

Chapter 6

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

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

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

2. Historical family life perspectives

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Courtship and marriage process

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

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

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

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

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



Plate 1. Amîrrû's matrimonial homestead

(Courtesy of Imeenti South Njûriñcheke's Cultural Centre- Mîtungûû. Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. The roles of husband and wife

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

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

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

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

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

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

⁽³⁾ The first instrument of power - *Mace* was 'Îtummo ria Mwito' which was carried by *Koommenjue* during the migrations from *Mbwaa* to *Mîrrû*.

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

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

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

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

5. Family law

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Inheritance by family members

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

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

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

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

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

7. Spiritual bonds of family life

7.1. Elders' role in the family

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

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

7.2. Christian influence on the family

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.4. Sacred sites' role in the family

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

7.5. Kîrîmmaarra and Nyambeenne ranges’ role in family religious life

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

⁽⁸⁾ A curse Mûgiro or Kîrumi, bewitched through evil spirits, was feared and required the intervention of the spirits of the dead ancestors.

⁽⁹⁾ Social order implies authoritative instructions and directions to be followed by all people and organized groups.

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

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

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

7.6. Nturrunkumma sacred grove's role in family life

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

7.7. Lake Thaaî's role in family life

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

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



Plate 3. Lake Thaaĩ (Photo by E. Mûtĩwĩrĩ)

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

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

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

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

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

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

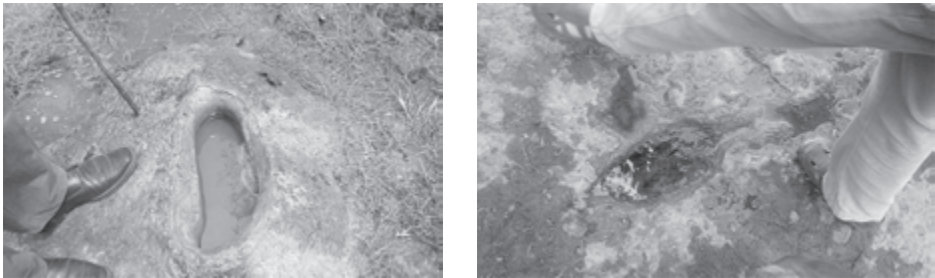


Plate 4. Ancestral footsteps at Theemwe Sacred Salt Pan
(Photo by Titus Gîtumma, Tito)

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

to ensure that order was maintained. They guided the visitors, including those who were on spiritual missions⁽¹⁰⁾ across the gallery forest and particularly those destined to climb to the top of Kîrîmmaarra, Mount Kenya. These elders ensured that there was minimal interference at the sacred site, as well as the surrounding areas; they provided express authority for the determination of spiritual solutions.

7.9. An example of a family member who frequented sacred sites

M'Ikîarra, a spiritual leader, had never revealed to anyone about his intentions to visit Kîrîmmaarra, the mountain. The authors of this paper tried to have an audience with him several times, but he gave scant information about himself and his missions on the Kîrîmmaarra. M'Ikîarra simply said, '*Let's all Praise God of Kîrîmmaarra, Mount Kenya!*', 'Tûthaathagienni Ngai wa Kîrîmmaarra!' He feared that talking too much about his mission would provoke the anger of evil spirits against him, which would result in making the security personnel curtail his trips across Mount Kenya, thereby leading to breaking the traditional laws and social order. M'Ikîarra's wife Alice Mbûûthû, who was about 60 years old, later told the authors that her husband was an ardent believer and never interacted freely with humans, including her. M'Ikîarra was not interested in power, the acquisition of properties, or wealth. She stated that at some time in the past, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) Officers had asked M'Ikîarra whether he would be interested in receiving donation of a posh mill to abandon his habit of making regular visits to Kîrîmmaarra, the mountain. He refused the offer by answering that his survival was based on natural products which were prepared in the bush and the makeshift dwellings beside his wife's hut.

7.10. Gîkoombe sacred valley's role in family life

The Gîkoombe sacred valley was used as a hideout area for families during cattle rustling, between 1840 and 1878 A.D., when the Thambuurru, Ntûrrûntimmi, Kûbai, and Kabûria Age Groups were in power and ruling the Amîrrû; later, the Valley became the hideout for the MaûMaû Freedom Fighters, around 1952-1963 A.D. during the struggle for Kenya's Independence, according to interviewee No. 38. Many family members, including children and women, were concealed in a secluded valley under huge trees beside the flowing river. The livestock were left in the homesteads and were herded by the men. The main activities in this seclusion were prayers, sacrifices, and rituals offered by the Elders to denounce the enemies. The river valley provided a variety of green vegetables, fruits, and herbs. Herbal medicinal was extracted from the trees and vegetation for treatment of sickness and injuries (see Annex1, Table 1). The traditional medicine healthcare practitioners visited the site to collect a variety of herbs and other requirements for their trade; insects, animal portions, the dung of elephants, all sorts

⁽¹⁰⁾ Theemwe site was regularly visited by a spiritual leader *Ephrain M'Ikîarra*, born 1928, Age-set Kîbaya/Mbaee. He surprised the KWS and Forestry personnel when in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, he visited the mountain top barefooted without any protective clothing.

of snakes, and various plants and mineral pebbles were good sources of medicines to treat diseases. The people praised God with such statements as *'Thanks to God! The person being attended to, and who is under our humble treatment will survive by the wishes of God! This sick person will survive by the grace and the will of God! We treat, but God cures!'* 'Muuntû ûû nî weetû nnaa Mûruungu! Baatwî twîmûjîyia nna wiinyia, îndî nnî Ngai Mûruungu Mweenne inya yoonthe ûkaamwooria mûrimmo jûrîa jûkûmûthaangîkia!'

The surrounding communities benefited from the forest patches which provided them with abundant firewood, honey, fish, birds, and herbal medicine. The nearby residents fetched clean water for their domestic use and their livestock. The Site has a very steep elevation characterized by persistent landslides; notably, it also attracted adventurers due to these characteristics. The historical phenomena include a huge stone-like object referred to as a meteorite, which fell from the sky in about 1945/1947, within the vicinity. The residents picked up the object. It was deposited in the National Museums of Kenya through the directives of the Colonial District commissioner.

7.11. Îgoombe sludge and Thaarrû salt water's role in family life

The families ensured that breastfeeding mothers were given a nutritional diet which was mixed with some minerals from Îgoombe in Îgeembe. The mineral water pans and springs of Îgoombe provided the water as a health drink, refreshment, and beverage, for human and livestock consumption. The mineral water which gushed out of the springs at Îgoombe was fetched and used to soften hard vegetables while cooking.

The Îgoombe Mineral Water is situated in Îgeembe Region of Mîrrû. It was valued for providing a sludge that was collected and dried. It was then ground for a variety of uses; for example, to blend tobacco snuff, to sweeten cooked food and porridge, etc. The expansive Tharrû mineral water in Imeenti Region of Mîrrû, was divided into three sections by use: the section used by the elephants, *Mwoonyo jwa Njogu!*, the area used for livestock; and, *Mwoonyo jwa ng'oombe!*, the area used for people, *Mwoonyo jwa antû!* This facility benefitted many families.



