

Family Dynamics and Memories in Kenyan Villages

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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

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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 Amîrrû 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 Amîrrû or Amîrû, spelt Ameru in previous publications, and their neighbouring communities.

The introductory chapter of this volume by Njũgũna Gĩchere describes the ethics and prohibitions in Agikũyũ customary marriage in both traditional and modern settings. The stories about the origin of the Agikũyũ 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 Amîrrû 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 Mûtŵiri and S. A. Mûgambi Mwithimbû observes the family ethics of the Amîrrû 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 Kîmmîrrû, or Kîmîrrû, 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 Kîmîrrû 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

Njūgūna Gichere was born and brought up in Kiharū, Mūrang'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 gazettelement 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 Ūembe 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: Sairyū-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); 'Homosexuality evoked: adult video of "bukake" 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 Mútwiri 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 *The African Elephant*, *Black Rhinoceros*, *African Mammals* and *African Birds*. He is an entrepreneur hotelier, the director Nkubu Safari Camp Amiiirru cultural resource center, currently vice chairman Imenti sub-county *NjuriinchekeyaAmiirru* and Vice chairman IKWA.

Stephen Anthony Múgambi Mwithimbú 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”*.