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga, Gĩkũyũ** found a woman (**Mũmbi**), who he made his wife. They established a homestead and reared their ten daughters. In Gĩkũyũ (the language), Mũmbi means creator. The nine eldest Gĩkũyũ daughters were married off to nine young and handsome men, who mysteriously appeared at a sacred ***mũgumo*** tree (Ficus species) after Gĩkũyũ offered a burnt sacrifice.

Gĩkũyũ was a very religious man. He always prayed and offered sacrifices to God (***Ngai*** or ***Mweenenyaga***), who lived on **Kĩrĩnyaga**. Over the years, the descendants of **Gĩkũyũ** and **Mũmbi** multiplied and spread out to the areas that neighboured **Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga**. Their area of domicile was marked by four sacred mountains. These are: Mount Kenya (**Kĩrĩnyaga**) to the east, the Aberadres (**Nyandarwa**) ranges to the west, Kilimambogo (**Kĩa Njahĩ**) to the south east, and Ngong hills (**Kĩrĩmbĩrũirũ**) to the south west. Gĩkũyũ would mention the four sacred mountains/hills in his prayers. This practice is also popular among the traditional Agĩkũyũ clergy.

Through interactions with their environment and ascertaining agreeable behaviour codes, the Agĩkũyũ developed customs[(1)] and traditions. However, since societies are dynamic, customs and traditions are also subject to transformation. Traditional marriage has its own rules and regulations. Marriage is an integral communal custom passing down from generation to generation, the rules pertaining to marriage have been tested and refined over time. These traditions are subject to external pressures, such as foreign cultural practices, which erode or

[(1)] Dr. Winfred Kimani defines customary law as consisting of the unwritten norms and practices of small-scale communities which dates back from pre-colonial times but has undergone transformations due to colonialism and capitalism. It is localized in nature and is as diverse as the communities involved, although there is general consensus on certain fundamental principles. It is unwritten and is characterized by dynamism and flexibility, as it develops and takes on different permutations in response to changing circumstances.

influence them significantly over time. Customary marriage among the Agĩkũyũ has also undergone such change.

**2. Agĩkũyũ concept of marriage**

In African culture, it is considered preposterous for an adult to have no children. For example, in Uganda and Rwanda, childless individuals are termed "***ekifera***", which means 'abnormal' or 'ill' person. Among the Agĩkũyũ, a childless person is referred to as ***thaata*** (infertile[2]), which is a derogatory term that no one wants to be associated with. It is expected that every adult should have children, who will eventually be their heirs. People without children are believed to be either bewitched, or subjects of some divine punishment. Marriage in the traditional African context can also be understood as a rite of passage. Every adult is expected to marry during their lifetime. The main purpose of the marital union is to widen the kinship network of the individual through procreation. Additionally, more relatives are also acquired via marriage. Families are comprised of a wide network of members, namely brothers, sisters, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, in-laws, unborn children, and deceased relatives. This network of family members serves as a social unit that is governed by norms and beliefs. It is also an economic safety unit for the survival of its members. The Agĩkũyũ believe that the only way one can pay back their parents for siring and raising them is by marrying and bearing children. This certainty in Gĩkũyũ language is loosely stated as ***'gũciara nĩ kũriha thiirĩ'*** (bearing children is paying back a debt). Secondly, the whole process of conceiving and bringing forth life is encapsulated by the Agĩkũyũ phrase ***'gũciara ti kũmia'***. This can be loosely translated to mean 'giving birth is not like going to the toilet, a child is a treasure'.

The family system in Kenya is mainly patriarchal (of paternal lineage or descent) and patrilocal (paternal residence—i.e., newlywed couples settle in the grooms' parents' compound/land).[3] This system is emphasised by the need for the groom or his family to pay dowry to the bride's family before marriage. The payment of dowry—also known as bride price—is a cultural practice among many African communities. Traditionally, the dowry was paid in livestock. The payment could be completed before or after marriage, depending on the agreement between the two families. However, this practice has changed in contemporary times. Today, people pay money or even both money and livestock as dowry. It serves as a token of appreciation from the groom's family to the family of his bride for their acceptance of him as their son in law.

**3. Process of dowry payment and its contemporary variations**

Traditionally, a girl upon her first menses was considered ready for marriage, but both girls and boys were required to be circumcised in order to be wed. Boys would be circumcised at

[2] The author remembers that his mother constantly refers to the fact that all her children have sired and raised children underlining the fact that childlessness is abhorred in the African society. She is proud to be a grandmother and great grandmother.

[3] Due to diminishing land resources, this traditional norm is no longer wholly applicable. Newlywed couples may live in rental spaces or purchase land elsewhere.

approximately the age of 18, whereas girls would undergo the rite of circumcision from about the age of 14. Over the period of a few years, both boys and girls were trained for marriage by their parents and other members of the community through various informal training activities. A young man was initially taught to take care of livestock by his father. He and his peers were expected to protect the community against its enemies, in addition to raiding (***gũtaha***) neighbouring communities as warriors/morans. Osamba (2000) argued that, traditionally, rustling cattle was considered a cultural practice among the pastoral communities, and it was sanctioned and controlled by the elders. Though the Agĩkũyũ were semi-pastoralist, they participated in these raids against their closest neighbours, the Maasai. Rituals were conducted before and after the raids, the former to bless and the latter to cleanse the warriors before they reintegrate into the community. In addition to livestock brought back from the raids, young girls would also be captured. They would then be integrated into the families of the raiders and later married off at an appropriate age. The Agĩkũyũ referred to the Maasai as **Ũkabi**, therefore these girls would be given a name such as **Nyokabi** ('from the **Ũkabi**'). The Agĩkũyũ believed that spilling the blood of a fellow human being was taboo and made one unclean. According to one informant, Mr. Manyeki Ng'ang'a, men would marry at approximately the age of 30 years. The girl likewise was simultaneously being trained to behave appropriately as an adult woman by her mother, grandmother, and aunts.

The customary marriage ceremony among the Agĩkũyũ was considered a sacred ceremony and it was carefully conducted with blessings of both parents. This was because they viewed the engagement as lifelong. Animals; farm produce such as bananas, millet, and sorghum to make traditional porridge; and traditional beer were used at appropriate stages to bless the marital process. Marriages were conducted with the thought of avoiding divorce at all costs. Divorces were considered costly and embarrassing. This was because a divorce would signify an unhealthy relationship and the livestock given to the bride's family would need to be returned. Marriage was understood and appreciated as a union between two families.[4] Several steps were followed in the marital process, as illustrated below:

**Dating, engagements, and acceptance**

The process of dating or engagement (***kuha mũirĩtu***) used to take place during traditional dance sessions. A boy would approach a girl and propose friendship in coded language (metaphorically).[5]

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[4] In this context, families refer to the extended family or ***mbarĩ*** (sub clan). The ***mbarĩ*** refers to several closely related households from one lineage; they were identified by men's names. The Agikũyũ are organized into ten clans (***mĩhĩrĩga***, *plural*) each clan organized into several ***mbarĩ***, and the ***mbarĩ*** into ***nyũmba*** or family proper. The ***nyũmba*** are divided into several ***ithaku*** or step families from different co-wives and finally the nuclear family, ***mũcĩĩ***. The clan, ***mũhĩrĩga*** (*singular*), does not actively participate in marriage ceremonies as this is a family affair.

[5] Here different approaches would be used. For example, the young man could ask the girl whether he could visit her parent's home for porridge. The girl could respond by telling him that her porridge is not for the likes of him. He will understand that his request has been rejected. If she said: 'You are quite

If the match was acceptable, both the boy and girl would inform their respective fathers. The boy would first visit the girl's homestead, where a sumptuous meal that consisted of traditional porridge would be served. The girl would invite two of her friends to help serve her boyfriend. After the meal and lengthy conversation, the boy would talk to the girl's father and announce his intention to be betrothed to her. The girls' father would enquire about the boy's clan and the name of his father. He would then ask the boy to ask his father to pay a visit. Meanwhile, the girls' father would confirm what he had been told by the boy with his daughter through her mother. The boy would also inform his father, who would ask the boy to let him 'sleep over it'. The act of 'sleeping over it' gives both sets of parents enough time to examine the potential match's family background, to determine whether there were any blood relations between the two families, whether the match was of good conduct, and so on.

If both families were compatible, meaning there were no impediments to the potential marriage, the girl's father would ask the boy to ask his father to visit. This paved the way for the boy's family to present 'beer' to the girl's family, symbolically requesting for her hand in marriage (***njohi ya njũrio***).

In contemporary Agĩkũyũ society, the engagement is not guided by the parents. The couples may meet at their workplace and begin dating. These workplaces may be located in the cities far away from their homes. Hence, thorough family background checks may not be conducted. This relationship thus exposes the boy and girl to the danger of marrying someone who is a close blood relative or from a family that their parents would not approve of. Apart from blood relations, culturally there were other prohibitions which were supposed to be respected. For example, one cannot marry someone who belongs to an incompatible clan. One informant, Lydia Wamaitha Gĩchumba[(6)] (interviewed on 17th August 2019), also mentioned the irreparable hatred that developed during the **Mau Mau** uprising. She stated that there was a lot of hatred between those who supported the **Mau Mau** (***itungati***) and those who supported the colonialists (***kamatimũ*** and ***ngaati***), to the point where marriage or any form of association between the children of those from opposing sides was banned. This deep-seated hatred arose out of the atrocities that the parties committed against each other. (See contemporary prohibitions)

**Presentation of traditional beer (*njohi ya njũrio*)**

This stage marks the first meeting between both families to make merry. A lot of food is prepared. It is during this occasion that members from the two families will be introduced to

welcome to come and sample it', the young man would know that she has accepted him.

[(6)] One of the respondents, Mrs Lydia Wamaitha Gĩchumba stated that, one day as the ***ngaati*** or ***kamatimũ*** were arresting **Mau Mau** sympathizers, her husband Gĩchumba wa Wamweya was arrested at their shop within Mũkũyũ market. She was asked to give money to secure the release of her husband. However, before that was done, she was slapped, and her baby accidentally slipped from her back, hit the floor, and died. Her husband was spared death. She asked, 'do you think I can ever forgive the one who did that, do you think any of my daughters can be married into that man's family?'

each other. In fact, in some quarters the event is referred to as ***kĩrugo***, derived from the verb ***kũruga***, which means cooking. Fermented porridge, bananas (a variety known as ***mũtahato***), and beer made from sugarcane were among the foods that the two families enjoyed at the girl's father's homestead. Cagnolo (1933) noted that upon eating, drinking, and making merry, older women would dance ***gĩtiiro***[7] in praise of the bridegroom, to celebrate the provision of an abundance of food and beverages. The family of the boy would bring a young female sheep and a young female goat (***mwatĩ na harika***). The act of bringing these two animals signified that the girl has been taken and that no other man can come to be betrothed to her. Additionally, this consolidated the proposed marriage between the couple and the everlasting union between the two families. This practice is therefore somewhat reminiscent of an oath. This occasion is also known as ***kũhanda ithĩgĩ***[8] (more commonly used in contemporary times), which means 'marking one's territory'. The beer prepared for this occasion is specifically known as ***njohi ya njũrio*** (beer for asking). Before the beer is served to the other family members, the girl will present a full horn of the beer to her father. The father will enquire whether the beer is related to her marriage. If the girl confirms that it is, the father asks his daughter, 'If I drink this beer, will you ever disappoint me?' The girl is expected to reply with 'No'. This practice is akin to the performance of martial vows before the two families. Then, the father sips the beer from the drinking horn and passes it to his brothers (the girl's uncles), so that they may sip it and express their approval.[9]

During this occasion, other gifts required by the family include bananas, goats, sheep, blankets, bed sheets, and clothes, among others are presented. These gifts are known as ***maruta*** and may vary from one family to the other or from one clan to another. These gifts are still considered an integral part of the dowry payment among the Agĩkũyũ. After this ceremony, the families would agree on the number of dowry animals to be delivered. The groom's side may start accumulating the bride wealth or goats in readiness for the payment of dowry. For example, during this first visit, ***kũhanda ithigĩ*** the groom may give out what he has to the in-laws to be accumulated in the dowry account (***kĩara***). Whenever he brings additional items, they are added to what he had previously deposited, until it adds up to the amount stipulated for the full bride wealth.

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[7] The dance is performed by women during the ***rũraacio*** ceremony; it is accompanied by ululations as they demonstrate the grinding of porridge. This dance signifies satisfaction, echoing an interviewees' (Joseph Manyeki Ng'ang'a) statement that traditionally, a girl was worth three things: beer, food, and dowry (***njohi, ndia*** and ***mĩroongo***). This also suits Cagnolo's observation on merry making. An example of such a dance by the Kangema urban group from Mũrang'a County can be found through the link below: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIXNHge9QfY&feature=youtu.be...

[8] ***Kũhanda ithigĩ*** is a symbolic ceremony where the groom's parents visit the bride's family to formerly report that they are interested in the other family's daughter.

[9] According to two of the elderly female informants, this ceremony made it very difficult for the bride to think of abandoning her marriage, despite any mistreatment she may receive from her husband.

**Dowry payment (*kũraacia*)**

The dowry payment was a significant occasion which further built the relationship between the two families. It was marked by delivery of several goats, cows, and bulls. According to the informants, the ***rũraacio*** stood at 30 goats in the 1940s and 1950s.[10] Later, the number of goats was increased to 45, and currently it stands at 90. If one did not have enough goats, they could be substituted with cows. One cow could be exchanged for ten goats, while one bull represented five goats.

All these animals were not delivered at once. Instead, the process entailed several visits from the groom, who would bring a few animals each time. The groom would also carry beer for partying (***maambura***) for each of these visits. The beer bore different names, such as beer for escorting the goats (***njohi ya gũkinyĩria mbũri***), beer for making the goats urinate (***njohi ya gũthugũmithiria mbũri***), beer for shepherding (***njohi ya ũrĩithi***), and so on. It is important to note that both male and female goats are required to be given as dowry to ensure that they multiply. If a goat or a cow dies, it must be replaced. (Interview with Manyeki Ng'ang'a on 18th August 2019)

**Actual wedding ceremony (*ngurario*)**

The ***ngurario*** is the last major ceremony and is conducted at the bride's home. Both families and friends are expected to be present. It is the final part of any Agĩkũyũ wedding. It is also known as the 'cutting the shoulder blade' ceremony (***gũtinia kĩande***), which formalises the wedding as per Agĩkũyũ traditions. After the ***ngurario***, the woman is considered a part of the groom's family and cannot marry another man or be easily divorced. The marriage was considered so final that even if the woman had a child from another man, the groom was expected to raise it as his own biological child. The ceremony begins with the slaughter of a fattened sheep (***ngoima***[11]) by the bridegroom and his people at the bride's home. The knife used is provided by the bride's mother and she would demand a present in order to release it. Once the sheep is ceremonially slaughtered, its meat is roasted.

Initially, this ceremony was completed before the girl went to the grooms' home, but these days it is generally conducted later. It serves as the official wedding ceremony. Culturally, there is no need for a church or civil wedding after this ceremony. According to Agĩkũyũ tradition, even if the couple has had a church wedding, they are not considered properly married if the ***ngurario*** has not been conducted. In 2017, Kenya passed a law (Marriage Act No. 4 of 2014 – Kenya) that mandated that all marriages, including traditional customary ones, need to be registered and certificated.[12] This is a positive move, because it legally recognises and

[10] This information is collaborated on page 108 of Fr. Cagnolo's book: *The Akikuyu: their customs, traditions and folklores*. He stated that the ***rũraacio*** would be 30–40 goats and 3–4 goats for slaughter.
[11] ***Ngoima*** is a fattened sheep that traditionally was fed from inside the woman's hut with quality feed such as sweet potato vines.
[12] The requirements for all marriage unions have been published by the office of the attorney general. (Available at: www.statelaw.go.ke/getting – married – in – Kenya/)

documents traditional African marriages.

**Important pieces of meat during the ceremony**

The following parts of the slaughtered sheep are considered extremely important and must be displayed (to confirm its wholeness) before being shared and eaten. These are:

• The right forelimb with the shoulder blade attached (***gwoko*** *&* ***kĩande***). It is from the shoulder blade that a portion of meat is cut and shared with the groom. Hence the ceremony is called 'cutting the shoulder blade' (***gũtinia kĩande***).

• The ribs (***ĩkeengeto/mbaru/îhaha***).

• A portion of the small intestines with the supporting membranes (***gîtuungo kĩa mara***).

Other pieces – 5 pieces that a husband gives to his wife are:

• The pelvis (***rũhonge***).

• The liver (***inî***).

• The ears (***matũ***). One is eaten by the groom and other by the bride. It symbolises the couple learning to listen to each other.

• The kidneys (***higo***) – represents the functions of breasts. She must eat them both.

• The omasum (***ngerima***) – the 3rd portion of the stomach that is highly folded.

Traditionally, once this ceremony is complete, the bride can move to the groom's home. However, it was not so easy. In some cases, the groom and his friends would plan to snatch her as she went to the river, fetch firewood, or stepped out for any other errand. If the groom delayed for too long, the bride's father would metaphorically say, **'**I cannot have your goats and continue keeping your wife**'** (***ndingĩrĩithia njirũ igĩrĩ***).

**4. Variations of the norm**

It is commonly believed that cultures are dynamic and not static, meaning they will change with time as circumstances change. Traditional marriages among the Agĩkũyũ are not immune to such changes either. As the population of the community grows, their farming and grazing areas have shrunk due to occupation and agricultural activities. Consequently, they cannot keep large numbers of livestock or grow various indigenous food crops. This has led to the diversification of the traditional economy and has had a direct effect on production of food items such as millet, indigenous varieties of bananas, sugarcane, and honey. These food items were integral to the various marriage-related ceremonies.

**Dowry items**

Introduction of a new land tenure system, which favoured the privatisation of land and the issuance of title deeds, adversely affected people's ability to keep large herds of livestock. This has had a direct effect on dowry payment because livestock and the other requisite items had to be substituted with money. Elders were expected to determine the price of these livestock to ensure uniformity. However, uniform standards, especially pertaining to the pricing of livestock, do not exist at present. This is one major contemporary variation in dowry payment.

Two people may be asked to pay for the same number of goats, but at different rates. Cotran (1996) agreed that it will be sufficient to say that there are allegations that the practice of dowry, which has been deeply significant in African society, is being commercialised. Typically, the dowry for a daughter is required to be equal to what her father had paid for his wife. However, currently, the pricing for the animals is generally inflated. Since the times have changed, one should not be expected to keep the price of a goat at thirty shillings, but nobody would agree to highly inflated rates either. Parties ought to agree on a reasonable pricing because dowry is not a commercial enterprise. In some cases, some items are no longer demanded. These include items like bananas, spears and ornaments. Traditionally, they were among the first items to be taken to the brides' parents.

Sodas and bottled beer have replaced the traditional porridge and ***mũratina*** beer respectively. In some instances, women from the bride's side will demand sodas and 'payment' because they had cooked for the groom's party. Additionally, they will request to be bought cloths called '***lessos'*** to be tied around their waist as they serve the visitors.

**Single motherhood and dowry payment (the *kamweretho* approach)**

Historically, the ***kamweretho*** groups seem to have evolved from social groupings among the traditional Agĩkũyũ women—commonly known as ***itati*** and ***ngwatio***. These groups point to communal efforts[13] The fundamental organization of the ***kamweretho*** resembles the popular women's merry-go-round phenomena, which has been crucial to the empowerment of African women. Each member of the group contributes a specified monthly amount of money, which is invested or used as a lump sum by one member at a time. The members normally go as a group and occasionally dress up in a uniform and deliver presents to their parents with a lot of fanfare (Mukuyu, 2014).

Against this background, single motherhood in Kenya is quite common among middle class and young educated women. Even in the past, the institution of marriage was not irresistible to the youth due to a variety of challenges. Owing to their economic stability, some young women have resorted to birthing children and raising them alone. The economic empowerment of women over the years has further facilitated this practice. Previously, women depended on men for their safety and upkeep. However, in the 1970s, there was a lot of emphasis on women and a campaign to champion the rights of the girl child. These campaigns focused on equal educational opportunities, banning female genital mutilation, and other such beneficial outcomes for women. This resulted in the creation of a societal war, which consequently destabilised marriages.

[13] In the 1970s, there was a popular group that was nicknamed **mabati** (iron sheets) in Kĩangage, the village where the author was born. During this period, most huts were roofed with grass (***kanyori*** and ***kĩgutu***), so the aim was to pull resources together and affix iron sheets on the huts. Each woman in the group contributed five shillings. The group was made up of fifty women and they required about four months to raise five hundred shillings to buy iron sheets and fees for the carpenter. These efforts transformed the village.

The challenge in this new world view emerges once their daughters seek to get married. Knowing that dowry is meant to be received and that there is a standard procedure for doing so, these single parents face a dilemma. For them to feel culturally comfortable and out of the fear of being cursed by their parents, they came up with a clever technique of self-paying their dowry.[14] Therefore, social groups such as the ***kamweretho***, which are common in central Kenya, are being utilised in order to perform this self-payment. The group performs the functions of appreciating parents and goes to seek their blessings. This allows them to pay off their own dowry, which in turn enables them to receive dowry from their daughters' suitors. It is a wise way of complying with cultural norms. Wamue-Ngare and Njoroge (2011) noted that 'while [the] ***kamweretho*** dowry ritual initially was common with single women, married women have [also] joined the dowry-payment orgy. By so doing, they have defied customs, hence the resentment of ***kamweretho*** by most men, and the Church' (p.18).

In April 2018, this author's cousin, who is married and has several children, planned to visit her mother to pay her dowry. However, the occasion could not take place immediately because her mother is not married. The aunt thus had to hurriedly organise to take some presents to her own mother in order to get her blessings. She could not receive her daughter's dowry before doing so. The author is not sure whether his aunt was accompanied in this mission by members of her ***kamweretho*** group. However, this ruminates what happens in a similar situation.

**5. Traditional threshold for divorce among the Agĩkũyũ**

Among the Agĩkũyũ, divorce was an extremely a rare occurrence. The meticulous nature of the whole marriage ceremony did not permit the couple to enter into a union that would not last a lifetime. Marriage was also regarded as a sacred covenant between all the parties involved and God. A woman was regarded as the foundation upon which the family is built because she carries the womb, through which life is created. The Agĩkũyũ myth of origin refers to a woman as **Mũmbi**, which means 'creating'. Therefore, during the negotiations, the in-laws (***athoni***) are carefully handled because they have the authority to deliver their daughter, who will bring forth new life, to the groom and his family. An old Agĩkũyũ adage states '***ũthoni ndũrangarangagwo***', which means the home of one's in-laws is not a place to just loiter and pass time. According to Agĩkũyũ customary law, a husband may only divorce his wife on the following grounds:

a. Barrenness.

b. Refusal to render conjugal rights without valid reasons.

c. Practicing witchcraft.

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[14] Gĩkũyũ culture experts note that a woman who is not married cannot pay dowry. This is because dowry is paid by a woman's husband and his family. In such a case, she is expected to bring the following items to her parents: two ***ngoima*** (one fattened male sheep and he-goat), one ***mũtahato*** and ***mũraru*** banana, traditional ***mũratina*** beer, and a container of ***ucuru*** (traditional porridge). Upon delivering these items, her parents will bless her and she can receive dowry and presents from her daughter's groom and family.

d. Being a habitual thief.

e. Wilful desertion without justified cause.

f. Anger pangs by a wife that lead to the breaking of a cooking pot. If this happens, it is considered a serious abomination. She is deemed to contract ***thaahu*** (*see definition below*) and can only be cleansed through a ritual in which seven male goats are required.[15]

g. Continued gross misconduct.

NB. A wife has an equal right to divorce her husband. Besides the aforementioned scenarios, she can divorce her husband on the grounds of cruelty, ill-treatment, drunkenness, and impotence.

**6. Prohibitions in marriage (*mĩgiro*)**

The Agĩkũyũ ethics and code of behavior was governed largely by a system of clear and honest standards. They had a long list of prohibitions called ***mĩgiro*** (plural)**,** which would require cleansing when breached. This section will focus on the prohibitions (***mĩgiro***) that were in place with regards to Agĩkũyũ customary marriage. If a person did not respect the ***mũgiro*** (singular), or contravened them, this resulted in them being deemed unclean (***thaahu***). Leakey (2019) further elaborated that ***thaahu*** manifests itself as 'an outward sign of wasting without visible cause' (p.1332). It thus had to be purified as soon as possible since it was believed to result in death. He emphasised that it is contagious, because it can be contracted through the actions of the person themselves or through other people. The case study described later (case study 03) will further facilitate comprehension of the deep fear and respect that the Agĩkũyũ have for traditional law. The tradition appreciated that failure to observe the customary laws results in a state of uncleanliness (***thaahu***) or a curse (***kĩrumi***). It was the duty of a traditional doctor (***mũndu mũgo***) to cleanse (***gũtahĩkia***) the victim. This was not witchcraft, but genuine treatment and the restoration of healthy living.

**Goat for cleansing the afterbirth of an unmarried girl (*mbũri ya mĩruru*)**

Traditionally, among the Agĩkũyũ, it was unacceptable to get pregnant while one was still unmarried. This was viewed in bad faith. One was considered immoral and undisciplined, often being referred to as ***mũkomathĩ*** (a girl who has loose morals) or ***ndũgama njĩra*** (one who idles along footpaths).[16] ***Ihu rĩa riiko***[17] (an unwanted pregnancy) was another derogatory term

[15] Hobley (1910): 'A malicious person will, sometimes, out of spite or in a fit of rage, take up a cooking pot, dash it down to the ground and break it, saying the words ***urokua o uguo***, "may you die like this". This is a very serious matter and renders all the people of the village ***thaahu***; it is necessary for the people of the village to pay as much as seven sheep to remove the ***thaahu***. This is naturally considered a crime according to native law, and the offender is punished by the elders of ***kiama***, who inflict a fine of seven goats'. (p.453)

[16] These terms signify that the woman is loose and immoral–indiscriminately sleeps with men.

[17] This terminology is not easy to translate but it can be understood as pregnancy resulting from a 'secretive relationship'. From a traditional or contemporary perspective, the parties courting do not

used when an unmarried woman got pregnant and no man claimed responsibility for the child. The Agĩkũyũ myth of origin states that the last-born daughter of **Gĩkũyũ** and **Mũmbi** suffered this misfortune after an incestuous relationship with her sister's son. When **Gĩkũyũ** noticed changes on her daughter, **Mũmbi** protested that their daughter knows no man unless it was ***ihu rĩa riiko***. **Mũmbi** did not know that their grandson was responsible for the pregnancy. This embarrassing situation made **Gĩkũyũ** chase her away from home to the area bordering Ukambani.

When a girl gives birth in her parents' house, she introduces a state of uncleanliness to the home (***thaahu***). The Agĩkũyũ reasoned that since the girl's mother gave birth within the same home, the afterbirth somehow found its way onto the floor of the hut. It was believed that if the daughter also gives birth there, her afterbirth fluids will mix with that of her mother, consequently resulting in this uncleanliness. This afterbirth was referred to as ***mũruru*** (singular) or ***mĩruru*** (plural). Later, if the girl gets married, her husband was required to give a goat to her parents, which was referred to as the goat of cleansing the afterbirth (***mbũri ya mĩruru***). When the husband delivers the goat to the bride's homestead, it is required to be slaughtered and consumed on the same day. It will only be eaten by the bride's parents and her siblings and their children, who reside in that homestead. The groom, bride, her children, or any of the groom's relatives are not supposed to eat this meat. Apart from cleansing the home, the goat serves to bind the acceptance of this child, particularly if the husband is not its biological father. The responsibility of the child is thus traditionally/legally transferred to the groom from the child's grandfather.

Some sections of the Agĩkũyũ community required that the bride's father should give the groom a goat, referred to as 'a goat for straightening the breasts since they had been suckled by the time of her marriage' (***mbũri ya gũtiira nyondo***).

**Taboos relating to marriage**

In the Agĩkũyũ oral narratives, taboos were utilised to govern societal moral behaviour. The prohibitions listed below were obtained/outlined during the interviews (Manyeki Ng'ang'a, Kimani Muchoki, and Wamaitha Gichumba in August 2019). The discussions focused only on those that related to traditional marriage laws. They were also collaborated from literature by Leakey (2019), Getonga (2014), and Hobley (1910).

1. If a man had sexual intercourse with an animal, that was considered a great deviation from moral norms. To cleanse the man, that animal was to be slaughtered and eaten by elderly men who were past the reproductive age.[18]

follow the well laid down procedures. When pregnancy results, the man does not come out to claim responsibility and the girl may refuse to disclose the one responsible.

[18] Leakey (2019, p.1030) discussed this unusual behaviour under 'fines for bestiality' and stated that a man was made to pay a fine to the council of elders (***kiama***) and the owner of the herd. He was also made to leave his territory and go to a place where he is not known, because no girl or woman who knew of his misdeed would want him in their proximity.

2. Sexual intercourse with one's mother, sister, step-sister, aunt, or mother in-law was taboo. If a man had sexual intercourse with his father's wife while the father was alive, it was believed to be attracting his father's death, which would consequently bring a curse upon the man.

3. If a man had sexual intercourse with another man, it was considered a grave taboo and had no cleansing method. ***The two men were expected to fight until one of them died***.[19] Kenyatta (1953) also stated that 'it was a taboo to have sexual intercourse in any position except the regular one—face to face' (p.161). Leakey (2019) and Hobley (1910) presented a similar argument. Thus, my understanding is that homosexuality and bestiality were abhorred. Kenyatta (1953) candidly stated that 'Homosexuality was unknown among the Agĩkũyũ' (p.162). He justified this by highlighting that restricted intercourse ***ngwiko***[20] (fondling) between young people of opposite sexes was allowed, which in turn made homosexuality unnecessary. Mbiti (2002) concluded his analysis on sexual offences in African societies by saying, 'Africans are very sensitive to any departure from [the] accepted norm concerning all aspects of sex' (p.149).

4. Sexual intercourse with one's daughter or one's daughter in-law was considered a grave taboo, but could be cleansed by the slaughtering of a cleansing goat.

5. An adult excreting inside the house or on the doorstep was also taboo. If this occurred, a fat cleansing goat (***ngoima***) was to be slaughtered and eaten by old men who were past the reproductive age.

6. If a man had sexual intercourse with a woman who was on her monthly periods, it was considered taboo.

7. If a woman crossed over her husband's legs or body, it was considered taboo. They were required to cease sexual relations and the only solution was to divorce.

8. If a goat drank water from the basin that was being used to bathe a child, it was considered taboo. The goat was given to the in-laws to be slaughtered and eaten there.

9. If a fire stone injured a woman, it was considered taboo. The stone had to be thrown away.

10. If the roof rack (***rũtara***) where firewood was kept fell along with the firewood, it was considered taboo.

11. It was taboo for a woman to have sexual relations with her husband or any other man after the goats had gone for pasture (late in the morning[21]).

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[19] On 24 May 2019, the High Court in Kenya refused an order to declare sections 162 and 165 of the Laws of Kenya unconstitutional. Kenya does not recognize any relationships between individuals of the same sex. Homosexual marriage is banned under the Kenyan Constitution since 2010. The judges argued that gay sex clashed with the broader, traditional moral values encapsulated within Kenya's Constitution. High court petition no. 150 was made by the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community. (Available at http://kenyalaw.org/caselaw/cases/view/173946/)

[20] ***Ngwiko*** had strict rules and at the initial stages was supervised by seniors. Actual sex/penetration—though not allowed—took place, but with undesirable consequences when discovered.

[21] This period of the day is between 9.00 and 10.00am.

12. It was taboo if a child was breastfed by any woman other than its mother.
13. It was taboo for a child to swing with the door. The child was believed to be inviting death to its parents.
14. It was ***thaahu***[22] for a child to fall off its mothers back. The punishment required purification ceremonies for both the mother and child.
15. It was ***thaahu*** for a lizard to fall into the fireplace in a hut. The remedy for this ***thaahu*** was for the entire hut to be demolished to build a new one.

**Contemporary prohibitions.**

There was indescribable hatred between those who fought against (***itungati***) and those who fought alongside (***kamatimũ/ngaati***) the colonialists during the Mau Mau uprising. It was so serious that those who fought against the colonial regime forbade their children from having any relationship with the children of those who fought alongside the colonialists.

**7. Case studies**

Four case studies that concern some of the issues mentioned above will be discussed in this section. The first case study focuses on unpaid dowry and the fear of a curse arising from a family that had flouted the norms. Two of the other case studies focus on the contravention of marriage laws with respect to the sharing of matrimonial property, which lead to familial conflict. The remaining case study discusses marriage between two close relatives, whose parents did not protest the match. Since the parents abdicated their traditional role of guiding their children in ensuring that such a betrothal does not take place, it eventually led to disastrous consequences for both families.

**Case study 01: Out of fear of a curse arising from Dowry payment, a calf is buried alive**

The scenario took place in Gĩkomora Village, Maragwa[23], Mũrang'a County in June 2012. Mzee Elisha Mũgucia Wang'era was the son of the late Tiras Wang'era Mũgucia. Upon the death of Tiras Wang'era, part of the dowry owed by Mariamu Wanjirũ's (his eldest daughter) husband had remained unsettled. As a result, his eldest son (Elisha Mũgucia Wang'era) was expected to receive it in the absence of their father. Unfortunately, the situation got complicated when Elisha Mũgucia forcibly demanded its delivery and began issuing threats.

Mariamu Wanjirũ was supposed to deliver the cow to complete her dowry payment, which according to Kikuyu tradition was supposed to be given to one of her brothers in the absence of their father. In this case, custom dictated that Elisha Mũgucia Wang'era would receive the animal. Upon realising that they were delaying payment, Elisha Mũgucia Wang'era warned

[22] ***Thaahu*** is the state of uncleanliness. See prohibitions.
[23] Maragwa Town is located about 10 kilometers south of Mũrang'a town. The name is derived from a source of saline water (**mũnyũ**) that was in ancient times used by livestock and wild animals. The name Maragwa comes from the Roman words Mara (Bitter) and Aqwa (water). The site is near the spot where in the early 1990s, a bus christened Marula caused an accident that killed several people.

that if the remaining cow was not delivered while he was alive, then it had to be buried next to his dead body. Background information indicated that the dowry had not been completely paid because one cow had died along the way to the in-laws.

Unfortunately, Elisha Mũgucia Wang'era passed away due to an illness. His sister and her husband had no choice but to comply with his wishes to avoid being cursed. The family raised money and bought a calf to represent the unpaid cow, dug a grave next to that of the deceased, and buried the animal alive, as per his wish. Different opinions were floated by those who were present, such as killing the animal before burial to avoid the wrath of animals' rights activists. All of these suggestions fell onto deaf ears. However, the family was later taken to task by the Society for the Care and Protection of Animals. According to Fr. Getonga (interviewed on 13th August 2019), the Kikuyu Council of Elders (KCE) had to intervene in order for them to be pardoned (The Star, 20th June 2012, p.13). Africans have a lot of respect for the wishes and demands of a dying person, which if not fulfilled, are believed to translate into a curse.

**Case study 02: Widow inheritance and unfair family land distribution[(24)]**

Mũgwe Kamanja, the eldest son of Mzee Kamanja, befriended and married Wakonje when he was of suitable age. The couple were blessed with two children, Wambura and Kamanja. During this period, Kenya was going through a difficult time due to the intensification of the **Mau Mau** Uprising, and a state of emergency was declared. Life was extremely arduous for young and middle-aged men. They were targeted for recruitment by both the colonial government and **Mau Mau** fighters. Unfortunately, in the early 1950s, Mũgwe Kamanja was among those Kenyans who did not survive the atrocities meted by the colonial administration during in the bloody uprising. Mũthomi Kamanja was the younger brother of Mũgwe Kamanja. As the Kikuyu tradition dictated at the time, Mũgwe's wife was 'inherited' by his younger brother, Mũthomi. The Kikuyu called it ***gũthambia*** (the literal meaning is 'to cleanse'). Getonga (2014) noted that 'the Kikuyu culture allowed widows and widowers to remarry close relatives for the continuity of the family' (p.202). He outlined the process that takes up to four days to complete. A medicine man (***mũndu mũgo***) leads the process by sprinkling traditional ***mũratina*** beer on the couple. This signified their purification and allowed them to live as husband and wife.

The narrator was unable to confirm whether Mũthomi had followed the traditional cleansing procedure outlined above. Nevertheless, Mũthomi Kamanja inherited his elder brother's wife and consequently sired three daughters (two of them are still alive at present). After the birth of their third daughter, Mũthomi decided to marry another woman, and sired several other children with the younger wife.

During the first land consolidation exercise in the late 1950s, a portion of land was set aside in the name of Mzee Kamanja, who was Mũgwe and Mũthomi's father. Since both Mzee Kamanja and Mũgwe had died during the **Mau Mau** uprising, Mũthomi was the sole remaining heir to his father's land. During the second land adjudication and consolidation exercise of the

[(24)] Names used in case study 2, 3, and 4 are pseudonyms to protect the identity of the persons mentioned.

early 1960s, which provided roads and other facilities that boosted accessibility, the entire land in question was now registered in the name of Mũthomi Kamanja.

The children of both his wives were maturing and ready to start settling down with their own families. In the late 1980s, Mũthomi Kamanja passed away. Technically, Agĩkũyũ tradition mandated that the parcel of land was to be sub-divided into two equal portions—one for each wife. Unfortunately, this did not happen. Since the younger wife's children were better educated and economically stronger, they unfairly edged out the first wife's children and took the biggest portion of land. This resulted in a bitter quarrel, which was not resolved by the clan. The matter was then taken to court and the case is still ongoing. As a result, the children of the first wife have been denied their fair share of their inheritance.

The author wished to understand why the parcel of land was not apportioned into two equal parts, as per Agĩkũyũ tradition. Additionally, the clan was also unable solve to the impasse. It was strange that the sons of the second wife apportioned the land themselves and sandwiched their stepmother's children between their portions of the land. This case demonstrated the pure selfishness and greed of the younger wife's children. It is my belief that they resisted the advice of the clan, which resulted in the protracted court case.

**Case study 03: Marriage between close relatives leading to unexplainable misfortune.**

Cagnolo (1933) noted that 'Agĩkũyũ marriage prohibits any form of consanguinity' (p.114). This meant that, for a Mũgĩkũyũ man, even a distantly related kinswoman was considered unsuitable for marriage. Leakey (2019) emphasised this further by noting that 'no man might marry a girl who belongs to the same sub-clan as himself, whether his membership is through his patrilineal or matrilineal lineage' (p.816).

This case study relates to marriage between two close relatives against the wishes of certain family members. Gatambo Kanyoora and Waira Kanyoora were half-brothers, who shared the same father, Kanyoora. Kamenjũ Gatambo and Kĩmarũ Waira were the sons of Gatambo Kanyoora and Waira Kanyoora, respectively.

**Scenario 1**

Wokabi (the daughter of Kamenjũ Gatambo) and her husband decided to pay dowry to her parents. Since Kamenjũ Gatambo had died and none of his sons were alive, the only person who could receive the dowry was Kĩmarũ Waira, Wokabi's first cousin. This was considered acceptable. It had no inconsistencies and it did not clash with Agĩkũyũ tradition.

**Scenario 2**

Later, Wokabi and her husband had a daughter named Nyagachũ, who worked and lived in Nairobi. Kĩmarũ Waira's son, Kanyoora Kĩmarũ, also worked and lived in Nairobi. He met and befriended Nyagachũ, they got married and had a baby boy. However, this was seriously resisted by Wokabi's mother (Nyagachũ's maternal grandmother). However, Kanyoora's parents (Kĩmarũ Waira and Wacuka) never saw anything wrong with this marriage and therefore supported it. The baby boy was not named after Kanyoora Kimaru's father as per the norm, but after Nyagachũ's father.

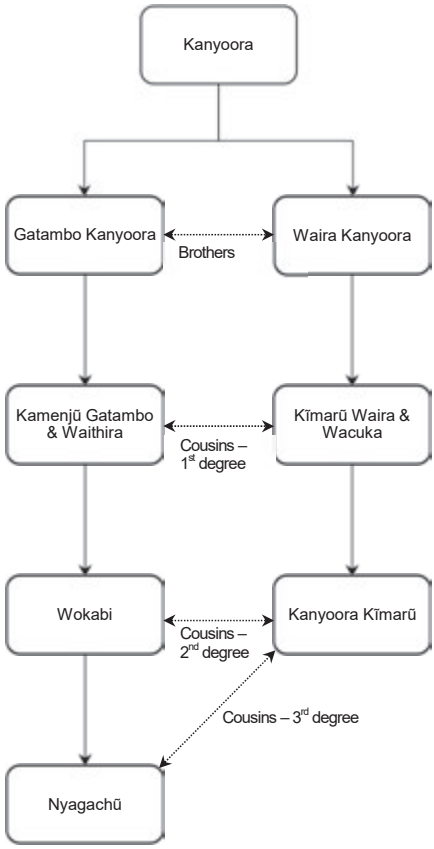


**Figure 1. Graphic representation of the family**

**Unfortunate events**

Around the year 2012, Kĩmarũ Waira decided that it was time to pay the requisite dowry to Wokabi and her husband, 'his son's in-laws'. However, they were also technically (or culturally) his children. On the eve of his visit, Wokabi fell ill and was incoherent in her verbal communication. Presently, she remains bedridden. The gates to their home are locked due to the fear that she may wander away from home and either go missing or meet with an accident. Kĩmarũ Waira also fell sick soon after returning to his home from the dowry payment ceremony. He still does not leave his home and he seems confused all the time.

In 2018, Kanyoora (Kĩmarũ's son and Nyagachũ's husband) committed suicide by ingesting poison in a bar on the outskirts of Nairobi. He had previously confided to his friends that he was plagued by terrifying nightmares. After his death, Nyagachũ never visited her matrimonial home. She did not participate in her husband's funeral either.

In July 2019, their two sons attended a prayer and thanksgiving ceremony at their paternal grandparents' home without their mother's permission. On returning to their mother

in Nairobi, the eldest son became gravely ill and was hospitalised. He was diagnosed with a kidney complication, which incurred a huge bill that the family is presently struggling to clear.

According to the informant, it is also noteworthy that Nyagachũ's pregnancies were exceptionally difficult and that she required Caesarean section both times.

**Case study 04: Man toils his youth off and wife abandons him later**

This case bears some semblance to case number two in that both originate from issues pertaining to widow inheritance, but they resulted in different complexities.

Mr. Waciura had married his wife, Nyakagũkũ in the early 1950s. They had two children together. However, during the period of emergency that resulted from the **Mau Mau** uprising, Waciũra died. His younger brother, Mwangi moved in to live with his brother's wife. When land consolidation and demarcation was taking place, Mwangi was allocated his portion. His late brother's wife was allotted her late husband's portion. Mwangi and Nyakagũkũ had only one child together. Mwangi was formally employed at the time. All along Nyakagũkũ knew that she had no love for her new husband. Nevertheless, they maintained the relationship to ensure that her children were educated and well-maintained.

However, when her children had grown up and were stable, she kicked Mwangi out. This action was not anticipated by her family or by the community. Despite being quite old and lacking significant resources, Mwangi had to relocate to his parcel of land, marry someone else, and bear children. His older years were therefore miserable. He had to work as a night guard to earn a living. The community thus blamed her apathy for Mwangi's premature death.

**8. Conclusion**

All the interviewees who responded to the questionnaire agreed that the customary marriage practices have always been in place. These practices were considered as old as life itself. As a result, there were no major complaints about these practices. However, they noted that in contemporary times, the institution of marriage faces a plethora of challenges. As a social practice, it is undergoing transformation, with some aspects of it being dropped and other new practices being adopted to suit the situation. For example, some Christians do not use the traditional beer for some rites and they instead replace it with soda. Experts of Agĩkũyũ culture vehemently disagree with these changes. They argue that the traditional beer was utilised to bless the couple. One may argue that replacing this beer with soda thereby forgoes this blessing. Additionally, some parents do not follow the established standards regarding dowry demands. Some request a greater dowry than what they paid for their wives, which is unacceptable because it amounts to outright greed.

I think that the few respected Agĩkũyũ Elders' Councils should guide the community in this matter. If this greed goes unchecked, it might adversely affect this noble cultural practice and deny several poor couples a chance to get engaged. The sense of cultural satisfaction,

belonging, and fulfilment may not be forthcoming to the economically disadvantaged.[25] It is good to note that there is an increased interest among young couples to perform traditional weddings, or to at least pay dowry and formalise their wedding in churches thereafter. The various dowry payment programs or ***ngurario*** sessions that have been recorded and uploaded to YouTube further substantiate this claim.[26] The issue of single ladies with children and their fascinating practice of 'self-paying' their dowry through their ***kamweretho*** groups should also feature in the elders' discourse on emerging issues. Culture is dynamic and I believe we must look for ways to embrace the changes or effectively cope with them. This will facilitate the revival of Agĩkũyũ culture with respect to traditional marriage and help preserve these ideals. Lastly, the mastery of negotiation is embedded in the use of **Gĩkũyũ** language. For the dowry negotiation, the groom's family selects the person with the best oratory and language skills. This wit can only be enhanced over generations if this culture is practiced.

With an increasing number of marriages breaking down in contemporary society, this traditional practice ought to be embraced as one that attempts to link contemporary society back to the strong moral standards of earlier generations. This is because the practice makes the woman feel valued and accepted by her husband and his family. Any discourse regarding Agĩkũyũ traditional marriage should focus on encouraging, strengthening, and simplifying the process of dowry payment.

**Acknowledgements**

I wish to thank Mr. Kaburu Ndubai, who gave me profound advice on how to approach the sensitive case studies, particularly the one that explored the marriage between close relatives. I also wish to thank the members of the Indigenous Knowledge Writer's Association (IKWA), who made significant contributions when the abstract and fair draft respectively were presented to them in August 2019. My kind appreciations to William Wambugu of the National Museums of Kenya who helped source some of the reference materials. Lastly, I would like to convey my sincerest thanks to Anthony Maina, the curator of the Mũrang'a Museum, who served as my research assistant.

The following interviewees/respondents also significantly contributed to this paper by answering the questionnaire. They have my utmost gratitudes.

1. Joseph Manyeki Ng'ang'a – about 95 years
2. Lydia Wamaitha Gĩchumba – 93 years
3. Felista Mũgechi – about 93 years

[25] Though the settings are different, an article in a national newspaper, dated 25th November 2019 attests to this fact. It is titled 'Ijara clerics ban lavish weddings, set new rules'. It is available at: https://www.nation.co.ke/counties/garissa/Ijara-clerics-ban-extravagant-weddings-set-new-rules/3444784-5361298-pf1kv2/index.html

[26] Recently, two high level ***ngurario*** ceremonies occurred that involved the country's political leaders. The governors of Kĩrinyaga and Nyandarwa conducted their ***ngurario*** ceremonies in 2019. This indeed raises the profile of these ceremonies.

4. Jane Nyambura Gĩchere – 70 years
5. Fr. Joachim Getonga – about 85 years (retired Catholic priest).
6. Kimani Muchoki (one of the custodians at Mũkũrwe wa Nyagathanga) – 92 years

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## Chapter 2

# ‘I hate to see my late husband’:
## Death and the last words among the Îgembe of Kenya

*Makio Matsuzono*

### 1. Introduction

The Îgembe are one of nine subgroups of the Kîmîîrû-speaking ethnic group. The Îgembe’s habitat is situated in the eastern part of the Nyambene region of the Kenyan central highlands.[(1)]

I have spent about thirty days between late July and early September each year since 2011 in farming villages in Îgembe Southeast Division. The present paper is a part of my study on Îgembe aged people.

After writing my previous paper on the Îgembe’s interpersonal relationships centring on ***îchiaro*** (Matsuzono 2014), I decided to gather data on the life history and daily life of each elderly person within a certain limited ecological area in the Division.