Plate 5. Extraction of mineral water products at Kaguru in Imeenti Region.
(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

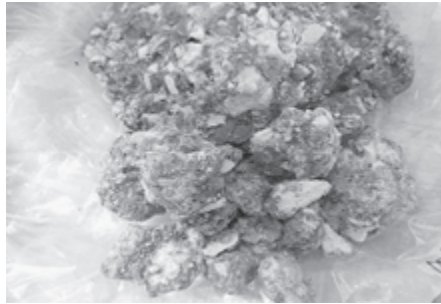


Plate 6. Dried sludge salt, *Îgati* (The by-products of mineral water)
(Photo by E. Mútwîri)



Plate 7. Dried sludge salt, *Îthûi* (The by-products of Mineral Water)
(Photo by E. Mútwîri)

The health status of the Amîrrû families was maintained by the extractions from Îgoombe and the mineral water, Riitho, which they consumed for therapy, to prevent constipation, to soothe gaseous stomachs, and prevent cancerous ulcers. The mineral water springs also provided salt bricks called Îgati and Îtûi or Îthûi to soften hard vegetables and roughages. These substances add flavour to cooked food. Anointed elders and spiritual leaders visited these mineral water springs and marshes primarily for surveillance and to conduct rituals and prayers. As pointed out earlier, these sites were not visited by women who were breastfeeding babies, Ntommonnonni, for reasons best known to the Amîrrû Elders.

7.12. Lake Mbutuutia's role in family life

The land along Lake Mbutuutia in Tigania Region was used traditionally for cultural rituals and offerings of slaughtered black-coloured lambs during times of famine, destructive floods, epidemics, and mysterious disease attacks, either on humans or their livestock. It was also used when the Age Groups of Kîruka and Ntîba prepared themselves to send the warriors on aggressive missions, such as cattle raiding, and according to interviewee No. 15, before the season for circumcision. The Mbutuutia sacred lake is situated in Kîanjaî in Tigania Region, off the Mîrrû-Maûa Road. It was originally covered with huge indigenous trees and shrubs, which

were well-watered by rivers and streams. The area was equally covered by various reeds and gourd creepers, Rûûngû, which provided gourds, such as Ncheengerio, Tûkiri, and Tûjuga into which food was placed to feed the big snakes, including pythons, and a variety of small mammals, insects, and birds.

Visitors and family residents at Mbutuutia were prohibited from picking the gourds, Tûkiri, from this Sacred Site. The Amîrrû believed that those gourds were instruments of the ancestral spirits and that any person who collected them to take home would face difficulties when these containers start complaining that:

'Why are you torturing me, you woman?'

'Nîmbi îgûtûmma ûmbûûrria na kûûnthaangikia we Mweekûrrû?'



Plate 8. Lake Mbutuutia sacred site
(Photo by Mûrîthi Îtûnga)

These complaints would continue until the objects were returned to their original location. It would take the interventions of the Elders to cleanse those culprits, whose intentions defiled the Sacred Site. Plate No.8: Lake Mbutuutia sacred site shows farming encroachment and cows grazing on that land strip. According to interviewees: No. 18 and 19, the cleansing ceremonies were conducted by the High Priest, Mûgwe, who would instruct that the lamb should be slaughtered, roasted, and eaten by the Njûriîncheke Elders after the ritual sacrifice. The ancestral spirits were appeased after the Elders threw the lamb's skin and its guts and offal, Matuumbo, into the surrounding reeds. Thus, the concerned family would be saved from future calamities arising from discretion at the Sacred Site.

7.13. Nchaûrre salt water, Giêto and Mbutuutia swamps' role in family life

The Nchaûrre salt water springs were frequently haunted by the spirits and many family members were scared to collect water from the springs, except for the members of one special clan called Kiutha. This spring was protected through close surveillance by the Elders for any interferences and interventions which had been provided through the Kiutha Clan, according to interviewees: No. 20 and 21. The Kiutha Clan glorified during communal dances with the citations such as: *'We are the Kiutha Clan! Outsiders are not allowed to interfere with this place!'*

The spirits only allowed the Kiutha Clan members to fetch water while they sang, *'These people are composed of pure members of Kiutha Clan! Let other clans not interfere!'* Gikí nî Kiutha kîtheri gîtîthukannûte! The clan members held prayers here while they were slaughtering lambs to appease their ancestral spirits. Other similar sacrifices and offerings were often conducted at the nearby Gîeto sacred swamp and Mbutuutia sacred swamp. Ceremonies which were conducted at the Gîeto sacred swamp included rituals to denounce the evils associated with famines, droughts, diseases, and other natural calamities, according to interviewee No. 17. The offerings of slaughtered unblemished lambs included a procession to the swamp which was led by the ancestral resident spirits. The elders who conducted the ceremony followed the steps of the spirits until they reached a destination where the offering was to take place. The physical benevolent spirits that were followed in the ritual procession included some pythons, leopards, gazelles, and birds which hovered on the gigantic trees on the edges of the Swamp. If any of these animals did not take part, the elders would return home because it was construed that the ancestral spirits would reject the gifts.

Only the chosen Elders ventured into the site to perform the intended sacrifices. The site was also used for thanksgiving offerings, during which an unblemished lamb was selected from a specific family from Antûbaita or Amûthetu Clans, to be slaughtered and presided over by the highly respected and knowledgeable priest, the Mûgwe. The lamb was killed by suffocation, and then it was slaughtered, and pieces of the meat were sliced and scattered in different directions while they were praying. The offal, organs, and guts were thrown into the centre of the Swamp to appease the resident ancestral spirits, Iruundu bia Bajûûjû. These spirits would accept the sacrifice by ululations and dances, which were loudly heard across the valley. This was regarded as an acceptance response to the prayers, indicating that the prayers would be answered by fulfilling their wishes. The ancestral spirits answered the rejection of the prayers, which had been offered during an earlier visit to the Swamp, before the sacrificial lamb was suffocated and slaughtered. If the Elders heard sounds of booing and shouting, they would return with the lamb to their homesteads. Enquiries would be made to the Mûgwe who would pray for a revelation from God. The nearby residents testified that Gîeto sacred swamp was at times haunted by bad spirits, Iruundu bia Nkomma, because they used to hear strange sounds of creatures dancing and singing circumcision songs by using mockery choruses. At times, the invisible creatures were heard singing other ceremonial songs, praising bumper harvests, and castigating bad incidences. The residents claimed that naughty people who entered the Sacred Swamp were severely punished by the spirits. They witnessed that in 1940 A.D., two soldiers vanished in the reeds of the Swamp after ignoring the warnings; they never resurfaced from the ground that had swallowed them. Simultaneously, some naughty, big, uncircumcised boys defiantly entered the Sacred Swamp grounds; they were grabbed by the ghosts, which had beckoned the village circumciser, M'Mûgwîika M'Amaai, to circumcise the boys amid much celebrations and pomp. Thus, there are many stories associated with these Sacred Swamps.

