Lethal Narratives and Anthropological Knowledge

Circulation of Narratives around the Death of a Promising Kenyan Youth

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Abstract: Long-term ethnographic fieldwork is said to make anthropology what it is. The anthropological knowledge produced through field research is thought to be qualitatively unique among modes of disciplinary knowledge in the social sciences.

Some argue that the open-ended, unpredictable nature of fieldwork experience, stimulating an incessant process of making and unmaking theories, may contribute to its unique way of knowledge production. I would also argue that fieldwork is, above all, a practice of living socially, one of establishing intimate communication networks that enable an anthropologist to access special types of narratives that have only restricted circulation within the community. These turn out to be crucial in understanding ongoing events and social processes.

To illustrate, I refer to a case recorded in August 2013, when I revisited the Duruma people of Kenya—among whom I have conducted ethnographic research since 1982—after a hiatus of a year.

A young man in the community died accidentally through electrocution. Five different narratives explaining his death circulated within and around the village in a period as short as four weeks. These were: (1) a Christian narrative, (2) a witchcraft narrative accusing an unrelated witch, (3) a witchcraft narrative accusing the man’s father, (4) a narrative related to devil worship, (5) a narrative of divine punishment. These narratives were not simply irresponsible rumors freely exchanged by the members of the community; each had restricted circulation in the community, and each had different moral, social, and possibly political consequences.

Narratives make visible certain norms, patterns, or structures underlying the situation, enabling one to understand that situation and prepare for its future development. Some narratives indeed do function as a kind of program imbuing one with strong emotions, forcing one to take a certain course of action, with consequences, which could at times be lethal. In order to understand how and why events follow a particular course in a certain community, it is crucial to know what kinds of narratives exist in relation to the nature and causes of a particular incident, as well as who shared a certain type of narrative, and how the networks of the various narratives overlap, or are separated from each other.

Only ethnographic field researchers, through what may be a lifelong social practice of constructing and maintaining personal networks with the local people, can access those kinds of narratives, which are inaccessible to survey-type questioning and formal interviewing.

Keywords: fieldwork, anthropological knowledge, narrative, discursive space, witchcraft, Christianity

I. Fieldwork Knowledge

With regard to both subject and theory, it is impossible for anthropology as a discipline to characterize itself as one unique field of knowledge. As a result, it has been the practice of fieldwork that has characterized the discipline. Yet on the other hand, even back in 1997, Gupta and Ferguson were calling attention to the fact that “most leading departments of anthropology in the United States provide no formal (and very little informal) training in fieldwork methods” (Gupta & Ferguson 1997: 2). What is the implication of anthropologists’ reticence toward fieldwork which is central to its practice?

Anthropologists Cerwonka and Malkki (2007) and Okely (2013) pick up on this question, and through their own methods, engage with theorizing anthropological fieldwork experiences and reach a similar conclusion. Fieldwork methodology is not a “closed set, hyponatizing as ’methodology’” and this is, in part, “why doing ethnography is so difficult to teach in a standardized manner from a textbook” (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007: 180, k2833). Furthermore, as Okely states “it cannot be reduced to the implementation of a set of techniques” (Okely 2013: 1, k109). She continues to state that “no one can rote learn what to do and how to be when moving among people whose daily lives and total context, unfamiliar and seeming familiar to the research, are to be studied over an extended passage of time” (ibid: 1). For these writers, this is not to be seen as a weakness of anthropology. Rather, it is an inevitable condition of anthropological knowledge—that is, “anthropological sensitivity”—which is different from sociological hypothesis-testing.