All those I interviewed are residents in a dozen villages in the two sub-locations in Y Location, Îgembe Southeast Division, Meru North District (alias *Nyambene*) [although these administrative zone names are now defunct, they are used in this paper for the sake of convenience]. I interviewed them a total of 59 times during 2015–2019, including the same persons several times. The interviews were conducted for about two hours each time, mostly at their front yard and sometimes in their home. For each dialogue I have been accompanied by my assistant-*cum*-interpreter who hails from Îgembe Southeast Division. The audio from the dialogues was recorded with permission from interviewees and later translated word by word into English by my assistant.

Most of the interviewees are 70 years old and above and each has his/her own private dwelling that is partitioned into two rooms, one with a fireplace and the other with a bed. Women cook and sleep in their dwelling and men wait for food to be brought to their dwelling by their wife, son’s wife, or granddaughter, although there are a few exceptions to this. Even if both husband and wife (wives) are alive, most couples in this generation take their supper together only sometimes and sleep apart from each other.

Most elderly people go to bed at 8 to 10 p.m. and leave their bed at 6 to 8 a.m., depending on the coldness of the weather each morning. There is no electricity and they spend long hours in the dark, though there may be a few hours of limited warmth and a faint glimmer coming from embers in the three-stone fireplace in the other room. One of my curiosities was just how they spend the long night all alone, sometimes with some of the small grandchildren in the women’s case.

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(1) See Ishida (2008) for geographical and socio-cultural information on the Îgembe.

Both elderly men and women are very busy during daytime, but women are more than busy, looking after grandchildren, cooking in the family kitchen, collecting water and firewood, cutting grasses for domestic animals, participating in a variety of social gatherings, and working in the gardens, which are usually found in faraway places: they walk to their gardens each way for two to three hours. I have found only a few women who enjoy uninterrupted sleep till morning. These women are rather vibrant in their sixties and amazingly hardworking farmers. All others, men and women, are awake for some hours after a short sleep, do something or sometimes nothing and go to sleep again.

In the first three years since 2015, I asked them questions relating to such subjects as: current daily routine, childhood experiences, how to become acquainted with their present or former spouse, kinds of dreams they have, history of changes in residence, history of changes in Christian churches and denominations, the most glorious time in their life, medical history, fear of death, social clubs and meetings they participate in, how to use money from the governmental Old Persons Cash Transfer (OPCT) if they are receivers, etc.

Included among the many things I had much interest in were the ways they spend the night in bed. What I remained long impressed with were (1) recurring prayers in bed and (2) women's feelings of sheer abomination and fear toward seeing the deceased husband in a dream.

In my later research, therefore, I tried to concentrate on how to find an association between these two issues, aided by the Îgembe concept of 'curse' (***kîrumî***) as a linkage between the two.

People's opinions and attitudes toward each different issue are various and those between men and women are sometimes conflicting, especially in this contemporary period of momentous social change. This is the reason I wanted to let this paper reflect both elderly men's and women's unfiltered opinions without being distorted by excessive condensation and opportunistic interpretations of my own.

## 2. The ghost, *kîruundu*, stays around the grave

### 2.1. The ghost remains after death

Although I had known that ***kîruundu*** was the word generally used among the Îgembe to refer to the ghost or spirit of a deceased person, I consciously avoided on my part touching on this particular word and tried to have the villagers give their own account of what happens after death.[(2)] My usual opening question was: 'When a person dies, does he/she disappear without a trace or does he/she leave anything in this world?'

Most villagers immediately responded by bringing up the word ***kîruundu*** and describing how the ***kîruundu*** makes its appearance as well as how it affects surviving family members. Some of their replies were as follows:

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[(2)] According to Nyaga (1997: 42), the sprits of ancestors were referred to as ***nkoma-chia-bajûûjû-beetû*** in the traditional Amîîrû society. It seems, however, that the concept of ***kîruundu*** is preferable to that of ***nkoma*** in this context as the latter is imbued with rather negative connotations of evilness in my informants' current points of view.

(A1) Yes, something remains. It is a ***kîruundu*** that remains. It is a kind of curse (***kîrumi***). If you act against the last words of the departed, the ***kîruundu*** will come to affect you [female, aged 85, 2015].

(A2) It is a ***kîruundu***. The ***kîruundu*** cannot be seen, but it can affect you unless you follow what was told by the departed. Something should happen to you if you ignore their last words. That is what is brought by the ***kîruundu***. Once you get affected by the ***kîruundu***, village elders will come and tell you how to perform the ritual of 'healing the curse' (***kwooria kîrumi***). Yeah, the ***kîruundu*** stays here after a person dies. Are you asking me why I know this? It's because we sometimes dream of a dead person. That is an evidence of the ***kîruundu*** staying around here [female, aged *ca.* 95, 2015].

(A3) A certain woman once told me about her dream where she had met her dead husband. Her husband began talking to her and tried to give her something. The moment she reached out her hand for it, she woke from the dream. I think what she saw was the ***kîruundu*** of her late husband. For me, I have never seen my late husband in my dream, but I believe that his ***kîruundu*** is hovering around here as well. I've heard so many times about people who start praying God right after waking from such a dream so that they may not repeat it. But I've never heard of people who were affected by a ***kîruundu***. It may be because nobody has ever done anything contrary to the last will of the dead in my village [female, aged 85, 2015].

(A4) Yes, something remains in this world. My late husband used to tell me, 'When I die, don't bury my body at a faraway place. Bury me here in this compound, then I can hear what you are talking about and I can guard you as well.' Now, he is down there [pointing to the grave], keeping a close watch over us [female, aged 92, 2015].

(A5) Yes, the ***kîruundu*** exists. It exists in ***manganyoni*** (somewhere between heaven and earth). The dead person's ***kîruundu*** will come and curse on you if you do something opposite to what you were instructed to do, especially when you were the one having listened in person to his/her last words [female, aged 86, 2015].

(A6) As a Christian, I don't believe in the ***kîruundu,*** because the departed shall resurrect someday as the Bible tells us. Though I say this, even me, I believe that if I disobey my parents on their deathbed, their ***kîruundu*** will come and punish me, affecting my life adversely. For example, what will happen if I take away a bigger plot out of the inherited land, ignoring my father's directions to divide the land equally among my brothers? My father's ***kîruundu*** will come automatically and start working on me. This will be the curse of my father's ***kîruundu*** [male, aged 73, 2015].

(A7) It was believed in the past that a deceased person remained as ***kîruundu*** in this world. That is why old people even now spill a little bit of their food and drink on the ground when starting to eat [I noticed this being done several times].[(3)] By doing so, they are 'feeding god of our grandparents' (***kûrumia ngai wa bajûûjû***). There also used be the ritual called 'authentic Meru prayers' (***maroomba ya Kîmîîrû***), in which they offered a ram to their clan when they wanted to save their child from a severe illness. The clan elders cut the ram from its head to tail, dividing it into two parts. The clan elders and the family in question ate a half of the meat and threw the other half into the bush to feed wild animals. Those wild animals were regarded as a manifestation of god of their clan ancestors [male, aged 93, 2015].[(4)]

(A8) Although not seen with our eyes, the ***kîruundu*** remains after the death of a person. That is what we believe. When I was a child, I used to see my grandmother pouring a little milk on a grave while she was milking a goat. She told me she was feeding her parents [female, aged 69, 2019].

**2.2. Pastors' interpretations of the ghost**

The majority of the villagers interviewed agree that a dead person leaves a ghost, ***kîruundu***, in this world, but there are a few exceptions. One male was hesitant at least in the beginning to admit the existence of the ***kîruundu*** (A6 above). Another male gave a flat denial, going so far as to say: 'I have never heard of the word ***kîruundu*** in my life. I was living with my mother, and she had never spoken of ***kîruundu***.' This elderly man is well known in the vicinity as a person of extensive knowledge as to the Îgembe traditions. He was a pastor for twelve years at a local Protestant church, now having retired from it, yet remaining there as an influential elder preacher. I was surprised at this remark made in 2016, since the word was freely used by many villagers during my interviews with them. I surmised that this ex-pastor's negation of the word ***kîruundu*** might be an expression of his own inward conflict in choosing either of the two positions: an elderly man widely informed of the traditional customs on the one hand and a devout Christian elder on the other.

Revisiting him three years later, I asked him unconcernedly about the connotative difference of ***kîruundu*** as it was used in Christian churches on the one hand and in Îgembe's daily life on the other. He replied:

(A9) The ***kîruundu*** for Christians is the ***kîruundu ûmûtheru*** (the Holy Spirit). But the ***kîruundu*** of the deceased for villagers here is just like a watchman guarding his compound.

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[(3)] See also Nyaga (1997: 42) for the Kîmîîrû way of libations of food and drink to ancestral spirits.

[(4)] This informant is said to be the eldest male in the villages of Y Location and he uttered during this interview interchangeably both '***ngai wa bajûûjû***' (god of our grandparents) and '***îruundu bia bajûûjû***' (ghosts of our grandparents).

> Among us the Îgembe, the ***kîruundu*** is regarded as something that comes to penalise those failing to follow the last words of the deceased (male, aged 74, former pastor, 2019).

Quoted below is part of a dialogue I had with an incumbent pastor at a Protestant Church [his denomination differs from that of the narrator in A9].

> (A10) [Question: When addressing a congregation, do you use '***kîruundu***' to indicate 'spirit'?] Yes, we use '***kîruundu***' in our church. It means the Holy Spirit, which is called more precisely ***kîruundu ûmûtheru*** in the Meru language. The Holy Spirit is what Jesus Christ sent to us believers as our guide. We Christians believe in the Holy Spirit.
> [Q: I hear many people saying that they meet and talk with the ***kîruundu*** of a dead person sometime in their dream. Is it true?] Yes, it is true. In such a case we do pray God so as not to have a dream of that kind again. But me myself I've never had such a dream.
> [Q: Do pastors preach in the church not believe in the ***kîruundu***?] No, no, we don't preach that way, because we pastors also believe in the ***kîruundu***, but we, as Christians, believe in it in a different way, different from the traditional meaning in its Îgembe usage. When you die, your body is buried in the earth but your ***kîruundu*** ascends to heaven to await the judgement. If you have done good deeds in this world, you are allowed in Paradise and you live a happy life forever hand in hand with God's angels. We pastors believe that there does not exist death in Paradise. Nor do we think that the dead person vanishes into nothing since his/her ***kîruundu***, though usually dormant, remains in this world. What has really perished is nothing but the body, that is, flesh, blood and bones [male pastor, aged 52, 2017].

From the two above quotations A9, A10, it may be assumed that the Îgembe Protestant pastors, when mentioning the world ***kîruundu***, refer to either the Holy Spirit or the soul of the dead. Their interpretation of the soul of the dead sounds like a mixture of the Christian concept of the soul and the Îgembe's indigenous concept ***kîruundu***.

**2.3. A summary of villagers' statements on the ghost**

For the time being, all the villagers' remarks as to the ***kîruundu***, including those quoted above and others not quoted, may be summarised as follows:

(1) One leaves one's ghost, ***kîruundu***, after death, which stays around one's burial place in the compound.

(2) One's ghost keeps a close watch over its surviving family members to have them not deviate from one's dying wish.

(3) The family member having acted against one's dying wish is cursed sooner or later by the ghost.

(4) The survivors fear seeing the ghost in a dream and, on seeing it, normally start praying God so as not to see it again.

Although the above summary itself seems simple, consistent, and easy to understand, it quickly raises many important questions: Does every person, regardless of sex, including a small child, become a ghost after death? How do they leave their will and what does it contain normally? What will happen to those cursed by the ghost and are there any means for them to escape from the curse? How is the ghost depicted in terms of its words and deeds while it appears in a dream of its family members?

Before tackling these questions, I describe briefly a drastic change in the ways to dispose of the dead body, which occurred during the first half of the 20th century in Îgembe society.

**2.4. The body was not buried before Christianisation**

In March 1910, after temporal visits by Europeans, 'a small kind of sub-station' of the British colonial government was opened in Maua, to be operated by an Assistant District Commissioner under the Meru District Commissioner's supervision.[5] The mission station of the Roman Catholic Church was first set up in Îgembeland between 1912 and 1913[6] [hereafter, the Îgembe's major habitat is referred to as Îgembeland], followed by that of Methodist Church in the late 1920s.[7] Therefore, it was probably the 1910s that marked Îgembe history's great watershed.

What concerns us here is how the dead body had been disposed of among the Îgembe before and how it changed after the onset of the colonial government and Christianity in Îgembeland. The data are too scarce at this moment to know in detail how this change proceeded among the Îgembe. By summarising below several elderly men's relevant statements, however, we can get a rough idea of what happened to Îgembe's mortuary practices.

There was nothing to be called burial before Christianisation.[8] Only elderly men's bodies were put in a fenced ground, called ***kîaara***, outside but close to the stockade surrounding the compound, and circumcised youths were posted there as guards until the bodies decomposed without being devoured by wild animals. All other bodies were laid in a small open space called ***kachiongo***, which was found in each village. The bodies put there were devoured thoroughly by wild animals before dawn the next day.

Although I may be digressing from the subject, what is of some interest here is a statement given by an elderly man. According to him, 'Even wild animals didn't touch the body of a person

[5] The sub-station, however, 'could not be worked on account of the withdrawal of the 2nd A. D. Commissioner' (Meru District Record Book, p. 3).
[6] Annual Report on Meru District for the Year 1912–1913, p. 38; Annual Report on Meru District for the Year 1913–1914, p. 1.
[7] Annual Report on Meru District for the Year 1929, p. 12.
[8] See also Nyaga (1997: 42) for a similar statement. Peatrik (2000: 3) notes; 'Nobody was buried, because of a strong prohibition against the burial of dead'. Nevertheless, the corpse of ***ntiindiri*** ('over-matured' person) was buried because 'the remaining life in the corpse was so little that it could not affect the earth and the crops' (Peatrik 2000: 4). Cotran (1969: 30–31) and M'Imanyara (1992: 139–142) notes different ways of disposing of the dead body according to his/her age and gender in the traditional Amîîrû society.

whose death was brought by the attack of ***îchiaro*** power. Only after the deceased's ***mwîchiaro*** was brought to the spot and the latter did ***kwiikia mataa*** (throwing saliva) to the body, animals started eating the body.' This statement smacks of exaggeration and caricaturing of a bygone practice, but at the same time it illustrates the degree of the Îgembe's fear of ***îchiaro*** power.[9]

Later in the 1930s, people were ordered by White colonial officers to bury the body (Lamont 2011). They followed the order and just put the bare body in a dug-out hole without using any kind of coffin. But there was an exception to this, again for elderly men. When an elderly man died, they slaughtered a ram. They smeared the ram's fat all over his body, wrapped it with the ram's raw pelt, and laid it in the hole. People started using handmade wooden coffins later for all the bodies, following instructions by White missionaries.

I do not have information as to how many years it took and what the actual process was for the new practice of burying dead bodies to become a widespread practice in Îgembeland. At least, I have never heard of elderly people talking about their parents' experience of having been caught up in any conflicts or squabbles when the younger generation buried their parents or siblings. This process of change probably went on smoothly, together with Îgembe's Christianisation.

**2.5. Burial today**

Today, all bodies are buried inside a compound. One's unmarried children are usually buried near the farthest bounds of the compound. A husband is buried near his eldest son's or wife's home. When he is a polygamist, his body is buried in most cases near his last wife's home, where he has spent his last years. A wife is buried near her home if her husband is still alive, and it depends on her sons' decision where to bury her when her husband is already dead.

Most of the elderly people while alive tell their sons where they wish to be buried: their wish is regarded as a part of their will, ***kiigai***. According to the ideal way, husband and wife are buried side by side facing each other: the husband's body is laid sideways in the coffin with his head on his right arm and the wife with her head on her left arm.

There are five big funeral service companies in Maûa Town [the capital of the now defunct Meru North District]. The villagers usually use one of these companies when they have lost a family member. Many kinds of funeral paraphernalia are purchased or rented from them depending on the financial situation of the bereaved family and where the person died: at home or in a hospital in Maua Town, or in a distant place. The paraphernalia available there include: hearses, coffins, a table whereon to put a coffin during the ceremony, a cross to be put on the grave, artificial flowers to be arranged around the grave, iron bars to be fixed in the four corners of a dug-out hole so as to bring a coffin safely down to the bottom of the hole, etc. This costs a huge amount of money for the family. For instance, the payment for a coffin is from 8,000 to 20,000 Kenyan shillings. The fee for the transportation of a body by a hearse from a hospital in Maua Town to the villages in Y Location depends on the type of vehicle used, but it costs at least

[9] See Matsuzono (2014) for detailed analysis of ***îchiaro*** and ***îchiaro*** power.

7,000 shillings.

The bereaved family prepares booklets containing a eulogy and funeral program with colour photos of the deceased, which are distributed among a large attendance at the funeral. The family also prepares food to be served for them after the burial.

A funeral for both a married and unmarried person is carried out as a community event involving many residents of nearby villages. A funeral committee is organised for planning the whole process of logistics including fund raising to cover the cost of the funeral. At church services prior to the funeral, donations are collected from the congregation not only in the church of the deceased but also in those of other different denominations.

The funeral is presided over by a pastor, father, or preacher of the deceased's denomination. Invited guests are the Location Chief and Assistant Chiefs of nearby sub-locations and the staff at churches of many different denominations. Guests and other attendants contribute their donations.

**2.6. Father's and husband's ghost**

Whenever I asked the villagers what the ghost looks like, their reply was always the same: 'I don't know. It's not visible. I've never seen it with my own eyes. But I'm sure it's floating on the ground near its grave.' They usually continued by saying that the ghost might show up in their dream just in the same way as the dead person looked like when he/she was alive.

Two types of dreams predominate in their talks about a ghost appearing in a dream: one is the father's ghost appearing in his son's dream and the other is the husband's ghost in his wife's dream. This seems quite natural since a father/husband in most cases is the actual owner of the whole family property, including land and ***mîraa*** trees.

I already quoted above the one villager's remark: 'the ***kîruundu*** is regarded as something that comes to penalise those failing to follow the last will of the deceased' (A9). Let me add another relevant remark:

> (A11) The ***kîruundu*** comes to your dream to remind you of the deceased's ***kiigai*** (will). So, in the case that you have disturbed what the deceased instructed you to do about his property, this ***kîruundu*** will bring you a curse before long. If you've done the opposite to the will, you die an abnormal death, dying not because of illness or any accident. Then we know your death is caused by the ***kîruundu***' [female, aged 66, 2015].

I have never come across villagers who could give me a detailed account of their own dream in which the ghost of their father/husband reproached them for not following his will. The emergence itself of a dead husband/father in a dream seems to be interpreted by them as a sign of his strong warning or censure regarding his family's running of his handed-over property as well as their efforts to maintain peace and order in the compound he left.

What is highly interesting in this regard is that all the several episodes concerning a wife being properly reproached or punished by the ghost appearing in her dream were revealed to

me in the form of the narrator's guessing or hearsay about other women, not as a narrator's own experience. I quote such an episode below:

> (A12) I've stopped visiting my intimate friend K, because she is exhibiting strange behaviour these days [for anonymity, a capital letter is used randomly to denote a proper name in this paper]. K took back and sold the plot of land that her son had inherited from his father [K's late husband]. She and the son have been arguing about the plot since. They go to the Chief's office almost every day to continue their argument [the Chief is a local administrator in charge of each Location]. I hate to see her behaving like that. I'm sure she will meet with a mishap when she dies. I mean she will die in agony and suffer from severe pain for many days until she breathes her last. For instance, I may hear of her death in the morning and later in the evening I hear that she is still alive.[(10)] Her husband's ghost will surely come to punish her in her dream. The ghost will run after and beat her up. Her neighbours may hear her screaming at night. But these neighbours may not be aware of the reason why she is being beaten by the ghost [the same female as in A4, aged 92, 2015].

**2.7. A mother's ghost is much less powerful but feared just as much**

While the villagers say that the mother's ghost is as horrifying as the father's ghost, they also assert that the mother's ghost is much less powerful since a woman dies with no particular inheritance for her family, hence not having much to tell in her last words. A mother appears more often in their dream than a father, but they think that her frequent appearances have nothing to do with the meagre property she has left.

The villagers' fear of the ghost of a father/husband apparently derives from their fear of a curse from his ghost as the preceding patriarchal head of the compound as well as the owner of the family property. This is also shown in the standard reasoning given by those women who, as they say, have never had, or very rarely had, a dream of their late husband: 'Because I have never disturbed my sons keeping their inherited land as was allotted by my late husband.'; 'I've kept this compound intact and peaceful and haven't done anything against my husband's instructions. There is no reason for my late husband to visit me in a dream to put a curse on me.'

Although the mother's/wife's ghost is looked on as much less powerful than its male counterpart, i.e. the father's/husband's ghost, in terms of its potential to curse its family, it is likewise most feared by the villagers when it appears in their dream. In fact, they emphasise that they are very afraid of both their father's and mother's ghosts, and to the same degree at that. The typical explanation given by both men and women for this is: 'Because both our parents fostered us with all their possible efforts.' Somewhat simple and indefinite as this may sound, there lie behind this remark certain significant cultural attitudes of the Îgembe regarding the dyadic relationship between parent-child generations: there are volumes of speech and behaviour codes

[(10)] This statement describes how the woman dies her unnatural death.

that bind them to pay respect to the people of the parental generation, a breach of which invites a serious curse from the latter; one's parents are regarded as capable of bringing the fiercest curse. I speculate that the children's feeling of awe and respect is carried on many years after parental death; this feeling is rekindled and revived especially when either parent appears in their dreams.

Another point to be made here is a universally found deep feeling of attachment between a mother and a child: a dead mother probably emerges more often than others in her child's dream. The most conspicuous reason why the Îgembe generally fear meeting the dead in a dream is related to their deep-rooted assumption that the deceased always visit them with the motive to take them away to the other world; they may soon die after having such a dream. Should a child wish to see their dead mother even in a dream and the mother appears in their dreams frequently, the child may well be captured each time by the idea of quick death after the dream.

As an example, a son's dream of his mother who recently died is quoted below:

> (A13) I've dreamed of my mother three times since she died two years ago. In the first dream, Mother came to my home and called me just as she had done while alive. I didn't answer in the beginning. I woke up the moment I was almost answering her. I realised that it was a dream. I felt very bad and prayed. We, the Amîîrû, think that when the dead appear in a dream, they are calling us back, taking us to their place. So, we think we will also die soon. That's why we fear having a dream of our relatives. I remember my second dream of Mother up to now vividly. I met Mother down there from my home, at the junction going to my fathers' compound. The moment I was raising my hand to greet her, I woke up from sleep. Immediately I noticed myself lifting my blanket up with my hand just as I was greeting Mother in my dream. I prayed God this time again. The third dream was like this: I saw Mother coming to her home, that is, our parental home. We brothers were having a lunch in Mother's home. She came nearer to the home and stopped in front of us. I stood up and went close to her, saying 'Mum, Mum.' That moment, I woke up. Not only me, other villagers also saw her in their dream more than once. They told me about their dreams. I saw Mother in my dream for a few months after her death. Now, I don't dream about Mother [male, married, aged 30, 2015].

**2.8. Does an unmarried person become a ghost?**

When I asked, 'Is there any difference between the ***kîruundu*** of unmarried people and that of married people?' one male replied, 'The ***kîruundu*** is what is left by grown-up, married people. Because children and unmarried people don't leave their will, they never leave their ***kîruundu***' [the same male as in A9, aged 74, 2019]. This remark is attested to by other villagers' statements. When they talk about the ***kîruundu***, it is in most cases the ***kîruundu*** of the father, mother, and husband, whether it appears in a dream or floating in the air.

However, for some villagers, it is not clear whether it is a ***kîruundu*** or not when they dream of their near kin who have died young, such as their children, grandchildren, nephews and

nieces. Their feelings toward these young kin appearing in a dream seem to be swaying between fear and affection. A very old woman told me about a dream in which she saw her grandson who had recently killed himself by taking pesticide. The last part of our dialogue follows:

> (A14) [Q: Have you ever heard of ***kîruundu***?] 'Yes, I've heard.'
> [Q: What is it?] 'I don't know it in detail. Doesn't it refer to something about a dead person?'
> [Q: Do you think the grandson of yours has left his ***kîruundu***?] 'I don't know. But I think why I saw him in my dream is because I was so fond of him who while alive had helped me a lot.'
> [Q: Is the ***kîruundu*** something horrible?] 'Yes, it's very, very horrible.'
> [Q: What does it do for living people?] 'If a person you love dies, the person remains in your memory for a long time, doesn't he/she? What let you keep that memory for a long time is the ***kîruundu***, I think.' [the same female as in A2, aged *ca*. 95, 2015].

Another female talked of a dream in which her dead son and daughter appeared several times.

> (A15) [Q: The two children of yours died young, unmarried. Are they also ***îruundu*** (plural of ***kîruundu***) now?] 'Yes, they are ***îruundu***. That's why they appear in my dream. But they won't do any harm to my family because they didn't leave any ***kiigai*** (will)' [the same female as in A8, aged 69, 2019].

I had better leave it open to interpretation as to whether an unmarried person turns into a ***kîruundu*** after death. As quoted above, there are two opposite opinions as well as ambiguous opinions in this regard among the villagers. My impression is that more females than males have a tendency to believe in ***îruundu*** of those dying young and unmarried.

## 3. 'I hate to see my late husband'

### 3.1. Why do we fear dreaming of the dead?

As has been pointed out up to here, the striking feature of the Îgembe's cultural attitudes toward dreaming is the extraordinary degree of fear they experience in a dream where they encounter deceased relatives, especially their spouse and parents, among others. I give two more examples as a case in point:

> (A16) I saw my late husband in a dream. I remember it occurred only once. The husband was coming toward me, greeting me. I shouted to him, 'Go back to where you came from'. I chased him and he went away. I woke up and started praying. A few days later I started keeping a panga (machete) by my side in bed so that I might cut him with it next time he would appear again in my dream. I've never dreamed of him since then [the same female as in A4, aged 92, 2015].

(A17) [Q: Have you ever talked with your husband in your dream since he passed away?] Oh, no! No! It's not good to dream of one's late husband. My husband died while I was holding him in my arms, feeding him with a spoon. In his last moments, he told me, 'You have to look after well our sons, daughters, and grandchildren.' If I ever see him in my dream, it means that he is calling me to the place he was taken to. That's why I'm praying God so often everyday not to see him in my dream [the same female as A5, aged 86, 2015]

According to the villagers, those appearing in a dream usually try to take the dreamer to their world of the dead; they sometimes even forcibly abduct the dreamer. The villagers' fear of such dreaming is apparently associated with their fear of death. One example follows:

(A18) I was very sick in bed. My late husband J appeared when I was asleep. J was nicely dressed in a black jacket and a white shirt with well-polished black shoes on. Standing in front of me, he asked, 'My wife, how are you?' I replied, 'I'm seriously sick'. Because I was very surprised to see him dressed so neatly, I asked him, 'Where have you been to this day? You look healthy and strong with such fine clothes on. You've totally changed'. He said, 'My place is rich in everything. There's a big difference between my place and here. I was so poor here. I've come to take you to my place. Why don't we live together? But now I remember that our last son M isn't married yet. Maybe I'd better not take you this time. I'll leave you here and wait until M marries and sire a grandchild for you.' Then, the ghost of my husband disappeared [female, aged *ca*. 80, 2019].

In the above statement (A18), the woman 'was very sick in bed.' In connection with this statement, I should add that those dreaming of their close relatives are sometimes seriously ill. A man commented:

If you frequently have a dream where you are talking with a dead person, the latter will come one night to take you away to the latter's place. In fact, it really happens like that. You die soon and follow the dead person. That is the way people here understand such a dream. Sometimes we hear people, mostly the old and the sick, grumbling about something. They are in fact talking with the dead. They will die shortly [the same male as in A9, aged 74, former pastor, 2019].

Although this man is a former pastor as well as a current preacher, he seems to have the same traditional views common to most of the villagers in this regard.

In the dream in A18, the deceased husband decided not to take his wife that time but to come back later. I heard of many other similar dreams where a dreamer had been saved from an abduction crisis. I give two examples:

(A19) One day, in my dream, I went out to collect firewood. When I was cutting a withered tree, my dead mother came and asked me, 'What are you doing here?' I said, 'I'm here for firewood.' Then she shouted, ordering me to go home quickly and stay with my family [female, aged 75, 2017].

(A20) Many people who had died years ago came toward me in my dream and said 'S [the dreamer], hurry up. You'll be left here if you don't hurry.' I stood up and followed them. Before I walked a few meters, my late son M appeared from nowhere and blamed them severely, 'Where are you guys taking my mother? Are you going to take her away? Let her go home right now.' They ran off, leaving me alone. While on my way back, I woke up only to know it was a dream. I prayed hard [the same female as in A1, aged 87, 2017].

As shown in the above examples, dreamers always wake up from a dream before being carried off to the other world: the deceased postpones his/her own intended abduction (A18); the deceased warns the dreamer not to come nearer and tells the dreamer to return home (A19); and in another case, a son of the dreamer appears on the scene, blocking the others' intended abduction of the dreamer (A20).

As one female confessed, her dead husband appeared in her dream and warned her of taking their daughter away, which did become a reality. Her story goes as follows:

(A21) My dead son and daughter appear frequently in my dreams. I'm happy to see them even in a dream. But I feel very sad when I wake up and realise that it was a dream. I never fail to pray God after dreaming of them. My dead husband appeared one time at night and asked me, 'I know you've been taking good care of our daughter K. But she looks so troubled these days. Why? Shall I take her?' A few days later at night K took pesticide and died in misery. I found her lying dead the next morning. A little unfinished liquid remained in the bottle beside her body. I couldn't even take her to a hospital. That is the last time I saw my husband in my dream [the same female as in A8, aged 69, 2019].

As for the last quotation (A21), I asked the narrator, 'Did your husband appear in your dream to warn you of a disaster to come?' She replied, 'Yes, he came to tell me that he'll take my daughter and he really did it so soon after' [their daughter K was 15 years old when she died. She was a school leaver, known for her beauty in the neighbourhood].

### 3.2. Why do we pray God?

#### 3.2.1. The deceased appear from the paradise-like world

The deceased as appearing in a dream usually come from a paradise-like place where crops and livestock are abundant, a river is flowing, never to dry up, woods are green, and sometimes angel-like girls in white robes are singing. As shown in A18, the deceased in a dream are usually properly dressed: they try to persuade the dreamer to leave their poverty-stricken

life and come to their opulent world.

As a matter of fact, not a few villagers say they are happy when they have an enjoyable dream in which, to give a few often repeated examples, they are singing a hymn in a church, surrounded by many people with white clothes on; they are invited into a big house wherein plenty of dishes of various kinds are arranged on the table; and they are holding a mountain of fresh bank notes in their arms. They simply enjoy dreams of this kind where none of their deceased relatives appear; they never feel it necessary to pray after waking from such a delightful dream.

The purpose of praying God after waking from a dream of the deceased relative is, to cite one villager's comment, 'to cut the total connection with that person and not to have such a dream again'. An elderly man said 'As long as I'm a Christian and I know how to pray, I can do away with bad dreams. I don't want to see my dead relatives in my dream. That's why, before going to bed, I pray not to have such a dream [male, aged 80, 2018]. An elderly woman gave a similar comment, 'I don't dream so often these days. But years ago, I used to dream when I skipped praying before going to bed [the same female as in A4 and A12, aged 92, 2015].

They also pray immediately after having nightmares in general: being attacked and devoured by a furious wild animal, being thrown into a deep hole like a dug-out latrine, a thug breaking into one's home and almost slashing one with a panga, one's car almost dropping from a shaky bridge over the river, a bus with one's grandson inside dropping into the river, etc.

### 3.2.2. The posture of praying God

The posture of praying in and around bed varies, according to one's habit and physical condition, between lying in bed, sitting on bed, and kneeling on the floor. Motions of hands and arms are also varied: opening one's arms then clasping one's hands, keeping one's arms folded across their chest and simply lying without moving their arms or hands. One woman said, 'I knelt down beside bed when I was younger, then later knelt on bed, and now I pray as I'm lying in bed because I've come to feel a pain in both my knees' [female, aged 65, 2019].

Saying prayers itself is an everyday affair in the home of the villagers. They pray before each meal. Elderly people, among others, pray before and after sleep and most of them also pray every time they wake up during the night. Most families do not fail to attend church services on Sunday or Saturday [Seventh Day Adventists], irrespective of their denominations. There are many church buildings, some under construction (even in a small village), funded largely by church members. Mass prayer meetings and intra- and inter-denominational seminars occur frequently on public grounds or inside public facilities, mostly schools. Villagers' church-related activities are countless, such as fund-raising, mutual financing, relief food distribution, and circuit welfare check-up by visiting each church member's home. Children are taught Christianity in a religion class at school.

Praying is ubiquitous in their everyday life, both at home and outside. Therefore, it may seem nothing remarkable that they start praying right after awaking from a bad dream. But this particular kind of praying related to seeing a dead close relative in a dream is worth noting for

two reasons: first, it is done all alone in a confined place, i.e. a bedroom; second, it is done for one practical purpose, that is, to either prevent or obliterate a nightmare, and most villagers believe that this really takes effect.

### 3.2.3. The bygone ritual to invalidate dreaming of the dead

While listening time and again to villagers' narratives about praying God to avoid or nullify their nightmares, I was wondering at what time the Îgembe started this practice. If their forefathers had also loathed dreaming of the dead, what would they have been doing to avoid it without knowing how to pray to the Christian God?

Here again the same informed elderly man, the former pastor, had his own answer to tell me. I have not yet cross-checked his statement with the other elderly people. But, as far as I understand from a long acquaintance with him since 2011, his knowledge as to Îgembe traditions as well as historical affairs is adequately trustworthy. It is worth quoting here his statement, which follows:

> (A22) [Q: People here pray God so as not to see a dead relative in a dream. How was this kind of practice done before Christianity came to this area?] It was done even well before Christianisation, though in a different way. Our forefathers, when they had a dream of that kind, performed a ritual that was called 'a ritual of closing' (***kîongwaana kîa kwiinga***) or 'a ritual of preventing' (***kîongwaana kîa kûrigîîria***). A ram (***ntûrûme***) and honey (***naichû***) were used for this ritual, which was administered by a special elder.
> [Q: Have you witnessed that ritual?] 'No, no, I haven't. I heard of the ritual from my grandfather.
> [Q: Will you tell me if you know how the ritual was done traditionally?] When the late father comes in a dream of his son because the son has not yet fulfilled what was told in his father's ***kiigai***, the son slaughters a ram and shares its meat together with the father's grandson [probably the son's son, who stands as proxy for his grandfather]. Maybe we can call it a kind of spitting (***kwiikia mataa***). Next, the son pours honey on the father's grave. Then, the father no longer appears in the son's dream. If the father did not leave any special ***kiigai*** to be fulfilled by the son, the latter pours honey only without slaughtering a ram. Nowadays Christians employ a much easier measure. They just say a few words of praying. That's all, and no more nightmare [the same male as in A9, former pastor, aged 74, 2019].

## 4. What will happen if the last words are neglected?

### 4.1. Written wills and verbal wills

The villagers are well informed that there are two kinds of wills: a written will (***kiigai kîandîki***, pl. ***biigai bîadîki***) and a verbal will (***kiigai kiugi***, pl. ***biigai biugi***).[(11)] They also know

[(11)] See also Cotran (1969: 38–39) and M'Imanyara (1992: 146–147) for generalised statements of the Kîmîîrû way of making wills.

that a person equipped with a written will generally enjoys a stronger position than otherwise when a dispute over inheritance is brought to the lawcourt.

As a matter of fact, there are very few elderly people who have prepared, or are going to prepare, a written will. The written will is regarded by them as something to be drawn up by a learned person. The villagers born in the 1920s say that, during their childhood, there were no schools, churches, or hospitals and there was only a small dispensary far away. Several elderly people born in the 1930s remember that they helped their parents carry bricks and other materials for building a school. A few elderly men born in the 1940s went to school but all of them dropped out. The elderly villagers are unanimous in saying, 'There was no school in our time and our children are the ones who started going to school.'

Several men were working as various kinds of helpers for colonial officers and there used to be many village men working far from home at Europeans' farmlands in Kenya during the colonial period. They came back home, equipped with some knowledge of English, but the men of this generation have now almost died out. Among the villagers above the age of 65 in Y Location whom I interviewed, none speak English and the majority have never been to school whatsoever.

There is not any prescribed language to be used in preparing a written will according to Kenya's succession law. However, Kenya's Constitution and laws are written in English. The main courtroom language is English, although other languages are used with the help of interpreters if needed. The court files and judiciary documents are also written in English. Therefore, there exists a very strong atmosphere causing villagers to feel that legal papers including wills must be, or had better be, written in English. In a sense most of those I interviewed belong to the generation of a transitional period when English was nowhere to be heard and schools were scarcely open to rural boys and girls.

One does not have to write one's will by oneself. When unable to write one's will, what one generally does is to write one's signature or mark on the prepared paper.

In addition to their illiteracy, the elderly villagers are not well informed of minute legal technicalities surrounding a written will. They need learned persons residing in their vicinity to accompany them to an advocate's office in Maua Town. The father's primary concern to be included in his written will is always to prevent the disputes that may arise regarding already allotted land among his sons as well as whom he wants to alienate from the land that remains unallotted.

Accordingly, to prove the land in question is really owned by him, the father must have the necessary documents copied at the relevant Government offices, which he shows to the advocate and attaches to his written will. He will spend a sum of money to pay for the advocate and to prepare transport for his frequent trips to Maua Town.

The land demarcation/adjudication by the Government Land Office started in Y Location in 1989 and the registration of all the pieces of land, each with its owner's name, is now completed. Granting title deeds to each piece of land is now underway. During the process of the land demarcation and following registration there have occurred countless disputes among

relatives and neighbours, which have been either filed at the local land office/committee or brought to the traditional elders' council (***Njûriîncheke***). The title deeds are currently suspended for those pieces of land that are still pending in court.

The younger generation are feeling it far more necessary to make a written will since most of them now have the means and land disputes are on the increase. They feel all the more so because the idea of equal legal rights between males and females is permeating among people in this area: daughters and divorced or abandoned wives are already beginning to make claims to their share of land, leading to their fighting with their fathers and ex- husbands in a Location Chief's office or in a courtroom.

Those who are seriously afraid of an untimely death prior to allotting their land among their sons are likely to prepare and keep their written wills. Even if a father has already divided his land among his sons, he may also prepare a will if he is aware that disputes over division of land among his sons will occur rather easily after his death.

The act of leaving a will for the villagers is not really a matter of choice between leaving a written will and verbal will. ***Kiigai*** means nothing but a verbal will in its traditional usage. Written wills for Kenyans came into being very recently, after the new Law of Succession Act came to effect in 1981. The villagers would have become aware of the legal significance of a written will much later. Even if one leaves a written will, one leaves a verbal will as well. Leaving a verbal will, accompanied with its conventional ideas and practices, has been carried out for generations among the Îgembe and it still remains firmly in place, with contemporary modifications.

However, the elderly villagers are even now mostly satisfied with leaving only a traditional ***kiigai***, i.e. a verbal will, as was done by preceding generations. They expect their ***kiigai*** to have a certain compelling power based on their ability, even after their death, to curse their spouse and children who may stray from their instructions.

**4.2. Two examples of written wills**

I have had no more than two opportunities to see written wills in Y Location. There would be some more, or many more, of them being placed in the safekeeping in villagers' homes. An elderly man said, 'The documents of that sort are very, very private ones and people are keeping them secret. I don't know whoever is keeping them.'

The two written wills I saw were related to land inheritance and land dispute. I give a brief outline of each will:

(W1) This will was written in ***Kîmîîrû*** (Meru language) in three pages of a small pocket notebook. M is a male, aged 58 in 2017, who keeps the will prepared by his late father R. The background of the will, which was narrated by M, is as follows.

R while alive divided all his land among his four sons. M is the eldest son. R's wife died years before and he was living alone in a plot that he kept for himself and his late wife. When R,

widower, became old and sickly, he moved to M's compound and lived there in an ***aarû*** (old man's separate dwelling). M and his wife took care of R very attentively: collecting firewood, making a fire every evening for M in his ***aarû***, washing his body, etc. R decided to leave his plot to M. R was afraid that there might arise a dispute among his sons regarding the inheritance of his plot. That is the reason R decided to leave a written will. He willed that all his property including the plot and cows and goats kept thereon must be inherited by M. The testator R ended his will with the most awful cursing: ***Ûreeja kuuna waatho bûû nkûmûruma naakwe*** (Whoever breaks my rule, I have cursed him to die).

Appended to this will is one page of handwritten letter. This letter is written in English and addressed to the Land Demarcation Officer and has the names, ID numbers, and thumbprints of both R and M at the end. As M, the keeper of the letter, told me, it had been written not by the testator R who did not know English, but by somebody else. The letter is an application for transferring the owner of the plot in question from R to M. It was probably attached to the will as a kind of evidence to support it. According to M, he showed his father R's will to other brothers and there was no argument among them. M is now using the plot as his own and planting yams there as his father R used to do.

(W2) This will is written in five pages of an A5 size notebook. It is written in English. The late testator C worked as a gardener at a European's farm before he married and knew how to write English. C divorced his first wife and married his second wife. The will starts with 'This is my will…' and describes how he intends to divide one plot of ***miraa*** *shamba* (***miraa*** garden) among three sons born by the first wife and another three sons born by the second wife.

C and his divorced first wife were contesting for years in a law court and ***Njûrincheke*** (elders' council) on the ownership of the plot in question. As the first wife claimed, the whole plot had originally been her father's property, which was later given to her. The court ruled that the plot was to be equally divided between the two.

The will was prepared after the court decision. The will states that a half of the plot on the left side is to be divided among three sons born by the second wife and the other half on the right side among three sons born by the first wife [I personally went to observe the plot]. In the will, a square measure is meticulously indicated for each portion to be inherited by his sons. A small, marginal fragment within the second wife's eldest son's share is indicated as the property of the second wife. The will states that the second wife, when in need of housing, food and clothes, will be helped by the profit to be gained from selling ***miraa*** on her fragment of land. Found in the final page of the will are the testator's and six sons' names, ID numbers, and thumbprints.

The will is kept by the eldest son of C's second wife. There is a later development to this will. The testator's divorced wife has refused to this day to divide her own share of the plot, *i.e.*

the half on the right side, among the three sons born by her. She has so far monopolised ***miraa*** harvest on her portion of the plot. The reason for her action, given by her neighbours, is that she wants to give the whole ***miraa*** garden of hers to K, one of her three sons, who was not sired by C but by another man while C was not at home, working for a European's farm for several years. The divorced wife is currently living with K in the plot that was given by K's biological father. It should be pointed out here that it was not uncommon during the colonial period for the wife of an absentee husband to get associated with the latter's age mate [circumcised during the same season] and give birth to a child. It happened sometimes and was tacitly accepted by the husband and other villagers.

### 4.3. The whats and hows of the *kiigai* utterance

#### 4.3.1. What is conveyed in a *kiigai?*

According to elderly people's views, a father's ***kiigai*** uttered to his sons usually includes the following matters [***kiigai*** hereafter refers to 'a verbal will' in accordance with its traditional usage]:

- Land division. Because in most cases, the father, while alive, has already allotted his land among his sons, he tells his sons to maintain his directions and to never argue about it after his death.
- The balance of dowry to be paid for his daughter's marriage. Because the dowry, in most cases, has not been paid completely, the father usually names his eldest son to collect the remainder and tells him to use it on his own.
- Names of his and his wife's ***îchiaro*** clans. Because his descendants are not allowed to marry members of these clans, he tells his sons to make sure of it.[12]
- A piece of land to be given to his divorced daughters.[13] Because divorces occur very frequently, the father instructs his sons to cede a part of their inherited land to any of his daughters returning home with or without her children after a divorce. While the inclusion of this matter in a ***kiigai*** may be regarded as a recent occurrence, the practice of giving a small piece of land to a divorced daughter for her housing and gardening has been carried on for generations since the time preceding the colonial period. According to what several elderly men heard from their grandparents, this practice was also in operation during the latter's lifetime, that is, when marital unions were more stable and lasting, divorces being much less frequent than today. This practice is probably a part of

[12] See Matuzono (2014) for *îchiaro* clans and forbidden marriage.

[13] While some people agree with statements such as 'Inheritance under Meru law is patrilineal', and 'daughters receive no share of the estate' (Cotran 1969: 30; see also M'Imanyara 1992: 144), there are different views or arguments over the succession principle within the Îgembe communities. Some village elders remember that both sons and daughters were given their share by their forefathers in the old days. It seems that population growth or emerging land scarcity, among other causes, have historically conditioned their 'patrilineal' distribution and succession of land property.

the Îgembe's longstanding traditional customs.

・General moral teachings and warnings. The father customarily finishes his ***kiigai*** by talking about the importance of unity and peaceful living in the family and neighbourhood: to pay respect to seniors, to take a good care of the widow, not to damage other's property, not to forget to go to church, etc.

A certain elderly man aptly remarked on a ***kiigai*** in a short phrase: a ***kiigai*** concerns property inheritance and warnings, not more nor less.

**4.3.2. Deathbed blessing**

The somewhat idealised scene of a ***kiigai*** utterance is depicted by elderly villagers as follows:

An old man is lying in bed, now aware of his impending death. Surrounding his bed are his wife (wives), children, grandchildren, and other villagers. One or two male elders are standing there as witnesses (***mûkûûji***, pl. ***akûûji***) of his ***kiigai*** [***mûkûûji*** derives from ***ûkûûji*** meaning 'evidence']. The witnesses are invited to listen to and remember what is told in the dying man's ***kiigai***. If any arguments arise later among surviving family regarding the ***kiigai***, the memory of the witnesses is regarded as the most instructive reference. In addition, the witnesses are supposed to be the first to recognise the specific reason for any of surviving family being attacked under the curse of the dead person's ghost.

The meat of an animal requested by the old man is roasted or cooked and put by his bedside. Either his wife or daughter gives him meat or meat soup. The old man gives a ritual blessing to his adult children either before or after speaking his ***kiigai*** if he is satisfied with his life without any complaint to make against any of his family. Although it seldom occurs, this is the time when he can put the most grievous kind of curse on any of his family, which never fails to strike the cursed person. This is what they call ***kîrumi*** (curse).

Here I quote two examples of how a dying father blessed his daughter:

(B1) When both my parents died, I had finished giving birth to all my children. I was on good terms with my father throughout. So, he didn't say anything and just blessed me. My father spat at the grasses he was holding in his hand, put them on my neck and said, 'My daughter, now I have blessed you. About your children, let them take care of you just as you have done for me.' My mother had died several years earlier. She also had blessed me [the same female as in A1 and A20, aged 85, 2015].

(B2) [Q: Were you at your parents' bedside when they passed away?] Yes, they died when I was married to H [the narrator was H's second wife, now divorced]. Father sent somebody

to my home. I was told to go to his home quickly. So, I went there together with my children. On my way to Father's home I bought cow's intestines, lung, and head. Father was happy to see me and my children. He told me, 'My daughter, I've been waiting for you. I'd like you to boil the meat you brought.' I boiled the meat. He took meat and soup. Then he picked up ***kîleenchu*** (Kikuyu grass) and blessed me, saying, 'You must have had trouble buying so much meat. I regard this meat as substitutes for the meat of he-goat, which I was expecting to get from your husband as a gift to be added to his payment of dowry. My daughter, may you live long! I wish your children to take good care of you as you have done for me.' I went back to my home. The next day, somebody came from Father's home and told me to come quickly because Father had passed away in the evening the day before. I went.

