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.

---

(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:

[(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.

[(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.

References

Cotran, E. 1969. *Restatement of African Law, Kenya 2: The Law of Succession*. London: Sweet and Maxwell.

Ishida, S. 2008. The indigenous law of the Îgembe of Kenya: An anthropological study. In (M. Miyamoto and J. J. Baptist, eds.) *Legal Culture in South-East Asia and East Africa* (Sabah Museum Monograph Vol. 11), pp. 145–239. Department of Sabah Museum, Kota Kinabaru, Sabah, Malaysia.

Lamont, M. 2011. Decomposing pollution? Corpses, burials, and affliction among the Meru of central Kenya. In (M. Jindra and J. Noret, eds) *Funerals in Africa: Explorations of a Social Phenomenon*, pp. 88–108. Berghahn Books, Oxford and New York.

Matsuzono, M. 2014. *Ichiaro*: An Igembe way of punishing and forgiving. In (N. Gichere, S. A. M. Mwithimbu and S. Ishida eds.) *Culture in Peace and Conflict Resolution within Communities of Central Kenya,* pp. 17–44. National Museum of Kenya, Nairobi.

M'Imanyara, A. M. 1992. *The Restatement of Bantu Origin and Meru History*. Longman Kenya, Nairobi.

Nyaga, D. 1997. *Custom and Traditions of the Meru*. East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi.

Peatrick, A. 2000. Life and death: Traditional religious conception among the Meru in Kenya. *Les Cahiers de l'IFRA* 19: 77–85.

Acknowledgements

Writing this paper would not have been possible without the help and good-will of the numerous people, young and old, in Meru North District. My greatest debt is to many senior members of villages, whose help in many cases went far beyond the interview sessions.

I wish to express my very sincere thanks to Mr. David Kimathi Muthee, who has been a good friend of mine for a decade and continuously helped me with my research. His home has really been a place of joy and relaxation for me.

My deepest gratitude also goes to Dr Shin-ichiro Ishida at Tokyo Metropolitan University, who first introduced me to the Îgembe people and their culture and has since provided me with every necessary support at each stage of my research.