For Okely to describe fieldwork in terms of “to conduct” is inappropriate; she suggests we use the more satisfactory verb “to experience.” The image of fieldwork is far from that of preparing in advance and then carrying it out diligently (ibid: 5, k208). If in fact that is all it was, the process of failure and mistakes would bring doubt to our qualifications as researchers—as individuals who have pretended to be detached and trained data gatherers. Yet in reality, however much experience we have, “relevant and detailed context cannot be predicted because they are part of emergent discoveries” (ibid: 7, k256) and because mistakes inevitably occur (ibid: 7, k256). Acquiring decisive anthropological knowledge frequently occurs through such accidental events. Fieldwork is about risks and surprises and an intellectual adventure (ibid: k350). Thus, anthropologists can never fully plan for fieldwork, nor should they plan with precision (ibid:6. k326). Moreover, it is a personal experience. The researcher takes into the field past reading experiences, intellectual training, favorite novels, worldview, and childhood experiences. “Similarly, the prior reading of details of the Trobrianders, the Azande or the Balinese offer resonances wherever in the globe the anthropologist may be standing” (ibid: 22, k585). After arrival in the field, the anthropologist, like a surrealist, has to be open to objets trouvés (found objects) (ibid: 23, k609). Knowledge comes through the skin and the senses (ibid:1, k127). This open-ended approach (ibid: 6, k326) offers the potential of acquiring different knowledge from that provided by...
sociological hypothesis-testing. “To the professional positivist, this seems like chaos but is creatively inevitable” (Law 2004). The voices and material lead the research in uncontrollable directions. This indeed is not a controlled experiment. The fieldworker cannot separate the act of gathering material from its continuing interpretation. Ideas and hunches emerge during the encounter and are explored or eventually discarded (Okely 2013: 23, k601). In her book, Judith Okely provides us with the accounts of 22 anthropologists’ fieldwork experiences and most anthropologists will find that the portrayal of fieldwork resonates with their experiences. The reality of fieldwork always betrays assumptions and predictions and presents unexpected developments. We relish these and train our senses so as not to miss the slightest sense of strangeness.

Even Malkki, in a book co-authored with a former graduate student (Allaine Cerwonka) that focuses on their e-mail correspondence, offers a similar portrayal of fieldwork. Fieldwork experience is not one of the “gradual accumulation of ‘data’ into a stable structure, but of moments of puzzlement and sudden realization, of making and unmaking” (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007:175, k2741-2744). Furthermore, the capacity to be “surprised” requires imagination (ibid: k2741-2744). At the same time, Malkki stresses that fieldwork is also living among people.

Anthropological fieldwork is not usually a straightforward matter of working. It is also a matter of living. Ethnographic research practice is a way of being in the world. All this engages the senses and the emotions, and it takes time. It is in this mundane, day-to-day way that the question of ethics emerges in ethnographic research (ibid: 178, k2793).

The production of situated knowledge through fieldwork develops in a way that is indivisible from everyday practices. The “process, the critical theoretical practice of ethnography, is typically long, often meandering, inescapably social, and temporally situated” (ibid: 177, k2782) and “embedded in relationally structured social lives, quotidian routines, and events that become events” (ibid: 177, k2783).

However, what Malkki emphasizes most about the characteristics of fieldwork is “improvisation” (ibid: 182, k2817-2818). In particular, she compares it to jazz improvisation. The research methods that have come out of anthropology—interview methodology, map-making, the examination of relations, the extended case method, and myth analysis—are all part of an “open, flexible, highly context-dependent and time sensitive repertory of possibilities. The intelligent use of that repertory depends on critical, always already theoretical and contextual improvisational practices” (ibid: 180, k2831).

The processes and practices of fieldwork rarely follow the compositional script envisioned in the initial research proposal...life happens in the course of work, as it should. There are false starts, adjustments of research questions, mistakes and surprises along the way. Encounters with informants can be like live performances. You cannot go back to un-say
or un-do things; you must make the best of it (ibid: 185, k2896-2898).

Both Okely and Malkki emphasize the open-ended nature of fieldwork and the improvisation of practice. And many anthropologists will agree that this is what makes it difficult to standardize it in textbook fashion or teach. It may seem to be an exaggeration to compare anthropology to the practice of art, but there is no dispute that this is the idealized form of fieldwork. However, there still remains a doubt whether this can bring us to claim that anthropological knowledge is superior to other disciplines. Surprises and unforeseen developments within fieldwork experiences and inevitable mistakes are to be expected; we can also expect that we have to deal with these in an improvised fashion through our own knowledge and skills. However, is the meaning of fieldwork as place of the production of anthropological knowledge exhausted in such a characteristic process? In cases when, luckily or not, we finish our fieldwork without failure, surprise or mishap, does our understanding acquired through fieldwork have no value? Clearly something is not right.

With ethnographic knowledge acquired in the field, can we argue that there are particular characteristics that cannot be obtained through other methods? If so, what kind of particularities are they and which characteristics of fieldwork are they derived from? To think through this issue, I present an example from my own fieldwork. This occurred in the summer of 2013, when I learned of the death of a young man and heard the subsequent narratives that were circulated by people of his community. I illustrate what happened after that and what kind of general theoretical observations can be drawn from the incident, and consider both the advantages and inherent characteristics of fieldwork that make possible an alternative anthropological understanding.