[Q: What was it like when your mother died?] One day, Mother came to my home and told me, 'I feel I cannot live any longer. So, will you go to a meat shop and buy me ram fat?' Then she added, 'One more thing, will you give me 500 shillings? I'll accept fat of sheep and 500 shillings together as substitutes of a ram, which I'm supposed to get from you as a gift' [the narrator explained later that her mother had expected to get a ram from her in lieu of her husband who had not paid fully his dowry]. I did what I was asked to do. Mother told me, 'I wish your children to show you love and respect as you have done for me.' Mother died several days later. My brothers didn't bother to let me know it. So, I didn't go for the funeral. [Q: When was it? Before or after Kenya's independence?] After independence. I was married and had two daughters [female, aged 75, 2016].

The well-informed elderly man [former pastor] provided me with a general picture of the blessing to be given by a dying parent. I summarise it below, adding to it some more information received from other elderly people.

The blessing by a dying parent is called ***kûthîînjîrwa***. The word is the passive form of ***kûthîînja*** meaning 'to slaughter.' Hence ***kûthîînjîrwa*** here means 'to be slaughtered for the blessing.' Therefore, this ritual blessing by the dying parent is one among the various kinds of so-called ***kûthaarimwa*** (blessing ritual).

The kind of animal 'to be slaughtered' is chosen beforehand by the dying parent: usually a goat, sheep, or cow. A chicken is rarely chosen, but will do if the dying parent does not feel like tasting goat, ram, or beef. If the parent is not used to goat meat, he/she is likely to choose other meat. Certain people have an allergy to the meat of a goat, sheep, or cow, developing itching on their skin.

Animal meat is regarded as the mainstay as well as the pivotal symbol of blessing rituals. The dying parent tastes meat because he/she is about to bless those present around him/her. If a son or daughter is unable to prepare a whole goat or sheep, not to mention a cow, the latter may buy a piece of meat at a shop. According to the opinion of many people, if the child does not follow the dying parent's request as to the kind of animal, the child will be cursed eventually by the parent's ***kîruundu***. However, they also say that they have never heard of cases where the child did not comply with the parent's request. Even if the child does not have the meat or cannot

afford to buy it from a shop, they say, he/she can ask help from other relatives or ***aîchiaro***.

The way to cook meat again depends on the dying parent's request: frying, roasting, or boiling. In most cases, meat is fried so that the animal grease may remain in the frying pan; the grease is used for blessing.

Any kin around the deathbed can feed the dying person: the spouse, a son or daughter, or even a son/daughter-in-law. This depends again on the parent's request; they may want to choose a specific person for the function. The parent takes the specific grasses called ***gîtima*** in his/her hand, dips them into the animal grease inside a container and puts the grasses around the neck of each of those present, uttering blessing words such as '***ûronora ja mauta jaa***' (may you become fat like this fat). The parent uses four grasses for blessing his/her son and three grasses for a daughter. When blessing many children of both sexes, the parent may simply use a bundle of grasses.

#### 4.3.3. Various circumstances where a *kiigai* is uttered

The circumstances in which a ***kiigai*** is spoken are various, depending on: who is in the deathbed—husband, wife, or grandparent; the form of death—a slow death or a sudden death; the place of death—at home, in a hospital, on a journey, or at which wife's home in case of a polygamous husband; the Christian denomination the person belongs to, etc.

There are cases where a husband is not able to leave his last words such as: he is seriously ill and too feeble to speak; he is killed suddenly in a traffic accident; he suffers from a mental disorder and cannot express his wishes properly; he dies of alcohol poisoning, etc. Under these circumstances, what the husband, while alive, told his family repeatedly about his ways of managing human relations, land inheritance, household economy, religious activities, etc. is interpreted as his ***kiigai***.

Because one woman's husband had diminished cognitive functioning, she was trying hard to catch his words whenever he returned to his senses, gesturing to say something important. She was taking his words as his ***kiigai***, since she was afraid that he might either die at any time or never regain his coherence. The wife narrates as follows:

> (B3) I am the only wife to my husband. He died two years after he had fallen sick. He became a madman (***muntû-o-nthûû***). He wandered around many miles, many hours without knowing where he was going. Sometimes he even wandered into the bushes and we went about searching for him all night long. I took him to a hospital in Maua Town. Because there were no vehicles in those days, we footed it all the way to the hospital. But he refused to take the medicine given at the hospital. So, we forced him to get injected.
> [Q: Was he able to leave any ***kiigai*** with you, even though he was unwell?] Yes, he told me before he breathed his last, 'Don't bring another man in my house after my death. Even any of my brothers is not allowed to come' [referring to the so-called widow inheritance]. Take care of my children nicely.
> [Q: Did he say anything else?] 'He told me to give all his property to his children. My late

husband left many head of goats behind. It's me myself who divided his land later among my sons every time they married. When my husband died, all the children of ours were young. Two sons were circumcised but not yet married.'
[Q: Did you hear your husband's ***kiigai***, you alone?] 'Yes, I heard it by myself. He had left his ***kiigai***, one by one, intermittently when he felt all right, not very insane. Whenever I saw him willing to say something, I tried to extract his words from his mouth before he forgot what he wanted to say.'
[Q: Didn't you call anybody to your husband's bedside as a witness to hear his ***kiigai***?] 'No. Because he was not normal, I could not ask anybody to be a ***mûkûûjî*** (witness)' [the same female as in A8 and A15, aged 69, 2019].

I quote another example in which an elderly man, the narrator, was not at home when his father died. He asserts that his father, while alive, used to tell him, the eldest son, what was supposed to be his father's ***kiigai***. The relevant part of the interview follows:

(B4) I was very happy when I got a driver's license. It was the time when I was preparing my marriage with my first wife. I drove a lorry carrying sand around Maua, Meru, Nairobi, Machakos, etc.… The report of my father's death was not brought to me, because I was driving far away from home.
[Q: If you were not at home that time, didn't your brothers hear your father's ***kiigai***?] Yes, they did. But my father told me his ***kiigai*** beforehand while he was alive, because I am the first son.
[Q: What did your father tell you?] He told me that the dowry had not been fully paid yet for the two of my sisters. He showed me the whereabouts of the homes they married in as well as the amount remaining for each daughter. My father added, 'If their husbands don't pay their balance before I die, you are the one who should go to their home and demand payment. Also, you have to treat your younger brothers tenderly.' My father left a piece of land with me, but I gave it to one of my brothers. My father didn't tell me to do so. But I was getting my money from my work as a driver and I was able to buy my own land somewhere else [male, aged 80, 2015].

As may be observed from the above-quoted accounts (B3 and B4), whatever is said as a ***kiigai*** by a father on his deathbed should be mostly told to his family through their day-to-day communications well before he falls into a critical condition. Therefore, what is uttered as his last words is, in most cases, no more than reiterating what he has already told, added with some moral warnings.

#### 4.3.4. Father's apprehensions about his daughters as future divorcees

What a father is most concerned with is how to divide his land among his sons. If all his sons are grown-up and married, they are already each allotted a plot from father's land in most

cases, which has been occupied and used for a certain length of time by each son's family for cultivation and harvesting. Unless there exist disagreements among his sons over the father's heretofore land allotment, each son may well be considered to have the right of possession to his plot, at least informally within the father's family. Each son's plot may or may not have been registered under his name at the Government Land Office, which does not worry them much since what remains for them to do is no more than registering their plot and applying for their title deed.

Prior to an aged father's death, most of his land is practically divided among his married sons and a portion thereof is reserved for himself and his wife as well as his unmarried sons. This is probably the reason why I have never heard of a ***kiigai*** that includes a father's instructions, detailed or general, regarding land division. The father's topmost worries, i.e. those of land division, are usually effectively settled largely due to his patriarchal power before he becomes feeble or senile, although the discord and quarrelling over the land may occur later after his death among his sons, sometimes involving their mother.

Below I quote a part of the interview with the second wife of the man (B4). The man passed away two months after I had interviewed him in 2015. The next year, I visited his compound and talked with the surviving wife by the side of his grave and at the front yard of her house. This interview is of considerable interest because she details the recently occurred scene of her husband's ***kiigai*** utterance as well as his approach to land division particularly in connection with his wife as well as his married daughters.

> (B5) Mzee [an elderly man, referring here to the late husband] was very weak for some years and used to go to the hospital for check-ups and treatment. But this time he refused to go there. Even when the Catholic Father came here with his car to take him to the hospital, he refused to go, saying 'I don't need a further check-up because I know I'll die soon. Let me die here in my compound, I have to die here.' The next day Mzee called the eldest son into his ***aarû***. Later the same day, the daughter who is married into the neighbouring village was also called in. They told me that they were each given Mzee's ***kiigai*** at that time. The other two sons' families had broken down and they were not reliable [see my comment below]. That is the reason these two sons were not called in for Mzee's ***kiigai***. But later they consented to what they heard from the eldest brother about their father's ***kiigai***.
>
> Finally, I was called in and was told two things by Mzee. He said, 'Now, I put the eldest son in charge of all the cares necessary for my children. About you, I told my children to take care of you.' He continued, 'If any of my daughters gets divorced and returns home, let the eldest son show her the place where to build her house and let her stay there. You should do neither more nor less than what I've told you.'
>
> I told the eldest son what I had heard from Mzee. The eldest son said that the ***kiigai*** he was given was the same as mine…
>
> The day when Mzee felt himself near death, he told me to invite the Catholic Father.
>
> He confessed his sins to the Father and sought forgiveness from whomever he had

wronged. Those surrounding the Mzee's bed were the Father, the eldest son, the first daughter, myself, and our church members. Father blessed us by using holy oil. Then Mzee spat three times on his chest to give blessing to us around. This is the traditional way very old people like Mzee bless other people. Father gave Mzee the last sacrament. Mzee passed away two days later. He was buried near his eldest son's house, not near my house. [Q: Why not near your house?] Mzee decided his burial place like that while alive…

Mzee's divorced first wife and her two sons came for the funeral. None of them had been told to come for Mzee's ***kiigai***. They even didn't know that Mzee was seriously sick. Anyway, they hadn't visited us for so many years. I chatted with the first wife and her sons at the funeral and we had our photographs taken together…

Mzee had allotted all his land among his sons. He once had much more land but he sold most of it. I know he had a land case in the court with our neighbours for years, which must have cost him a lot of money. But I don't have any idea about how Mzee finished the rest of the money gained from the sale of land. Only the small land was left, which he divided among three married sons of ours…

[Q: Weren't you given any piece of land from Mzee?] No, he gave me nothing. Didn't I tell you that he had sold most of his land? So, he was now forced to divide a small land among our sons, leaving nothing for me.

[Q: But why? Even a small piece of land?] No, the land was so small. I knew that I wouldn't be given any. So, I kept quiet.

[Q: About the garden you are now working on, do you pay a fee for it?] No. A certain good Samaritan let me use it for free only to grow my own food.

[Q: Whom do you rely on when you get older?] My sons and daughters, of course. Nobody else. I'm always praying God to lend a helping hand to them [female, aged 62, 2016].

The narrator above (B5) also told me, 'I have dreamed of the late Mzee three times since his death. I felt very bad and prayed God each time not to see him again.' She, with her late husband, has three sons and two daughters alive. All these children are married or were once married. Among the three sons, only the eldest son maintains a normal family with his wife and children. The second son's wife went mad and vanished from her marital home, leaving a small son under the narrator's care [the narrator was cuddling the boy while talking with me]. The third son's wife divorced her husband after he became ill, took all her children with her, and married another man. The narrator's two daughters are married with children in nearby villages and their marital homes are very ordinary.

It seems quite natural that the narrator's husband, Mzee, assumed the worst of what might happen to his daughters. Mzee had seen so many cases of family breakdowns not only in his own compound but also in every nearby village. This is one of the reasons he included in his ***kiigai*** his worries regarding his married daughters. Another reason is probably that he was merely doing what other elderly men were doing in accordance with age-old practice.

I personally know not a few divorced women in the villages who came back and now live

in a piece of land given from their fathers' compound, their fathers being either dead or alive. I give one example as a case in point. An elderly man P has his daughter M already settled together with her children in his compound after she divorced her alcoholic husband. P used to be a polygamist with two wives but later he divorced his first wife. This first wife, together with all her and P's children, went back to her father's compound 500 meters away from P's and she has lived there up to now. The first wife has seven children alive, who are all married or once married. Those divorced are one son and two daughters. The woman M in question is one of the two divorced daughters of the first wife. After the divorce M was given a piece of land in P's compound where P currently lives with his second wife and her children.

The picture may look rather complicated, but it is easy to understand it if we follow M's history of moving. (1) M was born in her father P's compound. (2) She moved with her mother to the latter's father's compound. (3) She married into her husband's compound. (4) After her divorce, M moved to her father P's compound. At present she lives in the house built at the farthest end of P's compound. M is currently associated with a certain divorced man. She may or may not move again to the man's compound.

P has three married daughters who were born by his second wife. P seems prepared to give some land in case these daughters get divorced and come back. One day I was talking with P about the ***kiigai*** he may utter someday. Quoted below is a part of P's comments on his future ***kiigai***:

> (B6) [Q: Considering your age, you will utter your ***kiigai*** sooner or later. Are you leaving your ***kiigai*** with your wife or your sons?] With my eldest and other sons, not with my wife [his second wife].
> [Q: Have you divided your land equally among sons and daughters?] I have already divided most of my land among my sons. Their plots are now registered under their names. Daughters can cultivate their husband's land, not mine. But if my daughters come back home after a divorce, I must have them stay here in my compound. That is why I keep a portion of land for myself with my wife as well as any of my three daughters who may return here someday. I tell my sons and wife almost every day about the matter. When my daughter M [from his first wife] came back here, I gave her a piece of land large enough for her and her children to live on. But when her only son grows up, he must go back to his real father's compound. That is the place where he will live and inherit his land. I will not allow him to stay here after he becomes a grownup. That is our tradition [the same male as in A6, aged 73, 2015].

What is described above (B5 and B6), about unstable marriages and worries shared by the two fathers concerned (Mzee and P) represents only some of the precarious social circumstances the present-day Îgembe are faced with.

Among six to nine adult married children born in any marital union, for instance, about half or sometimes more than half of them are divorced, and some are twice or thrice divorced at that. One of the consequences created under these circumstances is many aged grandmothers

being helplessly put in charge of taking care of the children born in broken marriages. A discussion on such a topic is beside the point in this paper and I will leave it for another paper. It may suffice here to say that those elderly fathers cannot escape these circumstances who are preparing or really uttering their ***kiigai*** on their deathbed.

There are several cases where a father allotted a part of his land to his married, but not divorced, daughters. All these cases are related to a father who owns a huge farmland or whose daughter is in serious discord with her husband and her divorce is expected before long.

When I was talking with the well-informed former pastor about a ***kiigai*** in general, I heard from him of one case where a father divided his land among all his children including married sons and daughters as well as a son and a daughter, each unmarried. Our dialogue follows:

> (B7) [Q: Why does a father give a piece of land to his married daughter? Is it because he is afraid that she may get divorced and come back to her parents' place sooner or later?] Not always. It's because a daughter also has the right to inherit her father's land according to the law. The father is just following the law.
> [Q: Have you ever heard of cases where a father has given a piece of land to a married but not yet divorced daughter?] That's me. I gave some land each to two married daughters of mine as well as my unmarried son and daughter. The two daughters are married in D Sub-Location, very near here. They often come here to my compound to work on their inherited shamba (garden). There in the shamba they plant maize and beans and they also have ***miraa*** trees. Whenever ***miraa*** is ready to harvest, they come to pick it to sell to middlemen.
> [Q: Are there other cases around here in which a father has given land to both married and unmarried daughters?] No, maybe none, my case is very rare. When they don't give land to their daughters, they usually leave a ***kiigai*** with their sons, telling them not to neglect their daughters when they come back after a divorce.
> [Q: Why did you decide to give land to both married and unmarried daughters? Is it because your land is so big?] No. I did follow our Government's law and it was also my idea. If while alive I hadn't given land to unmarried children, there should arise enmity later between brothers and sisters. The brothers may be kind enough to cede their land to their sisters who may come back after a divorce. But I can't say for sure. So, I have taken the safest measure.
> [Q: Have you advised your sons on the seriousness of the matter? And about your unmarried daughter's land, have you told your sons that the land is hers even after she gets married later?] Yes, I have. What I did is this. All of us went together to the Government Land Office. I had officers there change my name to my children's names for each plot number. So, each piece of land is now registered under their names.
> [Q: Do your children have their title deed for each plot?] No, not yet. It's coming soon, I think.
> [Q: Have you divided your land equally among sons and daughters?] No. I've given a much bigger plot to my sons, because they have to buy more land by themselves to widen their land while my daughters, once married, can make use of much wider land of their

husband's apart from their land here, which I gave.
[Q: Have you divided your land to your wife?] No. Because mine belongs to my wife, too. The land left behind after dividing it among my children is mine and my wife's. My next of kin is my wife.
[Q: When you die before your wife, don't you think it is important for her to have her own land registered under her name so that a dispute may not arise between your wife and sons?] I see. I know a certain man who has his land registered under his wife's name. If you know your sons are greedy and you are not on good terms with your sons, your wife's share may well be registered under her name [the same male as in A9 and A22, former pastor, aged 71, 2016].

#### 4.3.5. Women's *kiigai*

The messages contained in a mother's ***kiigai*** are entirely different from those in a father's ***kiigai***. The difference is aptly expressed in a woman's comment: 'Most women don't have much to say in their ***kiigai***. The reason is just because they don't have much to leave behind for their children. Should they own even a piece of land to call their own, they will leave some words about it' [the same female as in A1, A20, and B1, aged 85, 2015]. This comment reminds me of similar kinds of remarks made by several husbands: I have told my sons many times not to disturb, after my death, the land my wife is now using. As long as my wife has her own land, my sons will not neglect her and try their best to look after her, expecting to inherit her land.

I already cited a woman's statement that her mother had come to her home several days before death and asked for sheep fat and 500 shillings (B2). The woman must have interpreted this request as a part of her mother's ***kiigai***.

I quote below two other statements concerning a mother's ***kiigai***.

(B8) On her deathbed, my mother told me, 'Son, will you slaughter a he-goat for me?' I slaughtered the he-goat. While eating the meat, my mother told me, 'Son, I appreciate the meat you gave me. I want to pray that your children may all the time obey your orders and respect you. Just as you slaughtered a he-goat and gave me the meat, you should request your children to slaughter a he-goat for you.' Then, my mother breathed her last. I was her only son. When my mother died, I was married with my first-born daughter [the same male as in A7, aged 93, 2015].

(B9) One week before her death, my mother called all the villagers, men and women, around her bed and told them to get along peacefully. She also strongly encouraged them to go to whichever church they liked. At midnight a week later, she started singing a song, words of which went like this: whatever I have, I will go away one day, and I will leave it for my children I love, I will leave it for them. Ending the song, she started praying God. Midway in praying, she passed away.
[Q: So, your mother, did she live a happy life?] Yes, that's true [female, aged 68, 2015].

The following narrative was given by a divorced woman. According to her, her husband was an alcoholic and used to beat her frequently, which she says was the reason she divorced him. The husband later remarried and his new family with his wife and children currently live in the nearby village. The narrator lives in the plot left behind by her ex-husband, together with her unmarried children and two small grandchildren born by her daughter, who died five years after she was divorced and returned to her mother's [the narrator's] plot. Although annoyingly told by her ex-husband to vacate her present plot, she has been refusing, the reason for which is partly related to her mother-in-law's, i.e. her ex-husband's mother's, ***kiigai***. The woman's statement follows:

> (B10) [Q: Have you ever heard a ***kiigai*** from any of your close relatives?] Yes, I have. In my case, it's from the mother of my ex-husband. While I was married, she was living here with us. She used to tell me, 'If some other person, not you, dares to bury my body, I want you to dig up my body. You are the only one who should bury me.' The reason I decided to live in the plot of her son [the narrator's ex-husband] is because I was afraid of being cursed due to this ***kiigai*** of hers even though I was divorced. If I had left this place without burying her body, her ***kîrumi*** (curse) would have affected me.
> [Q: Why did your mother-in-law choose you as the one to bury her body?] After my mother-in-law became old and weak, I was taking care of her. After she became sickly, I was also the one looking after her. When we divorced, she was moved from our home to the home of another son of hers. But this son's wife was unable to look after her so nicely as I had done. So, my mother-in-law asked her son to take her to my place. She came back and we lived together again. She died here and I buried her.
> [Q: Does that mean that you are the only person to have heard your mother-in-law's ***kiigai***?] Yes, that's true.
> [Q: So, did your mother-in-law come back here again some years after your divorce, live with you and die here?] Yes. That's right.
> [Q: Where is her grave?] Just down there near the banana trees [female, aged 65, 2015].

As is shown vividly in the above quoted dialogues B2, B8, B9, and B10, the women's ***kiigai*** has its own distinctive characteristics. It is unique in its articulation of trivial matters, though very serious for them, as compared with men's ***kiigai***: Mothers in their ***kiigai*** requested ram's fat (B2), a he-goat (B8), and a specified grave keeper (B10); another devoted Christian mother wanted everybody to go to a church (B9). In a word, women's ***kiigai*** are full of individualities. These characteristics doubtlessly show women's specific status in Îgembe society: they have been traditionally placed under husbands' patriarchal authority without having a voice in the matter of household economy.

When a woman is lying on her deathbed, a ***mûkûûji*** (witness) is rarely invited there to listen to her ***kiigai***. While villagers usually mention a ***mûkûûji*** standing by the deathbed when they describe a standard scene of traditional ***kiigai*** utterance by a husband/father, I have never

heard them talk about the same scene for a dying woman, which again attests to Îgembe women's heretofore subdued socio-economic status.

## 5. The ritual to nullify the parental curse

### 5.1. What are the symptoms of the cursed person?

A person who has acted contrary to the parental ***kiigai*** is seen as likely to be cursed by the parental ghost, with the resulting symptoms of the curse surfacing in due course of time. A person inflicted with the parental curse is called a ***ndume*** (sing. & pl.), which is also applied to a person cursed by his/her agemates and ***mwîchiaro***. While the kinds of misfortunes befalling ***ndume*** are mostly common among those who are cursed by parents, agemates, and ***mwîchiaro***, there are several distinctive calamities expected to occur to those cursed by the parental ghost: infertility, insanity, irresponsibility, alcoholism, and premature death.

Below I quote several statements made by villagers regarding expected calamities befalling a ***ndume***:

> (C1) [Q: How does a father's curse affect his son?] If the son has done many things nice for his father, the father will leave with his son a ***kîthaarimo*** (blessing) as a part of his ***kiigai***. But if the son has been neglecting his father, the father will leave a curse with his son, which is so dangerous as to kill the son's children and grandchildren [female, aged 75, 2016].

> (C2) [Q: How do you know whether a person is affected by the curse of his/her parent? Are there any signs?] The person becomes very irresponsible in various ways. He doesn't provide what his family should be provided with. His children, having been obedient to him, no longer listen to him. Even if other people don't notice these oddities, he himself is aware of being affected by the curse [female, aged 65, 2015].

> (C3) [Q: Do you know anybody around here who was attacked by the curse of the dead parent?] Oh, there are many around here. If two sons inherit their father's land and one son grabs the other's plot, that son will become insane automatically. He will sell off all the land, his own and the other's. He will be driven into a difficult situation and die of poverty in the end unless he is cured of the curse [female, aged 74, 2016].

> (C4) [Q: What kind of misfortune will a ***ndume*** (cursed person) meet with?] A ***ndume***, both man and woman, will become a ***nthaata*** (infertile person). Even if he/she has children, they will die. In case of a female ***ndume***, she is regarded as a ***nthaata*** if she doesn't give birth to a child for several years after her marriage. She will be kicked out and her husband will be forced to remarry by his parents, because they want grandchildren who call them ***jûûjû*** (grandparents) [***jûûjû*** is one of the reciprocal terms of address between grandparents and grandchildren]. Her husband himself will also want to divorce his barren wife and remarry a woman who can give birth to a child. A ***nthaata***

> is not a normal being but a product of parental curse. Do you know a ***nthaata*** is sometimes called ***mûthaande*** (pl. ***mîthaande***)? It is the name of a certain tree that never bears fruits [the same female as in A1, A20, and B1, aged 85, 2015].

Insanity (***nthûû***) or an insane person (***muntû-o-nthûû***) is frequently mentioned by villagers as a result caused by the parental curse. The kinds of behaviours usually exhibited by an insane person are: talking to oneself everywhere, wandering outside half naked or totally naked shamelessly, walking while collecting whatever comes to one's notice, suddenly throwing a stone or anything at hand at pedestrians, saying abusive words to unknown people, being bundled up in thick clothing in fine weather, etc.

Insanity is often connected with alcoholism and irresponsibility. There are various stories of a husband who has sold off his land and other properties, investing all his money in gambling, alcohol, and women. According to villagers, insane people are rarely taken to a hospital except those afflicted with cerebral malaria, which can be treated there. Instead, they may be taken to a local diviner called ***kîroria***, who is a modern Christianised diviner using a Bible and water for divination. There used to be traditional diviner-healers called ***agaa*** (sing. ***mûgaa***) using a variety of fetish items (***ûroi***) but they are now totally defunct and replaced by ***îroria*** (pl. of ***kîroria***) [There was only one retired ***mûgaa*** in Y Location, aged 80 in 2012, whom I interviewed].

In order to reach an adequate understanding of the curse of parental ghosts, it is better here to briefly describe parental curses put on children while parents are alive. These two types of curses, one by living parents and the other by dead parents' ghosts, have features common to each other, while they are not identical.

Parents and children are traditionally ***antû ba nthoni*** (persons of respect) to each other. Their relationship is the exact opposite of that between grandparents and grandson, who are ***antû ba rûûgo*** (persons of joke) to each other. The parent-child relationship is the tensest and most strained among all the dyadic relationships in Îgembe society.

Children's behaviours that may incite their parents' anger and concomitant cursing include: uttering abusive words to parents, beating parents, disobeying parents, refusing to help parents when they can, etc. The bodily actions and appliances used for cursing a child are partly common and otherwise different between father and mother.

The most dangerous cursing words are related to infertility. For example, while hitting three stones in the fireplace with a stick, a father pronounces a curse on his son, '***Urooma ja maarî jaja***' (May you become dried up like these stones) [referring to his son's semen]. When a father curses his daughter, he hits a gourd filled with dirt with a stick until it gets broken and utters over and over, '***Uroûûmba***' (May you be barren).

The most menacing of cursing gestures by either parent is bending and sticking out his/her buttocks. In such a case, again, cursing words are loaded with the fury of parental despair, wishing for children's infertility and short life.

While the actual scenes of parental curse described above, as commented by elders, have

been fading away and are scarcely experienced by villagers today, a deep-rooted feeling of awe and respect towards parents and those in the parental generation yet remains intact among the villagers. This is partly attested to by domestic and neighbourhood disputes that arise frequently in connection with the exchange of abusive remarks between people of the two adjacent generations. A neighbourhood meeting, called ***îkaro***, is held, involving the families of the two parties in the dispute. The ***îkaro*** is carried on in accordance with the traditional procedures, with one of the elders chosen as an advisor (***mûkîrîra***) who presides over the meeting. Church members and ***aîchiaro*** of the two parties are sometimes invited there as mediators and witnesses of the meeting. Holding an ***îkaro*** itself costs a lot of money for the two families concerned: honoraria as well as food and transport expenses for all the visiting participants are paid by the two families. When an amicable resolution is not reached there, the problem is brought to a ***Njûrincheke*** or a Chief's office.

The elder who supplied me with detailed information as to the parental curse closed his talk, saying 'Cursing by parents is rarely seen nowadays. It's because of Christianity. Instead of cursing, parents today pray God so that their children's conduct may be improved.'

**5.2. A grandchild stands as proxy for the dead in the healing ritual**

Although no longer able to curse his children while living, the dead father's ghost now hovers around in the compound he left, just like a 'watchman' seeing to peace and order. His ghost, ***kîruundu***, is most concerned with whether his surviving family are following his last instructions regarding land division and moral teachings. The late father's appearance itself in a dream is interpreted by his family as his alarm signal of either cursing them or taking them to the world of the dead.

Several kinds of misfortunes befalling a ***ndume*** (cursed person) were already mentioned. The ritual to get rid of a curse is called ***kwooria kîrumi*** (to heal a curse), which is one of a variety of rituals generally referred to as ***kûthaarima*** (to bless) or ***kîthaarimo*** (blessing).

The ritual process of healing a curse laid by either a parental ghost or a living parent is the same with one exception: while a parent is alive, it is the parent who plays the leading role in the ritual; but when the parent is dead and has become a ghost, there must be someone who plays the parent's part.

A grandchild is regarded as a proxy of his/her grandparent on many occasions in Îgembe society. Reciprocal terms of address between grandchildren and grandparents are ***jûûjû***, ***rîîtwa***, and ***ntaau***. Among these three terms, ***rîîtwa*** or ***ntaau*** is preferred as a term of address when a pair of grandparent and grandchild are deemed as name-sakes with one another: A grandfather and his grandson in such a case like to call each other ***ntaau*** or ***rîîtwa*** rather than ***jûûjû*** which is more general and used for the dyad of both the same and different sex.

A grandson who takes the place of his late grandfather in the ritual is not necessarily a son of the cursed victim, although it is often the case. For example, when X is the victim, one of X's nephews can perform the ritual: any grandson of X's father will do. What a living father does in the ritual is now performed by his grandson, and the same applies to the dyad of the female sex: when

a woman is the victim of her late mother's curse, one of the latter's granddaughters plays the role.

If the late father's curse has worked on his son due to the latter's failure to give his father what was requested, the son must give it to the proxy for his father, most likely his own son, prior to the scheduled ritual. If the son took away his brother's land against the late father's injunction, he should return the land to his brother ahead of the ritual.

Below I give several comments or memories of those who have witnessed the ritual:

(C5) [Q: Why does a curse affect a person?] If you fail to do whatever your late father told you to do such as taking a good care of your younger brothers and sisters, then your father's curse will automatically attack you. In that case, you'll not be saved unless you have [your father's] ***ntaau*** or ***rîîtwa*** perform the ritual of ***kûthaarima*** for you.
[Q: Have you seen a ***ntaau*** being called to the ritual around here?] Yes, I have.
[Q: Was the ***ntaau*** a boy or a girl?] A boy, about five years old.
[Q: Tell me how the ritual proceeded.] A ***ntaau*** boy called to the place of the ritual was a grandson of the deceased. The boy was given a bundle of grasses and a calabash full of ram's grease. The boy dipped the bundle of grasses into the calabash and splashed the grease on the neck and breast of his father who had been cursed. While splashing the grease, he was saying, '***Ûkeethîra nî bwa ntaau nkûrita***' (If it were due to my grandfather, I have removed it).
[Q: Isn't it ***kwiikia mataa***?] No. It isn't. ***Kwiikia mataa*** is what is done between ***aîchiaro***. This is ***kûthaarima*** [usually translated 'to bless', but 'to purify or cleanse' may be a more appropriate translation]. Do you know that ***kûruma*** (to curse) and ***kûthaarima*** are opposite words?
[Q: Whose curse was healed by the boy in the ritual?] The boy healed the curse that his grandfather left with his father.
[Q: Was the boy's father attacked by a curse because he didn't do what he was told by the boy's grandfather?] Yes, that's right. A boy saves his father from a curse laid by his grandfather and a girl saves her mother from a curse put on her by her grandmother.
[Q: Do you know what wrongs the boy's father did to his own father?] Yes, I know it. When his father was sick, he refused to look after his father. The father was really sick that time [female, aged 67, 2016].

(C6) [Q: Once you are cursed by a ghost, you become a ***ndume*** (cursed person), don't you? Is there any ritual that cures you of the curse?] Yes, there is. You are given ***kwiikia mataa*** in the ritual. In this ritual, however, ***kwiikia mataa*** is given not by your ***mwîchiaro***, but by a ***rîîtwa*** [grandson of your farther]. You offer a ram to the ***rîîtwa***, the elders there slaughter the ram, and the ***rîîtwa*** gives you ***kwiikia mataa*** by using the ram meat [the same female as in A1, A20, B1, and C4, aged 85, 2015].

(C7) [Q: Even a small grandson of five or six years old, can he chase away the curse that his

late grandfather put on his father?] No problem. He can. All what the small boy does is just to follow what elders tell him to do. If the boy's father, prior to the ritual, already rectified his wrongdoing and fulfilled all the instructions given by the dead, he will be cured of the curse.
[Q: Have you witnessed the ritual of ***kwooria kîrumi*** (healing the curse)?] Yes, many times. The son gives his own son whatever he had failed to give to his late father. Then, on the spot of the ritual, he confesses his failures to his small son, who performs the ritual as told by elders.
[Q: What does the boy say to his father at the ritual?] The boy dips a bundle of ***gîtima*** grasses into ram grease in the calabash. The ram grease is usually collected from the chest of the ram. Then the boy splashes the grease over his father's body while reciting, '***Ngûkûthaambia meeyia jaaku*** (I have cleansed your sins)' [the same male as in A9, A22, and B7, aged 71, former pastor, 2016].

**5.3. Is the healing ritual a kind of *kwiikia mataa*?**

Three years after the interview (C7) above, I asked the same elderly man about how the healing ritual of the parental curse is related to ***kwiikia mataa***. The woman in C5 quite clearly denied the connection of the healing ritual with ***kwiikia mataa***, saying 'No. It isn't. ***Kwiikia mataa*** is what is done between ***aîchiaro***.' On the other hand, the woman in C6 narrated that ***kwiikia mataa*** was done in the ritual. Not only this woman but also other several men and women narrated to the same effect. I wanted to know the opinion of the elderly man in this regard.

(C8) [Q: Is ***kwooria kîrumi*** (healing ritual of the curse) a kind of ***kwiikia mataa***?] No, it isn't. Involved in ***kwiikia mataa*** are always ***aîchiaro*** (plural of ***mwîchiaro***). But those involved in ***kwooria kîrumi*** are a grandson of the deceased, an affected son of the deceased, and elders. They eat ram meat together and the grandson utters the words as told by the elders [the same male as in A9, A22, B7, and C7, former pastor, aged 74, 2019].

According to the narrators in C5 and C8, ***kwiikia mataa*** is a cleansing ritual performed between ***aîchiaro***. ***Kwiikia mataa*** is, in its physical meaning, to spit saliva somewhere on another person's body. However, the physical meaning has been extended to include such collaborative actions as sharing the same piece of food including banana, roasted maize, bread, meat, etc. as well as even sharing the same bottle of soft drink. These actions are nowadays considered as almost equal to spitting itself: one's saliva is transferred to another by sharing the same piece of food or the same bottle of drink.[(14)]

The rituals called ***kûthaarima*** (blessing or cleansing), which includes ***kwiikia mataa***, ***kwooria kîrumi*** and many others are always accompanied with slaughtering an animal, whose meat is shared by those present. At a ***kwiikia mataa*** ritual between ***aîchiaro***, a ***mwîchiaro***

[(14)] See Matsuzono (2014) for the extended applications of the original usage of ***kwiikia mataa*** (throwing saliva).

hands a half-eaten piece of meat to another ***mwîchiaro***, besides physically spitting. It is not difficult to imagine that sharing meat itself is now being confused with ***kwiikia mataa*** by an increasing number of people.

A good example of this confusion is presented by the former pastor whose statements have been quoted several times in the present paper. When explaining the bygone ritual, performed prior to Christianisation to nullify a dream of the deceased, he narrated, 'the son slaughters a ram and shares its meat together with the father's grandson. Maybe we can call it a kind of spitting (***kwiikia mataa***)' [A22]. Although ***mwîchiaro*** is not involved in this ritual, the elderly man is saying [contradicting himself in C8] that the ritual can be called ***kwiikia mataa*** because ram meat is shared by the son and grandson of the deceased.

**6. Final thoughts**

When villagers' statements have contradicted each other on several issues, I have tried to leave these inconsistencies as they are in this paper. This is because I have intended to describe varied living situations and opinions of the contemporary Îgembe elderly.

One of my findings that deeply interest me regarding the lifestyle of elderly men above the age of seventy in Y Location is their solitude in eating and sleeping. This lifestyle is doubtlessly what their fathers more strictly adhered to. The elderly men's dwelling is still called ***aarû*** as it was at the time of their fathers. But the ways and materials used for building the dwelling as well as the compound hedges have now totally changed. Their solitude made me think of it as something men paid for the sake of the patriarchal authority they enjoyed in their compound as well as the society at large. But things are not what they used to be. Traditional compounds and houses are no longer found in Y Location. Their dwellings, ***aarû***, may disappear in a decade.

The women in the same generation are daily involved in numerous domestic, farming, and social activities. I found surprisingly many elderly women who are single-handedly bringing up not a few grandchildren, parentless, or with one parent. There are several factors that bring forth a host of orphaned children: rampant divorce, accidental death, middle-aged people's death from disease, not uncommon occurrences of suicide, etc. Many of these elderly women rent a small garden from which they harvest less than enough food crops for small grandchildren, for whose clothes and school fees they must pay as well.

I was surprised that many women during our dialogues were united in uttering, 'Death is my friend' (***Îkuû nî mûchoore waakwa***). The woman aged 92 told me,

> Where do you hide yourself because you're so afraid of death? You are half dead when you are asleep. **Mûruungu** (God) is the one who wakes you up again, isn't it? You are always walking with death. Death is the only way to get to **Mûruungu**.

They also said, 'Death is something like a shadow (***kîthiîki***), which ceaselessly walks together with me. Only I don't know when it comes to call for me.' A piece of dialogue I had with a woman is as follows:

> [Q: You are 85 years old. Do you fear death?] 'No, no, no! Recently I was seriously ill but I didn't fear death. It's something I can't control. It doesn't knock on my door, nor does it give advance notice.'

Christian beliefs may be partly instrumental in mitigating their fear of death. However, most likely, death is for them a part of the natural process of human life: They may be just assuming the same attitudes toward death that have been handed down for generations since the time there was nothing to be called burial.

Now I am inclined to the thought that these elderly women are too busy in this world to find time to ascend to their paradise.

This paper is a product of the dialogues I have had with the Îgembe elderly on their life and death for the last several years.

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## Chapter 3

# Name-sharing among the Îgembe:
## The Kîmîîrû texture of personhood in a village community

*Shin-ichiro Ishida*

### 1. Introduction

On 29 August 2018, in the afternoon, a small bird flew into my hotel room on the outskirts of Maûa, the Headquarters of Îgembe district. It was a bird known as a ***kanyîrî*** in Kîmîîrû language.[1] I had never experienced such a miracle: at that moment, I was thinking of both the same bird and a new-born baby girl named Kanyîrî.

Mwasimba of the Mîrîti age group,[2] whom I first met as the chairman of the Akachiû clan in Nthare village in the Îgembe South-East Division (Ishida 2018: 88–90), was blessed with a baby girl in March 2018. When I met him in August 2018, he was so happy about his last born and he told me that he was going to organise a name-giving ceremony in the coming September. Mwasimba, his wife, and his mother had agreed among themselves that they would propose to their guests that Kanyîrî be the name given to the baby girl. Though Mwasimba and his wife had already registered Kanyîrî as her first name in the official certificate submitted just after birth, they understood that the registered name would remain unrecognised within their village community unless it was proposed and authorised in the proper Kîmîîrû way of name-giving. Mwasimba told me that he would invite his relatives and neighbours on the name-giving day and entertain them with plenty of food and drinks, hoping the guests would accept their proposal to name their daughter Kanyîrî.

In our interview, Mwasimba told me that the ***kanyîrî*** was a beautiful bird whose long, white tail-feathers had been used by traditional dancers as ornaments (**Figure 1**). He also quoted a Kîmîîrû proverb; ***Kanyîrî kainachua nî mweene***,[3] which literally means that the long tail-feathers of the ***kanyîrî*** can only dance with its owner (i.e. the bird itself). The feathers, in some contexts, may represent a woman who is faithful to her husband, while, in a more generalised sense, the proverb means that every preciousness is truly revered by its guardian. In September 2018, Mwasimba and his mother did indeed strongly propose that Kanyîrî be the child's name, and this proposal was accepted by their guests.

The Kîmîîrû way of name-giving is called ***kûchia rîîtwa*** among the Îgembe, which literally means 'to give oneself a name' in their language. In the above case, Mwasimba's mother, known

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[1] This bird's common English name is the African Paradise Flycatcher.

[2] A group of men circumcised within a given period of about 15 years constitutes an 'age group' (***nthukî***). Men of the Mîrîti age group were first circumcised in the year 1976, while the following Bwantai age group was opened in 1989 (Ishida 2017: 177).

[3] Mwîti (2004: 37) interprets the Kîmîîrû proverb '***Kanyiri kainagua ni mwene***' as 'A champion is advertised by the owner'.

as Kathao, assumed the responsibility of giving *herself* a name, which represented her personal character or social attributes and which could be given to the baby girl as *her* name. In other words, the name Kanyîrî was first proposed by Kathao to be 'her' name and then to be her granddaughter's name. With no objection being raised by the guests, the baby girl could be recognised by the name of Kanyîrî in the village community, and Kathao could be recognised as the little Kanyîrî's namesake (***ntaau***). The grandmother and granddaughter now address one another as ***ntaau***, and are believed to share one personhood.

**Figure 1. A *kanyîrî***

In one village community of the Îgembe, where I have conducted my anthropological research since 2001, one person may have more than three names. When I ask them about their full names, many people answer by telling me their Christian baptism name, first name, and their father's or husband's name, which are shown on their national ID cards. In some cases, however, it happens that none of the above three is recognised as one's name by other people from the neighbourhood or used to identify someone in their everyday life; a variety of 'nicknames' are employed instead.

This study observes how personal names (***marîîtwa***) are given to and shared by people in a village community of the Îgembe, one of the nine Kîmîîrû-speaking communities of Kenya. The first part of this paper details the four principles of the Kîmîîrû naming system as observed in three preliminary examples of my 'age-mates' [PN 1, 2, and 3; all belonging to the Bwantai age group].[(4)]

[(4)] See Note 3.

The second part of this paper offers detailed case studies of 6 informants from different backgrounds—out of 30 whom I interviewed for my research on personal names—to show how they and their family members were given names, and how they shared their names with their namesakes from previous and following generations within their family and family friends. The first three are male informants who were involved in my previous case studies (Ishida 2008, 2014, 2017, 2018), namely Kîeri [PN4] (Lubetaa age group, Amwari clan), Mûtûûra[5] [PN5] (Mîrîti, Athimba), and Mûrîangûkû [PN6] (Lubetaa, Athimba). The last three are female informants with different backgrounds, namely Nkoroi [PN7], Kainchua [PN8], and Doris [PN9].

The third section describes a family event on 24 August 2019 organised by Mwasimba [PN10] (Mîrîti age group, Akachiû clan), father to the above-mentioned little Kanyîrî. Mwasimba arranged for a group of people, including his family members and friends, in seven Toyota Probox vehicles to visit his wife's home in Imenti district, about 50 kilometres west of their home village in the Îgembe South-East Division. When I met him at home a couple of weeks before the event, Mwasimba explained the purpose of the day to me: they should visit his wife's namesake to celebrate their well-being and appreciate the togetherness of the two families. His wife's namesake had already passed away; therefore, they were now supposed to meet the namesake's family members, or, in other words, Mwasimba's in-laws.

Based on data collected in my research on the social texture and making of personal names within the Îgembe community, the final part of this paper discusses how personal names inform or reflect the Îgembe's understandings of personhood. First, personal names connect people in different ways. While agnatic membership and seniority may claim more attention in politico-economic contexts, personal names may tell more about matrimonial/affinal, inter-generational, and inter-familial bonds as well as personal friendship. Second, personal names are not the exclusive private property of their holders but are shared with one's namesakes from older and younger generations. A name can thus survive its individual holders, each of whom should not necessarily be remembered as individual ancestors in genealogy. The concluding section also notes some comparative implications.

**2. The four principles of the Kîmîîrû naming system**

The following are three preliminary examples of my 'age-mates'.

My research assistant [PN1], who was born in 1977 and belongs to the Bwantai age group, is known and addressed by others in his village community by his nickname 'Bruce', while his parents address him by his Christian name or as ***nthaka yekwa*** (my [circumcised but unmarried] son) using the Kîmîîrû kinship terminology, though he has daughters, one of whom is named after his mother as her ***ntaau*** (namesake).

Mûrûûngî [PN2], another friend of mine who was born in 1981 (the same Bwantai age group) and is now working as a ***mûrathi*** (hunter, meaning 'professional witchman in charge of criminal investigation/prevention'), has six names apart from three official ones on his ID. Four

[5] I used the pseudonym 'Mûtuma' for this person in my previous publications.

of them are business names given to him by former clients and recognised by others as well, one is a nickname related to his living environment and given by his age-mates, and the other is the original first name given to him by his parents. In other words, the official names registered on his ID do not include his birth name, which was replaced with Mûrûûngî, at his own will, after his father's brother (FB) as his ***ntaau***, who belonged to the Lubetaa age group. People outside Mûrûûngî's family rarely know his birth name.

Kîthîînji [PN3], yet another friend of mine who was born in 1980 (the same Bwantai age group), has three other names—Matîenyawa (Rastafarian-style hair), Mashangi (entertainer, in Kiswahili), and Baimîrongo—in addition to his three official names. While the first two nicknames given and used by his friends of the same generation show his appealing hairstyle and popular personality, the last derives from the Njûriîncheke name of his mother's brother (MB), who is his ***ntaau***, and is sometimes used to identify him by some of the Njûriîncheke elders in the village who know the two are related in the ***ntaau*** relationship. Since Kîthîînji was his late parents' last-born child, he was often addressed by them as ***mwana wakwa*** (my child) or ***mwîîjî wakwa*** (my [uncircumcised] boy), even after his circumcision, until their death in the early 2000s.

The Kîmîîrû naming system comprises the following four principles, which had also been observed in the above three preliminary cases.

1. One person may have more than three names, some of which are achieved in different stages of their life.
2. Almost all Kîmîîrû personal names have both a literal meaning and respective social contexts.
3. Every person has a reciprocal relationship with their namesake (***ntaau***), with whom one shares their name and/or personality.
4. Children's namesakes are selected alternately from their paternal and maternal relatives.

First, a person may have more than three names, some of which are manifested at different stages of their life (Peatrik 2019: 45–50). As mentioned above, Mûrûûngî [PN2] accumulated his four business names after he began work as a ***mûrathi*** in 2006. When I accompanied him as he worked in another village near Maua on 12 August 2018, I observed that he was called Kingwetee there. This name comes from the verb '***kûgwaata***' (to catch criminals [by curse]). From the case studies of the six informants in the following sections, it *seems* that men have more names than do women. This may be attributed to the politico-historical fact that only men in the Îgembe community have not relinquished their local institutions, such as age group organisation and the council of elders, where one could achieve additional identities and names. Both men and women, however, may be given names (nicknames) by friends in different contexts, as the above three preliminary cases show, and such *friendship* can explain even more about name-sharing among people of the older generations, as well as those of the younger ones, than can gendered social institutions.

Second, almost all Kîmîîrû personal names have both literal meanings and respective social contexts. Kîthîînji [PN3] was given the name by his mother and her doctor just after his

birth in hospital, where he was born by Caesarean section. The name comes from the verb '***kûthîînja***' (to slaughter an animal for meat or to cut or operate on a patient). Baimîroongo, another of Kîthîînji's names, originates from his ***ntaau***'s Njûriîncheke name, as mentioned above. His ***ntaau***, who belonged to the Ratanya age group and died in the mid-2000s, was a retired accountant for the local coffee and tea factories and thus given the name Baimîroongo by the Njûriîncheke council; the name comes from the word '***mîroongo***' (tens), which describes counting money and goods. Case studies in the following sections illustrate this variety of names with their meanings and respective *social context*, each of which tells one's *family history*.