Gîeto sacred swamp was a big swamp dominated by abundant reeds. It occupied a part of the Imeenti Forest which stretched to Kîrîmmaarra and Nyambeenne Forests. These forests

were inhabited by a large population of wild game: elephants, monkeys, buffaloes, leopards, jackals, antelopes, snakes, and big pythons. The area was closed to strangers because it was believed that it was a discretion of the sacred area to allow unclean people to set foot inside the area. Hence, only the anointed Njûrîncheke Elders and the Mûgwe, high priests, those with unblemished social status, Aarîki, and members of the families tasked to offer sacrificial lambs after a period of preparation were allowed inside this area. The Elders who were responsible to conduct the sacrifices at Gîeeto sacred swamp or at Mbutuutia sacred swamp were required to access the place by wearing a special attire of leather dress called Ngutukî, holding a black staff, Mûreegi, wearing a leather hat with fur, Muungî, carrying a small gourd, Mûtete, and a well-groomed calabash, Kajuga. When Christianity took root in the surrounding villages, the resident ancestral spirits that ruled Gîeeto and Mbutuutia sacred swamps were disturbed and migrated to an unknown place and they had called it Rûnyûrrî in their departure song. The disturbance was mainly caused by the adulteration of the Sacred Swamps, particularly by the colonial soldiers of the King's Rifles Regiment in the 2nd World War (1939–1945 A.D.), who had cleared the areas by cutting the reeds for thatching for their temporary houses at Kaaga Military Camp. These ancestral spirits left early one morning; they were heard singing a farewell song: *'We have migrated! We are headed to Rûnyûrrî!'* *'Twathaamma tweeta Rûnyûrrî!'*

The Îturi Grove, which was near Ngachiûmma River, was invaded by ancestral spirits such that even strangers would be chased away unless they offered to perform prescribed gestures and signs acceptable to the spirits. The visitors were advised to carry a stone; then, after walking a short distance along the river, they were advised to throw the stone into the nearby Ngachiûmma River. The visitors who defied these instructions found themselves blocked by huge snakes and dangerous wild creatures which ended their mission, according to interviewee No. 36. At Gîeeto sacred swamp, families sacrificed unblemished lambs as was prescribed to appease the ancestral spirits. The resident ancestral spirits would accept a sacrifice which was to be conducted; however, the spirits could also refuse to acknowledge it and/or refuse to accept the prayers offered. Many offerings were conducted at the site to seek God's indulgence against disasters, diseases, droughts, and famines. The elders sacrificed the lambs at the field called Kaenni ka Mbûri, according to interviewee No.16. The gathering of the Elders attracted the resident ancestral spirits who led the procession into the Îturri Grove. At times, these ancestral spirits would appear in the form of animals, who would lead the procession while the elders were uttering praises of God and conducting the necessary prayers on behalf of the families and themselves. In case of the non-appearance of animals, the Elders would postpone sacrificing the lambs offered for that occasion. Then, they would go to the Mûgwe for directions. The Mûgwe would pray and if the answers were not forthcoming from God, he would prepare a pure lamb for prophesying, Kûrroria. He slaughtered the unblemished lamb; then, he examined the vital organs of the lamb, which revealed the situation at hand. Having done the unveiling examination, Kûrroria, he would answer the Elders' questions. After further counselling and wise guidance, the next action would be decided upon.

7.14. Kithimma kĩa Mwooyo's role in family life (*the springs of life*)

The Kithimma gĩa M'Araigua springs, was known as Kithimma gĩa Karunya nna Nkoonko (*warriors from Tigania and Imeenti Regions, respectively*), before 1956 A.D. Christian pastors of Rûirî, Rwareerra, and Mîtûuntû have renamed it, 'Kithimma kĩa Mwooyo.', '*The Springs of Life*', because currently, they are baptizing many Christian adherents in these springs. Two warriors were fighting over complete control and occupation of grazing land and the water source in this area of Mîrrû. Each warrior wanted to have complete monopoly over water and grazing rights for members of his clan, from Tigania or Imeenti Regions, respectively. Each of them sought total occupation of this site's neighbourhood so that people from their family group could use it. Finally, the Njûrînceke Council of Elders resolved the conflict. During the periods of conflict between Karunya and Koonko, the surrounding communities kept close watch and vigilance and provided security to avoid any interference from unsubscribed outsiders, according to interviewee No. 15. The Kithima kĩa M'Araigua Site was surrounded by different sub-tribes, who had settled there to access the water from the springs and the savanna-land for grazing their livestock. Those who had settled at the site had diverse interests, which included the cultivation of land, grazing rights, and water for domestic and livestock use. The residents kept on arguing about the boundaries, the rights to graze, and access to water from the springs.

Consequently, Meru Colonial Annual Reports and extracts indicate that the persistent conflicts between Amîrrû and neighbouring communities emanated from the grazing grounds, watering points, and salt licks. The general conflicts of the warring parties included cattle raids and inter-clan clashes that persisted and were subsequently resolved by the Njûrînceke Council of Elders. The he-goat oath, Kûriinga Ntheenge, was preferred to ensure that there were no more quarrels over the user rights of the springs and the surroundings grass lands. This oath, Muumma, was called Nchaaû ya Ntigiri—which literary means *unity that was symbolized by the hoof of a donkey*—was administered by Elders of Njûrînceke at the Kithima kĩa M'Araigua Site in 1928 A.D. under the sausage tree, (*Kigelia africana*), Mûraantinna. This oath restored peace and established a lasting solution between the Imeenti and Tigania community members. This act was applauded by the Colonial District Commissioner C.M. Johnson Mackay, who indicated that the Njûrînceke leadership had restored peace. Around 1937 A.D., the District Commissioner directed that all leaders, including Chiefs, should be initiated into Njûrînceke Eldership. The Kithima kĩa M'Araigwa site was also elevated into a recruitment and initiating centre, Gaarru ya Njûri/Nyoomba ya Njûri, to expand and promote Njûrînceke membership and to continue maintaining peace. Inter-marriages took place to further unite the settlers and enhance peace in this area of Mîrrû.

The existence of traditional customary laws protected the land parcels from being grabbed illegally, and secured sacred areas for family worship. The disputed areas were protected by the Elders' subscription to *oath-taking* 'Muumma' *pronouncements, oath proclamations, and oath decrees*. The oath Muumma was the most respected and honoured means of uniting various family members against any form of land grabbing and organizing plans to chase away or attack intruders without their knowledge. This oath was administered by

slaughtering a mono-coloured black he-goat in a secluded area within the vicinity, according to interviewee No. 41. The he-goat was presented to the Elders for sacrifice and the people, who attended the ceremony, were warned about the dire consequences of disclosing the oath-taking; such matters should never be discussed at any occasion with unconcerned people, including their family members, unless they were a part of the oath-taking process. The anointed Elder killed the he-goat by cutting its throat; its blood was poured into a waiting calabash. The blood was mixed with rumen waste, Thuunthunna, and with the sap extracted from a selection of ritual plants; then, honey was added. Next, people who attended this ceremony were required to consume the contents served to them by rotation from the same calabash, to enable everyone present to take a sip while reciting the following: *'What I am consuming today in a secret oath represents our land, which we must protect at all cost! 'Kîrrîa twaanyua nnaarrua, na kîrrîa twaarrea nnaarrua, nna twaakunîkîrra nnaarrua, nnî kîa kûrwîrra thîrrî yeetû!'* Incidentally, there are two other Sacred Sites, namely, Laarria/Raarria salt lick and Koonyo ka Mbûri, at the foot of Ndunyuchabu Hill, which served many families by providing daily drinking water for each family's livestock. They will be briefly discussed later as Maji ya Chumvi. Furthermore, Kathimma ka Ntoonjara Source Pan is located on top of Rîbûi Hill. The resident families were required to be alert about unknown visitors who may venture to acquire land parcels to settle there. Loyal men and women volunteers guarded their land. They would frequently consult each other in a forum outside the homestead. They served as guards when the community felt threatened. During surveillance, these guards were provided with food supplies. Each family would cook food and porridge and place it at some designated place along the fence to conceal their identity. These volunteer guards collected the food and drinks at night and returned the utensils to the same place after consuming the food; then, they disappeared into the bush.