II. Proliferating Narratives

1. The death of a young man

I returned to the field on the 13th of August, 2013, after a hiatus of one year.1 As I reached a fork in the road leading to Kijiji village (a pseudonym), I noticed a change in the landscape. Along a path descending towards a river, there was a row of power poles. A few already had electricity lines installed. The lines stretched from Kinango town to the fork, and extended to the primary school in village G which was located ahead on the path. I was deeply impressed by the fact that electricity had at last come to this area. The dedicated endeavors of a certain young man were behind the reason why this area had been electrified before others. Some years back, Lugo (a pseudonym) had gone around to all the homes and

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1 Since 1982, I have conducted fieldwork amongst the Duruma people on the coast of Kwale district, Kenya. Practiced by many Japanese anthropologists who repeatedly visit and research the same locales many times over, this is yo-yo fieldwork (Wulff 2002). I have stayed there for a total of 60 months. Kijiji village (a pseudonym) has been my research site since 1989.
explained the benefits of installing electricity, and had gathered signatures. The biggest impediment had been the cost of installing the electric transformer, yet through Lugo’s efforts, the previous year he had secured a cost exemption for the residents. Suddenly, the chance of having electricity installed in homesteads along the road became very good. My long-term research partner, Katana, was excited over the prospect of bringing electricity to his house, which was under construction. This was finally about to bear fruit.

However, what awaited me on my arrival at the field was the news of Lugo’s death. They had just buried him. Lugo, born in 1985, had graduated from Jomo Kenyatta University and had worked at a bank at a famous coastal resort. In addition to earning a high salary, he had built a two-story home facing the sea, and it seems he supplemented his income by lending it out to “white people.” In the area, he was an exceptionally promising youth. However, he was far from arrogant and had paid the school expenses of the sons of his father’s poor brothers, made efforts to bring electricity, and busied himself with the development of the area. He had married in 2012 and was right in the middle of building a new home on the family homestead in Kijiji village. He had not become an urbanite, and his desire to put down roots in the area were met with praise. He was in the prime of his life, and this was brought to an abrupt end.

On the 7th of August, at a dormitory at his workplace, he tried to adjust the picture on a television set. While attempting to set up an antenna attached to a long iron pipe, he lost his balance. The antenna touched a high voltage power line, and both he and a junior staff member who tried to save him were electrocuted and subsequently died. In Duruma, this kind of accidental death is called chera, and is classified as a bad death (chifo chii). Burials are not performed according to standard tradition, and the body is not placed in the homestead for the night. Neither is the body placed in the family grave. Rather, it is buried at the side of the road within that day, and there is no mourning (hangwa) (Hamamoto 2001: 130). On the second day, his body was transferred to the village and then buried. On Lugo’s father’s orders, the body was taken into the homestead and buried at the rear of the house, which was still under construction—an act which some people claimed contravened “Duruma ways.” However, Lugo’s father was Christian, and there was no other choice. On the day of the burial, many people visited to pay their condolences, including a few who had travelled from Nairobi by plane. Apparently, there had also been a few white people too. Lugo’s wife, who was in her final month of pregnancy, went into labor from the shock of everything and gave birth in the middle of all this commotion.

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2 So that the readers can easily follow the narratives of the central characters. I use pseudonyms for Duruma names. However, with other informants, I employ an alphabetical sign for fear that overuse of strange names will hinder readability. For those persons who are members of kinship groups, I have followed the local phrases used for clans (mbari). However, these are actually subdivisions of clans (nyumba or mudzi) with the depth of 4 to 5 generations, and would normally be called “lineages” in anthropology.
2. Christian narratives

The next day, accompanied by Katana, I visited Lugo’s father, Kigoma (a pseudonym) at his homestead, apologized for not being at the burial, and paid my condolences. Kigoma spoke about how good his son had been, and after talking passionately about how well everything had been going he then said “such things are not favored around here” (kagahenzwa). This is a phrase that is often used in the region to start a narrative about an incidence of bad luck involving witchcraft. Kigoma hastily rephrased it saying “Satan is not pleased with this kind of thing” (pepo kahamirwa) and then ultimately referred to a Duruma proverb “the good will not live long” (mutu mudzo kakala duniani). He then said, as if to convince himself, that Lugo had been such a good boy that God had called him to heaven before he could be stained by the evil of this world. The reason behind Lugo’s death shifted in a bewildering fashion from witchcraft (human ill intentions) ultimately to the will of God. It seemed to me that he was wavering over which narrative in which he should place his son’s sudden death in order to be able to accept it.