Third, every person has a reciprocal relationship with their namesake (***ntaau***), with whom one shares one's name and personality. Mûrûûngî [PN2], for example, has his ***ntaau*** relationship with his father's brother (FB) of the Lubetaa age group, who is also called Mûrûûngî. The two Mûrûûngîs, junior and senior, reciprocally address each other as ***ntaau*** and enjoy this camaraderie. If the two were not related as ***ntaau***, the two Mûrûûngîs would never joke. One may not necessarily be given the real name of one's namesake, but a name that represents the character, personality, or social attributes of one's senior ***ntaau***. My research assistant [PN1] was given the name Kîrîmi after his ***ntaau*** (his mother's brother) because, though his predecessor had a different name, he had been remembered as a good farmer (***mûrîmi***). Some people are named after the respective age groups to which their namesakes belong or belonged, like the names in the above example that come from the Mûrûûngî age group (another name of the former Kîramunya age group). Neither of the two Mûrûûngîs, however, belongs to the age group of this name but to the Bwantai and Lubetaa age groups, respectively. The senior Mûrûûngî's namesake from yet another previous generation was the one who belonged to the Mûrûûngî age group, which indicates that one person may find that their ***ntaau*** from both the previous and following generations share names. In other words, one person can be deemed an *intermediary* between their predecessor and successor, with this succession expected to continue.

Fourth, children's namesakes are selected alternately from their paternal and maternal relatives (Peatrik 2019: 43). The first-born child is to be named after his father's father (FF) (if the child is a son) or her father's mother (FM) (if the child is a daughter), while the second-born child will be named after their mother's father/mother. The third-born child's ***ntaau*** will be again found from their father's relatives, including the father's parents and siblings. Theoretically, clan affiliation within the Îgembe community is *agnatically* oriented: one belongs to one's father's clan, and this biological status will never be altered, even after marriage. The fourth principle of the Kîmîîrû naming system, on the other hand, is *bilaterally* oriented as it allows *some* of one's children to inherit their father's kin's names and personhood and *others* to inherit their mother's kin's. Mûrûûngî [PN2], for example, was named after one of his *father*'s brothers, while Kîthîînji [PN3] was named after one of his *mother*'s brothers, as was my research assistant [PN1]. While the emerging land scarcity in contemporary situations causes family disputes and forces some people to argue for agnatic inheritance, elders agree that the agnatic orientation in clan affiliation has not necessarily excluded daughters and their children from living in their natal home since olden times (see also Matsuzono 2020).

### 3. The Kîmîîrû texture of personhood: case studies

#### 3.1. A man who amassed five names

Kîeri [PN4] (born in the early 1950s, Lubetaa age group, Amwari clan, Njûriîncheke member) has five names, comprising his (1) Christian name, (2) birth name (Kîeri), (3) father's name, (4) nickname among his age-mates (M'Mweenda), and (5) official names in the Njûriîncheke council (Mataata Baikwîînga).

He is his parents' third-born child (out of six) and second-born son (out of four). The above-mentioned fourth principle (children's namesakes being selected alternately from their paternal and maternal relatives) was not strictly applied but was well-considered among his siblings. Two, including Kîeri, are named after their biological father's 'parents', while another two are named after their biological mother's 'brothers', and the last two are named after their family friends or neighbours.

His birth name, Kîeri, was given by and after Baikwîînga, his biological father's (M'Lîchoro's) mentor. In other words, Kîeri remembers Baikwîînga both as his namesake and as M'Lîchoro's 'father in Njûriîncheke' (***îthe wa Njûri***) because Baikwîînga supervised or mentored M'Lîchoro in his initiation into the Njûriîncheke council. Though there is no biological relationship, Kîeri's namesake is his 'grandfather' (biological father's mentor). Kîeri also notices that Baikwîînga of the Antûamûtî clan is his ***îchiaro***[(6)] counterpart.

Kîeri is referred to or addressed by different names according to respective contexts: (1) he is known as Kîeri in everyday life in his neighbourhood; (2) his age-mates may call him M'Mweenda; (3) his colleagues of the Njûriîncheke council officially recognise him as Matata Baikwîînga; and (4) at government offices he is identified by the name Josphat M'Mweenda M'Lîchiro as shown on his national ID card.

The name M'Mweenda, which means a man who loves people, was given to him by his age-mates when he contributed a male goat at an age group meeting. Since he was proud of this name, Kîeri registered it officially on his national ID card.

When Kîeri himself joined the Njûriîncheke council in 2014, he was given the name Matata Baikwîînga. It was a rainy day when he was initiated, so he was given the name of Matata, which means 'water drops' [from banana leaves]. However, as Matata was rather a common name shared among several members, Kîeri was referred to as Matata Baikwîînga, which means that he was here again identified with Baikwîînga, who was his namesake, his ***mwîchiaro***, his 'grandfather', and a well-recognised and prominent Njûriîncheke member.

When I first met Kîeri at the Njûriîncheke compound on a case-hearing day in September 2005, he was not yet a member of the Njûriîncheke council of elders; rather, he was there as one of the parties since his wife had been accused by their neighbours in a witchcraft case. His wife denied the accuser's allegation and took a ***muuma*** (oath) before her ***îchiaro*** to prove her innocence (Ishida

(6) ***Îchiaro*** refers to an institutionalised inter-clan brotherhood in which the power to impose compulsory social norms operates between 'brothers'. See Ishida (2014, 2017) and Matsuzono (2014) for ethnographical details on *îchiaro*.

2008). Experiences of this kind were not new to him by then. Apart from the witchcraft case, Kîeri had been in a dispute with his 'brothers' (neighbours of the same clan affiliation) over land since the early 1990s. The land border at issue had once been agreed upon between the two parties, and their ***îchiaro*** men were invited to curse anybody who violated the border. Kîeri, however, soon noticed that his land had been seized by his 'brothers' while he was in jail for a false charge of illegal timber cutting. According to him, his 'brothers' bribed the ***îchiaro*** men to remove the curse without his consent, and the conspiracy caused the subsequent death of the ***îchiaro*** men. I met Kîeri again at the Njûriîncheke compound on another case-hearing day in August 2012. This time, he was there as plaintiff, demanding that the land dispute be settled by the ***kîthili*** oath.

He had learned lessons from all these experiences and had come to understand that he needed to become a Njûriîncheke member to protect himself and his family. In other words, since the ***kîthili*** oath, the final means of dispute settlement, is administered and witnessed only by Njûriîncheke members, he should be a member of the council to ensure that no conspiracy could be organised against his property and well-being. In 2014, he became a member of the council, and Matata Baikwîînga, his official name in the Njûriîncheke council, is the one he gained in the above context and personal history.

### 3.2. A man named after his ancestor

Mûtûûra [PN5] (born in the late 1960s, Mîrîti age group, Athimba clan [current chairman], Njûriîncheke member) has five names, including his (1) Christian name, (2) birth name (Mûtûûra), (3) father's name, (4) name after his namesake (Kîthia), and (5) official names in the Njûriîncheke council (Baiweeta Atalala).

He is the ninth-born child (out of ten) and third-born son (out of four) of his parents. The children's namesakes were selected both (not necessarily alternately) from their paternal and maternal relatives, with only the exception of his younger (last-born) brother, who was named after a ***mwîchiaro***.

His birth name, Mûtûûra, was given by his parents when he was born at a Catholic hospital in Maua. The name came from ***kûtûûra***, which literally means 'to last' or 'to stay' in the Kîmîîrû language, since he 'overstayed' inside his mother's womb before his overdue delivery. After his birth, he was given the name Kîthia after his mother's father's brother (Îthaliî age group, Antûborii clan). According to him, he could have been named after his mother's father; however, because of his mother's father's early death, his great-uncle became his namesake instead. His Christian, birth, and father's names appear on his national ID card, and he is widely called Mûtûûra in everyday life in his neighbourhood.

Since achieving his membership in 1992, Baiweeta Atalala has been his official name at the Njûriîncheke council. Baiweeta means 'to go yourself', while Atalala is the name of his clan ancestor of the former Bwantai age group, who was deemed to be of the Athimba's first generation in the present Îgembe South-East Division. This name implies that Mûtûûra is a direct descendant of the original Athimba family in the area. He has been chairman of the clan since August 2014 (Ishida 2017: 217, Note 23).

### 3.3. A man who ate many things

Mûrîangûkû [PN6] (born in the early 1950s, Lubetaa age group, Athimba clan) has five names, including his (1) Christian name, (2) birth name, (3) father's name, (4) nickname (Mûrîangûkû), and (5) nickname among his age-mates. The first three appear as official names on his national ID card.

He is his parents' first-born child (out of six) and first-born son (out of five). Among his siblings, namesakes were selected alternately from their paternal and maternal relatives. Mûrîangûkû, the first-born child/son, was named after his father's father, the second-born (his nearest younger brother) after his mother's father, the third-born (his sister) after his father's mother, and so on.

His birth name, Mûrûûngî, was given by and after Kamûrû (FF) as the namesake belonged to the former Kîramunya age group, which was also called the Mûrûûngî age group. The name Kamûrû was derived from a Kîmîîrû word '***rûûrû***' (westward, highland), in contrast with '***gaiti***' (eastward, lowland). Mûrîangûkû recognises that their grandfather was called Kamûrû because of his ***mûrûûrû*** (highlander) origin. Though Mûtûûra [PN5] and Mûrîangûkû [PN6] belong to the Athimba clan, the two have different origins.

Since his birth name, Mûrûûngî, is one of the more common names in the village community, he is instead recognised as Mûrîangûkû in everyday life, a nickname that originates from his family history: after years of marriage, his parents had still not been blessed with children. As the Kîmîîrû custom of the old days required, his mother's brothers continuously brought goats, sheep, or chickens to his mother until her first childbirth. Accordingly, he was given the nickname Mûrîangûkû, which means 'a man who eats many chickens (***ngûkû***)'.

His other nickname, Mûremera, translates to 'a man who insists'. As he recalled, whenever the age group requested that he contribute a male goat, he always refused. This unpleasant name was given to him after he joined the Lubetaa age group and is used jokingly even now by his age-mates. The name, in fact, has a negative connotation of miserliness, which some might attribute not only to his own personality but to his father's. In October 2001, I first met Mûrîangûkû's father as one of the representatives of the Athimba clan dealing with homicide compensation in 2001–2002 (Ishida 2017). Compensation items the Athimba clan had received, some say, were not properly shared among clan members, but secretly divided among a certain circle (Ishida 2017: 195). His father was later accused by clan members, though I noticed his father did have his reasons to warrant a larger share. Some mistrust and misunderstandings arose among the members, and his father passed away while discord among clan members still lingered.

As the oldest among his siblings, Mûrîangûkû had been plagued by the unhealed bad name his father had gained. I witnessed that he distributed his money among clan members while asking for blessings at the Athimba clan meeting on 3 September 2015 (**Figure 2**), which was organised to fundraise for yet more compensation for a hurt finger (***kûreaa kîara***).[7] As the

[7] See Ishida (2017: 207) for details of this compensation case.

clan was to pay a total of 40,000 Kenyan shillings, including the hospital bill of a young female victim from another clan, every clan member was then required to contribute 300 shillings, and Mûrîangûkû offered to help anyone among the clan members who came with only 100 or 200 shillings. After distributing his money, totalling approximately 3,000 Kenyan shillings, Mûrîangûkû explained to those who had needed his help to clear their debts that the money he contributed was from his father, was intended for helping clan members, and that he needed their blessings:

> **Mûrîangûkû**: This is from my father. He left it for me. I am eating it for nothing. Do as I have done for the Athimba clan. You have tried to move me to do something, and now I shock you like hitting your head with a hammer. [Addressing one of the clan officials]. Ngore, do you want me to give you something? [Addressing the biological father of a boy who hurt the girl] Kûbai,[8] have I helped you to pay for the finger with my 3,000? Who else wants some? It is the clan I am trying to help. This money will help you pay for the finger. Stop empty talk! If you beat me again, I will stop you with money. Is there anybody left with outstanding balance? That's the reason why I bless you and you bless me. Ûûii!
> [Other members speak, and Mûteethia recalled a leader from the past.]
> **Mûteethia**[9]: Now, you (clan members) tell him, Mûrîangûkû, he has done something good, because he has lessened some burden. Let his pocket be added. Let his way be straight because his money is for helping others.
> **Mûrîangûkû**: When M'Imaana (an advisor who was often invited by the Athimba clan) was about to die, he blessed me, and he told me to attend clan meetings and never to abandon the clan.
> **Mûteethia**: I have blessed you much.
> **Mûrîangûkû**: No! You have not blessed me. Stand there [at the centre of the attendants sitting in a circle] and say that you bless me. They have not blessed me, and I want them to say it. Have you blessed me, please?
> **Members**: Yes, we have blessed you very much.
> **Mûrîangûkû**: Thank you.

Clan members appreciated his well-wishing contribution and blessed him as requested; however, some believed that his contribution on this day did not fully relieve his long-standing burden. What he had been required to do was to rebuild their clan house, which had been demolished in 2002 without formal agreement, and to restore the 'secretly distributed' items back to the clan. Otherwise, they said, the clan could neither conclude the 2001–2002 homicide compensation nor bless him and his family.

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[8] I use a pseudonym here so as not to disclose his personal identity.
[9] I use a pseudonym here so as not to disclose his personal identity. Mûteethia of the Ratanya age group served as acting chairman for about eight years until 14 August 2014 (Ishida 2017: 211).

**Figure 2. Athimba clan meeting on 3 September 2015**

I met Mûrîangûkû's father in person many times in the early 2000s before his death. He was, to my knowledge, an elder of the Mîchûbû age group, an active church member, soya-drink lover, lame in one leg, and very kind to me. He smiled whenever interviewed. It was, thus, even more surprising to me to know the hidden meaning behind his daughter's birth name, which does not appear on her national ID card. He gave his daughter (his third-born child) the name Chiobebeeta, which literally means 'a woman who clears everyone' and, in this context, 'a woman who kills off every white man and woman': Mûrîangûkû's father had been a freedom fighter during the Mau war for independence, and he also named his fifth-born child (son named after the father's relative) after a famous field marshal in the war.

### 3.4. A woman named after a wild animal

Nkoroi [PN7] was born in the 1930s and belongs to the Nkirinaathi women's age group. Together with three of her age-mates, she sells bundles of banana fibre for *mîraa* workers[(10)] every morning at the Athîrû Gaiti open market. When I asked for her names, she told me she has two names, including her Christian name and Nkoroi (birth name), and that she has no other names that are recognised in her neighbourhood.

Her birth name comes from the ***nkoroi*** (colobus monkey), and there were two reasons for her naming. First, before her birth, her mother had experienced several miscarriages. To end this sequence of suffering, she was named after a wild animal since if a new-born was given the negative or unpleasant name of such animals, it was thought the baby would not be much missed even if they died, or that the baby might survive without being wanted by the evils. Second, her mother encountered ***nkoroi*** several times while she was pregnant. Such reasons are common in the Îgembe community, where some people interviewed or their relatives were named after wild

[(10)] Banana fibre is used for tying up bunches of *mîraa* in the local industry (Ishida 2008: 139).

animals, such as Mbiti (hyena), Îrukî (monkey), and Mpaandi (a type of small insect), among others. Nkoroi's younger sister is named Nchee (porcupine) for similar reasons.

**Table 1. Nkoroi's Children**

| Name | Reason for Name | Sex | Age group | Namesake |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Karanyoni | Selling vegetables during pregnancy | Female | none | FM |
| Meeme | Radios became popular items | Male | Miriti Nd | MF |
| Îrukî | Guarding her maize field against monkeys during pregnancy | Male | Miriti Nd | FF |
| Karîîthi | Grazing cattle during pregnancy | Male | Miriti Nd | MB |
| Mûrûûngî | After his namesake's age group | Male | Bwantai Nd | FB |
| Kaumbu | After his namesake's easy going, chameleon-like character | Male | Bwantai Nd | MFB |

Nkoroi has six children (see **Table 1**). Her first-, third-, and fourth-born were named after her daily work during pregnancy, such as selling vegetables (***nyoni***), guarding crops against monkeys (***îrukî***), and grazing cattle (***kûrîîthia***), respectively. Her second-born was named after the radio (***meeme***), which had been used only by colonial chiefs before independence; Meeme was born in the early 1960s, when people achieved their freedom to use the radio. Nkoroi's fifth- and sixth-born were named after their ***ntaau*** (namesake). Mûrûûngî is another name of the Kîramunya age group to which the namesake of her fifth-born belonged, while the namesake of her sixth-born was an easy-going, chameleon-like person (***kaumbu***).

Nkoroi is now a namesake to three granddaughters (Meeme's, Îrukî's and Karîîthi's daughters). Three are named after her personal character: Mûkiri (a cool and calm woman), Kîendi (a beloved woman), and Kathure (a chosen woman).

### 3.5. A woman who cares for a granddaughter

Kainchua [PN8] is a middle-aged woman born in the early 1960s. She is married with eight children in the Mûringene village and has three names: (1) Susan (her Christian name), (2) Kainchua (her birth name), and (3) Kîthûûre (her husband's name). These three names are shown on her national ID card. Her birth name Kainchua (derived from a verb '***kûinchia***' meaning 'to close the eyes') was given after her namesake (her father's mother), who was blind. She does not have any other names or nicknames recognised in her neighbourhood.

Her father (Ratanya age group, Bwethaa clan) was born and circumcised in the Îgembe South-East Division and then moved to Imenti district, where he secured a semi-permanent job as a live-in farmer and was married for many years. Kainchua was born in Imenti as the first-born child to her parents. She has three younger brothers and one younger sister, and their namesakes were selected (not necessarily alternately) from both their paternal relatives in Îgembe and maternal relatives in Imenti. Her youngest brother, Kîrema, was named after their father's employer in Imenti, who supported their father for years. The employer was a man who always did things his own way, and the name 'Kîrema' is derived from the verb '***kûrema***' (to be obstinate).

After their return home to the Îgembe South-East Division, Kainchua married her husband (Lubetaa age group, Antûamûriûki clan) in the Mûringene village. Their father spent his remaining years at his newly built homestead in the southern lower plain frontier (*rwaanda*), where land demarcation started in the 1990s, and was buried there.

Kainchua has eight children: five sons and three daughters. **Table 2** shows the reasons behind their names, all of which were given after their namesakes' personal characters. The table also details the gifts their namesakes brought on the day of ***kûchia rîîtwa*** (to give oneself a name). As shown, while female namesakes brought a gourd of porridge specially prepared for the celebration, male namesakes arrived with livestock, such as a male goat and a chicken for the first three sons, and cash for the last two sons. The namesakes for the last two sons came with their wives, who brought cooked porridge or uncooked food (maize and sugar). Kainchua explained that the traditional items of livestock and a gourd of porridge have, in recent times, been replaced by modern gifts of cash and uncooked food products, but their meanings remain the same.

**Table 2. Kainchua's Children**

| Name | Reason for Name | Sex | Age group | Namesake | Gift items |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baariû | After his namesake's age group (the old Gîchûnge) | Male | Bwantai Ka | FF | male goat |
| Kawîîra | After her namesake's people-pleasing (*kwîîria*) character | Female | None | FM | porridge, cereals |
| Nkatha | After her namesake's character as a generous woman (***nkatha***) | Female | None | MFBW | porridge |
| Kainda | After her namesake's hardworking character. Derived from the word '***îiinda***' (early morning) | Female | None | FM | porridge |
| Mwîti | After his namesake's life as a migrant. Derived from the word '***kwîîta***' (to go) | Male | Gîchûnge | MF | chicken |
| Mweenda | After his namesake's all-loving (***kweenda***) character | Male | Gîchûnge | FB | male goat, cash |
| Koome | After his namesake's good performance at school | Male | Gîchûnge | MB | cash (porridge) |
| Kîriinya | After his namesake who was a man of great strength (***inya***) | Male | Gîchûnge | FF (F's ***îthe wa kianda***) | cash (maize, sugar) |

Mweenda's namesake (Mîrîti age group, Antûamûriûki clan), who brought a male goat[(11)] and cash on the name-giving day, is a resident of the Mûringene village and a man of an all-loving character. Though he is not Muslim, he is locally known by his Arabic name, which was given as a nickname by his Somali business friends when he was working in the *mîraa* industry. He loves his Arabic name and even wears a Muslim cap in everyday life.

Kainchua is now a namesake for two granddaughters: the older one is her first daughter's (Kawîîra's) daughter and the younger is her first son's (Baariû's) daughter. She and the two girls

[(11)] In my interview with her, Kainchua recalled that the item brought for name-giving was a heifer.

address each other as '***ntaau***' (namesake). The elder ***ntaau*** was named Mûkami, which means 'milker', while the younger was named Atwîri, which means 'a woman who gives fodder to livestock'. Both reflect Kainchua's hardworking character, especially in the field of dairy production.

Her first son, Baariû, was once married with two daughters, including Atwîri, and then divorced his wife, who has married again elsewhere. The two girls living with their mother (Baariû's former wife), however, often visit Baariû, their biological father, and Kainchua in the Mûringene village. Kainchua will permanently remain a namesake for Atwîri and continues to care for the grandchild thanks to their ***ntaau*** relationship. While the namesake for Baariû's younger daughter is his former wife's mother, Kainchua welcomes this child too.

**3.6. A woman whose child has no namesake**

Doris [PN9] is a middle-aged woman born in the early 1970s and a single mother living in the Mûringene village and managing a small-scale ***mîraa*** workshop for daily income.[(12)] She has three names: (1) her Christian name (Doris), (2) birth name, and (3) her former/divorced husband's name, which are shown on her national ID card. She has not removed her former husband's name, even after their divorce. With no nickname having been given, she is known by her Christian name or birth name in everyday life.

She does not know either the name or clan of her biological father. Her mother deserted her children, including Doris (first-born), and re-married elsewhere. Doris and her siblings were brought up by their grandparents (mother's parents) in the Mûringene village. Their mother's father, and thus their mother, belonged to the agnatic clan of Athimba.

Doris has three children, including one daughter and two sons. Her first-born child (daughter) was named after her former husband's mother (father's mother), and her second-born child (son) was named after her brother (mother's brother). After the birth of the second child, Doris separated from her husband and returned home to the Mûringene village. Her former husband visited her many times even after their separation, and he is also the biological father of the third-born child (son). She says, however, that the third-born has no namesake, who should have been selected from her former husband's side if there had been no separation.

Doris herself is now a grandmother to two girls of six and three years. The six-year-old, whom I found staying with Doris at the time of my interview, is the child of Doris's first-born daughter. The child's father's mother is supposed to be the girl's namesake, though the name-giving ceremony had not been organised. Meanwhile, the three-year-old is the first child of Doris' son, and Doris should be the child's namesake. Though a name-giving ceremony has not been held, Doris always addresses the girl child as ***ntaau*** (see the third principle of the Kîmîîrû naming system) and pays her nursery school fees. The girl now has only a Christian name and has not yet been given any Kîmîîrû name.

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[(12)] I first met her as a worker in a ***mîraa*** workshop in Athîrû Gaiti in 2002 (Ishida 2008: 141–142), one year after the birth of her third child.

**4. A namesake day: The *ûtuunga* celebration**

On 24 August 2019, Mwasimba[13] [PN10] (Mîrîti age group, Akachiû clan) organised a one-day trip with his family members and friends in seven Toyota Probox vehicles[14] to Imenti district to visit his wife's natal homestead. I was invited by him and joined them to observe a joint-family celebration of their well-being in the Kîmîîrû way of *ûtuunga*, which literally means 'to put special attire on leaders, guests, or any kinds of important persons'. Margaret (Mwasimba's wife) assumed the role of doing ***ûtuunga***, or, in other words, giving *leso* (colourful cotton cloths) to every daughter of her namesake. Nkoroi (meaning colobus monkey, as per PN7), her namesake, is her deceased grandmother (father's mother). On the day of the celebration, Margaret performed ***ûtuunga*** for herself, Nkoroi's *daughters* including her [Margaret's] biological father's sisters and her biological mother, and Nkoroi's other namesake Mûkiri, who is her father's sister's daughter (see **Figure 3**).

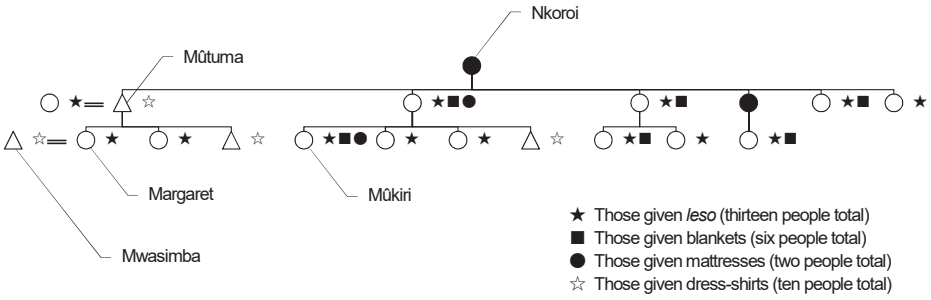


**Figure 3. Genealogy of Nkoroi's daughters and namesakes**

On the day, Margaret was identified with her namesake, Nkoroi, who was the founding mother of all of the children and grandchildren (**Figure 4**). In the year 1971, Nkoroi left her will with her son Mûtuma, saying that he should call her namesakes back to her homestead for a celebration one day in the future when these namesakes were married and blessed with children. In 2019, 48 years after receiving his mother's will, Mûtuma realised that the right time to call back his mother's namesakes for this celebration had come since Mûkiri (another

[13] Mwasimba [PN10] (Mîrîti, Akachiû) has five names, including Mûng'aathia (birth name after his namesake), his Christian name Baithinyai (father's name 'given by age-mates'), Mwasimba (nickname), and Mûthumo jwa ndege (another nickname). He is known as Joel or Mwasimba in everyday life in the village community. Mwasimba understands that Mûng'aathia is his birth name and at the same time the one given after Mûrîîkî, his mother's father. Mûrîîkî, his namesake, belonged to the Kobia sub-set of the Ratanya age group. The Kobia is sandwiched between the Nding'ûri and Kabeeria sub-sets and always plays a pivotal role for every age group. Names such as Mûng'aathia (***kûng'aathia***, to move) and Murira (***kûrira***, to protect) refer to a person who assumes such a role in the Kobia sub-set. Baithinyai comes from his father's name, but it was given not by birth but by age-mates who accepted his proposal of being so called.

[14] The four-wheel-drive Toyota Probox is now often used for *mîraa* transport from the farming villages of Îgembe to Nairobi, one of the international hubs for its export.

namesake of Nkoroi) had settled in her husband's homestead and had given birth to two children after years of quarrel and repeated separation from her husband.

**Figure 4. Nkoroi's namesakes and daughters wrapped in different coloured *leso***

On 24 August 2019, those invited from Îgembe, including Mwasimba, Margaret, their family members, and friends were served with food and drinks soon after their arrival at around 14:00. While the meal continued to be served to arriving guests from the neighbourhood, the celebration meeting started with Christian prayers at 15:10, followed by self-introductions between *in-laws*, or between the guests from Îgembe and the hosts from Imenti. At 15:50, Mûtuma (Nkoroi's son/Margaret's father) delivered a speech to explain the purpose and background of the day's event. His first words impressed the audience: 'Now, now, now, now…it's now!' (***Naandî, naandî, naandî, naandî…nî naandî!***) Then, Mûtuma began his story (see **Figure 5**):

> **Mûtuma**: Let me tell you my story. It's my story and nobody knows it. There is no appointment day (***kîatho***) that won't ever come. Now I am telling you that a parent is the second God (***Mûruungu wa baîîrî***). As you see, now I am here in front of you. This issue came to me in 1971, and I have lived with it until now. We had stayed here [for many years] with only our mother because my father was abruptly killed by an elephant. My mother told me something one day because of which we are here today. I was told (by my mother) that a heifer for Benditah was mine…

As a single parent, Nkoroi had given Mûtuma three instructions in 1971. First, when Benditah (Mûtuma's sister) got married, as he recounted in the above speech, he should take a heifer out of the items received, which he did. Second, Nkoroi told him that he should slaughter a heifer for a family feast out of the items delivered when Nkoroi's namesake among Benditah's

daughters (that is, Mûkiri) was married, which he also did. The third and last instruction from his mother was that he should call back her namesakes (Mûkiri and Margaret) for a future celebration when they were all married and had children. This is the issue that he had not dealt with for many years. Mûkiri's marriage soon became unstable without children, and she left her husband's homestead, returning to her parents' home. Mûtuma was then required by the husband's family to hand the paid heifer back to them. He said that he had been taking this seriously: 'I would be caught by a curse…I was tied with a rope because of Mûkiri'.

**Figure 5. Mûtuma making his speech**

As mentioned above, Mûkiri finally settled at her husband's home and was blessed with two children. Accordingly, Mûtuma now did not need to return anything; instead he received yet another heifer from Mûkiri's husband's family as the remaining part of her bridewealth. Mûtuma then learnt that his sister's daughter was stable at her matrimonial home and that the time to complete the third instruction had come at long last.

> Mûtuma: Now I am telling you what my mother told me. Kanjîra (Margaret's first name) is named after my mother and the holder of this family…

As he described in his speech, his mother said that Margaret (Mûtuma's daughter/Nkoroi's first namesake) should be identified with Nkoroi herself on the future *ûtuunga* day. Accordingly, Margaret, on the late Nkoroi's behalf, first wrapped herself with *leso* and then wrapped Nkoroi's *daughters* including her [Margaret's] biological father's sisters, her biological mother, and Mûkiri (Nkoroi's other namesake) to celebrate their being blessed with children. Some of those women were also given blankets and/or mattresses, which were said to symbolise their achievement of a permanent place in which to settle (see **Figures 3** and **6**).

**Figure 6. People holding mattresses with Benditah and Mûkiri**

While Mûtuma organised the event and paid for the guests' food and drinks, Mwasimba was the person responsible for the purchase of 13 pieces of *leso*, 6 blankets, 2 mattresses, 10 white shirts for the men, and 30 kilograms of honey for honey beer. For Mûtuma, it was a sacrifice for his mother, sisters, daughter, and in-laws. For Mwasimba, those he brought all the way from home were a token of his appreciation to his wife and gifts to his in-laws, which did not constitute any part of their bridewealth (***rûraachio***): Mwasimba had already paid *all* the bridewealth items, including one ewe, one ram, one male goat, six female goats, one heifer, and some cash. Only a heifer called ***mwaari-o-nkûrio***[(15)] remains to be brought by his children in the future.

In my interview with him, Mwasimba recalled how he first met his wife, Margaret Kanjîra from Imenti, in 1993 at a marketplace in the Îgembe district where he was involved in the then-emerging ***mîraa*** industry. She visited the market to see her sister who was married there, and met Mwasimba. The two fell in love and started living together. As Mwasimba recalled, it was like stealing a girl since they stayed together without her parents' knowledge for more than a year until he met her parents for the first time in Imenti; it was simply coincidental that he met Mûtuma's sister's son in his home village in 1995. The son happened to find a job splitting timber in Mwasimba's home village in Îgembe, where the emerging *mîraa* industry in the mid-1990s began to employ many more people than before, including those from outside the Îgembe district.

It was then, surprising not only to Mwasimba but to Margaret as well, that they met Derrick, one of Margaret's cousins (her biological father's sister's son, that is, Benditah's son), in

(15) A heifer called ***mwaari-o-nkûrio*** is a counter gift from a nephew to their mother's brothers who have provided the children with material support at various stages of life (schooling, circumcision, marriage, and so on), and is not strictly a part of the bridewealth items (Ishida 2010: 137).

an Îgembe village, which was when Mwasimba first contacted his wife's parents through Derrick and started buying the bridewealth items according to the Kîmîîrû of the Imenti. Derrick attended the *ûtuunga* celebration day in Imenti on 24 August 2019.

It was in 2018 that Mwasimba received a phone call from Mûtuma about his plan to organise the *ûtuunga* day. Mwasimba welcomed it and proposed that it should be held in August 2019, when he should be ready with every arrangement for the celebration. There were also good reasons for him to attend a family celebration with his in-laws: as described earlier, Mwasimba and Margaret were blessed with little Kanyîrî in March 2018, and their first grandson (their first son's son) was born the same year and was named after Mwasimba.

**5. Ideas of Kîmîîrû personhood: A conclusion**

In the Îgembe village communities, personal names cannot necessarily be the private property or independent identifier of their individual holders. One can be given a name to remember how one's mother was during, or even before, her pregnancy and how one was delivered (see Kîthîînji [PN2], Mûtûûra [PN5], Mûrîangûkû [PN6], and Nkoroi [PN7], for example). Moreover, if one is given a nickname by friends, it might tell something about one's own personality or social attributes (see Mûrîangûkû as Mûremera [one who insists] [PN6] and his grandfather named Kamûrû [highlander]). However, if the same nickname is later given to one's namesake child, it does not necessarily foretell the future personality of the child (see Kîthîînji as Baimîroongo [PN2], a woman named Kainchua [one who closes her eyes] [PN8]), but rather creates a reciprocal relationship between the two namesakes and between the future families of the two (see Mwasimba's visit to his wife's home in Imenti). In some cases, a person may work as an intermediary between their predecessor and successor (between their grandparent and grandchild, for example), through which their successor's name comes from their predecessor's social attributes or character (see the origin of the name 'Mûrûûngî' [PN3]).

The Kîmîîrû way of name-giving (***kûchia rîîtwa***) informs, and at the same time is informed by, the connection of people of different social attributes and generations. I myself, for example, am a namesake to a boy born in 2007. At the time of his birth, I was requested by Baariû, his father, to help them in paying an urgent hospital bill for a Caesarean operation. Baariû appreciated my contribution and later informed me that his new-born child was named after me. Retrospectively, by then, Baariû had already been my friend for six years since 2001, when he first helped me in a generous manner: as driver/conductor he kindly helped me find an alternative, even better route when I found myself swindled out of money reserved for my transport back to Nairobi. After some years of friendship, I got an opportunity to 'help' him in 2007. The boy is now called Kaûme (a boy who performs well at school) in his everyday life. Baariû and his wife are always counting on Kaûme, out of their other sons, to be the first to achieve his educational target, like his ***ntaau***, Shin-ichiro Ishida, who was educated enough to achieve his PhD. Baariû transferred Kaûme from a local public school to a private one for a better education, and he is performing well there. Meanwhile, I find it my Kîmîîrû duty to contribute something to my ***ntaau***'s school fees. People understand that two persons related by the

reciprocal ***ntaau*** partnership do not necessarily share the same character—but sometimes they do.

Agnatic membership and seniority claim more attention in emerging contexts of land demarcation, succession, or property disputes, for example. Kîmîîrû personal names, on the other hand, may tell more about matrimonial/affinal, inter-generational, and inter-familial bonds, as well as personal friendship. People have experienced such interconnecting functions of personal names in different ways and senses. Children of a divorced wife may continue visiting her former husband's parents or relatives as their namesake (see Kainchua [PN8] and her granddaughter, for example). Single mothers may find it difficult to find their children's namesakes from their father's side if the children are not recognised by their biological father (see Doris [PN9] and her child with no namesake). The case of Mwasimba [PN10] and his family's successful visit to the family of his wife's namesake in Imenti in August 2019 shows one of the positive and productive sides of name-sharing.

Inhumation of dead corpses, which was first introduced/forced by the British colonial administration's ban on traditional methods of corpse exposure (Lamont 2011), is now unquestionably practised. Nevertheless, erecting permanent gravestones has not been part of the Îgembe death culture, although the bereaved should not and cannot forget their deceased family and their words, as Mûtuma's speech on the *ûtuunga* day shows (see also Matsuzono 2020). Mbiti (1990: 26) writes in *African Religion and Philosophy* that in African communities an individual person retains one's 'personal immortality' as the living dead for some generations after one's death until one becomes an *empty name* without a personality:

> The appearance of the departed, and his being recognized by name, may continue for up to four or five generations, so long as someone is alive who once knew the departed personally and by name', and 'when there is no longer anyone alive who remembers them personally by name (…) the living-dead do not vanish out of existence: they now enter into the state of *collective immortality*. (Mbiti 1990: 25–26)

Personal immortality in Mbiti's sense does not last for long over generations, but, in Îgembe society, collective immortality does. The people do not remember their ancestors' names and their genealogical depth is relatively shallow when compared with other African communities with strong lineage principles. Though clan affiliation is agnatically oriented, their village communities have accommodated and assimilated people of different origins, and many people do not recall their agnatic ancestors' personal names or their genealogical relations to them. In the Îgembe community, it is not through memory work in genealogy with so-called structural amnesia but through name-sharing over generations that the living dead 'enter into the state of the *collective immortality*'. Peatrik thus writes:

> In Meru conception, there is no belief in life after death; there are no ancestors, no ancestor worship, no genealogical mentality, a state of things that fits well with the

> absence of descent groups. (…) Perpetuation is achieved through grandchildren, by the gift of a grandparent's name to a grandchild of the same sex, and through the orderly flow of the generations. (Peatrik 2005: 295)

This study demonstrates two facts: as Peatrik notes, Kîmîîrû personal names embody collective/structural immortality or the perpetuation of shared personhood, which lasts forever. Kîmîîrû names, at the same time, convey intimate memories by the acquaintance of individual personhood only among immediate family, relatives, friends, or namesakes. In this sense, the Kîmîîrû proverb that ***kanyîrî kainachua nî mweene*** (every preciousness is truly praised by its guardian) is also true for personal names.

The findings are not necessarily new among African ethnographies. As Lienhardt (1961: 319) noted in the conclusion of his masterpiece *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka*, 'notions of individual personal immortality mean little to non-Christian Dinka, but the assertion of collective immortality means much.' Further, at the time of the death of 'a master of the fishing-spear' (religious leader of the community),

> [I]t is conceded to the man's close kin—those for whom his own personality has been most significant—that they may indeed break down under the strain imposed, by custom, upon them, in having to control the expression of the sadness they may feel.' (Lienhardt 1961: 316)

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## Chapter 4

# Ontology of photograph among the Tigania:
## Inquiry into the relation of Meru culture and modern technology

*Jun Baba*

### 1. Introduction

Today, most Amîîrû of the Tigania are likely to keep photographs in a well-ordered form in an album or casually in a box. It is not rare to see some families put an extended portrait photograph in a frame and hang it on the wall, similar to a piece of furniture. These photographs are taken at various opportunities: *arusi* (wedding ceremony, ***mûranû*** in Kîmîîrû), ***mathiko*** (burial ceremony), parties (***kîatho***/***kîbaatithio***) regarding relative's gathering, baptisms and the ceremony performed when circumcised boys complete their isolation period, school events, family trips, and other occasions, such as Christmas. This has been an ordinary and familiar practice for the Tigania people, and in Kenya, in general.

A photograph is a device that 'makes an instant of climax in family life everlasting' (Bourdieu 1965:24), but 'the instant' that is captured differs across societies. For the Amîîrû of Tigania, the person is the focus, and one of the features of their photographs is that they only contain people: family members, friends, distant relatives, and even neighbours' children. Very few photographs of landscapes, which provide a panoramic view of an event or nature or animals, are taken. Even in photos of family trips, the scene of the landscape is the background and people are in the central foreground. This is somewhat different from photographic compositions made by the Yoruba, an ethnic group in West Africa, that include various objects and furniture with photographs of people (Spraque 2003). Hence, when an outsider, like myself, looks at these photographs, unless they are about easily identifiable events such as weddings, funerals, and baptisms, understanding the context can be challenging. Confronted by piles of photographs that are randomly kept in envelopes and drawers, to understand each one, I had to enquire about each photograph.

Photographs focusing on people are just what the Tigania people want. For them, how an event unfolds is an everyday reality that is taken for granted, and there is no need for photographs to convey when an event took place and what type of event it was. What is important is who was present, who was with whom, and how they behaved (including their expression and attire). As the Japanese anthropologist Suzuki stated reflectively, photographs that an anthropologist would expect are different from those they have (Suzuki 2015: 221–222).

The socio-cultural connotations of photographs in Meru culture (***mîtûûrîre ya Amîîrû***) cannot be overlooked. In Amîîrû culture, specific events and knowledge are widely kept secret, except for specific personnel. Ishida calls Amîîrû society 'a society that conceals individuals' (Ishida 2019: Chapter 2), where the uniqueness of individuals is de-personalized in the cultural process, and individual events traditionally merge into the background of social structure. To

keep photographs means that such events and personhood remain in the visible form. Thus, photographs that reflect individual events and personal appearance faithfully are the opposite of Amîîrû culture, which tends to adhere to structural amnesia.

This paper aims to examine how photographs are encompassed into everyday life and articulated with Amîîrû culture, describing the sociological characteristics of photograph in the Tigania. The scope of this discussion is up until August 2019, when I conducted the final research for this paper,[1] and is limited to physical photographs made by developing negatives or printing digital images. Although the Tigania people have begun to use mobile phones for taking and storing pictures, a form of photography that local majority keep is still classical at research time. My focus upon the material form of the photography will deepen our understanding of the ontology of photograph that has long lasted among the Amîîrû of Tigania.

I conducted anthropological research on Tigania people living in Athwana sub-location, an administrative unit of Mikinduri East Location, Mikinduri Central Division, Tigania East District. Athwana is situated to the east of Mikinduri (or Mîkiindûri in Kîmîîrû) market, which has traditionally been a centre of the south-western area of the Nyambene Ranges. This paper is based on case studies of 33 households (***mûcîî***) in Athwana, and the data were collected through participant observations and interviews with family members of these households (see Table 1). In this chapter, I will describe the specific cases, as illustrated in Table 1. In addition, my focus was on camera people (***ariingi mbicha***)[2] and studios who are important agents of producing photographs. Hence, my research includes interviews and observations of local camera people not only in Athwana but also in Kîgûûchwa,[3] the neighbouring location of Mikinduri Central Division, because the activities of camera people extend beyond the administrative borders. Further, I visited several photo studios in Mîkiindûri Market, Kîgûûchwa, and Meru town.

**2. General features of photograph among the Amîîrû of Tigania**

While the photograph has long been established as a form of art, Amîîrû attitudes to photographs are classical and realistic. For them, photographs are merely a medium of memory (***kûriikanna***/***mûriikanna***) that faithfully reflect the reality of the past rather than a medium of expression of metaphoric meaning created by the photographer. There are few interpretive or imaginative attempts to translate complex meanings from a photograph (cf. Kuhn 2002). The following narrative from a middle-aged man (No. 29) reveals the well-known, but a simple agency of photograph that evokes the reality of the past:

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[1] My anthropological research regarding this theme was conducted in February 2017, February 2018, August 2018, and August 2019. However, this paper also made use of my experience, knowledge, and data from before 2017.

[2] In this article, the term 'photographer', which implies aesthetic orientation and technological excellence, is distinguished from 'cameraperson' (***mûriingi mbicha***) who takes pictures for other people without the above orientation.

[3] Kîgûûchwa is one of the research sites that Anne-Marie Peatrik selected for her comparative study of traditional Meru culture (Peatrik 2019).

**Table 1. Households Interviewed**

| No | Status of Interviewee | Nthukî | Mwîîrîga | Album | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Husband | Rubetaa | Antûbaita | ○ | Njûriîncheke Member |
| 2 | Husband | Ratanya | Amûthetu | ○ | Njûriîncheke Member |
| 3 | Wife | Ratanya | Antûbaita | ○ | (H) Former Businessman |
| 4 | Wife | Ratanya | Andûûnne | ○ | |
| 5 | Single | Guantai | Andûûnne | ○ | |
| 6 | Husband | Rubetaa | Anthîîrra | ○ | Former Teacher |
| 7 | Husband | Rubetaa | Andûûnne | × | Former Policeman |
| 8 | Husband | Guantai | Andûûnne | ○ | Former Restaurant manager |
| 9 | Husband | Mîrîti | Amûthetu | ○ | |
| 10 | Wife | Rubetaa | Andûûnne | ○ | (H) Former Chief |
| 11 | Couple | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | ○ | Businessman & Teacher |
| 12 | Wife | Ratanya | Antûbaita | × | (H) Businessman |
| 13 | Husband | Rubetaa | Abboondiî | ○ | Former Businessman |
| 14 | Wife | Ratanya | Abboondiî | ○ | |
| 15 | Wife | Mîrîti | Andûûnne | × | |
| 16 | Couple | Mîrîti | Andûûnne | ○ | (Both) Teachers |
| 17 | Wife | Guantai | Andûûnne | ○ | (H) Businessman |
| 18 | Family | Ratanya | Andûûnne | ○ | Father, Son (1977), Daughter (1980) |
| 19 | Wife | Mîrîti | Amûthetu | ○ | |
| 20 | Husband | Rubetaa | Andûûnne | × | Former Teacher, MC |
| 21 | Husband | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | ○ | Policeman |
| 22 | Wife | Guantai | Antûbaita | ○ | Mother & Daughter (1996) |
| 23 | Husband | Ratanya | Antûbaita | ○ | Former school staff |
| 24 | Wife | Gîchûûnge | Antûbaita | ○ | Former Migrant Labourer (Nairobi/Nanyuki) |
| 25 | Wife | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | × | |
| 26 | Husband | Ratanya | Antûanthaamma | ○ | Tailor |
| 27 | Couple | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | ○ | |
| 28 | Family | Rubetaa | Andûûnne | ○ | Mother & Daughter (1995) |
| 29 | Husband | Mîrîti | Antûanthaamma | ○ | Teacher |
| 30 | Husband | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | ○ | Businessman (Meru Town) |
| 31 | Couple | Rubetaa | Andûûnne | × | |
| 32 | Wife | Guantai | Antûanthaamma | ○ | |
| 33 | Wife | Gîchûûnge | Antûbaita | × | Teacher's Certificate holder, (H) Businessman |

Notes: (H): Husband, Number in Bracket: year of birth

> 'If you look at a certain picture, that one will tell you, remind you…it will explain what kind of event took place. That is meaning. For example, a burial ceremony. In that picture, they look sad, and they were not happy. So, you will know this was a sad ceremony'. (August 11, 2019)

The well-known power of photographs that enables us to revive memories and emotions vividly is also evident. Some people burst into tears just from looking at a photograph. For example, this happened to a mother (No. 3) after her daughter died in a traffic accident in Nairobi. Nevertheless, this depends on the individual. This power that photographs have is not always effective; as an elder (***mûûnjûri***)[(4)] said, 'a photograph is a mere shadow. It never answers a question' (August 16, 2018). So much so, that I was once told by an elder (No. 26) that 'there is no meaning. It is a waste of time' when I was attempting to check each photograph (August 15, 2018).


**Figure 1. Decorative photograph taken at graduation (No. 32)**

It is still not the case that Tigania people look at the photograph from an aesthetic point of view. While the photograph is the product of 'a hybrid network of humans and machines' (Taki 2003: 21–22), the existence of the photographer merges into the background of the machine that automatically captures the likeness of reality. Even when aesthetics becomes an issue, for the Tigania people, attention is directed not to the composition of the photograph and the camera's specification or shooting technique, but to the flamboyant decorative frame with

(4) ***Mûûnjûri*** has a special meaning in the Amîîrû culture. He is a member of the council of elders (Njûriîncheke) which I will mention later.

flowers and letters (i.e., Happy Moments, Merry Christmas, Happy New Year, see the Figure 1). This style of photograph is very popular, and needless to say, this is a new preference brought about by advancements in technology. In addition, as decorative frames require a personal computer, printer, and design template, it is a difficult task for local camera people. Conversely, those camera people who can provide this type of photographs are well known in the surrounding areas.

Although the Tigania people hang framed photographs on the wall and sometimes prefer decorative frames, they rarely take out and look at photographs or albums in everyday life. For many villagers, photographs are not something they enjoy by looking at them daily or by actively taking photographs, but instead, they are something to be kept as evidence to be used when they want to justify or supplement what they believe in and what they think; in this sense, photographs are treated as an archive.