7.15. Lake Nkûûnga's role on family life

The traditional families used the Lake Nkûûnga Sacred Site to perform rituals meant to denounce the factors affecting crops and harvests. The Nkûûnga Sacred Lake is located off the Meru-Nanyuki road within the lower Imeenti forest. This site is about 6 kilometres from Meru Town along the Meru-Nanyuki Highway. The rituals to denounce the occurrences of human diseases, epidemics, and pest invasions were conducted here. This lake is situated in a volcanic depression with volcanic stone chippings spread across the surroundings, and it is covered by aquatic floating grass, which lies below huge trees, which the traditional overseers protected from any interference through citations and prayers. Lake Nkûûnga was the home of a mystical seven-headed snake-like dragon called 'Nkûûnga' which gave the lake its name, based on the dreaded snake-like beast, Îrrîa-rîa-Nkûûnga, according to Amîîrrû traditional folktales. The lake was formed from extrusive volcanic eruptions that occurred ages ago; molten lava and magma spilled through a vent and created this lake. Thus, hot magma was spread in the neighbouring areas, leaving a depression known as Îrrîa-rîa-Nkûûnga, which is surrounded by extruding banks and forest trees. The magma that spread in the neighbourhood cooled and then solidified. Later, some of it was covered by soil on which vegetation thrives and overgrowth is regenerated. This area is

visited by various wild animals looking for grass and water. Many animals, particularly huge elephants, find this habitat conducive. The Nkûûnga Sacred Lake continues to attract spiritual missions by the traditional families and Christian followers—from diverse denominations across the region—who conduct their rituals and prayers, according to interviewee No. 43. She said that the human settlement within the area surrounding Nkûûnga, strived to undertake farming activities despite the dry and stony aspect which affects the area. However, roaming elephants impact these farming activities by destroying crops. Nevertheless, the resident families continue to fetch clean water from the Nkûûnga springs for domestic consumption and livestock. These springs are referred to as Tûthimma twa Nkûûnga, and are equally shared by the wild mammals, monkeys, and birds. Kîthimma gîa Nchîgî, Karûûjî ka Nnaitîrra, Ngachiûûmma, Rûûrria / Lûûrria, Nchîrû and Kîthimma kîa Mwooyo / M'Araigua are thought to be streams from Lake Nkûûnga.

7.16. Laarria and Koonyo ka Mbûri salt water's role in family life

Laarria/Raarria and Koonyo ka Mbûri are called Maji ya Chumvi in the Kiswahili language. These adjacent sites have continued to serve Amîrrû to date. The Maji-ya-Chumvi mineral water springs were used as sites for conducting prayers and rituals meant to avert frequent epidemics and diseases which affected humans and their livestock. The Elders convened here for a religious ceremony known as Gûkinya Ng'oondû (*stepping on the sacrificial ewe*), according to a neighbouring resident (No. 23). The livestock in the vicinity would be rounded up and gathered in one common area and would be driven to the Maji ya Chumvi grounds. A teenage boy accompanied by a small girl would be given a mono-coloured pure ewe by the Elders. Then, they were instructed to run around the herd in circles while the Elders upheld their black walking sticks, Mîreegi (plural); then, the elders moved in front of the livestock and start leading them. They pushed the cattle into Maji ya Chumvi swamp to induce the animals to drink the mineral water. The Elders ensured that all the cows licked and/or drunk some salty water. The Elders prayed while they walked, praised the ancestral spirits, and keenly waited for a response from the resident spirits. The ewe carried by the boy was killed. All those present were asked to jump on it, Gûkinya Ng'oondû. Then, the Elders carried it to the village. There was a road across the village where the residents had been asked to gather. Each resident present was anointed on the forehead with the ewe's blood. Then, everyone present was asked to pray while fully walking over the dead ewe, but not stepping on it. This act signified the ceremonial action of Gûkinya Ng'oondû. The ceremony continued until every resident had participated. Finally, the ewe was returned to the Sacred Site and left there to be eaten by wild animals. However, the families stopped performing this ritual with the advent of strict colonial administration and Christian prohibitions. Nevertheless, the rituals created a sense of family togetherness and unity.

The river habitat and riparian land provided many by-products which were used to enhance family rituals, sacrifices, and prayers. The Amîrrû people believed that the presence of huge reptiles, mammals, birds, and insects, which resided in the river basins, provided either good or bad omens. The riverbanks, including the waterfalls, were subject to praises during evening camp-fire meetings as much as the sites which provided materials to be used in the performance

of rituals, prayers, food, clean water, and medicine. God in His mercies provided these areas which cut across and served the Amûrrû communities, who believed that the spirits of some creatures could read human feelings. For example, they believed that an owl, Ntuuntuguru, which perched on the tree in the homestead and made some peculiar sounds, announced that a member of the family was going to die very soon. If a person sighted a python along the Kîthînnû riverbank, it was a good omen, which revealed that the residents should expect a bumper harvest during that season; people should throw a portion of the harvested cereals into the Mûtiriingi Waterfall to thank God for providing them with a good harvest. There were designated Waterfalls within the rivers that served to discipline and reprimand the wrongdoers, criminals, sorcerers, witchdoctors, and witches, who were thrown into the waterfall as punishment.

7.17. Îthaangûûnne hill's role in the family's spiritual bond

Water fetched at the Îthaangûûnne Hill was regarded as a soothing therapy. It was used to heal those who were infected by incurable disease. Consequently, many people sought to apply the water to their skin to cure resistant ailments. This crystal-clear water was also used to bless new marriages and families.



Plate 9. Îthaangûûnne hill
(Photo by Mwaamba)

Families who lived near Kîeiga Hill respected this big rock which blended in to create the beautiful scenery of Kîeiga Hill forest patch. Married couples and the surrounding family members referred to this magnificent rock as 'Mûchierre', meaning *a beautiful woman in her prime age*. The surrounding areas near the Kîeiga Hill are noted for this woman-like, massive rock, which the residents believed to be the work of God to sanctify Kîeiga Hill. Married couples approached this feature with respect and the belief that if they said anything bad about the rock, they would be punished by the resident ancestral spirits. They trusted that the resident ancestral spirits could hunt and kill them should they discuss anything bad about this scenic feature. The residents refrained from collecting firewood when facing this majestic rock. This reverence led many families to sacrifice asking for various favours from the hill.