I had known Kigoma ever since his youthful years. The first time I met him was when he paid me a visit to ask if I would help him pursue studies at a Japanese university. He was a primary school teacher then. Later, when then president Daniel Toroitich arap Moi introduced music to the primary school curriculum, Kigoma realized that there were few music teachers. Therefore, he went to college to obtain a diploma and became one himself. Playing the melodica was quite adequate to land the job. This scheme paid off, as there was a shortage of teachers. He also started teaching in secondary school, and in due course became a district school inspector. In 1986, an American couple was sent to help with a Duruma bible translation project by the American Bible Association, which was based in Kinango. In 1989 the couple returned home to the States, and when a search began for a local Christian to continue the project, Kigoma immediately applied, overcoming his rival Katana and others to obtain the position, which he holds to-date. In all likelihood, his eloquence and teaching experience got him the job. Currently, he is a central figure in the Methodist church based in Kinango and attends as a pious Christian. However, when he initially landed the position, in contrast to the long-term pious devotion of Katana and others, he was known as a “makeshift” Christian, as he had been drinking heavily and relying on a witch doctor up to the previous year. Subsequently, with his steady salary, Kigoma dabbled in a variety of ventures and became wealthy. He had an eagle eye for opportunities, and a knack for transforming himself to meet them. Yet even for him, the death of his son appeared to have been a massive blow.

3. Thunder witchcraft

The circumstances behind the extraordinary death of this young man in the prime of his life may have required an extraordinary narrative to deal with it. Faced with extraordinary coincidence and correlation in an incidence of sudden deviation from the normal course of events, people are compelled to narrate. I also recognized the possibility that his death
might be narrated in relation to witchcraft. As expected, in my courtesy visits to people during the following few days, this was exactly the case.

Among those outside of Kijiji village who did not have close relations with the persons involved, a narrative had begun to circulate in recognition of what seemed to be a most bizarre incidence in their eyes. According to the narrative, Lugo’s electrocution was due to thunder witchcraft (utsai wa chikpwakpwara). The potion (muhaso) for this witchcraft used materials collected from a tree that had split after being struck by lightning. In fact, there were people who were not pleased about electricity coming to the area. Kijiji village is made up of two large clans, N clan and K clan which are in conflict, and Elder B of the K clan was one of the displeased. He was rumored to be a witch, and said to be able to transform himself into a lion. In the narrative, since he was the one dissatisfied with the developments that Lugo had sought to bring to the area, and since it was, in any case, “thunder” that ran through the electricity lines, he had used thunder witchcraft to kill Lugo. The antagonistic relationship between the two clans also constituted an element of the narrative.

Another version attributed the death to various types of thunder witchcraft used by Elders B (K clan) and P (N clan) as well as his mother R. Since long before, both B and R had been rumored to be witches, and their names resounded in other areas. The social axis of this narrative was, rather than the antagonistic relations between the two clans, a greatly simplified oppositional axis between the witches (who were enemies) to the development of the area on the one hand, and leaders of the development on the other. At any rate, the narrative clearly demonstrates how the bizarre coincidence of a young man who had made efforts to electrify the area being killed by electricity garnered everyone’s attention.

As I am good friends with the son of B who appears in this narrative (and he believes that the breakdown of his life is due to B’s witchcraft), I attempted to ask him if he knew of the talk. It was news to him, but he asserted that his father had nothing to do with the incident. He concluded that it was nothing more than a baseless attack circulated by P, with whom his father had recently fallen out over issues relating to land.

Nobody in the N clan mentioned the version which involved B and thunder witchcraft. The only exception was M, the wife of P. She said nothing specific concerning the death of Lugo, however she insinuated that B was an evil man and that many problems within N clan were B’s handiwork.

4. The selfish pursuit of wealth

Within Kijiji village itself, a completely different type of narrative was being whispered. According to this one, it was no other than Lugo’s father himself, Kigoma, who had killed Lugo. This apparently originated from within N clan, to which Kigoma himself belongs. P, who has been mentioned above as being related to thunder witchcraft, insinuated to me that this was so. In that same year, P was afflicted by a string of misfortunes, such as losing his daughter and breaking a leg. His son had gone to college, but had yet to find employment.