Subsequently, photographs can be seen as a 'personal archive' for preserving events and appearances. However, it is worth noting that photographs kept in a well-ordered form of an album or casually in a box are also considered the 'family archive', as these photographs mostly belong to ***mûcîî***, and not a specific person. One man (No. 16) said that his father had many photographs but these photographs was being held by his first-born daughter, who married out to another ***mûcîî*** (her husband's natal place); 'that is not good. We must take it back to our ***mûcîî***' (August 11, 2018). This narrative typically indicates that photographs belong to ***mûcîî***. As other examples, photographs that a husband and wife collected in the past became mixed property after marriage (No. 11); and a father said that he had a photo album, but in fact the album was managed by his daughter who used to organise various photographs (No. 18). This is one of the reasons that their album or photographs include many relatives and friends whom


**Figure 2. Eulogy (No. 3)**

the parents/children have never seen. Thus, the boundary between family archive and personal archive is ambiguous. However, younger generations tend to keep their photographs in their own album or box as a personal archive. In these cases, children pick out their favourite photographs (mostly photographs of their parents) from family albums and add them to their own album. In this way, personal archives sometimes become absent from family archives.

Although people rarely look at these photographs as part of everyday life, there are times when people look at photographs seriously. As a middle-aged-man said, 'these photographs will be used for preparing a eulogy' (August 12, 2018). Soon after a person has died, family members normally look for an adequate photograph and reprint it for a eulogy. Figure 2, which I extract a part (one page) from a eulogy, illustrates how many photographs can be used in a eulogy. Finally, a eulogy is distributed to participants of the ***mathiko*** (burial ceremony). Thus, personal and hidden photographs are transformed to social and public beings.

**Figure 3. Album of arusi (No. 21)**

The way that photographs are kept seems not to reflect social stratification necessarily, as indicated in Table 1. People living in poverty often have albums, and several wealthy families keep their photographs casually in a box or envelopes. However, wealthy families tend to arrange photographs in order of when the occasions happened and make a stunning *arusi* album. For example, the interviewee (No. 21) keeps an album and videotape concerning the *arusi* that he held in 2012 (Figure 3). They hired a company in Meru town that has professional staff for taking photographs, editing videos, and preparing albums. Wealthy people also tend to hang their portrait photographs in a frame on the walls of their house. In addition, the eulogies of wealthy family members are more sophisticated than eulogies for less wealthy family members. In comparison to a wealthy family (see, Figure 2), a eulogy for less wealthy family members only has words without photos; if photos are attached, they are monochrome.

In relation to this, there may be a possibility that women or wives tend to manage family photographs. As indicated in Table 1, many wives agreed to be interviewed and for their photographs to be checked. As a good example of this, one male participant (No. 26) said, 'there

is no meaning. It is a waste of time' and stopped the interview half-way through (August 15, 2018). In contrast, the camera people are all male, as I will describe later. I have heard that there are some female camera people, but I did not meet any of them, apart from a female employee of a company. I think that taking and managing photographs loosely depends on gender-based divisions of labour.

## 3. Social agents in the photography network

### 3.1. Collecting photographs

A middle-aged-man (No. 8) bought an analogue camera in the 1990s when he had worked as a restaurant manager in Nairobi. He had used his camera for private purposes, and his album contains many photographs he had taken in Uhuru Park, the Kenyatta International Conference Center[(5)], and other places from that time.

However, this is a rare case, as very few people take photographs and print them by themselves. Most of the photographs they have were taken by camera people. For camera people with a digital camera and printer, ceremonies, especially *arusi* and ***mathiko***, provide business opportunities; hence, they often appear in these occasions, but they rarely appear on occasions such as a small ***kîatho*** or birthday because the number of participants is limited. During *arusi* or ***mathiko***, a cameraperson prints out the photographs immediately after they have taken and displays them on a rope at the event (Figure 4). The participants can then look at the photographs and buy the ones they want. Many people buy photographs regarding themselves, family members, distant relatives and friends they do not regularly see as a memento; however, this is a recent practice. Up until the 1990s, when the camera people used films, they had to develop the films in Meru town. The camera people at that time would attach the negative to the

**Figure 4. Selling photographs in arusi (2012)**

[(5)] The Kenyatta International Conference Center was renamed 'Kenyatta International Convention Center' in September 2013 on the occasion of marking its 40th anniversary. But as photographs many people kept at my research time had been taken in the age of old name, this paper unitarily uses the old name.

developed photograph, visit each household, and try to sell them their photographs. A former cameraperson (No. 5) recalls that while it was costly to travel back and forth to Meru town, he made a profit because there was a demand.

Also, people sometimes casually take their photographs in a studio when they had an occasional day out in Nairobi or another large city, on special days such as Christmas, and after church services. Most studios have the plain background screen which is used to take ID photographs and the background screen with so fantastical pictures of cities and nature. When there is a special occasion such as Christmas or elections, they provide appropriate backgrounds that employ the features of particular occasions to meet the customers' needs.

Businesses of this kind seem to be common in sightseeing spots in Kenya. In places such as Nairobi and Mombasa, there have been many camera people and studios that were closely connected. And, studios provide backgrounds that employ the features of particular localities.[(6)] An older man (No. 2) carefully kept an old (monochrome) photograph taken in a Nairobi studio in the early 1970s when he had worked as seasonal migrant labour. Such styles gradually spread to other regions. For example, the original owner of Meru Photo Studio in Meru town was from Agikuyu community.

Furthermore, they exchange photographs with relatives and friends. One mother (No. 22) said that most of the photographs she had were obtained through exchange. Although one man (No. 31) only has one framed (monochrome) photograph, he does not appear in its photograph, and it reflects only his sister's family as his sister visited him and gave him the photo as a memento. In particular, upper primary and secondary students often exchange photographs with close friends so that they do not forget each other after graduation. As another example, my research assistant enclosed his photograph in a letter to his pen pal. Sometimes, photographs from student years have words stuck on them that have been cut out from newspapers or


**Figure 5. Student years (No. 5)**

(6) Behrend (2003) reported how cameramen and studios was active and flourished in Mombasa.

magazines (Figure 5). These words could be lessons for life or words of encouragement. For example, one wife (No. 27) attached the sentence, 'Challenging is imaginative and ability to work', on an old photograph. This is a 'decoration' appropriate for students. These photographs of the student years are also taken by the camera people. Local camera people would visit the school every time an event takes place, from a minor event to graduation ceremonies, and take photographs and sell them.

Thus, camera people and studios are indispensable agents in considering the ontology of photographs in a local area. In the following section, I will focus on these in more detail.

### 3.2. Camera people and studios

As the background to the many photographs that are circulating or exist among the Tigania, here I will describe, first, the activities of individual camera people and, second, photo studios. All personal names are pseudonyms to retain the anonymity of the participants.

Steven, who comes from Athwana, became a cameraperson in 1997 soon after he finished Form 4 of high school. At the time, his late brother, who was a teacher, bought an analogue camera (KODAK) so that Steven could earn an income as a cameraperson: 'I was willing to engage in camerawork because I saw a famous cameraperson and knew that it (camerawork) was good business' (February 10, 2018). The 'famous cameraperson' was John, whom we will discuss later. He mainly took pictures at local ***kîatho*** and baptisms, with his friend who helped check the names to sell the photographs afterwards. He developed negatives in Meru town and wrote the names on the back of each photograph by referring to a name list. After that, he visited the houses of everyone he took pictures of and sold the photographs at a rate of Ksh. 20/= per photograph, and attached the negative to each photograph. He said, 'It costed Ksh. 300/= for one film. I mostly used two or three films for one event. One film enabled me to snap 40 shots. Simply calculating, I got Ksh. 1600/= to Ksh. 2400/= per event. Even after the expenses for transporting, hiring an assistant (friend), and developing negatives were deducted, I got quite a pure profit'

**Figure 6. Many cameramen in one occasion (1998)**

(February 10, 2018).

As a cameraperson does not require particular skills and anyone can become one with just a camera, it was a suitable part-time job for jobless young people. In the 1990s, there were many camera people such as Steven and they seemed to earn an income (Figure 6). Steven stopped being a cameraperson in 2000 because he got a job as a hotel manager, and this income was more than that of a cameraperson.

Mwenda, who also comes from Athwana, has been a cameraperson since 2005. He belongs to a carpenter group based in Mîkiindûri and works as a cameraperson whenever people need him. He saw that other camera people earned quite a lot of money and decided to become a cameraperson: 'at that time, my friend taught me how to use an analogue camera. He was also a famous cameraperson, though his main occupation was as a primary school teacher' (February 11, 2018). As his first camera was analogue and as there was no facility for developing film in Mîkiindûri, he had to go to Meru town to develop his negatives. In 2013, he bought a digital camera for Ksh. 15000/= in Nairobi, and since then he has not needed to go to Meru town. However, he does not have a printer and still has to print his photographs at SABA SABA Photo Studio in Mîkiindûri market where it costs Ksh. 10/= for each normal-sized print. He sells one normal-sized photograph for Ksh. 30/= and sells king-sized photographs for Ksh. 50/=, which are the standard prices in the area. Mwenda said 'everybody knows me, and hires me for taking pictures. I am mostly invited to small ***kîatho***. Yesterday, I just worked at a birthday ***kîatho***' (February 11, 2018).

John, living in Kîgûûchwa, has been a famous cameraperson. His reputation reaches as far as Athwana because he is one of a few people in the area who can create a decorative photograph by using their personal computer and printer. Subsequently, many people in Athwana have photographs that he took and printed. When I asked people who edited their decorative photographs, many people mentioned his name, and so it was easy to recognise his work. John said, 'Some years ago, I gave my own USB memory to a friend and asked him to purchase a decorative design template in Nairobi' (February 13, 2018). While John sells photographs at the same price as other camera people, decorating the photographs is free-of-charge. His career began in 1996; soon after finishing Form 4 of high school, John got a job at the Friends Photo Studio operating in Mîkiindûri, which has now closed down their business: 'I learned many things about cameras and techniques there. And I knew photographs was a good business' (February 13, 2018). After finishing work at the Photo Studio, he continued to be local cameraperson and has used several cameras. Now he has a printer, a personal computer, and a single-lens reflex camera (NIKON), which he purchased for Ksh. 50,000/=. He makes temporary studio in a courtyard of ***mûcîî***, by pitching a background screen of pictures or plain screen in accordance with customer's needs. John does not like printing photographs directly at the event, soon after taking the pictures, because he is concerned with the quality of the photograph printing. All of his work is undertaken at his house. However, his income is not only from being a camera person but also from working as a barber (*kinyozi* in Kiswahili) and selling tea leaves.

Similarly, David comes from Kîgûûchwa and has experience of working in a photo studio.

He worked at Mt. Kenya Photo Studio in Nyeri for five years (2006–2010), and at that time he bought a digital camera (Fuji Film). Returning to his homeland, he became a 'mobile cameraman' (in his expression). However, he has never owned a printer and printed his photographs in Meru Photo Studio (Meru town). He operated Nyambene Photo Studio, near Kîgûûchwa market for about three years (2016–2018). Half of the office space was for the photo studio, and the other part was for *kinyozi*. He withdrew from there because his income was not enough to maintain the office space. He transferred his business to his ***mûcîî*** in Kaliene, an area halfway between Mîkiindûri market and Kîgûûchwa, and he operates both a *kinyozi* and a canteen, aside from working as a cameraperson. When I visited his business site in August 2019, his new photo studio next to the canteen was still under construction. He said: 'If the studio is attractive, people will come to me' (August 14, 2019).

Interestingly, local camera people seem to think of their work not so much as a passionate or worthwhile job but as a business. Even John, who has influenced other local camera people, views camerawork as a business first: 'photograph…I love it. But it is an income-generating project!' (February 13, 2018). However, there is now little room for optimism. Life cannot be sustained by camerawork alone. As John and David said, the time when their business makes the most money is during Christmas and New Year. Subsequently, they work as camera people concurrent to working as a carpenter, undertaking agricultural activities, or managing other businesses (*kinyozi* or canteen).

From here, I will focus on photo studios. In Mîkiindûri and Meru town, many photo shops can print digital data and several shops with studios.[7] Maintaining a studio is costly; it costs several thousand Shillings (about Ksh. 5000) per year for a license. However, the benefits of having a studio have now diminished. For example, when I met a woman in her late twenties at Nax Digital Photo, Meru town, she said, 'I don't like to take pictures in a studio. I take pictures in various settings. Photographs in the background of nature and photographs with friends are better' (August 9, 2019). The majority of customers certainly visit Nax Digital Photo to print their own photographs that they took somewhere else or to take ID photographs (Ksh. 100/= per 4 passport sized photographs). According to the owner,[8] the studio is mostly used for taking ID photographs using a plain background, except for during Christmas and New Year. This situation is also the same at Meru Photo Studio, which is a long-established shop with a developed studio. According to my observation and interviews with staff, there are not many customers who use the studios today. Thus, the cost performance of running a studio seems to be ineffective.

Many owners understand this cost and have developed various methods to eliminate waste. For example, Mkenya, a famous photo shop in Mîkiindûri, has no studio for reduction of

[7] In each area, I conducted research at the major studios; Meru Photo Studio and Nax Digital Photo in Meru town; and SABA SABA Photo Studio and Muchui in Mîkiindûri. Though I visited at Mkenya and Monalisa in Mîkiindûri, these have no studio.

[8] He was also a 'local photographer', and worked in his homeland region (Imenti). Calling him a photographer is more suitable as it matches his aesthetic sense.

cost (license fee), and uses a plain wall in the corner of the office to take ID photographs. John, a cameraperson in Kîgûûchwa, claims to have an 'instant' studio, which does not exist officially. In this way, his 'instant' studio is his way of cleverly getting around the audit.

Rather than creating an income from studio photographs, the income of photo studios is mainly developed from printing digital images, making photocopies (Ksh. 3/= per paper), laminating, selling photo frames with extended original photographs, and other services (i.e., preparing pamphlets or eulogies). As with Meru Photo Studio, when analogue cameras were used, local camera people came to develop films, and now the reputation as a long-established store attracts old customers, such as Steven and David. In contrast, Nax Digital Photo has gained a reputation from the quality and speed of its printing since it started operating in 2017.

The situation and operation of photo studios in local areas seem to be different from Meru town. Referring to the difference, I will consider how two photo studios in Mîkiindûri operated to earn an income.

SABA SABA Photo Studio, which opened in 2006, is today the most famous studio in Mîkiindûri. During Christmas and New Year, their studio is decorated with special background screens and ornaments, and they change these decorations every year. According to the staff, while the Christmas season is a major event, this is just only one of the times that people use this photo studio. Other opportunities include school holidays when the studio is popular with students and Sundays. For the latter, the photo studio is very close to St. Massimo Catholic Church, the biggest church in the area, and many attendees of the church service come to take their picture on the way home. Further, the staff attend local events, especially ***mathiko***. One staff member said, '*arusi* require permission. We must be invited to take a picture. But we are free to go inside ***mathiko***' (February 12, 2018). They can print digital images and sell photographs at the event (see Figure 4), and they spend the whole day there, using a printer and several batteries. Thus, the SABA SABA Photo Studio endeavours to keep their studio attractive and engage in the photography business in the field.

Muchui has run his own photo studio alongside the main road to Kunati from Mîkiindûri market since 2005. His studio is not organizational but purely an individual enterprise. He has a

**Figure. 7 Photo studio (Muchui)**

fantastical backscreen at his studio (Figure 7), which enables customers to experience an 'imagined journey' (Behrend 2003). He also goes out to various events (*arusi*, ***mathiko***, and ceremony performed after circumcision), and hires two or three friends who help him with his camerawork. According to Muchui, he has two printers, as he is concerned about 'printer damage'; one for his studio and one for fieldwork.

Further, in his words, he specialises as an 'art worker' (designer) painting and preparing various designs for events. This is the advantage he gets by getting invitations *arusi*: 'When I go to an event, I am busy with artwork and camerawork. I must sometimes concentrate on artwork. So, I need help' (February 12, 2018). In fact, he began his career as an art worker rather than cameraman. After finishing class 8 of primary school, he was first interested in artwork and developed his art skills. The reason that he bought first (analogue) camera is for design and artwork as well as private purposes. Through interactions with John, who often appeared in this section, he began working as a cameraperson at a studio, and since 2011, he has used digital cameras (NIKON and SONY).

In this way, the photo studio staff in Mîkiindûri take business trips to events held in local areas. It is easy for them to get information about and invitations to events because they are rooted in the area and have information networks through the traditional social structure (***mwîîrîga***, ***nthukî***, and relatives) and friends, and because of their reputation in Mîkiindûri. Further, they own must-have equipment (several printers and batteries), which enables them to go out on business trips.

**4. Articulations of photograph and Amîîrû culture**

Photograph that can capture reality faithfully fixes certain events and individual uniqueness at a certain point and conveys them to distant persons and places, and even to the future. It is such an effect of photograph that I, as an anthropologist and outsider, can look at photographs. These effects have a tense relationship with Amîîrû culture. In this section, I will demonstrate the articulation between such photographs and Amîîrû culture.

**4.1. Cultural restrictions of photograph**

One of the features of Amîîrû culture is to hide knowledge and events from certain people through the restriction of entry and through secrecy. As examples, here, I focus on ***kîanda*** and Njûriîncheke**.**

First, ***kîanda*** are small and simple huts, which are made of banana leaves, for isolating circumcised boys. The boys spend about three weeks in a ***kîanda***. During this period, entry to the ***kîanda*** is strictly limited to ***mûgwaati*** (the caretaker of that boy) and other specific people such as masked dancers (***m'nkûûrrî***). What happens there is kept secret to uncircumcised boys and women in general. Taking pictures of activities and people inside a ***kîanda*** is banned. After a period of isolation, people are permitted to take photographs, and there are many photographs of the ceremony of boys coming out from the ***kîanda***.

Second, the Njûriîncheke (Council of Elders)[9] is an association initiated through special procedures, which plays crucial roles in the legal and political functions of community life. In their own house (***nyûûmba ya Njûri***), the Njûriîncheke engage in various activities such as meetings for the community administration and settling of disputes in traditional ways. One of the features of Njûriîncheke is its secrecy for which it is categorized as a secret association. ***Nkûrûûmbû*** (non-initiates), women, and uncircumcised boys are strictly prohibited from entering the ***nyûûmba ya Njûri***. At the same time, it is a taboo for members of the Njûriîncheke to disclose information from the activities of the Njûriîncheke to any person who does not belong to the Njûriîncheke. This taboo is also applied to the police and even the President of Kenya unless they are an initiated Njûriîncheke elder. Similar to the ***kîanda***, taking pictures of their activities inside the ***nyûûmba ya Njûri*** is forbidden, and a ***mûûnjûri*** explained that this taboo was explained when he became a Njûriîncheke member. It is the fact that, as Rimita reported (1988:48–50), this secrecy is protected by an oath at the time of initiation into the Njûriîncheke.[10]

As everyone in the community knows the rules about the ***kîanda*** and Njûriîncheke, no camera people dare to enter and take pictures inside ***kîanda*** and ***nyûûmba ya Njûri***. Needless to say, there are also no Njûriîncheke members who take pictures of their activities and inside their house. I could not find photographs on this topic; instead, there are photographs of the ritual performed when circumcised boys come out from the ***kîanda*** and of fellow elders taken as a memento outside the ***nyûûmba ya Njûri***. While they love photographs, they prioritize the rules of their culture.

The negative attitude of the Njûriîncheke to photograph is sometimes salient. The Njûriîncheke hold a celebratory parade for new Njûriîncheke members. When I tried to take a picture of a Njûriîncheke's parade in Mîkiindûri market, outside a ***nyûûmba ya Njûri***, a ***mûûnjûri*** quickly came to slap my camera and warned me: 'Don't take any pictures!' Someone also muttered: 'Respect culture!' (August 27, 2011). Even though the Njûriîncheke's parade and *arusi* are the same celebrations, the cultural connotation is extremely different.

Interestingly, the Njûriîncheke do not recognize photograph as evidence (***ûkûûjî*** or ***okoie***) in settling disputes. During my interview, a ***mûûnjûri*** mentioned the reason as follows:

> Is the picture evidence? That is a mere shadow (***kîruundu***). It is like a dead person. It never answers a question, doesn't it? We must have an oral conversation (***kwaarria tûkaarranîria bwega***) with the persons concerned. When you have a case, you must show yourself physically. (August 16, 2018)

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[9] Initiating the Njûriîncheke was traditionally an automatic process after circumcision for all men of Meru because the Njûriîncheke belong to an upper part of an age-grade system. Today, all men of Amîîrû do not necessarily become members of the Njûriîncheke. For the contemporary procedures (especially payments) and reasons for becoming members of the Njûriîncheke, see my paper (Baba 2014).

[10] For the general process of initiation rituals, see Rimita (1988:47–51) and for a comparative perspective, see Peatrik (2019).

He added that the Njûriîncheke emphasised the 'eye' and the 'mouth': eyewitnesses and narratives, respectively. This kind of metaphoric expression was heard from many ***mûûnjûri***, and they added the 'head', which means memory; 'memory is in my head (***kîongo***)'. When settling disputes, the Njûriîncheke require that the complainant and the defendant must be present physically and give oral information to them directly. If a complainant was injured by someone, they must show his injury in front of the Njûriîncheke. Although photographs certainly enable the 'person' to be present, this 'person' cannot talk to the Njûriîncheke. This is the reason why the ***mûûnjûri*** calls them a 'dead person' or 'shadow'. As he stated, Njûriîncheke does not regard photograph as a verbally communicative agent like a living person. This expression of a 'shadow' or 'dead person' is related to the lack of an attempt to interpret and extract complex meanings from a photograph.

Another ***mûûnjûri*** said, 'Njûriîncheke follows the footstep (***îkinya***) of the Njûriîncheke founder, namely **Kaûrrobeechaû**' (February 19, 2017). ***Îkinya*** connotes a meaning of instruction and manner (***mîîtîrire***) to be followed. His narrative also explains another reason why the Njûriîncheke do not recognize photographs; because the founder did not use cameras and photographs. However, these attitudes and notions are not necessarily shared among all members of the Njûriîncheke in this area. Another ***mûûnjûri*** said, 'Our (Njûriîncheke) style may be old and out of date. We don't merely know a way of how to use photographs for dispute settlement skilfully' (August 12, 2018). This ***mûûnjûri*** implies the possibility that photographs and activities of the Njûriîncheke are articulated harmoniously. He may feel the current of the times. When I observed people coming into Nax Digital Photo, Meru town, a man came to print photographs to prepare a traffic accident certificate. It is now certain that photographs are already recognized as evidence in many social domains.

### 4.2. Beyond structural amnesia

Amîîrû culture works to prevent the individual's life and character from being prominent, which is a function of structural amnesia. Eight age-groups (***nthukî***),[(11)] each covering 15 years, constitute the cyclical time awareness of a cycle of 120 years (c.f. Nyaga 1997). The names of each age group have been fixed and will reappear in a cycle of 120 years. People's memory of genealogy does not go very far. Individual ancestors are forgotten, and only age groups that go through cyclical time survive. Recapturing a historical event is based on age groups and not individual ancestors. The Amîîrû notion of the individual sees individuals as simply 'water' that fills an everlasting 'container' (age group) in a particular era. Also, even if the ***mwîîchiaro***[(12)] possess the power to cast curses, it is thought to come from belonging to a certain clan, and not from an individual's character or capability (Ishida 2019:45). Similarly, when a masked dancer

[(11)] The eight age-groups are **Îthariî, Mîchûbû, Ratanya, Rubetaa, Mîrîti, Guantai, Gîchûûnge,** and **Kîramunya**.

[(12)] Ishida has long conducted research on ***gîchiaro*** in Îgembe, considering the characteristics of the whole Amîîrû culture (e.g., Ishida 2008; 2006).

(***m'nkûûrrî***) appears in the final stage of the circumcision isolation period, it is difficult to identify the dancer because of the mask and in any case, the dancer is not supposed to be identified (Ishida 2019:22). Furthermore, when the Njûriîncheke deals with conflict, it is their collective ruling, and no individual name is revealed even if there is an elder that stands out. The supernatural power of the Njûriîncheke**,** which includes both blessings and curses, belongs to the collective body, and not to specific individuals. In short, individual lives and characters merge with the background and disappear in this cultural process of de-personification. From this feature, Ishida calls Amîîrû society 'a society that conceals individuals' (Ishida 2019: Chapter 2). Thus, such a socio-cultural system is clearly contrastive to the photograph that fixes the unique individual forever.

However, there is a unique practice in Amîîrû culture in which an individual leaves their footprint (***îkinya***) for posterity. This emerges in the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren. I speculate that this relationship provides the space for photograph to connect to the socio-cultural system without conflict. Here, let me examine this form of articulation.

The intimate relationship between grandparents and grandchildren is widely found in African societies, and Amîîrû society is no exception. When schools break for a long holiday period, grandchildren living in cities would often visit their grandparents' in rural areas to spend time together. Grandparents not only look after their grandchildren well but also teach them a variety of things such as how society works, ***gîchiaro***, proverbs, and life skills (cooking, sewing, and so on), and therefore they are very dependable.[(13)] An educated mother, who wanted her daughter to receive a good education, said while holding her infant in a *leso* (colourful cotton cloth, **leecho** in Kîmîîrû) 'I will teach Meru language (Kîmîîrû) first. We can wait for English. As grandparents only know Kîmîîrû' (August 17, 2012). This demonstrates the importance of grandparents. In particular, the ***ntaau*** (or ***ntaagu***) relationship, which refers to a special relationship between one grandparent and one grandchild who then call each other ***ntaau***, is important. This is evident in the practice of naming grandchildren after grandparents (see Ishida's article in the present volume; Ishida n.p.). The names given to grandchildren include the names of their grandparents (namesake) as well as names that come from their character, demeanour, or achievements. The demeanour or characteristics of the grandparents are called '***îkinya rîa ntaau***' (footprint of ***ntaau***). When we look at grandchildren's names, we can, therefore, imagine what kind of person their ***ntaau*** (grandparent) was; for example, Nkatha means one who is generous and always greets everyone with a smile; Kîremi (male)/Karîmi (female) is someone who works hard in the farm; Gîtoonga is a rich man, mainly because of his large herd of cattle; Kîmaathi/Kamaathi seeks for something or labours to acquire wealth; and Ntoongai/Kaangai is a child born during the rain or survived death at some point or another.

In Amîîrû society in which individuals become concealed in structural time, the transmission of ***îkinya rîa ntaau*** is a way in which individuals are saved from being forgotten.

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[(13)] Grandchildren perform a ritual, a '***kûthaarima***' (blessing), for unfortunate incidents that are caused by an ancestral spirit (***kîruundu***); see Matsuzono's article in the present volume.

As characters and demeanours of a ***ntaau*** (grandparent) are handed down in the form of names, grandparents continue to live socially even if they are physically dead. Considering that the ***îkinya*** is the behaviour to be followed, it may be possible to say that grandchildren are the 'reincarnation' of their grandparents. In this way, to have grandchildren who inherit their ***îkinya*** is a cherished form of 'happiness' in Amîîrû society.

However, it is worth noting that names handed down from grandparents are general and never unique. There are many people with similar names. Without an explanation about the reason of naming, we cannot know how grandparents are unique. What guarantees the uniqueness of grandparents is actually the anecdotes about them. Photograph complements an anecdote regarding the name, illustrating the visual image of the grandparents. This kind of function is a point of harmonious articulation between photograph and Amîîrû culture. As one woman (No. 16) said, 'Photograph is just a feature reference!' (August 11, 2018). This perspective seems to be widely shared; many elder people leave their photographs to their families so that their grandchild and descendants can recognize them (No. 2, 4, 15, 23).

It is unclear if photographs that capture someone's life course have brought about a new form of ***îkinya***. Although the roles of photography in Amîîrû culture seems to be moderate and complementary, socio-cultural importance of the 'feature reference' is noteworthy. First, photograph is a reliable media for saving grandparents from oblivion. In the past, the personality of grandparents (especially ***ntaau***) was vested in names and anecdotes, but now, photographs add features of their appearance to make these more realistic (Figure 8). The agency of photograph in limiting structural amnesia cannot be overemphasized. Second, photograph creates an opportunity to explain anecdotes. During my research, I encountered many situations of children interestingly looking at old photographs with me because the photographs were usually hidden in an album or a box and the children then asked their parents or grandparents questions about unfamiliar persons in the photographs. This conversation has an educational effect in terms of learning about Amîîrû social relationships. The emphasis is on the order of the

**Figure 8. Preserving personal appearance of ntaau (No. 25)**

story and photograph, which is reversed. Looking at photographs introduces storytelling, and specific types of conversation would not be evoked without photographs. Such an agency of photograph in generating narratives regarding human relation cannot be also overemphasized. In next section, I will examine another change emerged with the introduction of photograph.

**5. Collection and connection**

During my research on photographs, I noticed that many people have photograph with similar backgrounds in Nairobi; a statue of Jomo Kenyatta, a legendary leader of the nation, and the Kenyatta International Conference Center (hereafter, KICC). Together, the statue and KICC, for its proximity, have become an integral background for photograph (Figure 9), and hereafter, I will call this type of photograph 'KICC photograph'.

The statue and KICC were established in 1973,[(14)] and since then, they have become the most famous sites in Nairobi for foreign tourists as well as Kenyan people. KICC was the highest building in Nairobi until many higher buildings were constructed in the 1990s. Even today, many tourists visit this location and take pictures with the background. There are usually several camera people waiting at the locations with single-lens reflex cameras. They print digital images on the spot and sell them for Ksh. 100/= each. Most photographs that I confirmed in Athwana were taken by camera people working at this location.

Importantly, the statue and KICC have been symbolic objects in terms of national memory and one of the images for representing Kenya, as these landmarks have been adopted on the note (Figure 10). Although a new note will replace the old note,[(15)] the image will remain the same. This indicates how Kenya, as a nation, adheres to this image.

During my interviews, this photograph reminds people of when they took it; for example, when they were working in Nairobi as a restaurant manager (No. 8); when they visited Nairobi for working as a part-time carpenter (No. 18); when they went to Nairobi to participate in a music festival (No. 16); and when they led a Church group to Nairobi (No. 20, Figure 9). As the KICC photograph is also exchanged or given among certain social relationship, some people explained to me the social relationship through which they exchanged or received. For example, a middle-aged-man keeps the KICC photograph that initially belonged to his late older brother, who was a former teacher (No. 5). A woman has the KICC photograph that one of her sons presented to her as a memento because he lives far away (No. 12). Another woman was presented the KICC photograph of her mother's brother by her mother who had kept it (No. 31).

However, it should be noted that their memories are limited to how and when they got the KICC photograph. Namely, the KICC photograph does not evoke various and deep memories or re-create the past through interpretations. The significance of retaining the KICC photo needs to be understood from another perspective, aside from memory and interpretation, which is open to another ontology of photograph among the Tigania people.

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(14) Construction of KICC began in 1967 and was completed in 1973.
(15) In 2019, the changeover to a new note is gradually progressing.

**Figure 9. The KICC photo (No. 20)**


**Figure 10. Old note of Ksh. 100/=**

As a clue, I refer to the case of a middle-aged-man (No. 5). He has collected many photographs and attaches them on the wall with many posters, maps, and calendars. Thus, his room is filled with visual images (Figure 11). As Sontag argued, he is 'collecting the world' by collecting photographs/visual images (1977:10). As a result, he feels surrounded by relatives, friends, national politicians, animals (lions, cheetahs, buffalo, and reindeers), nature, and even Usama Bin Laden. Photographs reduce temporary and spatial distance with objects and connect these on a flat surface beyond time and space. This connection are very real for him because they all exist/existed on the earth's surface. The point here is a kind of feeling that he exists in the world with others. In this way, his purpose of collecting photographs is the collection itself,


**Figure 11. A wall of his living room (No. 5)**

which evokes the feeling of being-in-the-world-with-others,[16] rather than for memory.

This argument indicates a change of perspective to photograph, which emphasises flat expansion rather than depths, connection rather than interpretation, and index rather than symbol. This perspective will enable us to understand another significance of having photographs such as the KICC photograph, not for memory. The KICC photograph intermediates the connection of the person who is now living in a local area to Jomo Kenyatta, KICC, camera people, Nairobi, people who have the same photograph, and even people who have passed away. This connection is not symbolic, but indexical because of the fact that all persons and things in the photograph are/were undoubtedly being-in-the-world.[17]

**6. Concluding remarks**

My interest in photograph goes back to an *arusi* I attended in 2012, where many people bought photographs that were displayed on a rope for sale (Figure 4). I had not seen this in Papua New Guinea, another country of my anthropological research. Further, in the social lives of people in Athwana, I sometimes realized that many people carefully kept photographs in albums, envelops, or on their shelves. Conversely, photographs were sometimes controversial during my research on the Njûriîncheke. These experiences also stimulated my interest in photograph, similar to the comparison with the village life in Papua New Guinea. After writing a thesis on the Njûriîncheke (Baba 2014), I began my research on photography.

This paper belongs to the genre of vernacular photography (e.g., Pinney and Peterson 2003), but this paper is not directed to post-colonial studies (e.g., Wright 2013) nor the entangled history between photography and anthropology (e.g., Pinney 2011), although I am aware that photographs among the Tigania are embedded in social and historical contexts.

[16] This expression and insight are derived from Moutu's reading (2007) on *Naven*, an analytical ethnography which G. Bateson wrote about Iatmul society in Papua New Guinea.
[17] The photograph as an indexical sign is a classically known conception in arguments of photography (cf. Maekawa 2019).

Instead, as I demonstrated in the introduction of this paper, my focus is on the relation between photograph and Amîîrû culture, especially an aspect of conflicting powers; while the photograph preserves realities beyond time and space, Amîîrû culture has tendency of structural amnesia. As I illustrated in the first half of this paper, keeping photographs has become an everyday practice among the Tigania, which has considerably owed to activities of local camera people and studios with the business minds. In the second half, I argued the aspects of photograph's articulation with Amîîrû culture. Restriction and rejection are still robust, and photograph does not still have the impact of changing Amîîrû culture. Although the photograph certainly becomes an agent of social interaction or a minor vehicle of changes, the role of photograph in Amîîrû culture is still moderate and complementary. The feeling of being-in-the-world-with-others through collection is not contradictory to Amîîrû culture because the worldview that the world consists of various components (for example, humans, animals, and nature) is inherent in Amîîrû culture and everyday life. So far there is no noticeable conflict between photograph and Amîîrû culture.

However, if I could collect data showing that photographs evoke acts of re-creating the past or reflective relations to other photographs, different arguments would develop so as to merge into post-colonial studies and historical entanglement, referring to the problem of 'post-memory'.[18]

In addition, as Amîîrû societies are changing rapidly, my argument might already be old. The practice of photography is ever-changing. In August 2019, I took part in two *arusi* but did not see any camera people. Both of the *arusi* were attended by large groups of people, but the participants took pictures using their smartphones and the *arusi* planners hired professional camera people who came from a company in Meru town. In one *arusi*, a video was recorded using a drone, which a professional camera person manipulated. In this way, local camera people had no space for their activities. Of course, I don't think that local camera people might have vanished because they would be needed in small or minor events. However, the era of the cameraperson surviving without a printer and a personal computer will end near future.

Further, the materiality of photographs, on which my thesis is based, will fade away with the process of moving towards digital data. Although I do not know when digital data will become dominant, digital data will undoubtedly change cognitive attitudes toward photograph that I argued here. Also, research should be conducted in terms of 'post-memory', which will change my conclusions. Thus, my argument is already open to alternative discussions and re-assessments.

[18] Post-memory is a specific form of memory created through generational distance and 'is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connections… its connection to its objects or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation' (Marianne 1997:22).

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## Chapter 5

# A family business:
## The case of Kisii stone

*Shiori Itaku*

**Introduction**

This paper aims to demonstrate how various members of a family are involved in the soapstone carving industry in the Gusii region of western Kenya. Soapstone is a type of talc with which Kenyans create sculptures called 'Kisii Stone'; they are sold not only in Kenya but also in East Africa and all over the world as art and handmade artefacts. As soapstone can only be collected in the Gusii region, many of the Gusii people are engaged in this industry as a family business. This paper attempts to indicate how this industry becomes a family business by focusing on one family. Household surveys and interviews were conducted; it was found that there are many clans that are traditionally involved in the soapstone business, although some clans do come from other areas within Kenya. The semi-structured interviews explored the Evans family's history and family life: the data demonstrate that various family members have joined the soapstone industry, although their background and path to this work all vary. It appears that every family business does not form one company, but rather that the members work independently and occasionally collaborate with family members.

Soapstone (Fig. 1) is a type of talc that is smooth to touch and that can only be collected in the Gusii region of Kenya; government publications on the Kisii District Development Plan determine that soapstone is a regional resource (Republic of Kenya 2001). Soapstone items are sold not only in Kenya, but also in neighbouring countries such as Tanzania and Uganda, although a book on contemporary art in East Africa introduces these sculptures as 'Kisii Stone' (Miller 1975). The soapstone sculptures produced in the Gusii region are diverse, such as figures, plates, trays, coasters, vases, chess sets, etc., and each has a wide range of sizes and shapes (Fig. 2). For example, figures can be animals (Fig. 3), families, hearts, or lovers (Fig. 4), and plates and trays can be anything from circles and squares to animal-shaped objects. Each size ranges from the size of a palm to a size that one person cannot carry.

Working with soapstone is a local industry in the Gusii region of Kenya, therefore the majority of all processes, from quarrying to carving, occur in this region. Many families from among the Gusii people are engaged in this industry; as Abuga stated, 'In Kisii, soapstone mining and carving is often treated as a family business' (Abuga 2018).

However, the exact familial relationships and interactions that concern the various soapstone family businesses have rarely been researched and little is known. Therefore, this paper will focus on one Gusii family and indicate how family members became involved in the soapstone industry.

**Figure 1. Mined soapstone at quarry (photographed by the author in 2019)**

**Figure 2. Gusii's soapstone items sold in Kenya and abroad (photographed by the author in 2017)**

**Figure 3. Animal figurine (photographed by the author in 2019)**

**Figure 4. Lovers figurines with no decoration (surrounding objects are also humans) (photographed by the author in 2018)**

**The Gusii**

The Gusii are a Bantu-speaking people, whose community currently inhabits western Kenya, in the Kisii and Nyamira counties (Akama 2017). They are surrounded by non-Bantu ethnic groups, such as the Luo, Kipsigis and Maasai. According to the 2009 census, the Gusiis' population is approximately 2.2 million (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2010b), within Kenya's total population of approximately 38.6 million, and they are the seventh largest ethnic group in Kenya.

Although many work in cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa, the Gusii are traditionally farmers. Major crops include corn, millet, and sorghum, vegetables such as kale for self-consumption and sale at the market, and coffee and tea as cash crops. The main livestock are chickens, cows, and goats. Although there are some people that are devoted to agriculture, many have another job in order to increase their income. Most of the workers in the soapstone carving industry combine crop and livestock farming. According to Akama, 'the Gusii lineage system was based on patrilineal principles and … the smallest unit of Gusii social structure was the homestead, *omochie*' (Akama 2017: 33). After the homestead is lineage (*riiga*), sub-clan, clan (*egesaku*), and sub-counties. Further, Akama states that the Gusii people have managed to expand and realign themselves into several clans that form the current main grouping of the Gusii: Kitutu, Nyaribari, Mogirango, Basi, Machoge, and Nchari (Akama 2017). Hakansson states 'The *riiga* (pl. *amaiiga*) was the largest group whose members could trace exact genealogical relationships' (Hakansson 1988: 30), and 'the clan had dominion over clan land and its members had incontrovertible rights to use land under its control' (Hakansson 1988: 35). As the Gusii has patrilineal principles, inheritance of land is chiefly inherited from father to sons, although today my research confirms that another clan may occasionally purchase land.

**The history of Gusii soapstone**

Gusii soapstone was originally used for ceremonial powders that were applied to the

face and body (women) or to shields (men) (Matsuzono 2001). According to Eiseman et al., who compared the soapstone industry between the Inuit and the Gusii, the Gusii began producing works in the shape of practical items, such as smoking pipes and cooking utensils, from the 1910s, and began to occasionally make animal statues for visitors in the 1930s (Eiseman et al. 1988). According to Miller (1975), by the end of the 1950s soapstone was widely sold inside and outside of East Africa: first, the carvings were simple, such as abstract animal images; next, more realistic animal figurines appeared; and then practical household products such as ashtrays and mugs gradually increased (Miller 1975). Following this, Mahoney (2017) states that, since the early 1990s, representations of human relationships, such as sculptures of a mother and her child, of lovers, or sculptures of a sexual nature began to appear. The soapstone carving industry has expanded its range of products, sometimes involving other ethnic groups, and has become established as art for tourists or handmade artefacts in Kenya and East Africa with the growth of the tourism industry in Kenya. While there are markets for such art for tourists and handmade artefacts, there are also niche markets for art, such as those exhibited in museums or collected by art collectors; there are elite artists in this industry who are active in these markets (Onyambu and Akama 2018a; 2018b).

**Soapstone industry in the Gusii region**

According to Onyambu and Akama, soapstone is found in the Gusii region, particularly in Tabaka and Gotichaki, and carving either takes place close to the quarries or in nearby carving and selling centres (Onyambu and Akama 2018b): the author's research has to date identified 23 locations within Kisii County (Fig. 5). Sculptures are made not only around the quarry, but in an industrial centre, the Tabaka area, where carving, decoration, and sales are all carried out. Tabaka is located in Kisii County and is a ward in the administrative division. It is located in a hilly area surrounded by mountains 25km from Kisii Town, the main city of Kisii County, which has 2,814 households and a population of 12,742, in South Mugirango sub-county (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics 2010a). The nearest quarry is approximately 700 metres from the Tabaka area, while the most distant quarry is approximately 13 kilometres away.

Wholesalers, carvers, and designers are concentrated on two 500m streets in Tabaka. The intersection of these two streets is the centre of the soapstone industry; customers and suppliers come from both inside Kenya and abroad in order to trade. The central area in Tabaka is traditionally home to the Bomware clan and even today the majority of workers are from this clan. There are approximately 60 stores in the central area, the majority of which are private stores for small businesses with fewer than 5 people working together, with a few for larger companies (Fig. 6).

As Mahoney (2017) notes, the internationalisation of Kenya's handicraft art market and the spread of the Internet and mobile phones are closely linked: payment is made through M-Pesa (a mobile money transfer service) and the customers and traders negotiate and order through text and WhatsApp messages. Some customers visit the Tabaka area once or twice a year, or traders are introduced to the next purchaser by a current customer; in the latter case,

some traders in Tabaka have never met the customer face-to-face. In addition to suppliers, some traders have their own shops in neighbouring countries, such as Uganda and Tanzania, and frequently travel between Tabaka and these shops.


**Figure 5. Quarry areas and Tabaka. A quarry area is where there are multiple quarries. There are 23 quarries overall in the areas surrounded by the dotted line (created by the author)**

**Figure 6. A private store (photographed by the author in 2017)**

**Tabaka area**

The traditional clans that reside in Tabaka are the Bomware, Bombure, Bokimai, Boshinange, and Botabori clans. In my household survey in Tabaka in September 2019, all 171 respondents were Gusii. Among them, 152 households are engaged in the soapstone industry (89%). Of the 152 households, the Bomware clan accounted for 76 households (50%); 25

households were from the Bombure clan, 13 were from the Bokimai clan, 11 were Botabori, and the remaining 27 households were from other clans. In this survey, Bomware was the largest clan in the industry: this result is consistent with previous literature that indicates that soapstone carving is done by the Bomware subclan of the Bogirango clan, who live in Tabaka village (Eiseman et al. 1988). Significantly, both of the largest wholesalers in this area belong to the Bomware clan. Furthermore, 27 of the 152 households that engage in this industry (approximately 18%) had more than two people in their families working in the soapstone industry.

There are currently few companies in the Tabaka area: most shops are private stores and they occasionally receive orders from the aforementioned companies. There are approximately 60 stores in Tabaka, which are principally separated into two types of shops: shop and workshop. The owners differ in their roles, such as supplier, carver, and designer. Although there is no clear difference between a shop and a workshop, it appears that size is taken into account when differentiating between the two. Workspaces with signboards are called 'shops' and are generally large; owners hire full-time or daily workers as carvers, designers, polishers, and finishing workers. Workshops, on the other hand, do not have signboards, and the owners are carvers or designers or women who wash the soapstone themselves.

The soapstone carving work process is divided into five stages: quarrying, carving, polishing (soaking soapstone in water and sandpapering it), decorating and shining (removing dust and shining soapstone with wax as finishing work), and then selling. Although the person who decorates the item also occasionally does the finishing work, each of the above processes is performed independently and is a division of labour.

**A family involved in the soapstone business**

This paper focuses on the life history of a single Gusii family, with Dean Evans as the head of the family, and explores how he came to engage in the soapstone industry, followed by the life history of his family. I explained the purpose of the study to his family and conducted research and writing with their permission. Through a life history, I believe that I can fully explore how people became involved in the industry and the ways in which people in this region live today. The survey methods utilised are semi-structured interviews conducted in English. The reason for using this research method is that it made it possible to obtain more detailed answers from the research participants by deciding the question to some extent, such as their motivation for being involved in the soapstone industry and about their family members involved in this industry, and changing the questions according to their previous answers. The data in this paper are based on fieldwork centred on Tabaka area and nearby quarries for a total of eight months from August to October 2017, from September to October 2018, and from August to November 2019.

This paper details the life history of the carver, Dean; the supplier, Gennes; and the designer, Ben, to see how they have entered and engaged in the soapstone industry. All personal names appearing in this paper are pseudonyms. The Evans family consists of seven members: a

father and mother, the eldest son to the third son, the eldest daughter and the second daughter (Table 1). The eldest son, Ben, has a wife and two children: although his family could be treated as a separate household, in this paper, I consider the eldest son as a member of Dean's family as this is a study of the entire family's dynamics. Tables 1 and 2 below display the occupations and birth years of the entire Evans family.

**Table 1. Evans family names, birth years, and occupations**

| Name | Relationship | Sex | Birth Year | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Dean Evans | Father | Male | 1968 | Soapstone Carver |
| Gennes | Mother | Female | 1972 | Soapstone Supplier |
| Ben | 1st son | Male | 1992 | Soapstone Designer |
| Win | 2nd son | Male | 1993 | Chef in Nairobi |
| Dan | 3rd son | Male | 1997 | Student in Nairobi |
| Dora | 1st daughter | Female | 1999 | Student in Eldred |
| Paris | 2nd daughter | Female | 2004 | Student in Kisii Town |

**Table 2. Ben's family members' names, birth years, and occupations**

| Name | Relationship | Sex | Birth Year | Occupation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Doris | Ben's wife | Female | 1993 | Primary school teacher |
| Andre | 1st son | Male | 2011 | Student in Tabaka |
| Abraham | 2nd son | Male | 2014 | Student in Tabaka |

Gennes owns a shop in Tabaka, with a compound attached to the back where the family lives. At the entrance of this shop, women who wash soapstone, and who are employed by Gennes, are working. One building in the compound is the eldest son's workshop, where he employs two to four people. Multiple people may share some workshops, but this workshop in particular is for the eldest son.

Dean and Gennes bought this land as the family home was approximately 20 minutes from Tabaka by bike. The motivation for the purchase was that Gennes had a workshop in the area and she wanted to explore the possibility of gaining more customers.

## Family history and daily life

### *Dean*

Dean was born in 1968, in his home village, as the second son in his family: he has seven brothers and sisters, and three of his brothers were carvers. In his village, there are many carvers, thus becoming a carver was natural, and Dean learned how to carve soapstone from a friend when he was 16. While working as a carver, he met Gennes, who is four years younger than him, in her village when he visited relatives. When the eldest son, Ben, was born in 1992, Dean paid a bridewealth and he and Gennes were married at church in 2000. Dean brought home carvings from the quarry every day and sold them to brokers when he had made a certain number of products. Gennes stayed home and worked as a farmer for more than 10 years. As she watched her husband sell to a broker, Gennes began to learn the soapstone carving business and

eventually became a broker herself, and in 2002, she rented a small room in the industrial centre of the Tabaka area to use as a workshop.

