Chapter 3

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

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1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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[1] This bird's common English name is the African Paradise Flycatcher.
[2] A group of men circumcised within a given period of about 15 years constitutes an 'age group' (***nthukî***). Men of the Mîrîti age group were first circumcised in the year 1976, while the following Bwantai age group was opened in 1989 (Ishida 2017: 177).
[3] Mwîti (2004: 37) interprets the Kîmîîrû proverb '***Kanyiri kainagua ni mwene***' as 'A champion is advertised by the owner'.

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

Figure 1. A *kanyîrî*

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

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

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[4] See Note 3.

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

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

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

2. The four principles of the Kîmîîrû naming system

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

1. One person may have more than three names, some of which are achieved in different stages of their life.

2. Almost all Kîmîîrû personal names have both a literal meaning and respective social contexts.

3. Every person has a reciprocal relationship with their namesake (***ntaau***), with whom one shares their name and/or personality.

4. Children's namesakes are selected alternately from their paternal and maternal relatives.

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

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

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

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

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

3. The Kîmîîrû texture of personhood: case studies
3.1. A man who amassed five names

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.2. A man named after his ancestor

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

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

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

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

3.3. A man who ate many things

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 2. Athimba clan meeting on 3 September 2015

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

3.4. A woman named after a wild animal

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

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

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

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

Table 1. Nkoroi's Children

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

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

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

3.5. A woman who cares for a granddaughter

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

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

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

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

Table 2. Kainchua's Children

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

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

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

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

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

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

3.6. A woman whose child has no namesake

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

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

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

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

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

4. A namesake day: The *ûtuunga* celebration

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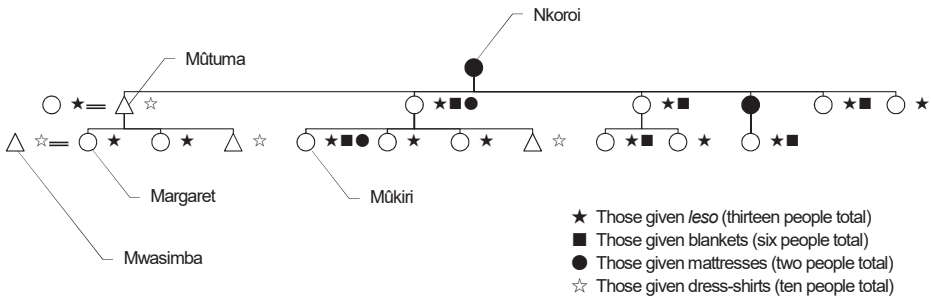

Figure 3. Genealogy of Nkoroi's daughters and namesakes

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Figure 5. Mûtuma making his speech

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

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

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

Figure 6. People holding mattresses with Benditah and Mûkiri

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. Ideas of Kîmîîrû personhood: A conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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