3 He himself preached the “devil worshipping” version of the narrative which appears below.
Both P and his wife suspected witchcraft to be at work. Although P’s wife clearly suspected B, P on the other hand, suspected Kigoma, his own relative. P avoided talking about him in relation to his own problems, but insinuated that Kigoma was not a good man (*tsi mutu mudzo*). “He says that he is a Christian (*mujeso*), but he is not a real one. He claims to be a Christian to hide his true identity (*mujeso wa kudzifitsa*).” Among the Duruma there is a widely-held suspicion that witches hide their true identities and slip into the Christian flock, and P believed Kigoma to be one of them.

According to P, the sudden death of Lugo was not unrelated to the previous sudden death of Lugo’s mother Mekiji (a pseudonym). It was said that she had died as a result of a protective talisman (*fingo*) that Kigoma had placed to prevent the theft of crops in his fields (Hamamoto 2014: 68-69), but the truth (according to the story) was that Kigoma, wanting to become rich, had intentionally sacrificed her (*kumulavya*). It was said that this led to the removal (*rauswa*) of the talisman, but this was not the case. The problem still remains (*gachereko*). And, as the story goes, Kigoma sacrificed his son.

One reason why P believed this to be so was due to Kigoma’s behavior during Lugo’s burial. Kigoma forbade anyone to cry in front of the body, stating that he suffered from high blood pressure and could not risk any surprises and lamentations. Furthermore, he said that Lugo’s wife, in her final month of pregnancy, should not have been given any shock. Yet, as per custom, people cried. How could they hold back the tears even if they were prohibited? And yet, Kigoma himself did not shed one tear and just sat there calmly. Anyone who saw that could tell that he was the one, according to P.

“Wealth collected in that way will vanish when the person dies; it is meaningless wealth,” explained P one day when speaking with me about the issue. He further explained the situation in the following way: “We are of the same clan (*ukulume*) so we cannot do anything, but the people in Lugo’s mother’s clan (*ukuche*) will act (and will demand murder compensation). It seems they are already preparing.”

It is a fact that Kigoma’s first wife, Mekiji, who gave birth to Lugo, died in 1988. I had heard about that before from Kigoma himself. According to Kigoma, he was already a Christian at the time, but continued to live a life involving alcohol and witchcraft (*uganga*). Kigoma was a regular at M’s (L clan) palm wine shop (*chirabu*), so much so that it had become a rule to save six bottles especially for him. And as he had frequently experienced crop theft, he asked a Muslim witchdoctor to place a protective talisman in his field, ordering the talisman to attack anyone who attempted to take anything from the homestead without his permission. If anyone wanted to take something out, they needed to follow a procedure to notify the talisman that it was not an act of theft, thus cancelling (cooling) the order to attack (in that instance). Frequent chicken sacrifices needed to be made for the talisman. However, after the Majute anti-witchcraft campaign (1985), the talisman

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4 The Duruma have a double descent system and both murder compensation and curses are problems for the matrilineal group. The right to demand murder compensation lies with the kin on the maternal side, and payment made by the kin of the murderer on the maternal side (Hamamoto 2001: 28-32).
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5 The purpose of the 1985 Majute anti-witchcraft campaign was to kill a person who had allegedly used

witchcraft by secretly setting a medicinal device to seal off the area. The use of a protective talisman (fingo) for preventing theft or for a good harvest was also taken to be a kind of witchcraft, and was feared to be a potential target of Majute retaliation. Thus, many people refrained from such practices (Hamamoto 1991, 2014: 357-358).
which a person who has led a sinful existence shows remorse and becomes a dedicated Christian. However, I had already heard a different story relating to this incident around 1989. In relation to the Majute anti-witchcraft campaign that had gathered momentum in 1985, some spoke of fear that abandoned talismans would transform themselves into genies (jine) and then attack the people of the homestead with which they were associated (Hamamoto 2014: 359-361). It was also said that, in relation to Kigoma’s wealth, the purpose of the problematic talisman was not to prevent theft but rather to make the owner wealthy through the use of a kind of witchcraft (utsai wa chiza) that required sacrificing relatives (Hamamoto 2014: 98-99). As such, it was rumored by some that Kigoma was actually a witch. This kind of talisman was said to demand regular sacrifices. Considering this, it is understandable that the death of Mekiji’s only son, under strange circumstances, 25 years after his mother’s death in 1988, would be seen as a very mysterious occurrence and not just a coincidence. P’s statement concurs with this, and K and N1 of the N clan also alluded to similar suspicions.