Dean worked at quarry A from the beginning of his career as a carver, until 2003. He says that the stone in this quarry was soft and easy to carve. Subsequently, he worked in quarry B from 2003 to 2014. The quality of stone in quarry B was good and there were many carvers, therefore it was convenient for Gennes to buy soapstone items. In 2005, Dean and Gennes purchased land in their own name, where they live now, and in 2006 they built their own house and opened a shop. Since then, Dean splits his time between going back to his home village in order to care for his cattle and plot of land and working in the quarry.

In the quarry, Dean created a group of carvers; when he changes quarry, he makes another group there. The research to date has not revealed the details of the group,[(1)] but Dean's explanation is that the group typically numbers six people, for quarrying together or going together to Tabaka to sell their items. This is because the group can buy more stones from an owner of a quarry and it is easier to sell them together than doing so individually. The group purchases soapstone from the landowner at the quarry, finds a suitable place in the area, and carves there. The carving is done at the quarry in order to reduce the weight as much as possible, and because the members of the group live in different locations.

From 2014 to the present, Dean has worked at quarry C. Although it is a distance from the shop and the house, the stones are whiter in this quarry than those in other quarries. Thus, Dean made a new group and together they rent a room and sleep there; he stays for approximately three days during the week. Dean manages all the items made by his group. He takes the items back to Gennes' shop, who then, through Dean, pays the members. Therefore, even during weeks when he is not working at the quarry, Dean must still collect the items produced by the members. As there is church on Saturday, Dean comes back on Friday at the latest and goes to the quarry on Sunday at the earliest. He is the church's Elder, and hence, he sometimes has to attend church gatherings and funerals on days other than Saturday. Further, he is occasionally absent for a few days in order to help his relatives with their harvest. Dean, who has a full and busy life, nevertheless earns the majority of his income from soapstone carvings.

The group principally produces bowls, as this is one of the most popular items in Gennes' shop; among the bowls, a small size of four to six inches is particularly popular. Although there are differences in personal carving abilities, Dean is particularly good at producing bowls, flower vases, and candles, but cannot carve family figures. The size of the bowls produced depends on the order and stock of Gennes' shop, and the size of the stone.

***Gennes***

As Dean travels a great deal, he is not typically at home and thus Gennes takes control of the house. However, there is almost no family at home. This is due to the fact that the eldest

[(1)] The nature of the group needs to be further investigated, for example, whether it is a functioning co-operative or is more loosely organised.

family members, who lived in the same compound until the end of 2017, now rent a house next to the compound, and the youngest children either work in Nairobi or live in a dormitory at their school. However, Dean and Gennes have help in the form of Andre. Andre is Ben's eldest son: he lives with his grandparents to help them, and because, in Gusii culture, sons must live separately from their parents after circumcision. Typically, the parents build another house in the homestead, however Andre lives in the compound, as Ben and his wife live in a single house, not a homestead, and thus cannot expand.

In addition to Dean's co-operative, Gennes purchases items from approximately 20 carvers and brokers. Apart from the transactions between suppliers in Tabaka, her main customers are all suppliers and sellers in Nairobi: there are currently approximately 15 customers. Gennes is busy, because trucks take orders to Nairobi every Wednesday and Sunday night.

Gennes is a Christian, therefore she goes to church and does not work on Saturdays. Carvers and brokers that are from another Christian sect come to her shop after 18:00 when the family has returned from church, as although Friday night to Saturday is a rest day, Gennes does not refuse her suppliers when they come. Further, Gennes has been a leader in the choir since 2008 and goes to church for an hour and a half every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon, unless she is busy at work. In addition to the shop and church, there is a small wife's garden (*Ekerundu*[(2)]) in the compound, and Gennes occasionally works there. Gennes is typically at the compound or the entrance of the shop, however, even if she is in the compound, carvers, brokers, and customers can come into the compound and talk to her: if they do not find her in compound, they wait for her to come back. When Gennes is out on business, Dean negotiates with the suppliers and customers. When I asked Gennes how she came to be involved in this industry, she replied, 'I thought the soapstone business would be money'.

**Ben's life history and daily life**

Ben, born in 1992, is the first son and the only householder amongst his brothers and sisters. Ben met Doris when he went away for secondary school: she later became his wife, and their first son, Andre, was born in 2011. Ben graduated high school in 2012, however, the relationship with Doris ended and Andre lived with Doris. Ben completed a computer-training course and went to college to become an electrical engineer, where he again met Doris, who was training to become an accountant. After their second son was born, Ben left college and opened a kiosk in Kisii Town, and in 2015, he went to Nairobi alone to look for higher paying jobs. This was due to his wife moving to a two-year teaching course; Dean's family paid the school fee as Doris' bridewealth.

Ben worked for a paint company, but life in Nairobi was not smooth sailing: living in the city was expensive for the amount of money he earned, thieves entered the house multiple times, and the work was hard. Therefore, Ben returned to Tabaka at the end of the year and started to

[(2)] The wife has her own garden to plant vegetables in Gusii region. It is called *Ekerundu* (pl. *Ebirundu*) in this area. Besides this, it is also called *Egeticha* (pl. *Ebiticha*) (from the author's fieldwork).

live with Doris and their children in a corner of the compound. The 'man's house' has one room on both sides across the middle entrance, and as the name suggests, it was originally a brother's room: this became Ben's family's room. Gennes says that her son and his wife should live in a compound for several years; 'You should live together with your husband's parents for some years since you got married. You will need to learn from your mother-in-law'.

Ben had thought about migrating to the United States since 2016, but gave up and began to learn how to decorate soapstone under a large shop in Tabaka where a cousin taught him how to decorate. After this, Ben built a workshop next to Gennes' shop on the land that she had bought, and started working on orders from the owner of a large shop. In addition to this workshop, a room at the entrance to the middle of the man's house was used as a storage room for work and a workplace when it was raining.

At first, Ben only received orders from one large shop, but after moving to the workshop, Ben's best friend introduced him to a Gusii customer who conducts business in Tanzania. From this time, Ben hired a daily worker. In December 2016, a customer from Mombasa visiting Gennes' shop saw Ben's work and soon became his customer, and the following year, in 2017, Doris began working at a private primary school near their compound. In April, the aforementioned customer from Mombasa introduced him to another soapstone businessperson, and Ben began to receive regular orders. Although this was an election year and business was not good, Ben said that his income was still higher than Doris'; according to Doris, her salary averaged 5,000 shillings per month. However, designer income is unstable, as in the low season, Ben earned 5,000 shillings per month and in the high season, 80,000 shillings. Ben can therefore out-earn Doris.

One day, I asked Ben in an interview why he did not become a carver like his father: 'Carving is a very hard job…they don't have enough income, even if it was hard work… and decoration makes more money'. Is it true that soapstone decorators can earn more money than carvers? Carvers and designers are paid daily and how much they earn depends on the number of items they sell. Suppliers, on the other hand, earn their income based on demand. Therefore, it is difficult to calculate a supplier's daily earnings. As a result of surveys given to carvers during my fieldwork, the daily income of a carver is approximately 200–500 shillings, with no significant individual differences. On the other hand, design skills vary greatly from person to person; some earn 200 shillings per day, while others earn approximately 1500 shillings. Thus, there certainly appears to be a difference in earnings between carvers and designers. However, the difference between carving and decorating could be that carving is hard physical work; even if carvers and designers earn the same 200 shillings per day, carving work is harder (on the body). On the other hand, decoration includes colouring, designing, and sketching. These processes are complex and might consume much time. It is said that Dean's three brothers did not continue working as carvers because of the harshness of the job, and are now dedicated to agriculture. 'I like this business. I make and sell with Gennes. This business is good, but it's a very hard job, so I don't want my kids to do this business. I think it is better to be designer of soapstone', Dean told me.

Similar remarks came from many soapstone industry workers during my fieldwork; however, when I enquired about the number of carvers and designers, everyone answers that there are more carvers than designers. This was likely due to the fact that Tabaka is the centre of designers, except for some tourist cities such as Nairobi and Mombasa. In contrast to designers, carvers' work areas are not restricted to Tabaka, as they can also work in quarries anywhere in the entire Gusii region: however, if you wish to become a designer, it is advisable to work in Tabaka. Although my research was done only in the Gusii region and the number of designers in other cities is currently unknown, the survey respondents all say that there are more carvers than designers; this may be an issue of optics, as whereas the designers gather only in the Tabaka area, the carvers are in Tabaka, as well as in the area around the quarry, thus it would appear that carvers are more numerous. Ben could be a designer because, fortunately, Dean and Gennes built a compound in the Tabaka area.

Ben's family lived communally with Dean's in the compound until the night they suddenly moved into a nearby house, which they rented. Nevertheless, Ben still comes to work at the compound every day. In 2019, because of road extension, his workshop had to move to the back of the compound.

The turning point was the following year. In October 2018, the customer from Mombasa introduced a new Gusii customer to Ben, and additionally, in December, a new customer from South Africa gave an order through Facebook. Orders from outside of Kenya pay better than orders from the shops in Tabaka; Ben told me that he gives priority to international orders and receives local orders only if he has time. When a large international order is received, Ben has to pay for the stones until he receives payment: he first collects 50% of the payment, and after delivery, he receives the rest. If the order is large, Ben needs to hire more people and therefore he has to pay their salary too. While orders from the outside typically bring large payments, they also increase the expenses of the workshop. As a result, Ben's life often becomes difficult until payment arrives.

The business has become quite different. Until 2017, Ben used to finish his work and go home early in the evenings. When work goes well however, Ben continues to work until midnight and he frequently comes to work in the early morning, at 5am. Circa 2018, Ben would occasionally hire temporary workers to polish soapstone, however, around 2019, the number of workers increased: two or three people as polishers and two designers with good decoration technique. Ben said, 'I don't want to do anything other than work. For example, church work. I am too busy and it's impossible.'

Further, Ben receives orders not only from large shops, but also other shops where the owner is a carver. In addition, he occasionally does business with his mother, Gennes; kinship is a method of procuring a job. Several relatives of Dean and Gennes' live nearby the compound; they are carvers, designers, and suppliers, and they occasionally give Ben soapstone orders. He also receives orders from those who go to the same church. When I spoke to a member of the church, he told me, 'We do business together! Because he is a good guy!'

I asked Ben, 'If there were no problems with your work in Nairobi, would you have

worked in the soapstone business?' Ben replied, 'Yes, this is a very good business, so I must have chosen this job sooner or later.'

**Conclusion**

In this study, I conducted household surveys and interviews regarding family soapstone businesses in the Gusii region of western Kenya. As a result of the household survey, it was found that there are many clans that are traditionally involved in the soapstone business. In addition, approximately 18% of the families that engage in the soapstone industry have more than two workers in the industry. As this result is based on a household survey, it will be necessary to investigate further and research the siblings or relatives of the workers.

An interview on a family business was described in the Evans family's life history. It is apparent from this family that although multiple family members can be involved in the soapstone business, their backgrounds and routes into the business are different: Dean entered the industry as his brothers were carvers and there are many carvers in his home village, hence his career path was natural; Gennes discovered a business opportunity in the soapstone industry after marrying Dean, thus they bought land and opened a shop; and Ben tried different multiple jobs before turning to the soapstone business. The data further demonstrate that although this is a family business, it is not in the typical sense of all members being a part of the same company, rather, they help each other, and do business independently. For example, Dean's group brings items to Gennes, because Gennes has a soapstone business there; it does not mean that this group is a subcontractor of Gennes. Dean bring the items to Gennes on behalf of the group and Gennes purchases them. In this way, three people from the family are engaged in soapstone. The fact that each of them are employed in different jobs, such as carver, supplier, and designer, demonstrates that the family is linked to each other, while still engaging with the industry independently.

At a glance, the Evans family are migrants in the soapstone business, and thus are different from that of the family that has a continuous carving family ancestry. In particular, buying land and moving the entire family from their ancestral home is rare, given the large number of local clans in the industry. The large shops in the district are typically run by such local clans; when compared to theirs, Gennes shop is smaller, the number of customers is small, and the order quantities from customers are smaller. Furthermore, the large shops have international customers, which Gennes does not. On the other hand, however, they are now rooted in the community as an Elder and a choir leader in the local church, and they receive orders through their church connections.

Similar to constructing local relationships, the network of relatives who originally live in the region is also important. It has been noted in Mahoney (2017) that business is developed using kinship networks, and this study received comparable data. For example, Gennes trades soapstone items with her brother who is a designer and supplier in Nairobi, while Ben takes orders from a maternal relative who is a supplier in Tabaka, and his cousin, who is a designer, sometimes helps Ben. Gennes may have decided to do business in Tabaka, as she has many

relatives there.

So, what do the second son, who is currently a chef in Nairobi, the third son, who is a student, and the first and second daughters who are in school, plan to do in their future? After enquiring about the possibility of participating in the soapstone business, there are no such plans for now. The second son said that he would like to open a shop to show foreign football games in Kisii County, once he has saved money in Nairobi. The third son is planning to go to college from next year to begin an engineer's course. Both the first and second daughters want to teach at high school. At present, neither of them is actively engaged in the soapstone industry; however, they grew up watching their father and mother work, and their older brother too in recent years, so they told me that they are familiar with soapstone. This demonstrates that they have substantial background in the soapstone business, thus it would be easier for them to enter the industry if they so desired. However, in a survey of 30 soapstone industry workers throughout Kisii County, all but one responded that they did not want their children to engage in the industry: 'Because it is hard work', 'I want them to do a better job'. Dean too had the same answer. Despite such parental intentions, Ben chose the path to the soapstone industry. Nevertheless, he also does not want his sons to become a part of the soapstone industry: despite being able to make a living from the soapstone business, Ben's feelings are complicated.

Negative attitudes towards the soapstone industry still exist in the region. In the past, other clans looked down on Bomware carvers, who traditionally did the soapstone working, because they believed that carving was a dirty job. It would appear that the parent's desire to discourage children entering the soapstone carving industry is a remnant of this industry being looked down upon, even though today it has become commercially attractive (Matsuzono 2001). The interviews further revealed that parents did not want their children to engage in the soapstone sculpture industry, because it was a considerable amount of hard, physical work for low wages. This sentiment is an important factor when considering a future in the soapstone industry. However, at the same time, the industry has the advantage of having resources unique to the region, which means that there will always be a job for people in the area. Dean is an example of this: he started to work on sculpture due to the influence of the surroundings, namely the soapstone resource in the Gusii region.

It is the current situation of soapstone industry workers that both the strength of local resources and the negative views on industry coexist. Therefore, there is scope for future research projects to investigate deeper into how workers (suppliers, carvers, designers, etc.) view the soapstone industry.

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## Chapter 6

# The divine forces guiding marriages, family members, and secular life

*Eliud Mûtwîri and Rev. Dr. S. A. Mûgambi Mwithimbû*

**1. Introduction**

The Amîîrrû customary marriage relationships had two major dimensional aspects. These were basically oriented to divine law and socio-cultural order, which was heavily governed by social norms. These were practiced, regulated, preserved, and regularly redefined with the purpose of handing over the best practices to the present and future generations. The divine laws played a major role in the life of the Amîîrrû. Although the belief in Spiritualism was not recorded in writing, it was taken seriously within the family set-up; consequently, it enhanced the basic and fundamental unit of the family, clan, and the entire community.

The Amîîrrû believed that God was a Supreme Being, Who administered divine justice to both men and women. Man had been granted gracious privileges and duties as prescribed in their Nkuaagaya, or divine law. This distinction was evident in the physical makeup of the genders. Man tended to be far more physically built, which was manifested through his social responsibilities of protecting the community, animals, and their land. In contrast, a woman was expected to fulfil the feminine honourable domestic responsibilities. The Amîîrrû believed that it was God's plan that man was granted authority and powers to oversee God's creation. For this reason, their traditions provided for the Amîîrrû's patriarchal society. It is reiterated that, according to the beliefs and practices of the Amîîrrû community, man was created and invested with a custodian authority emanating from powers bestowed by the Supreme God, *Who has always been above all human beings and other creatures*. The Amîîrrû praised God and gave Him many titles, including the following: the Ngai, *Rain-maker/Giver of Life*; Ngai wa Kîrîmaarra/ Mûruungu wa Kîrîînyaga, *God of Mount Kenya*; Ngai wa Nyambeenne, *God of Nyambeenne Ranges*; Ngai wa Kîaao, *The Merciful God*; Ngai-Kînikiirrû*, God of the Sky/Heavens and Ages, Harmless, and Handsome Creator*; Ngai Kaimba, *God, the Protector and the Governor/the Ruler;* Ngai Gîtîîje*, the Omnipresent, Immortal, Handsome, Immovable, Constant, and Benevolent God;* Baaba Mweenneinya, *Omnipotent Loving God, our Father***;** Mûruungu mûûmbi wa into bionthe birîa birî Igûrû na Nthîgûrû; birîa bioonnagwa na birîa bitîoonnagwa, *God, the Creator and Ruler, Who binds together all the Living and Non-living things, the Visible and Invisible Creation*.

The Amîîrrû related the *'nature of God'* as being closer to the *'nature of man'* with statements like these: Mûchiarri nî Mûruungu wa baîrrî! *Your parent is your second god!* Antû nî tûmûruungu! *Human-beings are lesser gods!* Nevertheless, they believed that God had absolute authority to dispense justice, and He also worked through the ancestral spirits and 'elders'. God's justice flowed to the land through the nucleus cells of the marriage—to their family units, clan members, and community—and various legitimate societal secular organizations and groupings,

such as Gîchiaarro (singular)/Ichiaarro (plural), that is *the family bonds and clan alliances which bound them as solidly united single family.* The societal arrangements of the Amîîrrû community involved women in decision-making roles, even though women were not always allowed to participate in some of the activities specifically involving males' secular organizations, such as the Gatuurrî, Rammarre, Kîamma, and Njûriîncheke, etc. Nevertheless, when their respective husbands were made full members of those male groups, the wives were automatically elevated to those levels and accepted as indiscriminate non-participatory affiliates: such a wife would be called 'Mweekûrrû wa Njûri*', a wife of a member of Njûri;* and their children were deemed to be 'Mwaanna wa Njûri (singular)'/'Aanna ba Njûri'(plural*),* that is *Children of Njûri*. This justifies the saying: Gûtî waanna ûrrî mamirra! That is, '*No child should ever be discriminated!'* An elder was privileged to do corresponding duties and roles within the marriage parameters. He provided for his family's welfare. He settled the various disputes, which arose within the home. He was responsible for much of his children's cultural education, including acceptable practices and revitalization of societal norms*.* The word '*education*' is not limited to formal education, as we may tend to think today. Its curriculum aimed at instilling morals and values, wisdom, and knowledge that would be acceptable to the entire Amîîrrû family and society. They believed that the responsibility of instilling wisdom was bestowed by God to the head of the family; moreover, Man was regarded as the *Central Pillar/Head of the family*, 'Gîtugî kîa Ng'aang'a,' whereas, the wife was likened to the *'*Nkiingo*',* that is *the neck of her husband*. If one's neck were cut off, that person would die. Consequently, a man without a wife was regarded as lifeless. Hence, great love and respect abound between the two. The women in marriage, even though submissive to her man, played a major role in the family and the community. They helped men in performing various duties, roles, and tasks to sustain their marriage and family. Wives exercised a lot of authority as mothers during child rearing, in taking care of the family, and ensuring that their marriage remains intact, albeit the fact that some men fathered many children. Parents played an immense role in the children's education by providing guidance, as required by the Amîîrrû customs. Adults exercised corrective measures when any member of the society erred. The children belonged to the entire community; from childhood to adulthood, the children were nurtured through societal initiations. The girl-child remained in the custody of her mother and the women's community, until she reached the age for marriage. Thus, she could learn from her parents and her community how to become a caring and responsible wife and mother. However, the boy child had to move from his mother's house to his hut at an appropriate age within the homestead. Thereafter, he would grow independently under the guidance of his father and other men in preparation to undertake challenging and diverse manly responsibilities, as provided in secular and religious organizations.

The understanding of divine laws, family norms, and socio-cultural order, which bound marriages and families together, were developed over a very long time and handed down from one generation to another. It was necessary for the community to test and retest, adjust, refine, and modify, through the secular groups of Elders and wise men. The youth were also required to play their roles of initiating their age mates into various developmental stages to ensure that

they would grow up to be useful and responsible citizens. The cultural order, customary laws, cultural norms, and practices were applied physically and spiritually by anointed human agents[1] and/or traditional religious authorities.

God's blessings were bestowed by the human 'agents' to protect marriages against breaking up due to many encroaching misunderstandings, which would cause instability. Those blessings also secured the families and the clans against injustices and socio-cultural insecurity. The elderly continually provided the youth with *cultural history information and guidelines*, Nkuaagaya and Ngonno, including information about the past and about those women and children who had survived during cattle rustling, sporadic wars, disease epidemics, and loss of human life or property by God's mercy. During difficult times, people identified various notable historical sites, tunnels, groves, hilltops, caves, and rock crevices to hide from the enemies and as places of worship. The Amîîrrû condemned, during their prayers and rituals, malicious individuals who were known to unjustly interfere with trade routes, wooden bridges, grazing sites, forests, environment, and water resources. Good spirits were fed with water, food, drinks, blood of animals, grains, portions of animal meat, and specially identified organic and inorganic portions, which were taken and spread across the identified site areas. The Amîîrrû believed that God would acknowledge and manifest His pleasure for their devoted life. During pleasant occasions, elders were morally required to bless people, children, and the situations by spitting saliva on their own chests, or on the hands of the person being blessed, and also on the ground, thus expressing their happiness, satisfaction, and gratefulness to God.

**2. Historical family life perspectives**

The Amîîrrû believe that they were the descendants of Mûkûûnga, 'their *patriarch*', and Ngaa, 'their *matriarch*'. The origin of Mûkûûnga and Ngaa was not known for certain, but the common source of Amîîrrû was portrayed in their language, dialects, and manners of communication. The Amîîrrû refer to themselves as the children of 'Mûkûûnga' and 'Ngaa', or 'Kîrîîndî kîa Mûkûûnga na Ngaa'. Oral history of the Amîrîrû linked their origins with a strong anchorage to Northern African civilizations. This historical theory may lead us to speculations of shared moral and spiritual aspects with the Jews, who once lived in Egypt. These Jewish aspects are embedded in their culture which is characterized by persistent prayers, rituals, and sacrifices during traditional functions. According to the descriptions by Mwaniki, H. S. K., (2010) and Nyaga, D., (1997), these practices were clearly reflected in the Jewish beliefs in sanctity, godliness, practices of rituals, grain and animal offerings and sacrifices, and circumcision as their rite of passage. The Amîîrrû are known to practice a strict adherence to customary laws and other norms wherein the union of marriage is very important. The ritualized lifestyle of the Amîîrrû families included following several rites of passage, which were practiced by various age

[1] The 'agent' refers to intelligent and trusted elderly wise men/tradesmen engaged in the tasks of perpetuating and enforcing Amîîrrû customs, culture, spiritualism, and law and social order to avoid the burden of curses.

groups, during ceremonies and communal feastings. These cultural practices, which involved ceremonies and sacrifices, were conducted in accordance with spiritual directives and based on adherence to the ancestral legacy, social order, and the respect for law, defined as Nkuaagaya chia Amîîrrû; Nkuaagaya chia Bajûûjû, also called Kiigai kîa Amîîrrû; Kiigai kîa Bajûûjû. The customary legal practices, social order, and spiritualism upheld the guiding principles, which ensured proper leadership, good governance, harmony, justice, and orderliness. The Amîîrrû tradition shows a lot of respect for the authority of the renowned Njûriîncheke Founding Father, who was a legendary spiritual leader and prophet, named Kaûraoobeechaû.

The legacy, which was provided by Kaûroobeechaû, was perpetuated through initiation rites, slogans, and citations that pronounced and reflected his philosophy for the development of a just 'law' and 'social order', particularly in the context of marriage and guidance to the family life and community living. The Kaûroobeechaû's law and social order were also echoed and implemented through citations and the song referred to as 'Blessings and Curses recited in the Amîîrrû Anthem', which is sang by Njûriîncheke Elders: 'Ûû Ûchiûû**!** Kaûraoobeechaû nnaarumanîre Njûri îkaûrra! Ûû Ûchiûû! Kaûraoobeechaû nnaarumanîre Njûri îkaûrra! This means that Kaûroobeechaû, the Njûriîncheke's Founding Father, *left a dictum that the laws, social order, and guiding principles of traditional Amîîrrû's governance shall be abandoned, but must be maintained forever.* The Amîîrrû's folklore reveals that Kaûra wa Baeechaû (Kaûroobeechaû) was once besieged by his selfish uncle, M'Thereenje, who was striving to acquire a large chunk of land to show off his physical prowess. M'Thereenje raised his club, *Nchûgûmma,* high. He threw it over the land to mark the boundaries of his claimed land, which he intended to acquire for his personal use. It is said that this self-centred uncle was very strong and could throw a club several miles. Kaûroobeechaû disagreed with him. He provided leadership because there was a need to equalize the Amîîrrû clan sin terms of distribution and acquisition of new lands and natural resources. This narrative was supported by Amîîrrû's mainstream and secular groups, who were members of Kîammootha, Kîamma gîa Nkomango, Kîamma gîa Kabogo, or Kîamma gîa Kîrimmû.Those names describe the same or equivalent stages of initiation to eldership of the middle-age Amîîrrû men. The elders, grouped into various statuses by virtue of their respective initiations into Njûriîncheke eldership, were spread across five traditional federal government regions of Amîîrrû, namely, Tharaka, Igeembe, Tigania, Imeenti, and Nithi. According to interviewees Nos. 22 and 44, representative elders from those lodges were asked to formulate and spell out rules and regulations and mint penalties for deviant members of the society, who may willingly—and/or unknowingly—commit offences against the Amîîrrû community, either through their greed and/or envy, or commit any other crimes against the Amîîrrû community.

According to Mbithi (1969), Africans are notoriously religious; nothing could happen in Africa unless it was a Godly act and all the actions were attributed to either Godly or devilish and satanic forces. The Amîîrrû ceremonies, rituals, offerings, and sacrifices were spiritually guided through divine laws, which fostered adherence to the deity worship through conscious and profound devotion in one's heart. Kaûroobeechaû's followers focussed on these laws to fulfil the wishes of God. According to interviewee No. 1, the role and responsibilities of the union of

marriage and the family was to worship the Gods. The traditional Amîîrrû are identifiable by their social settings, which are mainly characterized by persistent prayers. In traditional settings, the Amîîrrû believed that there was one God, Who was a God of Mercy. They exercised 'Monotheism'. The family members subscribed to the nature of God, Who was good, loving, caring, and benevolent to their marriages blessed with children, the nuclear family settings, the clans, lineages, the community, and secular groupings.

The Amîîrrû believed that God was the most powerful, omniscient, and omnipresent. The most pious people saw this God at the peaks of Mount Kîrîmmaarra, in Kenya. The family members, and the accredited agents, reached God through prayers and sacrifices. Hence, people offered their best possessions; God was expected to receive these offerings and ultimately respond by 'action' within an appropriate period of time. God's actions would be manifested in the form of rain, good harvest, favourable weather, good health, family stability, and abundant wealth.

**3. Courtship and marriage process**

The Amîîrrû traditional marriage began with courtship—which created and nurtured family relationships—between a mature girl, a young man, and their families. This relationship progressed with time as the families exchanged visits. When both lovers and their respective families agreed that the two should establish a matrimonial home, their respective relatives were informed. The immediate and extended families from both parties met to agree and bless the relationship. Then, they would advise the couple and make them understand that they were headed towards the creation of an everlasting bond because there were no impediments either through Ûgîchiarro, Ûgiranni, or blood relationships, etc. The parents also assisted them to formulate an agreement on the marriage process, including the payment of customary items as dowry. The discussion about dowry payment was done between the parents and relatives from both sides who attended according to the customary standards. This process was called Kwaajuanjoroo, Kûraachia/Rûraachio in Imeenti. Thereafter, the parents would begin addressing each other as in-laws, Athonni. The Amîîrrû's customary dowry consisted of the following: a virgin sheep, Mwaatî; a virgin heifer Mwaarri; twenty litres of pure honey Gîempe; a bull Ndeegwa**;** pure ram Ntûrûmme; a bull to be slaughtered on the wedding day, Ndeegwa ya Nthîînjo; gifts to in-laws, including relatives and friends; Nguû chia Mûthoni, suits or clothes for the bride's parents, Ntegûri; and 200 kilograms of millet Mweerre to prepare porridge. At present, families have added 200 kilograms of sugar, at least 12 *Lesos* for the women and young ladies who would prepare the wedding feast, a cooking pot, Chuburia, and a water storing tank**,** Gîtaangi kîa Rûûjî. It is important to emphasize that these gifts were given to enrich and strengthen family relationships. However, when circumstances necessitated the bridegroom to pay only a Mwaatî, he was allowed to marry his wife; he would pay the rest of the dowry items much later. Mwaatî was the *sine qua non,* a key dowry item, which was followed by the Mwaarri. Next, we consider what the bride's family was expected to give, and we discover that marriage was only a social contract of give and take. The bride's family, for example, had to give another sheep to their daughter to send her off. The Gîempe, or the honey, was brewed and taken by

Elders and members of both families as a sign of blessing to the couple. Most items were shared between the two families, their relatives, and neighbours to mark the establishment of their family bonds. Later, their daughter's son would be given Mwaarri ya Ndûgû, which he would pay for his marriage to perpetuate family links. The ram, Ntûrûmme, was slaughtered to give parental blessings to the couple. The price of the bridal gifts were universally determined by each age group just before the next Ntwîîko, which celebrated the beginning of twelve to fifteen years of the instruments of power's transfer from either Kîruka or Ntîba age group who were at the helm of the Amîîrrû traditional government. Each age group had to enact the price of these items payable during their tenure of government's rule. The payment of dowry was followed by the announcement of the matrimonial ceremony. The parents of the bridegroom would fix a day when they would come to bring the dowry to the bride's parents' home and to seek final acceptance for the couple to enter the marriage union.

The wedding day was executed by the elderly women, other mature ladies, and relatives, who would pick up the bride from her parent's home. Then, the wedding procession would leave, led by the bridegroom. They would proceed to the matrimonial home. The bridegroom's parents and relatives would be waiting for the couple with a ceremony prepared to celebrate the wedding. The gathering would be served with food, beer, and porridge. The announcement for the marriage ceremony was done by the bride—who was beautifully decorated with beads—as she walked to her relatives' homes announcing the good tidings. As part of the preparations, the marriage was preceded by ritualistic activities, such as: minor tattooing on one's face, Kwaanwa Karrocho; piercing of ears, Gûtûrwa Matû; and tattooing for body beautification, Gûkûûrwa Nkûûrro. The bridegroom had previously undergone the initiation of circumcision. Grooming or Gûtuungwa was a pre-marriage requirement and it included full decoration of the bride. Brides, wearing substandard ornaments and bungles, were treated casually and their parents were penalized. In such cases, the parents of the bridegroom would demand payment of a Ndeegwa ya Mathaga or Mbûri ya Rwaîkio for the poorly decorated bride and/or for using minor ornaments and bangles during the matrimonial ceremony. This demand was conducted in good faith because the bride's parents would later recover the penalty through the precious gifts presented to the bride by the bridegroom's parents. The marriage ceremonies were marked with general prayers aimed at exorcising the appearance of evil spirits and for unforeseen interferences caused by utterances of those who were jealous. The spiritual leader would shout: 'Mwaanki, Rûmûrrî uga mbuu**,**Maitha ja Nkomma jakûûke Mûchiî jûjû!' 'Let the burning fire descend with rolling sound on this home and expel all demonic attacks to ensure that the devil is burned and uprooted'. The wedding ceremony followed. It was conducted on a pre-decided evening to welcome the fiancé to the newly established matrimonial home. The animals set as the bride's price items were brought to her home in the evening, Kûraachia, by young boys. They would hang on the gate into the bride's home a ritual plant called Mûrrao, *Senna didymobotrya.* This act of planting of Murrao, Kwaandîrwa Mûrrao, legalized the bride price. It closed the doors for other intending suitors. After this act, the intended marriage was clear. Nevertheless, the couple was not allowed to have a sexual relationship until the night of their wedding. Acceptance of the

honey (Gîempe) by the father of the bride meant that his daughter was a virgin. He would not take the honey from his son-in-law if she was a woman who had either been married before, or had given birth, Nkathianni. Moral values and ethics were key virtues which were observed before the marriage was concluded. Self-constraint and spiritual purity were cardinal values before marriage. This was why the fiancé would never visit his fiancée alone. He had to visit in the company of another age mate to curb sexual temptations. Two young men had to walk in company together to avoid falling into sexual temptations. Young women had to walk in the company of one or two younger children for the same reasons. It should be reiterated here that moral and ethical values were highly valued by all Amîîrrû society. If one was caught or reported as being involved in immorality, that person was given public punishments: his/her immoral behaviour would be part of songs in public functions; he/she would be excommunicated by age mates; and he/she would be required to pay a bull and a ram for a cleansing ceremony denoting repentance and commitment towards not repeating such immoral behaviour.

At the matrimonial house, the bride and bridegroom would be blessed by the community's spiritual leader/or a seer. The celebrations would continue overnight. The spiritual leader also anointed the parents who presented the married couple with gifts, which included land parcels, livestock, household utensils, ornaments, containers, cooking pots, granary for grains, beautification items such as a small guard full of anointing oil, Nthaguta and chains of jewels and beads, Mîkathî.

**Plate 1. Amîîrrû's matrimonial homestead**
(Courtesy of Imeenti South Njûriîncheke's Cultural Centre– Mîtûngûû. Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

The married couple and their children made their nucleus family cell in the wider community. The entire family unit in a homestead was part of that community, whose membership had been created through relationships between the kin, relatives, in-laws, the clan, and the secular organizations and groups. They were entitled to the allocation and utilization of the communal land and other common utilities. The family members trusted one another while seeking solutions for basic problems, and they avoided any lack of commitment and mistrust that could affect their marriage. The married couples organised visits to sacred areas to seek some solutions for issues affecting them and for problems which were perceived to go beyond

their control. They chose to seek guidance in terms of direction and advice from the spiritual leader(s) and overseer(s) and/or prophets: Kîrorria (singular) or Irorria (plural). They would be directed by the anointed agents of God to seek blessings, to be prophesied to have their dreams interpreted, to find solutions for various issues on health, for acquiring wealth, and to foretell their destiny and that of their kin or other related individuals. They were also asked to act on the recommendations given and to seek answers about why and how the matters would be implemented; they would also seek information about how and where to get appropriate solutions or remedies, and how the problems would be resolved. Some sites had been designated for specific offerings and sacrifices. The sites were supervised by the anointed leaders, the spiritual leaders, and the overseers.

Family planning was an integral part of the traditional norms because spouses preferred to raise several children, who would be named after their immediate paternal and maternal family members, starting with their parents. Nevertheless, the couple would not have a sexual relationship until the preceding child had been weaned and/or had reached the age of grazing livestock with other older children. No parent was allowed to bring up an under nourished child for lack of adequate mother's milk, Nthîîrîrwa. The Amîîrrû society considered such behaviour as gross indiscipline punishable by the Age Group and the community at large. The husband contained himself until after the child had undergone the ceremonial ritual of shaving the child's hair in declaration that the couple was ready to seek for the next child, Kwenjwa mûtuundu jwa Kîînda or kweenjwa mûtuundu jwa Kîthanna. Children from neighbours' homes and relatives were invited to the celebrations. The father of a new born child would be assigned various tasks related to the warrior's Gaarrû ya Nthaka, to help him to get busy and disciplined enough so that he can abstain from unplanned sexual contact. The spouses would take vows, Kûnyua Muumma, to abstain from sexual intercourse so that they can avoid siring children without proper family planning.

The elder Esther Kanyore Elijah of Mûgito (Mûrûûngî/Riûngû) age group was interviewed in 2018 at the age 120 years. She died on 25 January 2019. She equated the traditional marriage to a traditional cooking pot, which was supported by three stones. These three stones signified the unity and purpose between the '*husband*' and his '*wife*' in creating companionship and siring their 'children'. The traditional marriages were philosophically founded on a spiritual bond, which had defined rules and regulations for the family members to ensure adherence to morals, ethics, and cordial relationships so that there was true unity and togetherness between the two, 'Ngwatanîro'. Each of them was required to exercise 'Kîaao', compassion and selflessness, 'Kîaao', and truthfulness, 'Ûûmma', which was the second pillar of a lasting marriage unity. The marriage unions were also given some responsibilities. There were preferred consequences coupled with disciplinary actions and punishments. The husband guided the sons, and the wife was a guide and mentor to the daughters. If the mother observed any misbehaviour or abnormal character from their sons and daughters, she would report these events to the husband. The husband consulted his wife on the type of punishment to be meted to the culprit. In marriage, the wife and children remained as the 'property' of the husband even during a 'divorce'/separation period; the husband was required to pay their upkeep under all

circumstances. In case of divorce, the husband allowed his wife to take under-age children with her so that she could nurture them until when they were mature enough to return to their father's home. In addition, the uncircumcised youth were punished by other men, regardless of the presence of their parents. The girls were punished by mature womenfolk. Furthermore, the married women were generally punished by other women of the same age group, who were also accompanied by elderly womenfolk. The mature men were punished by their age group and elders. Thus, every Mûmmîîrrû was required to adhere to the stipulated laws and social norms.

The intermarriages between Amîîrrû and members of the neighbouring communities were perfectly acceptable by the traditions of the Amîîrrû community and social order. They shared a remarkable relationship with some distant communities, particularly with those of the Maasai blood that were integrated within the Amîîrrû. It was reported that there were times of sporadic wars and cattle rustling. The captives were eventually assimilated into the Amîîrrû community, sometimes through forceful marriages. The dowry was paid to the captors just as described in the extracts from the Meru Colonial District Commissioner's annual reports of 1927 A.D. As a tribe, the Amîîrrû have a mixed blood and genetic vitality that has promoted generosity whenever the Amîîrrû would be required to give anything to the members of other communities. According the colonial extract dated 25 April 1918, 'There is no doubt that a large number of *Mwooko* were absorbed in the Amîîrrû tribe especially in the northern part of Mûthaarra that even the Asian community, who had settled in Mîîrrû around 1890s with an expansion of their businesses, spread and integrated with the Amîîrrû community across the entire Mîîrrû region in market centres, where the Meru Native Council had given the Asian community opportunity to be conspicuously integrated and assimilated into the Amîîrrû community through marriages in accordance to the Amîîrrû 's culture and customs particularly in Îgoji Market, Mîîrrû Town, Mîkiindûri Market and Kîanjaî Market.

There were interesting moments when 'polyandry' was practiced. Some women decided to bring another man into their matrimonial home to help in bearing children on their behalf, particularly when her husband was unable to do so. This situation arose when the couple realized that the husband had reproductive disorders. This scenario was common with rich families, who had plenty of properties to be inherited. The negotiation to bring another man was normally fronted by the wife, in secrecy. The spouses who had only parented girls also preferred to find a man to sire boys for the family. This man was not fully recognized as a husband. However, the children sired by this man became the property of the 'matriarch husband', as provided by the customary laws governing traditional marriages. The term, Mûka wa mwîîrrîga meant any woman whose husband had been found mistreating his innocent wife without tangible course or evidence in his claims. The entire community would decide to protect her from her hostile husband by building her a house wherein she could live with her children at a corner of her husband's land parcel. The clan declared that if her husband would ever interfere with her stay at the new home, the entire community would punish the troublesome husband. She lived under the protection of her legal husband's clan. However, if the husband realized his mistake, repented, and sought reconciliation, the clan would sanction their reunion and cohabitation.

**4. The roles of husband and wife**

The husband was responsible for building huts for the family. He was responsible for the provision of food and clothing and other items required in the household. His duty to maintain the wife/wives ceased when a wife abandoned her matrimonial home. The wife would take the responsibility of maintaining the home when her husband was on errands outside the homestead; nevertheless, he would also arrange with relatives to take charge and provide the required assistance when he was absent for a long time. The responsibility of a husband was to oversee the morals and ethical development and behaviour of their children. The rights to mete disciplinary measures or to chastise his wife and children, in case of misconduct, were vested on the husband. Unjustified beating of either a child or a wife was strictly prohibited. Excessive beating of a wife or a child and/or inflicting bodily harm was not only punished by the age mates and clan, but was also condemned in the strongest terms. This may warrant the wife to return to her parents' home. The man was also punished by his age group and Elders for such unwarranted behaviour. A husband was not expected to beat any woman and particularly, a woman who was not legally married to him and/or any pregnant woman. The women were nurtured to resist from overreacting, and they were discouraged from hitting back the husband even when the husband was brutal. This was to avoid establishing grounds for 'divorce' or separation, depending on how seriously her husband would view her response and how he would present the matter to elders and the community at large.

The wives were always very close to their growing children because they breastfed the children. Through their actions, they would teach their mother tongue to the children. The husbands always remained jovial with them. He would react mildly while listening and making jokes and display non-attentiveness to all discussions between the mother and her children. The marriage was bound to certain cultural norms and practices which instilled discipline in the family members. The growing children went through basic induction and ritualized training. Their growth period included rituals Nkuagaya, such as rites of passage from the infants Kûgaarwa kwa mwaanna or Kûgaarra mwaanna or Kûgaarra Gakeenke, *to give an infant its first earthly feeding,* which was an act designated to the midwife or birth attendant Mwîîjûkia, who performed the ritual by using traditional medicine to boost immunity, called Mîtheega/Mîtîmîkûrrû, as was provided by the Amîîrrû's traditions*.* After four or five years, this ritual was followed by the weaning ritual of the baby, Gakeenke, which *comprised a shaving ceremony* called Mpeenjo ya mwaanna and Gwîîkîrwa mwaanna mûkoorro*, putting a necklace made of sheep's skin and fat around the child's neck, as a blessing;* this occasion was used to confirm an appropriate name, Gwîîtwa riîtwa, given to the child*.* It also marked the beginning of the couple's preparation for the next conception and childbirth.

The growing youth were also subjected to ritualized rites of passage namely: Kannamataka, Kîthigancheege, Ngiekîgîrrî, Gatuurrî, Ûriingûri, Kiigûmmi, and Nchiibi. For the very bright youth Rammarre/Lammala, training was provided in leadership roles and discipline was instilled as a lifestyle. These were practical sessions to ensure that they were aware of law and order, indigenous technology, and spiritualistic citations. The maturing boys and girls

prepared themselves for adulthood by undergoing endurance training, which culminated in circumcision and *warrior hood*, Ûthaka, for boys; for girls, the training aimed at making them Ngutu, *young marriageable ladies.* The warriors who guarded the circumciser, Mûtaanni, were called Keenda ya Mûtaanni, *assistants of the circumciser by carrying his circumcision tools*.[2] The warriors were meticulously dressed in their distinguished regalia: the dagger, Gachiû, sword, Rûchiû, spear, Îtumo, the jingles, Ibeerre, which were worn on both legs, and the horn, Rûgoji to blow as siren to indicate the arrival of this team or to express stress. The circumciser's bag carried the knife, Gachiû and traditional herbal medicines, Mîtheega with which to treat circumcised boys. The girls graduated into Mwaarrî, Ngutu, and Nthammaarri after circumcision, which advanced them towards marriage. They were dressed and decorated by wearing small jingles, Ngichiirri on both the legs, beads, Mînna specially fitted into pierced earlobes, hand bungles, Mîkathî ya njara, fingerings, a skirt, Kîendû, a small shield for dancing, Ngaa, the stick, Mûreegi and a whistle, Nkûrri curved horn from a small antelope. After marriage, they further graduated into wives, Achierre. When their first-born children qualified for circumcision, they were entitled to be called Eekûrrû, elderly ladies; when their first-born children married and had teenage children, they graduated into elderly women, Ntiindiri; finally, when they started devoting their lives to spiritual matters, they were admitted into Waarrîki and called Mwaarrîki (singular) or Aarrîki (plural).

The post child-bearing men and women were led by thethe Amîîrrû's High Priest and King, Mûgwe. These elderly people were admitted into Waarrîki Lodge, which was devoted to prayers and spiritual life. A member of that lodge was called Mwaarrîki (singular), Aarrîki (plural). They lived a pure and uncontaminated Godly lifestyle. The society consulted them for advice. This class of Elders was expected to speak the truth and provide direction in all the matters. They were equally expected to bless families and those people who would seek their blessings, including the newly born and the sickly; they were also expected to bless ceremonies and installations, including newly established homesteads and the elder's camps Gaarrû, on behalf of and for the Mûgwe. They also blessed the instruments of power *Mace*[3] held by the High Priest and Prophet, Mûgwe (singular) or Agwe (plural). The Aarrîki elders were regarded as a treasure to their families and secular groups whose combined efforts helped in providing for their basic needs. The Mûgwe, for example, owned a farm on which the public worked for providing food to his home; he had a herd of livestock which was grazed by the public. He was only married to one wife. The public brought their first crop to his house for blessings. His home never lacked any supply of food and milk. He was contacted before the onset of the rainy season to inaugurate and bless the planting of crops, which was called Kuummagaria mbeeû. Thereafter, the people would continue with the planting exercise. The Aarrîki Elders were also involved to flag-off the events, including cerebrations, ceremonies, and rituals of slaughtering pure livestock.

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[2] The Circumciser's tools were carried in a bag called 'Kîondo kîa Mûtaanni'; these were Gachiû, Giatû, Mîtheega, Mîtummi, Mîgwî, and Îthuunya

[3] The first instrument of power – Mace was 'Îtummo ria Mwito' which was carried by Koommenjue during the migrations from Mbwaa to Mîîrrû.

The family members worked on a rotational basis. Women provided food and drinks while men harvested bee hives and provided honey and meat for blessings and celebrations. The children were considered holy and pure. Hence, they attached themselves to the Aarrîki by providing firewood, while the young girls fetched and provided water. The Aarrîki Elders welcomed the gifts with prayers by uttering words of blessings. The family members, who had offended the elders and distanced themselves from them, were deemed as cursed; it was remarkable that in some instances such villains became insane. The repercussions of the curse would equally affect the culprits' kin several generations later. The Aarrîki, led by the Mûgwe, were spiritual leaders and the upper stratum of spiritual elite who were equally honoured. They also carried some protective instruments that were used to dispel evils. The Aarrîki's clothes were specially designed to fit their spiritual work, and they were easily identified by the markings on their foreheads.

The cardinal responsibility of the married man was to protect and shield his wife/wives and all children and guide and keep the peace within his marriage. He would also undertake communal responsibilities to safeguard the community from any danger, to promote conflict resolution and arbitration, to guard the family from any aggression within and outside the boundary of the family, to be the provider of resources, and to guard and protect the Amîîrrû's land boundaries. Their post-marriage lifestyle was expected to link their family affairs with other extended family members and the clan based on social and cultural activities, including ceremonies. The nuclear family members ensured that they associated themselves with the parental lineage of the husband and the in-laws through activities like naming the child following the concept of blood brotherhood. The first-born child was named after either the father or mother of the husband depending on his/her gender and was called Chiethe. The second-born child was named after the father-in-law or the mother-in-law, depending on his/her gender, and was called Chiong'inna. The third-born child was named after the sibling of the husband, depending on his/her gender, and was called Chiethe. The fourth-born child was named after either the brother or sister of the wife depending on his/her gender and the child was called Chiong'inna. They kept on alternating until the couple stopped bearing children. This naming system reflected the closeness of the couple's family members; thus, brothers and sisters had Ntaagu (singular) or Baantagu (plural) in their extended families. Nevertheless, there were variations in the naming of children after the husband's family and then the wife's family among some of the Amîîrrû sub-tribes, and would start with the husband's family member first, so the next child would be named after the wife's family member. However, the basic and uniting factor is that the alternated naming system was maintained by all the Amîîrrû communities.