This hill was known to have resonant echoes which were partly associated with the

ancestral spirits that resided in the vicinity. The resident families were never scared about interacting with the birds, insects, reptiles, and mammals living in this forest patch; however, they would be scared by the sounds produced by invisible creatures. They believed that these sounds were express acts of either good or evil. Hence, they protected the *picturesque woman*, Mûchierre. The uncertainty of the messages pronounced by the echoes from the forest creatures ensured familial attachment to the forest patch, even though they were unaware of the consequences of their actions while within the surroundings. The families avoided cutting wood or felling trees for firewood, but they collected the fallen branches without fear. Cutting and felling trees were totally rejected by the resident ancestral spirits, which was expressed through the life threatening sounds that were produced by the creatures living in the forest patch. Nevertheless, all these occurrences helped to strengthen family bonds, driven by a sense of unity.

7.18. Gakûûnni sacred site's role in family bond

The regular family prayers, sacrifices, and offerings at the Gakûûnni Sacred Site were conducted to protect livestock while grazing. The neighbouring residents at the Gakûûnni Sacred Site drove their livestock to the site to hide them from intruders. This was the safest place for the families who grazed their livestock to avoid attacks by enemies. The ritual for protection was conducted at the site. They believed that this would blindfold any intruder and rustler from knowing where the livestock was hidden. The residents trusted that if they prayed, sacrificed by slaughtering an un-blemished goat, and made offerings to God, this area would remain exclusively protected for herding and that no intruder would dare to know where the livestock was kept. Anointed Elders conducted cleansing ceremonies at the site on behalf of the Mûgwe whenever residents felt that the site had been desecrated. Defilement included killing either a wild animal or livestock within the bounds of the Gakûûnni Site without good reason, destroying the trees and vegetation, or discarding pollutants or foreign objects within the Sacred Site. The cleansing ceremony was led by an elderly woman who carried twigs, Mathîgî, and demanded the sacrifice of an unblemished mono-coloured goat for the ceremony from the suspected culprit, intruder, or defiler. The sacrifice was done swiftly, as failure to cleanse the area attracted the wrath of the resident ancestral spirits; they believed that if they failed to offer the sacrifice, a curse would befall them and affect the whole clan. They also believed that if the victim did not confess and yield to the demands of providing an unblemished mono-coloured goat, the clan would throw down the twigs as a sign of their curses, after consultation with the woman celebrant leader who would prescribe punishment for the family members living within that homestead where the victim resided.

The sacrificial goat's meat would be consumed on the Site, leaving nothing that could be carried away from the site; even the bones and the skin were burned to ashes. Further prayers were conducted condemning the transgressor to appease the ancestral spirits so that they would grant mercy and shelter the community from other calamities. Anointed Male Elders also conducted a bigger and more solemn ceremony for the entire clan. During this ceremony, a small boy and a young girl were accompanied by an elderly man on a walk around the village, as they led an unblemished mono-coloured goat to be sacrificed. An elderly woman leader followed

them carrying a basket full of cereals as they proceeded to the appointed spot for the sacrifice. Prayers were held; then, the goat was slaughtered and its meat cooked with the cereals. Then, this food was consumed on the spot. This ceremony was concluded with prayers and dancing and by singing the praises of God.

7.19. Kîbûûka riparian's role in the family bond

Most popular sacrifices and prayers were conducted at Kîbûûka Riparian Site, which comprised the killing of an unblemished mono-coloured lamb for Kwaagia Mburra, *for the lack of rains*; hence, Kûûrragîra Mbûri, *intercessions for rains*, was conducted. These sacrifices were offered by Elders of the family / families which were traditionally class of sacrificing and offering prayers, aimed at averting a gross lack of rainfall, misfortunes, and livestock and human diseases, which had affected the area for an alarming period of time. Other sacrificial ceremonies were conducted at the site to seek a solution for the persistent drought which had affected the surroundings areas. An unblemished mono-coloured goat was brought by an Elder, who was followed by other Elders in a solemn procession. An Elder from sacrificial family, who led the procession with the sacrificial goat, handed it over to another elderly man from sacrificial lineage, who waded through the river. He put the goat into the flowing river led it across to the other side, according to interviewee No. 3. Other Elders slaughtered it at the bank of the river. They burnt all the meat along with the bones, hooves, horns, and skin to ashes. These ashes were thrown into the flowing river.



Plate 10. The Mono-coloured ritual goat
(Photo by E. Mûtwîri)

After this sacrifice, it was expected that the rains that would immediately follow would extinguish the fire. Then Elders left the scene of the sacrifice confident that God had heard their prayers. All the resident families attached a lot of faith, respect, and honour to the surroundings of the Kîbûûka Confluence with Kathiita and Kîthînnû Rivers, because the unseen ancestral spirits always guarded the area against destructive human activities. The people believed that the resident ancestral spirits would drive away any intruders and were able to chase away the defilers by caning them. The picking of twigs, Thaa, from this site was not prohibited. The people

who were prone to polluting the site would be surprised when the same contaminants they had dumped on that site were found at the doors of their homesteads.

7.20. Ndurummo ya Nkarri's role in the family bond

The Ndurummo ya Nkarri site was also used for sacrificial rituals to bring rainfall and curb droughts. The sacrifices involved the slaughtering of unblemished mono-coloured sheep early in the morning before sunrise. This sacrificial goat was wrapped with dry banana leaves. Then, it was thrown into a pool of water in front of the anointed Njûriñcheke Elder. If the sheep died immediately, it was assumed that the ancestral spirits and God had accepted the sacrifice. If the sheep emerged from the water and walked away, it was construed as a failure which clearly indicated that the sacrifice was not accepted. A repeat of the same sacrifice was to be organized, in consultation and with the advice of the Mûgwe, the foreseer, Kîrroria, and the regional High Priest. When the sacrifice was accepted, an eight-day ceremony was held. It was marked by big celebrations at the sacrifice's site, whereby the elders slaughtered another unblemished ram, which was wholly consumed. The assurance that God and the ancestral spirits were happy with their sacrifices consolidated their familial bonds.

7.21. Kaumbaû Marshland's role in the family bond

The ancestral spirits living in Kaumbaû Marshland usually beckoned and attracted animals, reptiles, birds, and insects to the edge of the Ntenderreenne Well which is at one end of this marshland. When animals strove towards the water, they died instantly. The poisonous well at Kaumbaû greatly surprised the surrounding community because flies, mosquitoes, snakes, frogs, and birds, which came into contact with this bubbling well, died instantly, according to interviewee No. 31. However, there were magnetic forces which pulled the creatures to the well, which were believed to be the work of the resident ancestral spirits that had invaded the well. The surrounding marshland was encroached by residents to create space for farming because residents believed that these ancestral spirits had chosen to migrate to Giitûñne gĩa Karrienne, a remnant forest. The resident ancestral spirits at Giitûñne gĩa Karrienne, a remnant forest, were annoyed and disturbed when the road contractor uprooted arrowroots and huge trees and excavated the picturesque stones. This was around the 1960s A.D., when the Nkûûbû-Mîrû Road was being constructed. The Giitûñne ancestral spirits relocated to an unknown place called Rûnyûrrî. The familial bonds were temporarily destabilized. Nevertheless, people were consoled when the road improved the economy of the residents, which strengthened the familial bonds once more.