5. Devil worshipping

Kigoma’s elder brother N2 gave an account which concurs with the above, but added an unprecedented component: “devil worshipping.” According to this version, Kigoma was a member of “the devil association” (chama cha devilu). By joining, it was said, a person could become rich. However, this required the regular sacrifice of a relative to the association (kumlavya). On other points, the story did not differ greatly from P’s interpretation. I heard this “devil worshipping” version from K clan in Kijiji village, and in neighboring M village. There is no term in Duruma for devil worshipping. It is either referred to in English, or simply called devil (devilu), or devil association.

In the mid-90’s, the spread of devil worshipping was openly discussed in Kenya. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank’s international schemes to channel the flow of wealth and energy out of the country were rumored to be a form of devil worship that had spread among Kenya’s elites and the young at schools. In 1995, the then president Daniel Moi openly criticized devil worshipping and under his orders set up a commission under the chairmanship of Archbishop of Nyeri, Nicodemus Kirima. Rumors continued to flare up after the government declined to disclose the findings of the report. A part of the report was finally made public in 1999 and stated that “[D]evil worshippers are usually wealthy and prominent people who drive expensive cars. Some of them own large commercial enterprises.” The report also touched upon night meetings with group nudity and blood ceremonies for initiates. The report concluded that “from all the evidence presented, the commission is of the opinion that the cult of devil worship exists in Kenya, both in the learning institutions and in the society” (Weru 2010). The obsession of the central government, triggered by interference and pressure from international society, may have also reverberated in the imaginations of many Kenyans. However, in the mid-90s, the

6 Locally it is called devil worshipping in English.
idea of devil worshipping had not yet circulated amidst the Duruma, among whom Christians constituted a minority.

The first time I heard the Duruma bring this up was around 2007. At the time, a friend who was teaching at a primary school told me of a rumor about a new devil worship association that was emerging as an evil means of accumulating wealth. According to this story, if one called a certain mobile number and stated that they wanted to become rich, they would be asked what they would be willing to give in return—perhaps their own child, their mother, or a part of their body—and doing so would allow them to obtain a loan. He stated that the motive was to get more poor people to join the devil worshipping church. Regular churches are open during the day, yet their congregations were said to gather at night, and to worship naked, and to consume human flesh and blood during the services. Furthermore, the friend said that the parishioners didn’t enter the church by walking in facing the front, but by walking in backwards—after taking off their clothes. Witchcraft used to obtain wealth through illicit means by sacrificing something constitutes the core part of the Duruma’s witchcraft imagery (Hamamoto 2014: 97-99), and my understanding was that they had added a Christian dimension to it. This concept of devil worship had arrived quite recently in Duruma society, but it appeared that it had swiftly taken root in the people’s imaginations. However, the death of Lugo was the first case in which I actually heard anyone narrate a case of personal death through the concept of devil worship.

I heard a detailed version on the 20th of August, from the young wife Km of the Elder Ba when I visited M village neighboring Kijiji. She is the sister of the second wife of Kigoma’s elder brother N2, and when I broached the topic of Lugo’s death she tumbled into a discussion. It is possible that N2 and his wife were the main source of information on the entire issue.

She stated that Kigoma had joined a devil association and had thus acquired his wealth, but that he had had to sacrifice relatives (sadaka) on a regular basis, and that this was what had actually happened regarding the sudden death of Lugo’s mother, Mekiji. Kigoma has maintained that it was caused by the talisman that he had laid to prevent the theft of crops, but according to Km this was a pretext (chisingbwa), and the truth was that he had sacrificed her to gain wealth: he singles out one of his relatives, an “accident” occurs, and the person singled out suddenly dies. Twenty-five years had passed since Mekiji’s death, and the time had come again, and this time Lugo—the only son of Mekiji—was singled out, alleged Km. This kind of person cannot cry at the burial, she said, as he knows what he has done. She pointed out that Kigoma had not seemed to be sad at all, and that as he wouldn’t cry, he disallowed others to do so. He said that his son had been electrocuted by a high voltage power line, but this was simply a pretext in her view, as Lugo had actually been singled out as a sacrifice. And again, she stressed, long after this incident, another would be sacrificed.