The wife maintained the stability of her marriage by preparing food for the family. The wife's primary duty in the homestead was to cultivate the fields assigned to her by the husband, to prepare and offer food and drinks to the family and their guests, to maintain and care for the home, and above all, to bear children and continue nurturing them. The cereals and grains were grinded, Kwaarraria and Gûkia na Iiga na Nthiie, by women using traditional methods of crushing and Kûûrra na Ntîrrî, pondering the grains between two stones or a mortar to feed the

family with porridge. The women concentrated on the production of containers for the household, the manufacture of earthen/clay pots Kûûmba nyoongû and all kinds of knitting, Gûtumma. The men in the family enjoyed the field activities, such as grazing, tending crops, traditional apiculture, carving, hunting, dancing, wrestling, and other traditional games. The beehives were made from hollowed logs, and men were charged with the responsibility of harvesting the honey. Honey harvesting was an art reserved specifically for the men who placed beehives between appropriate tree branches. They applied and placed aromatic herbs to attract bees. These beehives were inspected from time to time to ensure that bees had migrated into them. Men ensured proper management of the beehives which included a habitat that had many flowering plants and a readily available source of water. Honey was used as a source of good quality brew used as an ingredient during blessings, and as medicine for humans. The brewing and consumption of alcoholic drinks played a crucial role during marriages. Honey was among the important items of dowry for blessings. Honey was used to ensure the consolidation of relationships among the elders and between the in-laws. Honey was served to the elders during marriage discussions, negotiations, and celebrations. The beer pot containing some water and honey was placed close to the fire for several days. It was then fermented by applying the dried fruit of the *Kigelia africana,* Mûraantinna, which provided the enzymes that served as a catalyst for brewing. In a family, the husband ensured that this honey alcohol was consumed by the elderly age mates; it was sparingly given to women and rarely to children.

**5. Family law**

Under the Amîîrrû customary law, girls and boys were strictly prohibited from sexual relationships until they entered into conclusive marriage relationships. Relatives were also prohibited from getting married to one another, which was known as consanguinity impediment. The Amîîrrû customary law strictly prohibited any kind of cohabitation elopement and abduction and/or any other action that undermined moral and ethical values. 'Marriages' not sanctioned by parents—a rare occurrence—were not acceptable. Such marriages did not meet the sanctity standards of the Amîîrrû customary law and traditions. Nevertheless, the abduction of girls from other communities was allowed, particularly during cattle raids. The Amîîrrû believed that it was important to improve the genetic vitality and hybridization through women from other communities. This is evident among some of the Amîîrrû communities that were prone to traditional cattle rustling conflicts, wars, and boundary conflicts, who portray some assimilation characteristics, such as physical masculinity, language, and human character.

The Amîîrrû claim that the Turkana people are descendants of the Amîîrrû, 'Aturukanna nî Amîîrrû', who are recognized as their kin brothers; no Mûmmîîrrû was allowed to shed the blood of a Turkana person under any circumstance. They claimed that the ancestors of the Turkana people had separated themselves from their Amîîrrû at a place called 'Nkûûbiû' in Mîîrrû because warriors denied them to be circumcised. The Amîîrrû and Turkana call one another 'Mûtaanni', which means, 'my dear brother, you left before you had faced the circumciser' (Nyaga, 1997).

An abduction of a previously married woman did not legalize the new marriage union, even though the woman was legally divorced from her legal husband. The Amîîrrû did not believe in divorce in its strict meaning. They accepted practices that required the abductor to pay the dowry through her former husband who had the right to sue the abductor for 'removing a married woman from her husband's custody', which was a criminal offence under the Amîîrrû customary laws. Moreover, in all cases, the consent of the girl's parents was essential for blessing and validating the legal marriage processes. If the girl became pregnant during cohabitation, the young man was required to pay a 'pregnancy compensation fine' to the girl's father without being given a re-affirmation for legality. In addition, if the young man decided to marry this woman, the property paid to the parents of the bride would be counted as part of the dowry. If this woman was impregnated by another person during that cohabitation period, the 'pregnancy compensation fine' which had been paid to the woman's father could be recovered. The groom could not directly benefit from the properties paid as the 'compensation fine'. The man would not claim for damages emanating from the acts and cases of adultery against that woman by other intruders during the process of cohabitation, because this was done within the bounds and jurisdiction of the bride's parents. If an unfortunate situation arose where the fiancée died before entering into the legal marriage, the matter attracted a 'payment of compensation fine' amounting to an agreed sum of livestock and a drum of honey to the father of the 'would-be bride'.

According to the interviewees Nos. 5, 12, and 41, all marriages were secured by full trust in God, blessings from the parents, and the personal self-discipline of the individual in question.

**Plate 2. Esther Kanyore had reached the Waarrîki status. She is seen in this picture raising her hand in prayers to bless the family. The right hand was always used to bless.**(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

Esther Kanyore (pictured above) who was interviewee No. 40, reiterated that the most disciplined girls were tough and decisive about their undertakings within the family setting and the surrounding community. The commitment and pride of a woman was to remain morally pure and to create a homestead, highly supported by her endurance in siring children, sustaining

pregnancy, enduring prolonged labour pains, and the ultimate task of child rearing. Consequently, girls were tough and candid in maintaining their integrity. Women remained soft in front of the men, particularly their husbands. Some of the girls believed that they could not be challenged because they were known to be fighters. A situation may arise when she would be grazing livestock in the field and becomes annoyed with another person who may cause her to grab that aggressor's hands, use her nails and teeth to discipline the aggressor, and dip that person's head into a gushing spring of mineral water. Thereafter, if the aggressor was injured and began to bleed profusely, the elders would convene a meeting to discipline the ruthless girl. She would be punished for causing bodily harm to the aggressor.

Later, the code of conduct in the family was guided by the statutory laws of Kenya, as provided by the then Constitution during the colonial era and Independent Kenya. The Statutory Laws of Kenya, at independence, laid down the provisions for The Marriage Ordinance Cap.144, and the African Christian Marriage and Divorce Ordinance Cap.99, which were used as the guiding principles of the union of marriage. The validity of a marriage under the said Marriage Ordinance did not affect any incapacity imposed on the customary laws, particularly regarding the dowry's payment. The marriage under the customary law was invalid, if contracted during the continuance of a marriage under the Ordinance stipulated in Marriage Ordinance Cap.37. The dissolution of a traditional marriage was entered into with the consent of the spouses and the traditional arbitration institutions comprising of the parents, families, relatives, elders, and the traditional court. The process of the termination of a marriage by granting divorce began with the spouses, family members, and clan elders, Akûrrû ba Mwiîrrîga, but the customary court of law made the final decision. Although separation was allowed, there was no total and conclusive divorce in the eyes of the Amîîrrû. The process of separation was endorsed by the elders and recorded. A "divorced" woman would return to her first legal marital home during a ceremony at old age called reconciliation and forgiveness ceremony which lasted eight days, Kûrreantuuto. On many occasions, such women never returned to their second marital home. If any of the partners wished to separate from each other, the husband would send his wife back to her parent's home in the company of two Elders, one representing the Kîruka Age Group and another representing the Ntîba Age Group. This procedure legalized the separation. Contrarily, the wife may alternatively opt to disappear from her matrimonial home and run away to hide in her parent's home. In such a situation, the wife was required to report to her in-laws and her parents, giving the reasons why she had to leave her matrimonial homestead. This left room for reconciliation, before it was too late.

In case the wife decided to desert her matrimonial home to go to her parent's residence, her biological father would invite several elders to discuss the deserter's issues and find ways of setting up an arbitration forum to bring about reconciliation between the parties. If the elders failed to institute a reconciliation process, they would advise on how to deal with specific areas of contention and show the overriding effects on the lives of the children; they would also advise on the distribution of family properties to benefit both parties and children, and how the traditional laws could best be applied to resolve the matter under scrutiny. The elders would

postpone the meeting to provide adequate time for the couple to rethink and seek further advice and to explore possible pragmatic solutions. When the elders would settle on a separation, this was reaffirmed by slaughtering a lamb, Mbûri ya gatoogo. Nevertheless, the slaughtering was perceived by some clans as an indication that the 'divorce' had been allowed and legally concluded. Under the circumstances, such a woman was referred to as Nkabianni or Nkathianni, that is, *a woman who has had children before marriage.* The alternative process of 'divorce' was to refer the matter to the elders as members of the Traditional African Court, who would decide to review the case presented before it, and conclude the matter. This Court explored the grounds for 'divorce' provided by the two parties and decided to grant 'divorce' in accordance with the Amîîrrû's Customary Laws. The Court's decision to make a pronouncement was satisfactory if the tribunal had sufficient grounds, following the procedures under the Customary Laws. The decision allowed the two parties the freedom to find other suitors and to re-marry. In the event of the 'dissolution' of a marriage, the wife was entitled to take selected properties, acquired before and after marriage. The properties acquired through joint efforts were divided between the partners for their children's benefit.

The grounds for 'divorce' required to be proven beyond reasonable doubts to the arbitrators or the Court in order to satisfy the parties arbitrating to rule in favour of 'dissolution'. Marriage required that the wife and her husband maintain peace in their marital home and render each other conjugal rights. The customary laws allowed a husband to marry other wives, in consultation with his first wife. In case of a 'divorce', the wife was allowed to carry the personal effects, bangles, earrings, utensils, gifts, and her harvested crops. If the wife died, the husband had the right to marry another woman. The non-payment of the dowry did not invalidate the marriage. Nevertheless, his children and grandchildren were tasked to pay whatever dowry that had not been paid. A breach of payment was clearly stipulated in the Customary Laws. Forceful marriages were not allowed in Mîîrrû. When this happened, it attracted a daughter's curse, Gûkorroogîta mwaarrî wa nja îîjî ûgûrwa nî nthaka! This curse resulted in having Ngiranni in the Amîîrrû community. This produced *usually very beautiful daughters born in such a family and its descendants, whose husbands, if the husband had never entered into marriage before, he would die before they sired a second-born child. Women from that lineage were to marry previously married men to escape premature death.* However, intermarriages and polygamy as mentioned in the colonial extracts, were common and legally allowed.[4]

As pointed out earlier, the customary arbitration tribunal was composed of representatives from the nuclear family, some selected elders, the clan representatives, Mwîîrrîga, and / or members of the African Traditional Court. The customary laws also required that, in case of the death of the wife, the marriage was automatically terminated, but not family relationships which were bound by the children from that marriage. In addition, the husband's

[4] The Amîîrrû practiced peaceful lifestyle and calm atmosphere, *Thîîrrî* or *Thaaî* in prayers (Thuku 2016). They used plants for peace-making because some of the trees were designated as sacred and others were used in rituals (See table on page 26).

death did not necessarily terminate a marriage. Many widows chose to rear their children in their matrimonial homes. Youths, who created and nurtured their relationships and protected their bond with the sole purpose of establishing matrimonial homes, were secured by the Customary Laws. The friends were not allowed to engage in sexual relationships. Thus, if the boy was found to have misled the girl or cheated on her for the purpose of a sexual relationship, the boy was immediately circumcised and disciplined. He would be encouraged to maintain a lasting relationship with the girl. If she became pregnant, she would also be immediately circumcised and would have to bear and raise the child in seclusion with the hope that they can marry at a future date, after a dowry has been paid. If they broke up their friendship, the young man was required to pay an appropriate amount of livestock as compensation to the parents of the girl. If the young man agreed to marry the girl, the amount of livestock paid in compensation would be counted as part of the dowry, Rûrraachio. If the girl became pregnant, she would not be allowed to procure an abortion because the Amîîrrû customs and traditions did not allow it. If this girl did not marry that young man, she would not be allowed to marry an unmarried young man. She would be referred to as Nkathiaanni or Kîrûûrrî or Kîûrrûûrri, a useless woman, worthy of being married to an already married man, to become his second, third, or fourth wife. The second wife would be welcomed into marriage by the first wife because there were no issues that would bring conflict in the family. However, this is regarded as an obsolete custom in modern times, even though the marriage laws of Kenya have given leeway of prior consent by the first wife. A wife's primary obligation in marriage was to sire children. If a married woman stayed for several years without conceiving, various cultural solutions were sought. Among them, one was treatment by a traditional medicine healthcare practitioner. Another was that her husband was encouraged to marry another woman to prove that he was not barren. Nevertheless, even if it was proven that she was barren, she was not sent away. Over the course of time, one of her co-wives would bear a boy child for her. She would take that boy child just before weaning. Then, the boy child would be considered her biological child; this would be a family secret. The boy child would inherit all her entitlement: property, land parcels, and livestock. Thus, he would be her heir.

**6. Inheritance by family members**

Homesteads were the depository of the family wealth: properties acquired before and after marriage. The compound provided space for the dwelling huts and storage for the harvested crops. Each wife had her hut and grain containers called Mûûrrû (singular), Mîûrrû (plural), and stores called Kîreerre and Nchuku, which were constructed for grain storage and to preserve other crops besides grains, cereals, and a variety of foodstuffs. The husband constructed a homestead to provide an enclosure, a sheltered shed to keep livestock, Nkannata ya ng'oombe, for cattle, and Kiûgû kîa mbûri or Îkûûmbî rîa mbûri, for goats and sheep. The property acquired during married life was mainly in favour of the wife/wives, but the sole controller of those properties was the husband who had a right over every item owned by the family. Nevertheless, it was customary for the husband to consult the wife when he wished to sell

any property which had been acquired during their married life or even before their marriage, even though he had ultimate power to make a decision on any such property. Each wife knew her and her children's entitlement to the inheritance. A wife had ultimate power on and would freely control properties, including household goods, her kitchen, foodstuffs, utensils and containers, beatification items, and bangles and earrings, along with the food that she had cultivated and harvested in the fields. Her husband could not sell the livestock which had been bought by her, including its off-springs, without proper consultation and an agreement between both of them.

Both partners ensured that food was readily available on the table. Yet, the husband would mostly be out of the household in his efforts to gather and amass wealth for his family. It was the duty of the husband to try his best to establish a matrimonial home near his parents' homestead. Circumstances could dictate that he lives elsewhere with the wife/wives, or move to a separate land parcel. A man could decide to be either polygamous, or not. He had the duty to provide separate huts for each of his wives within an area determined by him. It was also possible for the other wives to share the same dwelling hut, according to the arrangements made by the first wife, because she controlled and guided the other incoming wives; they ultimately accepted and acknowledged the arrangements to share one dwelling place. The husband had his private hut wherein he would see each of them, separately. In a polygamous household, the wives were ranked according to the order in which they were married; the most senior wife was called Kambaanja (from Kwaamba Nja, *laying the foundation stone of the family*), and she directed the other wives in the absence of their husband. Kambaanja implies a lady who builds the family from scratch. The husband was the lawful guardian of the wives and would protect them against any adverse situation. Hence, he was held liable for the payment of any compensation, damages, and fines resulting from his wife's conduct, wrongdoings, and criminal offences that she may commit when they lived together. The wives were required to inform their husbands whenever they wished to leave their matrimonial home to visit their parents or when they would be attending communal functions outside their homes. Their husband was also supposed to reciprocate by informing them about his whereabouts. Nevertheless, in the event of 'classified', confidential, and 'secretive' missions that may have 'security threats', he might decide to disclose his mission only to his highly trusted brother.

The family inheritance of properties was controlled by the traditional customary laws that operated according to the guidance perceived to emanate from the spiritual powers and sanctions which would be given by the family elders. The inheritance rights included wives, daughters, and widows entitled to receive their pertinent properties, like land. The land parcels earmarked for daughters were termed as Rûthaanju rwa mwaarrî (singular), Nthaanju chia Aarrî (plural); these were provided for their cultivation, but could be transferred to their brothers upon payment of appropriate compensation. If the daughter got married, to avoid possible misunderstanding with her husband, she would ask her brother to pay the compensation after two seasons so that he could cultivate the land parcel. This compensation was usually a young ewe, Mwaatî (singular), Mîaatî (plural). The eldest son in the family became the defacto administrator of the properties, which had not been shared by the father. He was also

responsible for handling all ensuing family and land disputes which may arise. He would become the guardian of his brother's widow and children. In most cases, the eldest surviving son would be charged with the responsibility to witness the execution of his late father or brother(s). He was responsible for equitably sharing, or as the will might have been, with the children in marriage, the rightful apportionment of land and other properties that were entitled to each widow. However, the respective sons could receive some preference, if a will had specified it. Hence, no bias was entertained. Each surviving widow or child would get a fair and appropriate share of the property being shared.

## 7. Spiritual bonds of family life

### 7.1. Elders' role in the family

The Njûriîcheke Council of Elders was the foundation of unwritten Amîîrrû traditional laws on which marriage and family life were established. The marriage was governed by customary laws, social order, and spiritual guidance. These principles and guidelines were filtered and managed through the Elder's houses, Gaarrû chia Njûri or Nyoomba chia Njûri, which existed within the various units. This concept of central places spread and culminated in the formation of five regional headquarters at Ntugî in Tharaka, Mîorri in Îgeembe, Rweerrea in Tigania, Gîkîndûûnne in Imeenti, and Kababiga in Nithi. Finally, Nchîrû Shrine in Tigania was made the Amîîrrû's national headquarters, according to interviewee No. 46. Nchîrû Shrine, since its foundation, has served as the parliament of the Amîîrrû. It was inaugurated around 1843 A.D., when Thambuurru (Kîruka Age Group 1840 A.D.) and Ntûrûntimi (Ntîba Age Group 1853 A.D.) were under the traditional government. Henceforth, all customary laws and national decisions were made at Nchîrû Shirine to unify the Amîîrrû. Njûriîncheke Elders worshipped in these administrative sites and made decisions to direct the Amîîrrû in their everyday life. Each of the five Regional Headquarters had its Mûgwe, who performed the most important and solemn religious functions in his respective region. However, Nchîrû Shrine was above all the Regional Offices. Their main officials were called: Mûgwe (singular), Agwe (plural), the High Priest and King; Mûkûrrû (singular) Akûrrû (plural), an Elder(s); Mûûnjûri (singular), Njûri (plural), an Initiate(s) of Njûri; Mûgaambi (singular), Agaambi (plural), a judge(s) and/or an arbitrator(s); and Mûkîamma (singular), Akîamma (plural), their Prime Minister. The laws and spiritual and social order were safeguarded by the secular groupings of the Elders' lodges of Rammare/Lammare at the warriors' level, Kîamma gîa nkommango, or Kiammootha, or Kîamma Kînnenene or Kîamma gîa kîrimmî at the retired warriors' level, and Njûri, Njûriîmpingîre, Njûriîncheke, and Njûriîmpere at the middle age and older levels of Elders' lodges. Nchîrû Shirine is situated roughly equidistant from all the original boundaries of Mîîrrû State. Historical injustices have reduced the land of the Amîîrrû to less than half of its original size. The Amîîrrû families, secular organizations, wise men, tradesmen, and the elderly professional groups utilized the traditional sacred groves, sacred sites, and shrines for their family religious activities, in consultation with the accredited agents of the Njûriîncheke Council of Eldersand the Mûgwe, the spiritual leadership of the Amîîrrû. These sites were literary centres of worship. The head of a family was

the family's priest. Each family ensured close contacts with the traditional cultural sites, but they would be guided by the Elders through traditional guidance, recommendation, and warning, Nkuaagaya to curb possible irresponsible behaviour, to avoid discretion, malpractices, destructive activities, and/or defilement. The family's spiritual life consisted of attachment to the sacred sites and honouring resident ancestral spirits. These sites were held as in-born treasures. However, it is regrettable that these practices were later weakened and destroyed by the colonial administration and Christianity.

**7.2. Christian influence on the family**

Interviewee No. 39 claimed to have witnessed the arrival of the first European Missionary in Imeenti, Father Giovan Balvo, who was given the local name, Mûchinyoro. The priest was accompanied by three sisters, namely, Jacinta, Bibiana, and Kaarûra. They first settled at Kîîja, but later Father Giovan Balvo moved to establish himself at Mûûjwa, in around 1911 A.D. She recalled that Father Giovan Balvo was impressed by the leadership of the Njûriîncheke Elders and wished to be initiated into the eldership group of Njûriîncheke. Some senior uncircumcised naughty boys approached and cheated Father Giovan Balvo by informing him that he would be allowed to undergo the initiation rituals. He was excited and accepted the offer to become an elder by offering his mule to be castrated as an outright graduation into Njûriîncheke membership; thus, his mule died unexpectedly. She also recalled that Mûûjwa village was a place for the most feared devil known as Ntûkînnenne. It was believed that those who dared to defile the area would face the wrath of the resident evil spirits, which inflicted instant punishments. She said that people who chose to cut the trees in that protected grove were amazed to witness that the damaged trees oozed blood and milk; whirlwinds and unfamiliar cries were heard across the nearby villages. The resident spirits also punished the wrongdoers who defiled the site; the defilers witnessed their cooking pots being upturned and thrown up in the air, across the homestead, but, surprisingly enough, those cooking pots would return to their original location with their previous contents. The other resident spirits began to beat the wrongdoers with tree branches, while castigating their bad actions; those spirits used threatening and deafening voices. The site at Mûûjwa was originally used as a dumping place for dead human bodies in the hope that hyenas would come to pick and consume them.

The land acquisition and occupation by the missionary, Fr Giovan Balvo, at Mûûjwa disturbed the resident spirits. The protective spirits decided to escape and they left the despised 'devilish' spirits to take charge of the area, according to interviewee No. 39. She confirmed that the bad spirits also decided to migrate from Mûûjwa singing and moved to occupy the other sites in which their song was identified as Rûnyûrî, Mbûinna, and Kîrûîrro. The spirits left in a convoy and were heard singing to the effect that *we are annoyed and that we have re-located to Bûinna, Rûnyûrî, and Kîrûîrro,* 'Twathaamma tweeta Mbûinna, Twathaamma tweeta Rûnyûrî, Twathaamma tweeta Kîrûîrro'. It was difficult to truly identify the new sites *where they relocated.* However, this was how the first Roman Catholic Missionaries gained entry in Mîîrrû. Thereafter, many families around Mûûjwa joined the Christian Faith through the Catholic Church

Missionaries; for a long time, Mûûjwa served as the Headquarters of the Catholic Church in Mîîrrû, until 1954 A.D., when the Rt. Rev. Bishop Lawrence Bessone was appointed the first Catholic Bishop of the New Catholic Diocese of Meru, and established his residence in Mîîrrû Town at St. Joseph's Cathedral. Previously, Mîîrrû was part of the Catholic Diocese of Nyeri.

**7.3. Mweenji's role in the family of the deceased**

The most harboured scenario was the reality of death, a situation that caused many Amîîrrû to shiver because death snatched away their loved ones. Fear surfaced when death occurred. Many questions were asked, particularly when the dead is a young person. The dead bodies of those who had no children and/or whose own offspring could not be traced, Mûgûûmbi (singular) or Ngûûmbi (plural),were disposed of by Mweenji (singular), Eenji (plural), *a professional undertaker of the dead bodies, who was feared and regarded as an outcast, because of* Rûkuû, that is, *impurities arising from the dead people contaminated him and the individual had to be cleansed in order to interact with the community under normal circumstances.* People would not dare to come close to him. Those who lost their kin were equally traumatized, prohibited, and secluded in quarantine for no less than two months, until they had performed a cleansing ritual called Kweenjwa Rûkuû. They were not allowed to interact or participate in communal activities until they had been officially cleansed. They would not be allowed to fetch water, collect firewood, or any materials within the surroundings and vicinity. They would be secretly assisted by their close relatives, particularly during the night, and allowed to integrate with the others after being cleansed through the rituals referred to as Kweenjwa Rûkuû. Families visited cultural groves and sacred sites which were protected through the traditional laws. Cultivation, grazing, and the felling of trees were not allowed in these sensitive areas and shrines. If a tree was to be cut down, only blunt objects were recommended as a deterrent to make the exercise difficult.

Some of these areas were used as compounds for punishment; whenever a wrongdoer deserved to be executed, he/she would be rolled down into a waterfall, and this was prescribed to those found to have caused harm or death to other people by poisoning or witchcraft. Other criminals were given corporal punishment by being stoned or set on fire after being tied with dry banana leaves which burnt the body; in addition, they were put inside a beehive and then rolled down into a waterfall or off a steep hill. Those who were known to practice witchcraft inhabited secluded areas in groves, caves, and rock crevices and travelled at night to conceal their activities as they went to collect their portions of charms, such as plants, soils, minerals, stones, animal organs, and toxic substances. These people should not be confused with the traditional medicine practitioners, who also ground herbal medicines into powder or ashes, and made concoctions to store in containers usually made of shells, gourds, earthen pots, baskets, bamboo, hollow pieces of wood, and horns of animals to enhance and promote their trade. These habitats harboured medicinal plants, ritual ingredients, and food supplements which were fully utilized by the families who needed healthcare. (See Annex1: Tables 1, 2, 3, & 4). It must be emphasized that daughters of traditional healers were married to sons of other traditional healers. Daughters of farmers, daughters of specific craftsmen, daughters of blacksmiths, and

daughters of traditional medicine healthcare practitioners were married to the sons of families in similar professions. Rarely did Amîîrrû encourage their children to marry partners from families which were from different professions.

**7.4. Sacred sites' role in the family**

Many families highly valued their association with sacred sites. However, information regarding sacred areas was not disclosed to unauthorized persons. To do so would be tantamount to disobeying the ancestral spirits, according to excerpts by Traditional Medicine Practitioner, Stanley Kanyomoo Araigua, whose father, Stefano M'Araigua Kaananake was a renowned traditional medicine practitioner. These sacred areas were secured and maintained by Elders so that people who were regarded as unclean and untrustworthy were not allowed to visit. The cattle raiders, for example, were not allowed to interfere with common utility areas, such as sources of water, sacred sites, the routes to various places, and communal log bridges, regardless of whether these areas were within their jurisdiction, and/or those used by the neighbouring communities. The criminals were arrested and arraigned before the Njûriîncheke Elders for a verdict and appropriate punishment, or outright execution.

The enforcement of laws and social order lay in the hands of every family member. Criminals were executed by anointed representatives or agents assigned by Njûri Elders[(5)] within the selected areas of jurisdiction, such as the Elders' group who were called the swallowers of Kîamma gîa Kîrimmû. The activities of this group were primarily practiced in Tharaka to instil remorse among the criminals. The Amîîrrû believed that the wrongdoers and convicts would be swallowed and vomited elsewhere in distant lands; for example, being swallowed and then vomited across the River Thagichû was frightening and uncalled for.

The Amîîrrû family laws that protected hills ensured access to areas where prayers were offered and rituals were performed by slaughtering lambs, Kûûragîra Irîmma Ng'oondu. It was a great event for a family to offer a pure ewe, particularly of one colour, for slaughtering, to shed blood on behalf of a family, which was referred to as Gwiita Kîgoongwanna. The citations of customary laws to protect the land, property, and human life was performed by Njûri Elders, who used phrases such as '*To shelter the family elders under the tree of the Njûriîncheke Council of Elders'* or *'Equip the family Elders of Council of Elders for a mission by providing them with food, drinks, and arms', 'Ensure that the family elders' decisions are protected until the Council of Elders retains the rights to change their decisions', and 'Whoever loses a case in truthful court of Elders shall never launch an appeal against those decisions*', which implies 'Gûkara ruungu rwa Mûtîînne jwa Kîamma.Gwîîkîra Kîamma Iraatû. Kîamma Ngarûki! Mwîîngwa na Mûgwî jwa Ûgaambi atî chookaga!' Family issues associated with environmental destruction, pollution of rivers and mineral water springs, droughts, epidemics, wars, and unforeseen calamities were resolved by

[(5)] The Njûriîncheke Council of Elders, the legislative, judicial, and executive arms of the Amîîrrû people, were effective in dispute resolution as shown in the citations 'Obstinate swearing never settles Dispute' '*Ndataanwa îtîgiitaga îgamba!*'

offering sacrificial lambs, but not without warnings and offering alternative solutions. The family members believed that any unfamiliar occurrence required the appeasement of the ancestral spirits with earnest family prayers, rituals, and sacrifices; thus, nothing was taken for granted.

The family traditionalists believed that it was the power of the spiritual leader and prophet, Mûgwe, to prescribe a remedy. However, the spiritual powers of the priest and prophet, Mûgwe, were diminished after the occupation by the colonial administration and Christianity. The Njûriîncheke leadership was also curtailed in their key responsibilities and interventions of securing habitats and protecting water sources and friendly and moisture-retaining trees from destruction, according to interviewee No. 2 (see Annex 1, Table 3). The families designated certain habitats for interpretation of their family's wishes, family sacrifices, and other purposes, such as establishing traditional Courts of Law. The Njûriîncheke Shrine at Nchîrû had already been designated as a traditional parliament which made laws and procedures to direct major community decisions.

Notably, there were other sacred sites and groves, such as Theemwe, Thaaî, and Nturukumma which served as the traditional high court, Supreme Court, and court of appeal. In addition, there were areas near Nyoomba chia Njûri which were designated to settle complex cases and disputes through an invocation exercise called Kîthiri (singular), Ithiri (plural); Gwiikua Kîthiriinne, *made to swear and vow while simultaneously cutting, mutilating, and slowly killing a he-goat, which was carried on shoulder length by the plaintiff* (interviewee No. 43).The family elders believed that destruction and degradation of the environment was a serious crime, whose consequences welcomed a public occasion leading to curses, Kîrummi (singular), Irummi (plural), which could cause disaster in the culprit's family. The curse could be reversed, when and if the family members offered a lamb for sacrifice, which included sprinkling the lamb's blood and sipping, sprinkling, and spewing brewed honey over the family and the offender, called Kûriindia Kîrummi,while the celebrants were praying. The Njûri Elders used their flywhisks to bless, Kûthaarrimma,or the repentant families, the repentant offender, and all entities, including land and homesteads. The Amîîrrû believed that resident ancestral spirits[(6)] may empower the demons[(7)] to punish the unrepentant wrongdoers and defilers of the groves and water sources. These demons would be sent to destabilize the marriages and families who practiced demeaning behaviours and actions. The resident ancestral spirits could also act by enforcing punishments through mysterious and unfamiliar occurrences in families and the community at large. The family beliefs in the powers of ancestral spirits were weakened by the colonial administration and Christianity, which led to the disregard of and penetration into sacred areas and destruction of the habitat.

The sacred sites and groves, referred to as Îirri (singular), Maiiri (plural) or Îgirri

[(6)] Resident Spirits derived their powers from the spirits of the dead ancestors and would come in the form of animals, whirlwinds, quakes, the destabilization of objects and entities, cries, and unfamiliar occurrences.

[(7)] The demons were used by the resident spirits to punish the wrongdoers.

(singular), Magirri (plural), *the main post(s) of an entrance into a family homestead,* were protected through the direction of anointed Elders of Njûri, coupled with implementation through resident ancestral spirits. The secular organizations and groupings also provided mechanisms to protect the land by the proclamations of curses[8] and blessings and Social Order[9], which were regarded as mandatory law by the families. They also provided mechanisms to safeguard the matrimonial homesteads in terms of the overall security of the posterity of their marriage and all the family members. The information provided in this section was gathered from some highly respected Amîîrû wise men. These elders directly interacted with traditional shrines, groves, scenic sites, and habitats. The excerpts contain not just the narratives of myths and folk stories, but also first-hand information about their social interactions, utilization of sacred sites, and protective measures. Some of the interviewees are not alive now (*God rest their Souls in eternal peace!*) but their valuable memories are captured in this paper, as raw materials, which are instrumental in facilitating this publication. Most of the interviewees were of varied age-sets, Nthukî, as indicated in the acknowledgements. During the years, 2001–2002 A.D., the Meru Museum, in collaboration with the Swedish Museum, conducted research under the Swedish African Museums Program (SAMP) entitled, 'Sensitive Amîîrrû Culture, Myths, Folk Stories on the Traditional Sacred Groves and Sites', wherein interviews were conducted. Respondents included highly knowledgeable Amîîrrû elders and wise men: the Njûriîncheke Elders, spiritual leaders, prophets, tradesmen, medicine men, sorcerers, overseers, traditional lawyers, and the intelligentsia. The field study and collation of the materials were coordinated by the Herbalist Stanley Kanyomoo Araigua and Moses K. Ndeegwa, according to Okwaro P.D., the erstwhile Curator of the Meru Museum.

**7.5. Kîrîmmaarra and Nyambeenne ranges' role in family religious life**

The Amîîrrû believed that God, Mûruungu, resides on top of Kîrîmmaarra, Mount Kenya; when there was snow on that Mountain, it was a sign that there would be sufficient rainfall and plenty of food. They believed that when the Mountain became bluish, it was an indication of insufficient future rainfall and possible famine. All prayers and offerings to God were directed to Kîrîmmaarra. The appearance of clouds and fog over Mount Kenya was construed to mean that there were some unclean people in its surrounding, according to interviewee No. 13. Many sacrifices were also offered on the Nyambeenne Ranges, in the same manner and style as those offered on Kîrîmmaarra, where there is also a small lake at the Mûkûlûlû Site in Tigania Region. The spiritual leaders and accredited agents of the Mûgwe did not have difficulties in approaching the Mountain top, but those who were possibly unclean, continued their journey without much success or progress. The unclean people encountered insurmountable hardships as they

[8] A curse Mûgiro or Kîrumi, bewitched through evil spirits, was feared and required the intervention of the spirits of the dead ancestors.
[9] Social order implies authoritative instructions and directions to be followed by all people and organized groups.

proceeded to manoeuvre its terrain, and they would never reach the Mountain top. How? They tried to proceed, but a fog appeared before them, and it disappeared when they came closer to the top. They could hear their names being called and warnings that they should immediately leave the place, lest they are punished. If they ignored these calls and warnings about not to proceed further, their journey was cut short by deep darkness. They were also blocked by wild animals, which made it difficult for them to get out of the place; many times, such sinners died. This faith helped in transforming mythical narratives into real-life incidents. Water is life! It was one of the most important items used during sacrifices, which also required the shedding of blood, for cleansing.

Mount Kenya, Kîrîmmaarra, is surrounded by unique natural features: Harris, Lûtundu, Îthaangûûnne provide clear sparkling water which people fetch to perpetuate the performance of rituals along with the cultural and spiritual cleansing of the traditional Amîîrrû homesteads, when family members had experienced inexplicable hardships. Oral history has indicated that the ancestors named this Mountain Kîrîmmaarra, meaning *the Mountain of God, beauty, and splendour.* Its attractive peaks, such as *Batian,* which is 5,199 meters above sea level, was given the name, *Kagoji,* by the first Amîîru Age-set, Ntarratî (Kîruka Age Group,1565 A.D.). This dismisses its discovery by white men, according to interviewee No. 25. The historical perspective ensured an urge by the Colonial Government to declare the site as a National Park in 1949 A.D.; then, in 1953 A.D., the colonial authorities designated most of the surrounding land, including the areas within the Amîîrrû's Land Unit, to be protected as a forest reserve. These declarations made it difficult for the Amîîrrû families to perform their worship and traditional rituals like before.

In 1978 A.D., Mount Kenya was designated a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve, and in 1997 A.D., it was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO due to its high elevation and its historical, scenic, and cultural background and natural features. Besides its economic potential as a tourist attraction, the water tower, crystal-clear lakes, underground and open surface rivers, springs, and swamps continue to benefit millions of family members downstream. The Mountain has provided walking routes with the starting points located at Chogoria, Kamweeti, Narummoru, Sirimon, and Timaû. Other routes used to reach the Mountain by the traditional elders, who went on spiritual and ritual missions, are Kîbaranya, Maranya, Thaaî, and Theemwe, historical sites. These routes have also been adopted by enthusiastic mountain climbers wishing to reach Mount Kenya's peaks. The traditionalists ensured that *"No sacrifices and rituals"* were allowed on top of Mount Kenya and the forest reserve, except for the designated sites, such as Thaai and Nturrukumma. Many people, who have visited Mount Kenya chose to have an overnight stay at the Maranya Grove. The traditional mountain climbers stopped at this site to slaughter and sacrifice a lamb to acknowledge the resident ancestral spirits before continuing on their journey. They briefly stopped at Maranya to consult with the ancestral spirits (Iruundu bia Bajûûjû) through prayers, to seek the necessary guidance as they travelled and understanding the need for possible interventions.

### 7.6. Nturrunkumma sacred grove's role in family life

The Nturrunkumma Sacred Grove was specifically visited by the family members who believed that they had been cursed and who needed to seek blessings from God. These people had to observe correct behaviour. For example, the throwing of stones at this site was prohibited; doing so, would stir, provoke, instigate, and annoy the ancestral spirits, according to interviewee No. 22. Nothing should be left behind after the ritual ceremony. No twigs or vegetative matters were allowed be picked or carried away from this site after ritual ceremonies. All the sacrifices, whether for a family or community, who involved offering a lamb or a heifer sacrifice, were done at the Nturrunkumma Site. This site was particularly used for slaughtering sacrifices to find solutions to the mysterious occurrences of unanswered prayers conducted by the families at other prayer areas. In cases where a member of the family had been cursed by their parents, the cleansing was conducted at the Nturrukumma Site, and it was believed that the individual would come out clean of the curse. Likewise, if someone had committed a crime, including murder or manslaughter, and required forgiveness, he would seek permission from Njûriîncheke Elders to conduct a sacrifice of forgiveness and cleansing at the Nturrukumma Site. It was also believed that individuals who would misbehave at this Site would find themselves thoroughly caned by unseen evil spirits. The anointed Njûriîncheke Elders who were performing the rituals at the Nturrunkumma Site sought assistance of other elders assigned to Lake Thaaî when handling difficult issues, according to interviewee No. 13. In addition, throwing stones at the site was prohibited. It was believed that if one threw stones at this site, the same stones were diverted back by spirits, which hit the thrower. It was equally believed that people who presented their offerings, but outwardly defiled this place, were disciplined with strokes of a cane from the guard spirits. The area surrounding Nturrukumma Site was a dense forest with a variety of birds, animals, and insects that made the area sound musical due to diverse noises, sounds, and echoes. This area was also inhabited by huge elephants, buffalos, various types of monkeys, and antelopes. Inside the bamboo forest, there were several springs that feed Thiingithû River, whose water was used by thousands of people downstream. This water also serves the Mîtûngûû Irrigation Scheme which is a great economic asset for many Amîîrrû families.

### 7.7. Lake Thaaî's role in family life

Lake Thaaî on the slopes of Mount Kenya was considered by the Amîîrrû families to be the most popular in terms of the perfection of the rituals, specifically for families who were seeking blessings and guidance for their families and kin, who were embroiled in family and marriage disputes, and after overriding calamities and disasters. Lake Thaaî Sacred Grove, located south of the Mûchîenne forest station, was earmarked as an important stop-over for people destined to climb Mount Kenya and for offering prayers aimed at alleviating the prevailing droughts, famine, and natural calamities, according to interviewees No. 13 and 26. This was a respected area because its water mass does not exhibit any inlet or an outlet. Sacrifices of slaughtered goats and other offerings were never done within Lake Thaaî, but all sacrifices were offered at Nturrunkumma Sacred Grove. The Amîîrrû families upheld Lake Thaaî

with great respect and honour. Njûriîncheke Elders played a great role in sustaining the interests in these sacred sites and perpetuating positive attitudes towards these sites.

**Plate 3. Lake Thaaî** (Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

Lake Thaaî was fully designated to cater to the community and needs of the clans, such as settling needs related to droughts and famine, in addition to the rituals for improving family and marriage issues, as illustrated previously. The offerings were presented to the Living God Whose dwelling was in the Mountain vicinity and rains would be expected to arrive at the close of a ritual ceremony.

Killing wild animals, cutting trees, and collecting vegetation and forest products from this Site was prohibited. All people undertaking illegal activities were warned to immediately leave the place, but if they defied the order, they would hear voices coming from different directions raising complaints against them. After a while, a loud voice would be heard saying: '*What should we do to this person?* Tûmûthiithie atîa?' Other voices would respond: '*Let us kill him!* Tûmûûrrage!' and another voice may say '*No, let us spare him! He has not committed a crime deserving death!* Arî, tûkaammûraga! Atîthiithîîtie ntabarrako!' Another voice may reply: '*What should we do to him?* Tûmûthiithie atîa?' The last voice may say: '*Let us shave him and smear him with everlasting jelly*! Tûmweenje na tûmwaake maguta ja Ûtûûrro ba kenya!' Subsequently, he would find that he had become bald. This was scarring to the extent that it became a great deterrent from actions contrary to the rules. None can corroborate the truth of this story. What we are sure of is that the Amîîrrû practiced very strong beliefs, which dictated individual and communal behaviour and character. The Amîîrrû were highly disciplined right from childhood, through their teenage, youth, and adult lives. Their initiation rites strengthened each person's behaviour at every stage of life. It is a pity that modern education and colonial influence caused such traditions to fall apart; returning to the Amîîrrû's traditions is not easy. Nevertheless, recording the traditional knowledge and cultural expressions of this community for posterity is a significant step.

### 7.8. Theemwe sacred salt pan site's role in family life

The blessings bestowed to a member or members of a family were received at Theemwe

Sal Pan, after which thanksgiving offerings and sacrifices were performed at Nturrunkumma Site. A pot-like pan called Koongû ka Theemwe was strategically placed and was used by the family members who sought blessings to determine their wealth worth. The worshippers were instructed to dip their hands into the pots. If someone picked the dung of livestock, it was interpreted that he would be blessed with a big herd of livestock. This Site was regularly visited by the traditionalists, who climbed up Kîrîmmaarra, Mountain Kenya to pray and perform the required rituals.

Theemwe Sacred Site is located about four kilometres inside the forest on the eastern slopes of Mount Kenya, near River Îrarrû. The neighbourhood community members and other people across the region believed that there were supernatural powers at Theemwe Sacred Site capable of foretelling their destiny, according to interviewee No. 14. The panorama of Theemwe Sacred Site has gigantic indigenous trees, and its neighbourhood has a swamp of mineral water, Mwoonyo, which gushes from orifices, offering beautiful scenery. The Sacred Site has some footsteps embedded in rocks; people associate these footsteps with frequent movements of human-like prehistoric creatures (vide Plate 4).

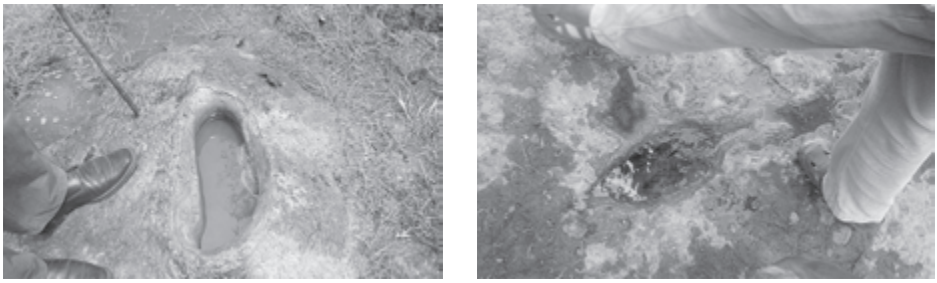

**Plate 4. Ancestral footsteps at Theemwe Sacred Salt Pan**
(Photo by Titus Gîtumma, Tito)

It was a rule that those who wished to visit Theemwe sacred site had to give notice to the Njûriîncheke Elders, and be cleared by the Mûgwe after consultation with the Elder overseers. The family had to volunteer advance information, showing the purpose of the intended visit. The people who inhabited the neighbouring region, like other Amîîrrû, visited the Theemwe sacred site to seek blessings, to be prophesied, to have their dreams translated, to seek solutions to their issues regarding marriage, family, health, poverty, and wealth, and to be foretold the future destiny of their kin and other individuals. The people sought to repent and reveal their sins, to get curses removed and receive blessings, and to know what needed to be done as remedial performance. It is reiterated that the Theemwe sacred site was used to specifically resolve family issues. It was never to be visited by breastfeeding or menstruating women. This area was kept out of bounds for any other activity. Unauthorized people and livestock were kept out for eight consecutive days before any ritual could be conducted there. There were Njûriîncheke elderly specialist 'agents' of the Mûgwe, equivalent to Aarrîki, who controlled the activities on this site

to ensure that order was maintained. They guided the visitors, including those who were on spiritual missions[10] across the gallery forest and particularly those destined to climb to the top of Kîrîmmaarra, Mount Kenya. These elders ensured that there was minimal interference at the sacred site, as well as the surrounding areas; they provided express authority for the determination of spiritual solutions.

**7.9. An example of a family member who frequented sacred sites**

M'Ikîarra, a spiritual leader, had never revealed to anyone about his intentions to visit Kîrîmmaarra, the mountain. The authors of this paper tried to have an audience with him several times, but he gave scant information about himself and his missions on the Kîrîmmaarra. M'Ikiarra simply said, '*Let's all Praise God of Kîrîmmaarra, Mount Kenya!*', 'Tûthaathagienni Ngai wa Kîrîmmaarra!' He feared that talking too much about his mission would provoke the anger of evil spirits against him, which would result in making the security personnel curtail his trips across Mount Kenya, thereby leading to breaking the traditional laws and social order. M'Ikiarra's wifeAlice Mbûûthû, who was about 60 years old, later told the authors that her husband was an ardent believer and never interacted freely with humans, including her. M'Ikîarra was not interested in power, the acquisition of properties, or wealth. She stated that at some time in the past, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Officers had asked M'Ikîarra whether he would be interested in receiving donation of a posh mill to abandon his habit of making regular visits to Kîrîmmaarra, the mountain. He refused the offer by answering that his survival was based on natural products which were prepared in the bush and the makeshift dwellings beside his wife's hut.

**7.10. Gîkoombe sacred valley's role in family life**

The Gîkoombe sacred valley was used as a hideout area for families during cattle rustling, between 1840 and 1878 A.D., when the Thambuurru, Ntûrrûntimmi, Kûbai, and Kabûria Age Groups were in power and ruling the Amîîrrû; later, the Valley became the hideout for the MaûMaû Freedom Fighters, around 1952–1963 A.D. during the struggle for Kenya's Independence, according to interviewee No. 38. Many family members, including children and women, were concealed in a secluded valley under huge trees beside the flowing river. The livestock were left in the homesteads and were herded by the men. The main activities in this seclusion were prayers, sacrifices, and rituals offered by the Elders to denounce the enemies. The river valley provided a variety of green vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Herbal medicinal was extracted from the trees and vegetation for treatment of sickness and injuries (see Annex1, Table 1). The traditional medicine healthcare practitioners visited the site to collect a variety of herbs and other requirements for their trade; insects, animal portions, the dung of elephants, all sorts

[10] Theemwe site was regularly visited by a spiritual leader *Ephrain M'Ikîarra,* born 1928, Age-set Kîbaya/Mbaee. He surprised the KWS and Forestry personnel when in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, he visited the mountain top barefooted without any protective clothing.

of snakes, and various plants and mineral pebbles were good sources of medicines to treat diseases. The people praised God with such statements as '*Thanks to God!The person being attended* to, *and who is under our humble treatment will survive by the wishes of God! This sick person will survive by the grace and the will of God! We treat, but God cures! '* 'Muuntû ûû nî weetû nnaa Mûruungu! Baatwî twîîmûjîyia nna wiinyiia, îîndî nnî Ngai Mûruungu Mweenne inya yoonthe ûkaamwoorria mûrimmo jûrîa jûkûmûthaangîkia!'