7.22. M'Mweenda Cave's role in the family bond

According to interviewee No. 32, M'Mweenda Cave had been particularly transformed into a hide-out for the Amîrrû family warriors from 1800–1853 A.D. during the period of inter-tribal wars with neighbouring tribes. The traditional governments of Age Groups, which were then affected, include the following: Mbarrata (1815A.D.), Kîrruuja I (1828 A.D.), Thaambuuru (1840 A.D.), and Ntûrrûntimi (1853 A.D.). This cave has a small entrance, such that those who

entered had to crawl on their stomachs. The warriors who accessed the cave were spiritually prepared to undertake the mission. It was believed that they would never be attacked by the dangerous wild animals residing in the surroundings. There are two rock table benches located on both sides of the Cave's entrance. These rock table benches were held by the hands as a supporting action to enable the entrance of people into the Cave. Then, one would slowly release his hand from the bench so that one could reach closer to the door.

Cave users uttered words of praise for the ancestral spirits while they strolled alongside the benches which led towards an area guarded by invisible Cave guards. These guards were armed with visible swords and spears to kill any spiritually unclean human intruders and dangerous animals if they dared enter. Walking further inside, one was led into a spacious meeting hall which accommodated about 80 people. This space was designed for meat roasting, rituals, and sacrifices, according to interviewee No. 32. The blood of slaughtered animals was poured into a partially concealed cleavage along the entrance of the Cave.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is noteworthy that as shown in Annex 2, there were many other Sacred Sites, which had been designated for family worship. Some of them include the following: Ngong'unnabûû, Ngarrîndarrî, Kîthimma gîa Nchîgî, Karûûjî ka Nnaitîrra, Karrienne Swamp, Kîthiithinna, Gîkîîndûnne, Kîrrammata, Kînyaritha, Kîthimma gîa Chabuenne, Ngarînnaarro, Nkachîî, Kanyûûrrooko, Irri, Mîrurîîrrî, Ndunyumûtûnyi, Mûtoonga, Nithi, Thûûchî, Mûurro jwî Nkoondi Îrumma, Thaganna, Kuurru, Mweerronkoro, Mweerronkanga, Libûbûng'i, Lûûrria, Lûbûnni, Kîarre, Guathûmmarra, Nchoorro, Mûrûûta, Lailûba, Kammanoorro, Liliabba, Lîuutu, Kaliimba, Lûûmma, Urta, Thiitha, Thaangatha, and Thannaantû, to name a few.

Family spirituality was extremely important to the Amîîrrû community. This spiritual practice developed very strong moral and ethical values in the Amîîrrû men and women, which enhanced familial bonds. It was against this spiritually-rich background that Christianity found its way into Mîîrrû. However, the truth is that colonial powers introduced Christianity and other foreign systems in Africa, fully motivated by a policy of divide and rule for effective occupation, which was propelled by the *deliberate destruction of African traditional education, culture, and heritage*. This policy was well articulated on 2 February, 1835 by Lord Macaulay, who recommended to the British Parliament *to replace the old and ancient African Indigenous Education and Cultural Heritage* with everything English and foreign. To quote his statement: *'I have travelled across the length and breadth of Africa and I have not seen one person who is a beggar, who is a thief, such wealth I have seen in this country, such high moral values, people of such calibre, that I do not think we would ever conquer this country, unless we break the very backbone of this nation, which is her spiritual and cultural heritage and therefore, I propose that we replace her old and ancient education, culture, for if the Africans think that all that is foreign and English is good and greater than their own, they will lose their self-esteem, their native culture, and they will become what we want them, a truly dominated nation*. Currently, many educated African men and women are suffering from the effects of the destructive colonial policy and

domination. It is most unfortunate and ironic that the European administrators, traders, and missionaries falsely summarized the rich spiritual culture of the Amfîrrû as paganism, people who had no religion, and heathens, people who did not know or worship God; this was done to ensure that their colonial policy succeeded, in line with the above quoted statement.

Annex 1. A variety of products extracted from natural sites and habitats

Table 1. Plant Extracts used as Herbal Medicine

Botanical name	Local name	Some local usage
<i>Cathas edulis</i> /Khat	Mîraa	Stimulant/Ritual Plant
<i>Dovyalis abyssinica</i>	Mûrroo	Blending Soups
<i>Ricinus communis</i>	Mwaarrîki	Lotion for Skin/Ritual/Straw
<i>Euphorbia grantii</i>	Mûthûrri	Treats Ear Aches
<i>Osyris lanceolata</i>	Mûthithi	Edible Fruit/Treats Dysentery
<i>Harungana madagascariensis</i>	Mûnyamwe	Treats Malaria
<i>Galinsoga parviflora</i>	Mûngei	Treats Stomach Problems
<i>Bidens Pilosa</i>	Mûnyûgûnyûgû	Treats Liver Problems
<i>Combretum molle</i>	Mûramma	Treats Snake Bites
<i>Tagetes minuta</i>	Mûbaangi	Insect Repellent
<i>Cuscuta campestris</i>	Thfînnna	Treats Pimples
<i>Solanum incurnum</i>	Mûtoongu	Treats Anthrax/Snakebite/Ritual Plant
<i>Leonatis mollissima</i>	Mûchiibi	Treats Gall Sickness
<i>Plectranthus ambionicus</i>	Mûjarra	Sanitary/Rituals
<i>Schoebera elata</i>	Mûtuumba	Treats Headaches
<i>Cyperus articulata</i>	Ndago	Treats Headaches
<i>Vernonia lasiopus</i>	Mwaatha	For Intestinal Worms
<i>Viscum fischeri/tuberculatum</i>	Kîee kîa Mûraangi	Regulates Menstruation
<i>Cucurbita maxima</i>	Mareenge	Anti-inflammatory/Potency
<i>Mondia whytei</i>	Muukûrwa	Sexual Stimulant

Table 2. Plant/Animal Extracts used as Food, Tools, Instruments, and Biomedicine

Botanical/Scientific name	Local name	Some local usage
<i>Vangueria madagascariensis</i>	Mwiirrû/Mûbirrû	Edible Fruit/Medicinal
<i>Kigelia africana</i>	Mûraantinna	Fermentation/Ritual/Medicinal
<i>Dalbergia melanoxylon</i>	Mweengo	Walking Sticks/Medicinal
<i>Mellettia oblata</i>	Mwaangua	Posts/Poles/Medicinal
<i>Elaeodendron buchananii</i>	Mûtmweerrû	Extracted Poison from Fruit
<i>Annona reticulata</i>	Mûtomoko	Edible Fruit/Medicinal
<i>Urtica massaica</i>	Thaa	Edible/Medicinal
<i>Ocotea usambarensis</i>	Mûthaitî	Furniture/Tools/Medicinal
<i>Vitex keniensis</i>	Muurru- (Meru Oak)	Instruments/Medicinal
<i>Scorpiones</i>	Kang'aurrî	Extract Poison/Medicinal
<i>Lovea swynnertinii</i>	Mûkoongorro	Log Bridges/Medicinal
Honey	Ûûkî/Nainchû	Antiseptic/Meat Preservation
<i>Tarbernaemontana stapfiana/elegans</i>	Mweerrere	Sap for Trapping Birds/TB
<i>Arundinaria alpina</i>	Mûraangi	Mats/Medicinal
<i>Triumfetta marophylla</i>	Mûjiijo	Weaving Baskets/Medicinal

Table 3. Indigenous Trees for Retention of Water and Moisture; Ritual and Sacred Plants

Botanical name	Local name	Some local usage
<i>Ficus thoningii/natalensis</i>	Mûgummo	Sacred/Ritual/Riverbank Protection
<i>Ficus Sycomorus</i>	Mûkûû	Sacred/Ritual/Riverbank Protection
<i>Anthodeista zambeziara</i>	Mûrigûrigû	Riverbank Protection
<i>Hagenia abyssinica</i>	Mûjuga	Riverbank Protection
<i>Zyzigium guinense</i>	Mûřîrrû	Riverbank Protection
<i>Raphia farinefera</i>	Palm/Mwaarre	Riverbank Protection
<i>Newtoniabuchananii</i>	Mûkûûi	Riverbank Protection

Table 4. Animal and Natural Products Used by Families

Product	Use
Clay Soil	For earthenware pots
Sheep's Wool/Bird's Feathers	For hats
Egg Shells	For Necklaces
Porcupine's Quills	Arrowheads, for straightening hair
Animal Bones	Bracelets
Cow Tails	Flywhisk
Reeds/Sedge (Îrriimba)	Dancing skirt/thatching/mats
<i>Cordia africana</i> , (Mûriinga Tree Bark)	Sandals
Animal Horns	Drinking container/Blown as siren
Animal Skin	Manufacture of drum/clothes/costume
<i>Ocotea usambelensis</i> , (Mûthaitî Wood)	Carvings, tools, furniture
Black Stone	Sack poison from snake bite
Iron Ore	Manufacture of tools, implements
Nchûûi (a sucking tool made from horn)	Remove rotten blood from fresh wounds
Hard Grinding Stone (Innoorro)	Sharpen instruments/tools
Shield (Rong'o/Ngaa)	Protection and dancing instruments
Fossil Stone (Ntoonga)	Remove placenta in livestock/Snake bite cure
Stone/Volcanic Stone (Magînga)	To smoothen dry skin on feet
Red/White Ochre	Smear on body for ritual and beauty

Annex 2. List of Sites, Shrines, Groves, and Habitats in Meru/Tharaka Nithi Counties that were Regularly Visited to enhance the Amûrrû Family Culture and Traditions, and the Extraction of By-products.

Site name	Locality	County
Kibûûka Sacred Site	Tharaka Central	Tharaka Nithi
Gakûûnni Sacred Site	Tharaka Central	Tharaka Nithi
Mûkwairwîga Sacred Site	Tharaka Central	Tharaka Nithi
Manyiraanni Sacred Site	Marimanti	Tharaka Nithi
Ndiarî Sacred Site	Marimanti	Tharaka Nithi
Maraagwa Sacred Site	Nkondi	Tharaka Nithi
Ikwa Sacred Site	Nkondi	Tharaka Nithi
Kîegege Sacred Site	Nkondi	Tharaka Nithi
Ndururummo-ya-Nkarî Sacred Site	Imeenti North	Meru
Ndurummo-ya-gakirîro	Imeenti North	Meru
Îgombe Salt Lake	Îgeembe	Meru
Equator Tamaduni M'Rûkûnga Cultural Center	Imeenti Central	Meru
Thaarû Mineral Water Springs	Imeenti South	Meru
Meru Museum	Imeenti North	Meru
Theemwe Salt Lick	Imeenti South	Meru
Lewa Conservancy	Bûûrî	Meru
River Mûtoonga Stone Excavation Quarry	Meru/Embu Road	Meru
Ngaya Forest	Îgeembe North	Meru
Kîathaandi Hills	Adjacent Meru Town	Meru
Kîanuunku Hill	Adjacent Meru Town	Meru
Mûgorro Forest	Mikiindûri	Meru
River Kathiita Gîtwîlki Waterfall	Meru Town	Meru
Mbili Waterfall	Mikiindûri	Meru
Devils' Bridge Waterfall	Adjacent Meru Town	Meru
Kamûrraamba Maû Kitchen	Meru National Park	Meru
Mûchierre Stone Woman/KîeigaForest	Meru Mikiindûri Road	Meru
Îga-rîa-Ngutu/Îga-rîa-Nkenye	Tigania East/Nyambeenne Range	Meru
Gîitûûnne Sacred Forest	Imeenti Central	Meru
Maanku-Kithînnû River Falls	Imeenti south	Meru
Ndiîinne Falls	Imeenti North	Meru
Ndiîi ya M'Ntaanni	Imeenti North	Meru
Kianniangîrî	Imeenti South	Meru
Nkûûnga Sacred Lake	Bûûrî	Meru
Kînnuunkeenne Tunnel/Caves	Imeenti North	Meru
Mûchierreenne Sacred Lake	Imeenti South	Meru
Kîrîmma-kîa-Mîkûû	Imeenti North	Meru
Kîrîmma-kîa-Mwîmbî	Tharaka Nithi	Tharaka Nithi
Njûrîincheke Nchîrû Shrine	Tigania West	Meru
Ng'oong'a Tunnel	Mitûngûû	Meru
Kîjege Hill	Tharaka	Tharaka Nithi
Îthaangûûnne Table Mountain	Imeenti South	Meru
Lake Rûmûkû/Îrriimbeenne	Imeenti South	Meru
Kîrîinga Forest Patch	Imeenti South	Meru
Lake Mbutuutia Sacred Site	Tigania West	Meru
Kagerwe Springs	Imeenti Central	Meru

Kings African Rifles Memorial Plaque	Kaaga/Imeenti North	Meru
2 nd World War Memorial Monument	Kaaga/Imeenti North	Meru
Nkaando-e-Nkomma Maû Maû Hide-out	Imeenti Central	Meru
Rweerrea Nyoomba-ya-Njûri	Mikiindûri	Meru
Nyambeenne Hills Forest Habitat	Nyambeenne	Meru
Maû-Maû Camp Kînoru	Imeenti North	Meru
Karîmma-ka-Njûri Mîtungûû	Imeenti South	Meru Njûrînceke Cultural Centre
The footsteps of Jesus 'Makinya ja Jesû'	Bûûrrî	Meru
Înnandurru Caves	Maarra	Tharaka Nithi
The Elephant Corridor	Bûûrî	Meru
Mt. Kenya Lakes: Harris, Rûtûûndû, Îthaangûûnne	Mt. Kenya	Meru
Gikoombe Gorge-Mûcheege Forest Patch	Imeenti South	Meru
Nthûngûûrrû Forest Patch	Imeenti South	Meru
Ngîrrîinne Hill/Heights	Imeenti South	Meru
M'Mweenda's Cave Mûchîeenne	Bûûrrî	Meru
Nyoomba-ya-Aathi Cave Îrarrû	Imeenti South	Meru
Kîeiga Hill Forest Patch	Mikiindûri	Meru
Laarria/Raarria Salt Lake	Bûûrrî	Meru
Îturri Grove	Imeenti North	Meru
Gîeto Sacred Site	Imeenti North	Meru
Maji-ya-Chumvi Mineral Water Springs	Tigania West	Meru
Lake Thaaî Sacred Grove	Bûûrrî	Meru
Nturukumma Sacred Grove	Bûûrrî	Meru
Kîenni-gîa-Kathaata	Igeembe	Meru
Gikongorro-kia-Mbinna	Imeenti South	Meru
Gikongorro-kia-M'Kîirîka Log Bridges	Imeenti North	Meru
Kîenni-gîa Mwîltari	Mîirîga-Mîerrû	Meru
Kîrîrwa-Kîrago-kwa-Mûgwe	Imeenti Central	Meru
Meru National Park Habitat	Meru/Tharaka	Meru& Tharaka Nithi
Ngarrendarre (Ngarrîntarrî), Kîagû, Kîjege, Kîeerrera, Gîkiingo, Maatha, Mûteejwa, Ntugî, Thûûrrî, Ngaya Forests	Meru/Tharaka Nithi	Meru/Tharaka Nithi
Îgaîroonni	Tharaka	Tharaka Nithi