The surrounding communities benefited from the forest patches which provided them with abundant firewood, honey, fish, birds, and herbal medicine. The nearby residents fetched clean water for their domestic use and their livestock. The Site has a very steep elevation characterized by persistent landslides; notably, it also attracted adventurers due to these characteristics. The historical phenomena include a huge stone-like object referred to as a meteorite, which fell from the sky in about 1945/1947, within the vicinity. The residents picked up the object. It was deposited in the National Museums of Kenya through the directives of the Colonial District commissioner.

### 7.11. Îgoombe sludge and Thaarrû salt water's role in family life

The families ensured that breastfeeding mothers were given a nutritional diet which was mixed with some minerals from Îgoombe in Îgeembe. The mineral water pans and springs of Îgoombe provided the water as a health drink, refreshment, and beverage, for human and livestock consumption. The mineral water which gushed out of the springs at Îgoombe was fetched and used to soften hard vegetables while cooking.

The Îgoombe Mineral Water is situated in Îgeembe Region of Mîîrû. It was valued for providing a sludge that was collected and dried. It was then ground for a variety of uses; for example, to blend tobacco snuff, to sweeten cooked food and porridge, etc. The expansive Tharrû mineral water in Imeenti Region of Mîîrrû, was divided into three sections by use: the section used by the elephants, *Mwoonyo jwa Njogu!,* the area used for livestock; and, Mwoonyo jwa ng'oombe!, the area used for people, Mwoonyo jwa antû! This facility benefitted many families.

**Plate 5. Extraction of mineral water products at Kaguru in Imeenti Region.**
(Photo by E. Mûtwîîri)

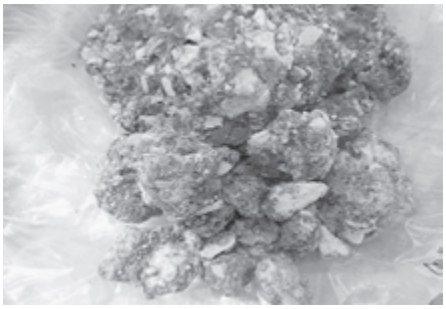

**Plate 6. Dried sludge salt, *Îgati* (The by-products of mineral water)**
(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

**Plate 7. Dried sludge salt, *Îthûi* (The by-products of Mineral Water)**
(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

The health status of the Amîîrrû families was maintained by the extractions from Îgoombe and the mineral water, Riitho, which they consumed for therapy, to prevent constipation, to soothe gaseous stomachs, and prevent cancerous ulcers. The mineral water springs also provided salt bricks called Îgati and Îtûi or Îthûi to soften hard vegetables and roughages. These substances add flavour to cooked food. Anointed elders and spiritual leaders visited these mineral water springs and marshes primarily for surveillance and to conduct rituals and prayers. As pointed out earlier, these sites were not visited by women who were breastfeeding babies, Ntommonnonni, for reasons best known to the Amîîrrû Elders.

### 7.12. Lake Mbutuutia's role in family life

The land along Lake Mbutuutia in Tigania Region was used traditionally for cultural rituals and offerings of slaughtered black-coloured lambs during times of famine, destructive floods, epidemics, and mysterious disease attacks, either on humans or their livestock. It was also used when the Age Groups of Kîruka and Ntîba prepared themselves to send the warriors on aggressive missions, such as cattle raiding, and according to interviewee No. 15, before the season for circumcision. The Mbutuutia sacred lake is situated in Kîanjaî in Tigania Region, off the Mîîrrû-Maûa Road. It was originally covered with huge indigenous trees and shrubs, which

were well-watered by rivers and streams. The area was equally covered by various reeds and gourd creepers, Rûûngû, which provided gourds, such as Ncheengerio, Tûkiri, and Tûjuga into which food was placed to feed the big snakes, including pythons, and a variety of small mammals, insects, and birds.

Visitors and family residents at Mbutuutia were prohibited from picking the gourds, Tûkiri, from this Sacred Site. The Amîîrrû believed that those gourds were instruments of the ancestral spirits and that any person who collected them to take home would face difficulties when these containers start complaining that:

'*Why are you torturing me, you woman?*'
'Nîmbi îgûtûmma ûmbûûrria na kûûnthaangîkia we Mweekûrrû?'

**Plate 8. Lake Mbutuutia sacred site**
(Photo by Mûrîthi Îtûnga)

These complaints would continue until the objects were returned to their original location. It would take the interventions of the Elders to cleanse those culprits, whose intentions defiled the Sacred Site. Plate No.8: Lake Mbutuutia sacred site shows farming encroachment and cows grazing on that land strip. According to interviewees: No. 18 and 19, the cleansing ceremonies were conducted by the High Priest, Mûgwe, who would instruct that the lamb should be slaughtered, roasted, and eaten by the Njûriîncheke Elders after the ritual sacrifice. The ancestral spirits were appeased after the Elders threw the lamb's skin and its guts and offal, Matuumbo, into the surrounding reeds. Thus, the concerned family would be saved from future calamities arising from discretion at the Sacred Site.

### 7.13. Nchaûrre salt water, Gîeto and Mbutuutia swamps' role in family life

The Nchaûrre salt water springs were frequently haunted by the spirits and many family members were scared to collect water from the springs, except for the members of one special clan called Kiutha. This spring was protected through close surveillance by the Elders for any interferences and interventions which had been provided through the Kiutha Clan, according to interviewees: No. 20 and 21. The Kiutha Clan glorified during communal dances with the citations such as: *'We are the Kiutha Clan! Outsiders are not allowed to interfere with this place!'*

The spirits only allowed the Kiutha Clan members to fetch water while they sang, *'These people are composed of pure members of Kiutha Clan! Let other clans not interfere!'* Gîkî nî Kiutha kîtheri gîtîthukannûtue! The clan members held prayers here while they were slaughtering lambs to appease their ancestral spirits. Other similar sacrifices and offerings were often conducted at the nearby Gîeto sacred swamp and Mbutuutia sacred swamp. Ceremonies which were conducted at the Gîeto sacred swamp included rituals to denounce the evils associated with famines, droughts, diseases, and other natural calamities, according to interviewee No. 17. The offerings of slaughtered unblemished lambs included a procession to the swamp which was led by the ancestral resident spirits. The elders who conducted the ceremony followed the steps of the spirits until they reached a destination where the offering was to take place. The physical benevolent spirits that were followed in the ritual procession included some pythons, leopards, gazelles, and birds which hovered on the gigantic trees on the edges of the Swamp. If any of these animals did not take part, the elders would return home because it was construed that the ancestral spirits would reject the gifts.

Only the chosen Elders ventured into the site to perform the intended sacrifices. The site was also used for thanksgiving offerings, during which an unblemished lamb was selected from a specific family from Antûbaita or Amûthetu Clans, to be slaughtered and presided over by the highly respected and knowledgeable priest, the Mûgwe. The lamb was killed by suffocation, and then it was slaughtered, and pieces of the meat were sliced and scattered in different directions while they were praying. The offal, organs, and guts were thrown into the centre of the Swamp to appease the resident ancestral spirits, Iruundu bia Bajûûjû. These spirits would accept the sacrifice by ululations and dances, which were loudly heard across the valley. This was regarded as an acceptance response to the prayers, indicating that the prayers would be answered by fulfilling their wishes. The ancestral spirits answered the rejection of the prayers, which had been offered during an earlier visit to the Swamp, before the sacrificial lamb was suffocated and slaughtered. If the Elders heard sounds of booing and shouting, they would return with the lamb to their homesteads. Enquiries would be made to the Mûgwe who would pray for a revelation from God. The nearby residents testified that Gîeto sacred swamp was at times haunted by bad spirits, Iruundu bia Nkomma, because they used to hear strange sounds of creatures dancing and singing circumcision songs by using mockery choruses. At times, the invisible creatures were heard singing other ceremonial songs, praising bumper harvests, and castigating bad incidences. The residents claimed that naughty people who entered the Sacred Swamp were severely punished by the spirits. They witnessed that in 1940 A.D., two soldiers vanished in the reeds of the Swamp after ignoring the warnings; they never resurfaced from the ground that had swallowed them. Simultaneously, some naughty, big, uncircumcised boys defiantly entered the Sacred Swamp grounds; they were grabbed by the ghosts, which had beckoned the village circumciser, M'Mûgwîîka M'Amaaî, to circumcise the boys amid much celebrations and pomp. Thus, there are many stories associated with these Sacred Swamps.

Gîeeto sacred swamp was a big swamp dominated by abundant reeds. It occupied a part of the Imeenti Forest which stretched to Kîrîmmaarra and Nyambeenne Forests. These forests

were inhabited by a large population of wild game: elephants, monkeys, buffaloes, leopards, jackals, antelopes, snakes, and big pythons. The area was closed to strangers because it was believed that it was a discretion of the sacred area to allow unclean people to set foot inside the area. Hence, only the anointed Njûriîncheke Elders and the Mûgwe, high priests, those with unblemished social status, Aarîki, and members of the families tasked to offer sacrificial lambs after a period of preparation were allowed inside this area. The Elders who were responsible to conduct the sacrifices at Gîeeto sacred swamp or at Mbutuutia sacred swamp were required to access the place by wearing a special attire of leather dress called Ngutukî, holding a black staff, Mûreegi, wearing a leather hat with fur, Muungî, carrying a small gourd, Mûtete, and a well-groomed calabash, Kajuga. When Christianity took root in the surrounding villages, the resident ancestral spirits that ruled Gîeeto and Mbutuutia sacred swamps were disturbed and migrated to an unknown place and they had called it Rûnyûrrî in their departure song. The disturbance was mainly caused by the adulteration of the Sacred Swamps, particularly by the colonial soldiers of the King's Rifles Regiment in the 2nd World War (1939–1945 A.D.), who had cleared the areas by cutting the reeds for thatching for their temporary houses at Kaaga Military Camp. These ancestral spirits left early one morning; they were heard singing a farewell song: '*We have migrated! We are headed to Rûnyûrrî!'* 'Twathaamma tweeta Rûnyûrrî!'

The Îturi Grove, which was near Ngachiûmma River, was invaded by ancestral spirits such that even strangers would be chased away unless they offered to perform prescribed gestures and signs acceptable to the spirits. The visitors were advised to carry a stone; then, after walking a short distance along the river, they were advised to throw the stone into the nearby Ngachiûmma River. The visitors who defied these instructions found themselves blocked by huge snakes and dangerous wild creatures which ended their mission, according to interviewee No. 36. At Gîeeto sacred swamp, families sacrificed unblemished lambs as was prescribed to appease the ancestral spirits. The resident ancestral spirits would accept a sacrifice which was to be conducted; however, the spirits could also refuse to acknowledge it and/or refuse to accept the prayers offered. Many offerings were conducted at the site to seek God's indulgence against disasters, diseases, droughts, and famines. The elders sacrificed the lambs at the field called Kaenni ka Mbûri, according to interviewee No.16. The gathering of the Elders attracted the resident ancestral spirits who led the procession into the Îturri Grove. At times, these ancestral spirits would appear in the form of animals, who would lead the procession while the elders were uttering praises of God and conducting the necessary prayers on behalf of the families and themselves. In case of the non-appearance of animals, the Elders would postpone sacrificing the lambs offered for that occasion. Then, they would go to the Mûgwe for directions. The Mûgwe would pray and if the answers were not forthcoming from God, he would prepare a pure lamb for prophesying, Kûrroria. He slaughtered the unblemished lamb; then, he examined the vital organs of the lamb, which revealed the situation at hand. Having done the unveiling examination, Kûrroria, he would answer the Elders' questions. After further counselling and wise guidance, the next action would be decided upon.

**7.14. Kîthimma kîa Mwooyo's role in family life (*the springs of life*)**

The Kîthimma gîa M'Araigua springs, was known as Kîthimma gîa Karunya nna Nkoonko (*warriors from Tigania and Imeenti Regions, respectively*), before 1956 A.D. Christian pastors of Rûirrî, Rwareerra, and Mîtûûntû have renamed it, 'Kîthimma kîa Mwooyo.', '*The Springs of Life*', because currently, they are baptizing many Christian adherents in these springs. Two warriors were fighting over complete control and occupation of grazing land and the water source in this area of Mîîrrû. Each warrior wanted to have complete monopoly over water and grazing rights for members of his clan, from Tigania or Imeenti Regions, respectively. Each of them sought total occupation of this site's neighbourhood so that people from their family group could use it. Finally, the Njûriîncheke Council of Elders resolved the conflict. During the periods of conflict between Karunya and Koonko, the surrounding communities kept close watch and vigilance and provided security to avoid any interference from unsubscribed outsiders, according to interviewee No. 15. The Kîthima kîa M'Araigua Site was surrounded by different sub-tribes, who had settled there to access the water from the springs and the savanna-land for grazing their livestock. Those who had settled at the site had diverse interests, which included the cultivation of land, grazing rights, and water for domestic and livestock use. The residents kept on arguing about the boundaries, the rights to graze, and access to water from the springs.

Consequently, Meru Colonial Annual Reports and extracts indicate that the persistent conflicts between Amîîrrû and neighbouring communities emanated from the grazing grounds, watering points, and salt licks. The general conflicts of the warring parties included cattle raids and inter-clan clashes that persisted and were subsequently resolved by the Njûriîncheke Council of Elders. The he-goat oath, Kûriinga Ntheenge, was preferred to ensure that there were no more quarrels over the user rights of the springs and the surroundings grass lands. This oath, Muumma, was called Nchaaû ya Ntigiri—which literary means *unity that was symbolized by the hoof of a donkey*—was administered by Elders of Njûriîncheke at the Kîthima kîa M'Araigua Site in 1928 A.D. under the sausage tree, (*Kigelia africana),* Mûraantinna. This oath restored peace and established a lasting solution between the Imeenti and Tigania community members. This act was applauded by the Colonial District Commissioner C.M. Johnson Mackay, who indicated that the Njûriîcheke leadership had restored peace. Around 1937 A.D., the District Commissioner directed that all leaders, including Chiefs, should be initiated into Njûriîncheke Eldership. The Kîthima kîa M'Araigwa site was also elevated into a recruitment and initiating centre, Gaarru ya Njûri/Nyoomba ya Njûri, to expand and promote Njûriîcheke membership and to continue maintaining peace. Inter-marriages took place to further unite the settlers and enhance peace in this area of Mîîrrû.

The existence of traditional customary laws protected the land parcels from being grabbed illegally, and secured sacred areas for family worship. The disputed areas were protected by the Elders' subscription to *oath-taking '*Muumma'' *pronouncements*, *oath proclamations, and oath decrees.* The oath Muumma was the most respected and honoured means of uniting various family members against any form of land grabbing and organizing plans to chase away or attack intruders without their knowledge. This oath was administered by

slaughtering a mono-coloured black he-goat in a secluded area within the vicinity, according to interviewee No. 41. The he-goat was presented to the Elders for sacrifice and the people, who attended the ceremony, were warned about the dire consequences of disclosing the oath-taking; such matters should never be discussed at any occasion with unconcerned people, including their family members, unless they were a part of the oath-taking process. The anointed Elder killed the he-goat by cutting its throat; its blood was poured into a waiting calabash. The blood was mixed with rumen waste, Thuunthunna, and with the sap extracted from a selection of ritual plants; then, honey was added. Next, people who attended this ceremony were required to consume the contents served to them by rotation from the same calabash, to enable everyone present to take a sip while reciting the following: '*What I am consuming today in a secret oath represents our land, which we must protect at all cost!* 'Kîrrîa twaanyua nnaarrua, na kîrrîa twaarrea nnaarrua, nna twaakunîkîrra nnaarrua, nnî kîa kûrwîîrra thîîrrî yeetû!' Incidentally, there are two other Sacred Sites, namely, Laarria/Raarria salt lick and Koonyo ka Mbûri, at the foot of Ndunyuchabu Hill, which served many families by providing daily drinking water for each family's livestock. They will be briefly discussed later as Maji ya Chumvi. Furthermore, Kathimma ka Ntoonjara Source Pan is located on top of Rîbûi Hill. The resident families were required to be alert about unknown visitors who may venture to acquire land parcels to settle there. Loyal men and women volunteers guarded their land. They would frequently consult each other in a forum outside the homestead. They served as guards when the community felt threatened. During surveillance, these guards were provided with food supplies. Each family would cook food and porridge and place it at some designated place along the fence to conceal their identity. These volunteer guards collected the food and drinks at night and returned the utensils to the same place after consuming the food; then, they disappeared into the bush.

**7.15. Lake Nkûûnga's role on family life**

The traditional families used the Lake Nkûûnga Sacred Site to perform rituals meant to denounce the factors affecting crops and harvests. The Nkûûnga Sacred Lake is located off the Meru-Nanyuki road within the lower Imeenti forest. This site is about 6 kilometres from Meru Town along the Meru-Nanyuki Highway. The rituals to denounce the occurrences of human diseases, epidemics, and pest invasions were conducted here. This lake is situated in a volcanic depression with volcanic stone chippings spread across the surroundings, and it is covered by aquatic floating grass, which lies below huge trees, which the traditional overseers protected from any interference through citations and prayers. Lake Nkûûnga was the home of a mystical seven-headed snake-like dragon called 'Nkûûnga' which gave the lake its name, based on the dreaded snake-like beast, Îrria-rîa-Nkûûnga, according to Amîîrrû traditional folktales. The lake was formed from extrusive volcanic eruptions that occurred ages ago; molten lava and magma spilled through a vent and created this lake. Thus, hot magma was spread in the neighbouring areas, leaving a depression known as Îrria-rîa-Nkûûnga, which is surrounded by extruding banks and forest trees. The magma that spread in the neighbourhood cooled and then solidified. Later, some of it was covered by soil on which vegetation thrives and overgrowth is regenerated. This area is

visited by various wild animals looking for grass and water. Many animals, particularly huge elephants, find this habitat conducive. The Nkûûnga Sacred Lake continues to attract spiritual missions by the traditional families and Christian followers—from diverse denominations across the region—who conduct their rituals and prayers, according to interviewee No. 43. She said that the human settlement within the area surrounding Nkûûnga, strived to undertake farming activities despite the dry and stony aspect which affects the area. However, roaming elephants impact these farming activities by destroying crops. Nevertheless, the resident families continue to fetch clean water from the Nkûûnga springs for domestic consumption and livestock. These springs are referred to as Tûthimma twa Nkûûnga, and are equally shared by the wild mammals, monkeys, and birds. Kîthimma gîa Nchîgî, Karûûjî ka Nnaitîîrra, Ngachiûûmma, Rûûrria / Lûûrria, Nchîrû and Kîthimma kîa Mwooyo / M'Araigua are thought to be streams from Lake Nkûûnga.

**7.16. Laarria and Koonyo ka Mbûri salt water's role in family life**

Laarria/Raarria and Koonyo ka Mbûri are called Maji ya Chumvi in the Kiswahili language. These adjacent sites have continued to serve Amîîrrû to date. The Maji-ya-Chumvi mineral water springs were used as sites for conducting prayers and rituals meant to avert frequent epidemics and diseases which affected humans and their livestock. The Elders convened here for a religious ceremony known as Gûkinya Ng'oondu (*stepping on the sacrificial ewe*), according to a neighbouring resident (No. 23). The livestock in the vicinity would be rounded up and gathered in one common area and would be driven to the Maji ya Chumvi grounds. A teenage boy accompanied by a small girl would be given a mono-coloured pure ewe by the Elders. Then, they were instructed to run around the herd in circles while the Elders upheld their black walking sticks, Mîreegi (plural); then, the elders moved in front of the livestock and start leading them. They pushed the cattle into Maji ya Chumvi swamp to induce the animals to drink the mineral water. The Elders ensured that all the cows licked and/or drunk some salty water. The Elders prayed while they walked, praised the ancestral spirits, and keenly waited for a response from the resident spirits. The ewe carried by the boy was killed. All those present were asked to jump on it, Gûkinya Ng'oondu. Then, the Elders carried it to the village. There was a road across the village where the residents had been asked to gather. Each resident present was anointed on the forehead with the ewe's blood. Then, everyone present was asked to pray while fully walking over the dead ewe, but not stepping on it. This act signified the ceremonial action of Gûkinya Ng'oondu. The ceremony continued until every resident had participated. Finally, the ewe was returned to the Sacred Site and left there to be eaten by wild animals. However, the families stopped performing this ritual with the advent of strict colonial administration and Christian prohibitions. Nevertheless, the rituals created a sense of family togetherness and unity.

The river habitat and riparian land provided many by-products which were used to enhance family rituals, sacrifices, and prayers. The Amîîrrû people believed that the presence of huge reptiles, mammals, birds, and insects, which resided in the river basins, provided either good or bad omens. The riverbanks, including the waterfalls, were subject to praises during evening camp-fire meetings as much as the sites which provided materials to be used in the performance

of rituals, prayers, food, clean water, and medicine. God in His mercies provided these areas which cut across and served the Amîîrrû communities, who believed that the spirits of some creatures could read human feelings. For example, they believed that an owl, Ntuuntuguru, which perched on the tree in the homestead and made some peculiar sounds, announced that a member of the family was going to die very soon. If a person sighted a python along the Kîthîînnû riverbank, it was a good omen, which revealed that the residents should expect a bumper harvest during that season; people should throw a portion of the harvested cereals into the Mûtiriingi Waterfall to thank God for providing them with a good harvest. There were designated Waterfalls within the rivers that served to discipline and reprimand the wrongdoers, criminals, sorcerers, witchdoctors, and witches, who were thrown into the waterfall as punishment.

### 7.17. Îthaangûûnne hill's role in the family's spiritual bond

Water fetched at the Îthaangûûnne Hill was regarded as a soothing therapy. It was used to heal those who were infected by incurable disease. Consequently, many people sought to apply the water to their skin to cure resistant ailments. This crystal-clear water was also used to bless new marriages and families.

**Plate 9. Îthaangûûnne hill**
(Photo by Mwaamba)

Families who lived near Kîeiga Hill respected this big rock which blended in to create the beautiful scenery of Kîeiga Hill forest patch. Married couples and the surrounding family members referred to this magnificent rock as 'Mûchierre', meaning *a beautiful woman in her prime age.* The surrounding areas near the Kîeiga Hill are noted for this woman-like, massive rock, which the residents believed to be the work of God to sanctify Kîeiga Hill. Married couples approached this feature with respect and the belief that if they said anything bad about the rock, they would be punished by the resident ancestral spirits. They trusted that the resident ancestral spirits could hunt and kill them should they discuss anything bad about this scenic feature. The residents refrained from collecting firewood when facing this majestic rock. This reverence led many families to sacrifice asking for various favours from the hill.

This hill was known to have resonant echoes which were partly associated with the

ancestral spirits that resided in the vicinity. The resident families were never scared about interacting with the birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals living in this forest patch; however, they would be scared by the sounds produced by invisible creatures. They believed that these sounds were express acts of either good or evil. Hence, they protected the *picturesque woman,* Mûchierre. The uncertainty of the messages pronounced by the echoes from the forest creatures ensured familial attachment to the forest patch, even though they were unaware of the consequences of their actions while within the surroundings. The families avoided cutting wood or felling trees for firewood, but they collected the fallen branches without fear. Cutting and felling trees were totally rejected by the resident ancestral spirits, which was expressed through the life threatening sounds that were produced by the creatures living in the forest patch. Nevertheless, all these occurrences helped to strengthen family bonds, driven by a sense of unity.

**7.18. Gakûûnni sacred site's role in family bond**

The regular family prayers, sacrifices, and offerings at the Gakûûnni Sacred Site were conducted to protect livestock while grazing. The neighbouring residents at the Gakûûnni Sacred Site drove their livestock to the site to hide them from intruders. This was the safest place for the families who grazed their livestock to avoid attacks by enemies. The ritual for protection was conducted at the site. They believed that this would blindfold any intruder and rustler from knowing where the livestock was hidden. The residents trusted that if they prayed, sacrificed by slaughtering an un-blemished goat, and made offerings to God, this area would remain exclusively protected for herding and that no intruder would dare to know where the livestock was kept. Anointed Elders conducted cleansing ceremonies at the site on behalf of the Mûgwe whenever residents felt that the site had been desecrated. Defilement included killing either a wild animal or livestock within the bounds of the Gakûûnni Site without good reason, destroying the trees and vegetation, or discarding pollutants or foreign objects within the Sacred Site. The cleansing ceremony was led by an elderly woman who carried twigs, Mathîgî, and demanded the sacrifice of an unblemished mono-coloured goat for the ceremony from the suspected culprit, intruder, or defiler. The sacrifice was done swiftly, as failure to cleanse the area attracted the wrath of the resident ancestral spirits; they believed that if they failed to offer the sacrifice, a curse would befall them and affect the whole clan. They also believed that if the victim did not confess and yield to the demands of providing an unblemished mono-coloured goat, the clan would throw down the twigs as a sign of their curses, after consultation with the woman celebrant leader who would prescribe punishment for the family members living within that homestead where the victim resided.

The sacrificial goat's meat would be consumed on the Site, leaving nothing that could be carried away from the site; even the bones and the skin were burned to ashes. Further prayers were conducted condemning the transgressor to appease the ancestral spirits so that they would grant mercy and shelter the community from other calamities. Annointed Male Elders also conducted a bigger and more solemn ceremony for the entire clan. During this ceremony, a small boy and a young girl were accompanied by an elderly man on a walk around the village, as they led an unblemished mono-coloured goat to be sacrificed. An elderly woman leader followed

them carrying a basket full of cereals as they proceeded to the appointed spot for the sacrifice. Prayers were held; then, the goat was slaughtered and its meat cooked with the cereals. Then, this food was consumed on the spot. This ceremony was concluded with prayers and dancing and by singing the praises of God.

**7.19. Kîbûûka riparian's role in the family bond**

Most popular sacrifices and prayers were conducted at Kîbûûka Riparian Site, which comprised the killing of an unblemished mono-coloured lamb for Kwaagia Mburra, *for the lack of rains;* hence, Kûûrragîra Mbûri, *intercessions for rains,* was conducted. These sacrifices were offered by Elders of the family / families which were traditionally class of sacrificing and offering prayers, aimed at averting a gross lack of rainfall, misfortunes, and livestock and human diseases, which had affected the area for an alarming period of time. Other sacrificial ceremonies were conducted at the site to seek a solution for the persistent drought which had affected the surroundings areas. An unblemished mono-coloured goat was brought by an Elder, who was followed by other Elders in a solemn procession. An Elder from sacrificial family, who led the procession with the sacrificial goat, handed it over to another elderly man from sacrificial lineage, who waded through the river. He put the goat into the flowing river led it across to the other side, according to interviewee No. 3. Other Elders slaughtered it at the bank of the river. They burnt all the meat along with the bones, hooves, horns, and skin to ashes. These ashes were thrown into the flowing river.

**Plate 10. The Mono-coloured ritual goat**
(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

After this sacrifice, it was expected that the rains that would immediately follow would extinguish the fire. Then Elders left the scene of the sacrifice confident that God had heard their prayers. All the resident families attached a lot of faith, respect, and honour to the surroundings of the Kîbûûka Confluence with Kathiita and Kîthîînnû Rivers, because the unseen ancestral spirits always guarded the area against destructive human activities. The people believed that the resident ancestral spirits would drive away any intruders and were able to chase away the defilers by caning them. The picking of twigs, Thaa, from this site was not prohibited. The people

who were prone to polluting the site would be surprised when the same contaminants they had dumped on that site were found at the doors of their homesteads.

**7.20. Ndurummo ya Nkarrî's role in the family bond**

The Ndurummo ya Nkarrî site was also used for sacrificial rituals to bring rainfall and curb droughts. The sacrifices involved the slaughtering of unblemished mono-coloured sheep early in the morning before sunrise. This sacrificial goat was wrapped with dry banana leaves. Then, it was thrown into a pool of water in front of the anointed Njûriîncheke Elder. If the sheep died immediately, it was assumed that the ancestral spirits and God had accepted the sacrifice. If the sheep emerged from the water and walked away, it was construed as a failure which clearly indicated that the sacrifice was not accepted. A repeat of the same sacrifice was to be organized, in consultation and with the advice of the Mûgwe, the foreseer, Kîrroria, and the regional High Priest. When the sacrifice was accepted, an eight-day ceremony was held. It was marked by big celebrations at the sacrifice's site, whereby the elders slaughtered another unblemished ram, which was wholly consumed. The assurance that God and the ancestral spirits were happy with their sacrifices consolidated their familial bonds.

**7.21. Kaumbaû Marshland's role in the family bond**

The ancestral spirits living in Kaumbaû Marshland usually beckoned and attracted animals, reptiles, birds, and insects to the edge of the Ntenderreenne Well which is at one end of this marshland. When animals strove towards the water, they died instantly. The poisonous well at Kaumbaû greatly surprised the surrounding community because flies, mosquitoes, snakes, frogs, and birds, which came into contact with this bubbling well, died instantly, according to interviewee No. 31. However, there were magnetic forces which pulled the creatures to the well, which were believed to be the work of the resident ancestral spirits that had invaded the well. The surrounding marshland was encroached by residents to create space for farming because residents believed that these ancestral spirits had chosen to migrate to Giitûûnne gîa Karrienne, a remnant forest. The resident ancestral spirits at Giitûûnne gîa Karrienne, a remnant forest, were annoyed and disturbed when the road contractor uprooted arrowroots and huge trees and excavated the picturesque stones. This was around the 1960s A.D., when the Nkûûbû-Mîîrû Road was being constructed. The Giitûûnne ancestral spirits relocated to an unknown place called Rûnyûrrî. The familial bonds were temporarily destabilized. Nevertheless, people were consoled when the road improved the economy of the residents, which strengthened the familial bonds once more.

**7.22. M'Mweenda Cave's role in the family bond**

According to interviewee No. 32, M'Mweenda Cave had been particularly transformed into a hide-out for the Amîîrrû family warriors from 1800–1853 A.D. during the period of inter-tribal wars with neighbouring tribes. The traditional governments of Age Groups, which were then affected, include the following: Mbarrata (1815A.D.), Kîrruuja I (1828 A.D.), Thaambuurru (1840 A.D.), and Ntûrrûntimi (1853 A.D.). This cave has a small entrance, such that those who

entered had to crawl on their stomachs. The warriors who accessed the cave were spiritually prepared to undertake the mission. It was believed that they would never be attacked by the dangerous wild animals residing in the surroundings. There are two rock table benches located on both sides of the Cave's entrance. These rock table benches were held by the hands as a supporting action to enable the entrance of people into the Cave. Then, one would slowly release his hand from the bench so that one could reach closer to the door.

Cave users uttered words of praise for the ancestral spirits while they strolled alongside the benches which led towards an area guarded by invisible Cave guards. These guards were armed with visible swords and spears to kill any spiritually unclean human intruders and dangerous animals if they dared enter. Walking further inside, one was led into a spacious meeting hall which accommodated about 80 people. This space was designed for meat roasting, rituals, and sacrifices, according to interviewee No. 32. The blood of slaughtered animals was poured into a partially concealed cleavage along the entrance of the Cave.

**8. Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that as shown in Annex 2, there were many other Sacred Sites, which had been designated for family worship. Some of them include the following: Ngong'unnabûû, Ngarrîndarrî, Kîthimma gîa Nchîgî, Karûûjî ka Nnaitîîrra, Karrienne Swamp, Kîthiithinna, Gîkîîndûnne, Kîrrammata, Kînyaritha, Kîthimma gîa Chabuenne, Ngarînnaarro, Nkachîî, Kanyûûrrooko, Irri, Mîrurîîrrî, Ndunyumûtûnyi, Mûtoonga, Nithi, Thûûchî, Mûurro jwî Nkoondi Îrumma, Thaganna, Kuurru, Mweerronkoro, Mweerronkanga, Libûbûng'i, Lûûrria, Lûbûnni, Kîarre, Guathûmmarra, Nchoorro, Mûrûûta, Lailûba, Kammanoorro, Lîliabba, Lîuutu, Kaliimba, Lûûmma, Urra, Thiitha, Thaangatha, and Thannaantû, to name a few.

Family spirituality was extremely important to the Amîîrrû community. This spiritual practice developed very strong moral and ethical values in the Amîîrrû men and women, which enhanced familial bonds. It was against this spiritually-rich background that Christianity found its way into Mîîrrû. However, the truth is that colonial powers introduced Christianity and other foreign systems in Africa, fully motivated by a policy of divide and rule for effective occupation, which was propelled by the *deliberate destruction of African traditional education, culture, and heritage.* This policy was well articulated on 2 February, 1835 by Lord Macaulay, who recommended to the British Parliament *to replace the old and ancient African Indigenous Education and Cultural Heritage* with everything English and foreign. To quote his statement*: 'I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education, culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture, and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation.* Currently, many educated African men and women are suffering from the effects of the destructive colonial policy and

domination. It is most unfortunate and ironic that the European administrators, traders, and missionaries falsely summarized the rich spiritual culture of the Amîîrrû as paganism, people who had no religion, and heathens, people who did not know or worship God; this was done to ensure that their colonial policy succeeded, in line with the above quoted statement.

**Annex 1. A variety of products extracted from natural sites and habitats**

**Table 1. Plant Extracts used as Herbal Medicine**

| Botanical name | Local name | Some local usage |
|---|---|---|
| Cathas edulis/Khat | Mîraa | Stimulant/Ritual Plant |
| Dovyalis abyssinica | Mûrroo | Blending Soups |
| Ricinus communis | Mwaarrîki | Lotion for Skin/Ritual/Straw |
| Euphorbia grantii | Mûthûûrri | Treats Ear Aches |
| Osyris lanceolata | Mûthithi | Edible Fruit/Treats Dysentery |
| Harungana madagascerienciss | Mûnyamwe | Treats Malaria |
| Galinsoga parviflora | Mûngei | Treats Stomach Problems |
| Bidens Pilosa | Mûnyûgûnyûgû | Treats Liver Problems |
| Combretum molle | Mûramma | Treats Snake Bites |
| Tagetes minuta | Mûbaangi | Insect Repellent |
| Cuscuta campestris | Thîînna | Treats Pimples |
| Solanum incurnum | Mûtoongu | Treats Anthrax/Snakebite/Ritual Plant |
| Leonatis mollissima | Mûchiibi | Treats Gall Sickness |
| Plectaranchus ambionicus | Mûjarra | Sanitary/Rituals |
| Schoebera elata | Mûtuumma | Treats Headaches |
| Cyperus articulata | Ndago | Treats Headaches |
| Vernomia lasiopus | Mwaatha | For Intestinal Worms |
| Viscum fischeri/tuberculatum | Kîee kîa Mûraangi | Regulates Menstruation |
| Cucurbita maxima | Mareenge | Anti-inflammatory/Potency |
| Mondia whytei | Muukûrwa | Sexual Stimulant |

**Table 2. Plant/Animal Extracts used as Food, Tools, Instruments, and Biomedicine**

| Botanical/Scientific name | Local name | Some local usage |
|---|---|---|
| Vangueria madagascariensis | Mwiirrû/Mûbirrû | Edible Fruit/Medicinal |
| Kigelia africana | Mûraantinna | Fermentation/Ritual/Medicinal |
| Dalbergia melanoxylon | Mweengo | Walking Sticks/Medicinal |
| Melletia oblata | Mwaangua | Posts/Poles/Medicinal |
| Elaedendron buchananii | Mûtîmweerrû | Extracted Poison from Fruit |
| Annona reticulata | Mûtomoko | Edible Fruit/Medicinal |
| Urtica massaica | Thaa | Edible/Medicinal |
| Ocotea usambaressis | Mûthaitî | Furniture/Tools/Medicinal |
| Vitex keniensis | Muurru- (Meru Oak) | Instruments/Medicinal |
| Scorpiones | Kang'aurrî | Extract Poison/Medicinal |
| Lovea swynnertinii | Mûkoongorro | Log Bridges/Medicinal |
| Honey | Ûûkî/Nainchû | Antiseptic/Meat Preservation |
| Tarbernaemontana stapfiana/elegans | Mweerrere | Sap for Trapping Birds/TB |
| Arundinaria alpina | Mûraangi | Mats/Medicinal |
| Triumfetta marophylla | Mûjiijo | Weaving Baskets/Medicinal |

**Table 3. Indigenous Trees for Retention of Water and Moisture; Ritual and Sacred Plants**

| Botanical name | Local name | Some local usage |
|---|---|---|
| Ficus thoningii/natalensis | Mûgummo | Sacred/Ritual/Riverbank Protection |
| Ficus Sycomorus | Mûkûû | Sacred/Ritual/Riverbank Protection |
| Anthodeista zambeziara | Mûrigûrigû | Riverbank Protection |
| Hagenia abyssinica | Mûjuga | Riverbank Protection |
| Zyzigium guinensee | Mûrîîrrû | Riverbank Protection |
| Raphia farinefera | Palm/Mwaarre | Riverbank Protection |
| Newtoniabuchananii | Mûkûûi | Riverbank Protection |

**Table 4. Animal and Natural Products Used by Families**

| Product | Use |
|---|---|
| Clay Soil | For earthenware pots |
| Sheep's Wool/Bird's Feathers | For hats |
| Egg Shells | For Necklaces |
| Porcupine's Quills | Arrowheads, for straightening hair |
| Animal Bones | Bracelets |
| Cow Tails | Flywhisk |
| Reeds/Sedge (Îrriimba) | Dancing skirt/thatching/mats |
| Cordia africana, (Mûriinga Tree Bark) | Sandals |
| Animal Horns | Drinking container/Blown as siren |
| Animal Skin | Manufacture of drum/clothes/costume |
| Ocotea usambelensis, (Mûthaitî Wood) | Carvings, tools, furniture |
| Black Stone | Sack poison from snake bite |
| Iron Ore | Manufacture of tools, implements |
| Nchûûi (a sucking tool made from horn) | Remove rotten blood from fresh wounds |
| Hard Grinding Stone (Înnoorro) | Sharpen instruments/tools |
| Shield (Rong'o/Ngaa) | Protection and dancing instruments |
| Fossil Stone ( Ntoonga) | Remove placenta in livestock/Snake bite cure |
| Stone/Volcanic Stone (Magîînga) | To smoothen dry skin on feet |
| Red/White Ochre | Smeared on body for ritual and beauty |

**Annex 2. List of Sites, Shrines, Groves, and Habitats in Meru/Tharaka Nithi Counties that were Regularly Visited to enhance the Amîîrrû Family Culture and Traditions, and the Extraction of By-products.**

| Site name | Locality | County |
|---|---|---|
| Kîbûûka Sacred Site | Tharaka Central | Tharaka Nithi |
| Gakûûnni Sacred Site | Tharaka Central | Tharaka Nithi |
| Mûkwairwîîga Sacred Site | Tharaka Central | Tharaka Nithi |
| Manyiraanni Sacred Site | Marimanti | Tharaka Nithi |
| Ndiairî Sacred Site | Marimanti | Tharaka Nithi |
| Maraagwa Sacred Site | Nkondi | Tharaka Nithi |
| Ikwa Sacred Site | Nkondi | Tharaka Nithi |
| Kîegeege Sacred Site | Nkondi | Tharaka Nithi |
| Ndururummo-ya-Nkarî Sacred Site | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Ndurummo-ya-gakirîrro | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Îgoombe Salt Lake | Îgeembe | Meru |
| Equator Tamaduni M'Rûkûnga Cultural Center | Imeenti Central | Meru |
| Thaarrû Mineral Water Springs | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Meru Museum | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Theemwe Salt Lick | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Lewa Conservancy | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| River Mûtoonga Stone Excavation Quarry | Meru/Embu Road | Meru |
| Ngaya Forest | Îgeembe North | Meru |
| Kîathaandi Hills | Adjacent Meru Town | Meru |
| Kîanuunku Hill | Adjacent Meru Town | Meru |
| Mûgorro Forest | Mîkiindûri | Meru |
| River Kathiita Gîtwîîki Waterfall | Meru Town | Meru |
| Mbili Waterfall | Mîkiindûri | Meru |
| Devils' Bridge Waterfall | Adjacent Meru Town | Meru |
| Kamûrraamba Maû Kitchen | Meru National Park | Meru |
| Mûchierre Stone Woman/KîeigaForest | Meru Mîkiindûri Road | Meru |
| Iiga-rîa-Ngutu/Iiga-rîa-Nkenye | Tigania East/Nyambeenne Range | Meru |
| Giitûûnne Sacred Forest | Imeenti Central | Meru |
| Maanku-Kîthîînnû River Falls | Imeenti south | Meru |
| Ndiîînne Falls | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Ndiîî ya M'Ntaanni | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Kîanniangîîrrî | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Nkûûnga Sacred Lake | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Kînnuunkeenne Tunnel/Caves | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Mûchierreenne Sacred Lake | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Kîrîmma-kîa-Mîkûû | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Kîrîmma-kîa-Mwîîmbî | Tharaka Nithi | Tharaka Nithi |
| Njûriîncheke Nchîrû Shrine | Tigania West | Meru |
| Ng'oong'a Tunnel | Mîtûngûû | Meru |
| Kîjege Hill | Tharaka | Tharaka Nithi |
| Îthaangûûnne Table Mountain | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Lake Rûmûikû/Îrriimbeenne | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Kîrriinga Forest Patch | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Lake Mbutuutia Sacred Site | Tigania West | Meru |
| Kagerwe Springs | Imeenti Central | Meru |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kings African Rifles Memorial Plaque | Kaaga/Imeenti North | Meru |
| 2nd World War Memorial Monument | Kaaga/Imeenti North | Meru |
| Nkaando-e-Nkomma Maû Maû Hide-out | Imeenti Central | Meru |
| Rweerrea Nyoomba-ya-Njûri | Mîkiindûri | Meru |
| Nyambeenne Hills Forest Habitat | Nyambeenne | Meru |
| Maû-Maû Camp Kînoru | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Karîmma-ka-Njûri Mîtungûû | Imeenti South | Meru Njûrîîncheke Cultural Centre |
| The footsteps of Jesus 'Makinya ja Jesû' | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Înnandurru Caves | Maarra | Tharaka Nithi |
| The Elephant Corridor | Bûûrî | Meru |
| Mt. Kenya Lakes: Harris, Rûtûûndû, Îthaangûûnne | Mt. Kenya | Meru |
| Gîkoombe Gorge-Mûcheege Forest Patch | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Nthûngûûrrû Forest Patch | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Ngîrrîînne Hill/Heights | Imeenti South | Meru |
| M'Mweenda's Cave Mûchîeenne | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Nyoomba-ya-Aathi Cave Îrarrû | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Kîeiga Hill Forest Patch | Mîkiindûri | Meru |
| Laarria/Raarria Salt Lake | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Îturri Grove | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Gîeeto Sacred Site | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Maji-ya-Chumvi Mineral Water Springs | Tigania West | Meru |
| Lake Thaaî Sacred Grove | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Nturrukumma Sacred Grove | Bûûrrî | Meru |
| Kîenni-gîa-Kathaata | Igeembe | Meru |
| Gîkongorro-kîa-Mbinna | Imeenti South | Meru |
| Gîkongorro-kîa-M'Kîîrrîka Log Bridges | Imeenti North | Meru |
| Kîenni-gîa Mwiitari | Mîîrîga-Mîerrû | Meru |
| Kîrîîrwa-Kîrago-kwa-Mûgwe | Imeenti Central | Meru |
| Meru National Park Habitat | Meru/Tharaka | Meru& Tharaka Nithi |
| Ngarrendarre (Ngarrîntarrî), Kîagû, Kîjege, Kîeerrera, Gîkiingo, Maatha, Mûteejwa, Ntugî, Thûûrrî, Ngaya Forests | Meru/Tharaka Nithi | Meru/Tharaka Nithi |
| Îgaîrroonni | Tharaka | Tharaka Nithi |

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**Acknowledgements of interviewees**

1. Erick Mûrîîthi, a 32-year-old seminarian, interviewed 2019
2. Chief Robert Mweebia, 58 years of age, age group Mûng'atia, interviewed 2017
3. Charity Nchama, 85 years of age, agegroup 'Mûkami'equivalent Kaburu/Gîchûrû, interviewed 08/01/2018
4. Gideon M'Arîmi, born in 1934, age-set Gîchûrû/Mbaee, interviewed on 29/05/2002
5. Mary Njirû M'Ajogi, born in 1893, age-set (Mûgito) Mûrûûngî/Riûngû, interviewed in May 2002
6. Ephraim M'Ikîara, born in 1928, age-set Mbaya, interviewed on 15/05/02 and 1/06/2002
7. Alice Mbûûthû M'Ikîara, 60 years of age, interviewed 2002–2004
8. Josphat M' Rûkinraangi, born in 1928, age-set Kaburu/Gîchûrû
9. John M'Rûkûûnga, born in 1930, age-set Kaburu/Gîchûrû, interviewed in 2018; he died on 25 October 2019
10. John M'Mûgwîîka, born in 1912, age-set Mîrîti/Kaaria
11. M'Înoti M'Mwirîchia, born 88 years ago, age-set Mîrîti/Kaaria, interviewed on 4/06/2002
12. Margaret Chiorwîîgî M'Kwaarria, born in 1888, age 114 years, age-set Mûrûûngî, interviewed on 19/06/2002
13. M'Mburûgû Kububeria, age 79 years, age-set Kaburu/Gîchûrû, interviewed 2002
14. Erastus Mûgaambi, age 61 years, age-set Mbaya/Mbaee, interviewed 2002
15. M'Ikîao M'Mûthuurri, age 93 years, age-set Mûrûûngî/Riûngû, interviewed 2002
16. Mr. & Mrs. Phillip M'Îtueraandû, age 73 years, age-setMbaee/Mûrûgû, interviewed 2002
17. Ngeera Nkonko, age 81 years, age-set Mbae/Mûrûgû, Interviewed 2002
18. Kaunyaangi Thimangû Mûtuorroi, age 65 years, Kîbaabu/Ratanya age-set, interviewed 2002
19. M'Ibûi Chiokarînga, age 93 years, age-set Murungi/Riungu, interviewed 2002
21. HDr Stanley M'Araigua, age 63 years, age-set Gîchûûnge, interviewed 2002
22. M'Mûrîthi Mwoorria, age 78 years, age-set, Mbae, interviewed 2002
23. Mr. M'Rîmbeerre, age 73 years, age-set Mbaee/Guantai, interviewed 2002
24. Jason M'Mûgwîîka, born in 1912, age-set Kaburu/Gîchûrû
25. Stanley Kîbuî Rûteerre, age 93 years, age-set Mûrûûngî/Riûngû
26. George Kîmaathi Rîntaugû, age 68 years, age-set Kîbaabu
27. Chief Kathia M'Magaambo, age 61 years, age-set Kîbabu, interviewed 2019
28. John Kîrîmi Mûrerwa, age-set Kîbaabu, interviewed 2005
29. P.D. Okwaro, National Museums of Kenya
30. Japhet Mwîkaamba, information on Kîbûûka site, May 2015
31. Paul Kîbwîî
32. Isaya M'Ndeegwa, age 80 years, age-set Kaburu, interviewed 2002
33. Tom Nguthaarri, born in 1958, age-set Gîchûûnge,
34. Josphat M'Rûkîraangi, born in 1928, age-set Mbae
35. Jason M'Mûgwîîka, born in 1912, age-set Mîrîti/Kaaria, interviewed 5/06/2002
36. Esther Kanyore, age 120 years, age-set (Mûgito) Mûrûûngi/Riûngû, interviewed 2008
37. Patrick Kînyua M'Mûrîîthi, age 67 years, age-set Kîbaabu, interviewed 2008
38. Julius Riûngû Manyara, 68 years of age, agegroup Kîbaabu

39. Tirus Mîrîti, Kîbaabu
40. Michael Gîtobu M'Rînyirû, Kîbaabu
41. Louis Chiomwebia Jonathan, born in 1938, age 81 years, age-set Mukami, interviewed 2018
42. Aaron M'Abûri, age 86 years, age-set Mbaabu/Kîbaabu
43. Marion Mûgûre Kînoti, aged 61 years, Mûcheche/Mbaabu interviewed in 2019