Bibliography

- County Government of Meru.2015.*Meru Tourism Guide*.
- Gîchere, A.N. et al. 2016.*The Indigenous Knowledge of the Amîrrû of Kenya*. University of Nairobi Press.
- Gîchere A.N. et al., 2014.*Culture in Peace and Conflict Resolution within Communities of Central Kenya*. (Eliud Mutwîri, Chapter 8 & 9), National Museums of Kenya.
- Institute for Culture and Ecology and National Museums of Kenya. 2015.*Useful Trees and Shrubs for Kenya Documentation Stories of Sacred Sites in Tharaka*.
- Journal of Natural History. 2012.page 78, Being Kikuyu in Meru, Challenging the Tribal Geography of Colonial Kenya.
- Laughton, W.H. 1944.*The Peoples of Kenya-The Meru*.
- Mbithi, J. 1969.*African Religions and Philosophy*. Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Morgan W.T.W & Manfred Shaffer, N. 1966.*Population of Kenya, Density and Distribution*.Oxford

University Press.

Mwaniki, H.S.K. 2010. *Roots, Migration and Settlement of Mt Kenya*.

New Sources of Food, Conservation and Sustainable Development (1995 Oct/Dec.), Vol. 11 No. 4.

Nyaga, D. 1997. *Customs and Traditions of the Meru*. East African Education Publishers.

The Costs Benefits and Unmet Needs of Biological Diversity Conservation in Kenya, Swara Issue Sept-Oct. 1995.

UNEP. 1992. *The Socio-economic Dimension of Biodiversity Conservation in Kenya*.

Acknowledgements of interviewees

1. Erick Mũrĩthi, a 32-year-old seminarian, interviewed 2019
2. Chief Robert Mweebia, 58 years of age, age group Mũng'atia, interviewed 2017
3. Charity Nchama, 85 years of age, agegroup 'Mũkami'equivalent Kaburu/Gĩchũrũ, interviewed 08/01/2018
4. Gideon M'Arĩmi, born in 1934, age-set Gĩchũrũ/Mbaee, interviewed on 29/05/2002
5. Mary Njirũ M'Ajogi, born in 1893, age-set (Mũgito) Mũrũũngĩ/Riũngũ, interviewed in May 2002
6. Ephraim M'Ikĩara, born in 1928, age-set Mbaya, interviewed on 15/05/02 and 1/06/2002
7. Alice Mbũũthũ M'Ikĩara, 60 years of age, interviewed 2002–2004
8. Josphat M' Rũkinraangi, born in 1928, age-set Kaburu/Gĩchũrũ
9. John M'Rũkũũnga, born in 1930, age-set Kaburu/Gĩchũrũ, interviewed in 2018; he died on 25 October 2019
10. John M'Mũgwĩĩka, born in 1912, age-set Mĩrĩti/Kaaria
11. M'ĩnoti M'Mwirĩchia, born 88 years ago, age-set Mĩrĩti/Kaaria, interviewed on 4/06/2002
12. Margaret Chiorwĩgĩ M'Kwaaria, born in 1888, age 114 years, age-set Mũrũũngĩ, interviewed on 19/06/2002
13. M'Mburũgũ Kububeria, age 79 years, age-set Kaburu/Gĩchũrũ, interviewed 2002
14. Erastus Mũgaambi, age 61 years, age-set Mbaya/Mbaee, interviewed 2002
15. M'Ikĩao M'Mũthuuri, age 93 years, age-set Mũrũũngĩ/Riũngũ, interviewed 2002
16. Mr. & Mrs. Phillip M'ĩtueraandũ, age 73 years, age-set Mbaee/Mũrũgũ, interviewed 2002
17. Ngeera Nkonko, age 81 years, age-set Mbae/Mũrũgũ, interviewed 2002
18. Kaunyaangi Thimangũ Mũtuorroi, age 65 years, Kĩbaabu/Ratanya age-set, interviewed 2002
19. M'ĩbũi Chiokarĩnga, age 93 years, age-set Murungi/Riungu, interviewed 2002
21. HDr Stanley M'Araigua, age 63 years, age-set Gĩchũũnge, interviewed 2002
22. M'Mũrĩthi Mwoorria, age 78 years, age-set, Mbae, interviewed 2002
23. Mr. M'Rĩmbeerre, age 73 years, age-set Mbaee/Guantai, interviewed 2002
24. Jason M'Mũgwĩĩka, born in 1912, age-set Kaburu/Gĩchũrũ
25. Stanley Kĩbũi Rũteerre, age 93 years, age-set Mũrũũngĩ/Riũngũ
26. George Kĩmaathi Rĩntaugũ, age 68 years, age-set Kĩbaabu
27. Chief Kathia M'Magaambo, age 61 years, age-set Kĩbabu, interviewed 2019
28. John Kĩrĩmi Mũrerwa, age-set Kĩbaabu, interviewed 2005
29. P.D. Okwaro, National Museums of Kenya
30. Japhet Mwĩkaamba, information on Kĩbũũka site, May 2015
31. Paul Kĩbwĩĩ
32. Isaya M'Ndeegwa, age 80 years, age-set Kaburu, interviewed 2002
33. Tom Ngũthaarri, born in 1958, age-set Gĩchũũnge,
34. Josphat M'Rũkĩraangi, born in 1928, age-set Mbae
35. Jason M'Mũgwĩĩka, born in 1912, age-set Mĩrĩti/Kaaria, interviewed 5/06/2002
36. Esther Kanyore, age 120 years, age-set (Mũgito) Mũrũũngĩ/Riũngũ, interviewed 2008
37. Patrick Kĩnyua M'Mũrĩthi, age 67 years, age-set Kĩbaabu, interviewed 2008
38. Julius Riũngũ Manyara, 68 years of age, agegroup Kĩbaabu

39. Tirus Mîrîti, Kîbaabu

40. Michael Gîtobu M'Rînyirû, Kîbaabu

41. Louis Chiomwebia Jonathan, born in 1938, age 81 years, age-set Mukami, interviewed 2018

42. Aaron M'Abûri, age 86 years, age-set Mbaabu/Kîbaabu

43. Marion Mûgûre Kînoti, aged 61 years, Mûcheche/Mbaabu interviewed in 2019