She also said that she had personally witnessed Kigoma arguing violently with Lugo at one point. She did not know what the argument had been about, but she said she had clearly heard Kigoma say that if he died he would be buried in the family grave and that if Lugo
died he would be buried at the back of the house. That is how it actually happened: Lugo was buried at the back of the house, which was nearly completed and where he had been expected to live with his wife—the prophecy of death taken as evidence of the involvement of a witchcraft practitioner. Km also added that N2, her husband, had seen strange white men visit Kigoma’s homestead a number of times. N2 had suspected that they were members of the devil association.

Km does not understand English, so I attempted to ask her if she knew the meaning of the word “devil.” She said she wasn’t sure, but that it was one type of witchcraft. It seemed to be related, in her understanding, with the white man and Christianity and she even went on to say that the Methodist church, of which Kigoma was a member, was also a devil association. The church, as a mutual aid organization, gives money to selected poor children so that they can continue their studies, but she stated that they do this in lavish style only to sacrifice them later. As a matter of fact, there was an incident where two children who were receiving aid had drowned to death. This fit into her view that those to be sacrificed are given an education, allowed to do well and then killed. She pointed out that Kigoma had also given Lugo the best education possible.

6. Gossip concerning Kigoma

It is possible that N2 was the source of the interpretation linking Kigoma to a devil association. As already mentioned, it was known that Lugo had offered financial support to the children of relatives in N clan. N2 is himself one of those persons whose son (the son of N2’s first wife) received financial support for secondary school. According to elder P’s wife, at Lugo’s burial, N2’s first wife cried loudly in spite of Kigoma’s prohibition and yelled, “now there will be no one to pay for my son’s school fees. My husband is useless.” Since N2 had taken a second wife, he had distanced himself from his first wife and she had taken their children and gone to a place in their field and built a hut, in which they were living. As heard from elder P and elder Ba’s wife Km, the behavior of N2’s first wife at the burial emphasized Kigoma’s prohibition against crying, and his bizarre act of not shedding one tear formed a contrast and heightened people’s suspicions of him. Furthermore, according to N2, Kigoma was receiving a large amount of money (20,000 shillings) from Lugo every month. In spite of this, Kigoma was said to have not been happy with the support being given to his brother’s children and was angry that Lugo was “supporting other children but only” sharing 20,000 per month with him. According to the story, this is why Lugo was killed.

There are some people who point out that N2 and Kigoma were never on the best of terms. According to K, Kigoma’s brother (father’s brother’s son FBS), N2 was not pleased with the regular visits by white men to Kigoma’s house. This led to a falling out between the brothers, to the extent that at one point Kigoma moved the family house to agricultural land that he had bought in the neighboring area where the Digo people live. He opened a snack shop (hoteli) there which prospered, but this caused a decrease in the number of customers going to other shops, so he was accused of stealing them through witchcraft (kutsorera). Therefore,
he gave up and returned to Kijiji.

Yet, according to K, when Kigoma moved to the Digo area, Lugo alone refused to go, stating that Kijiji was his home, and he started to build the above-mentioned hut for his new bride. K stated that when arguing Kigoma had cursed Lugo by saying that if he died he would be buried behind his hut. And then that is exactly what happened. This must have been the same argument that Ba and Km had witnessed.

The second wife of B in the K clan whose name has already appeared above in relation to the thunder witchcraft rumor-mongering, is taxonomically Kigoma’s first wife and Mekiji’s elder sister. However, her eldest son was among those who associated Kigoma with a devil worshipping discourse. According to him, on entry into the devil association, members must take turns sacrificing their relatives, and when Kigoma’s turn came, he killed Lugo. However, it was not Kigoma himself who chose Lugo according to this version: it was done by the association (chama), and Kigoma could not have known who was to be chosen. Thus, he related, it wouldn’t have been a surprise to see him distressed. The word “devil” had recently reached the Duruma, and although the name was new, such practices were said to have existed for a long time. To become rich, one gives a relative or a part of their own body. But it is forbidden for the giver to cry at the burial of the relative who was given: if the giver sheds tears, everything will be ruined. He explained that if a person didn’t cry at the funeral of a relative, the person would be suspected of witchcraft. In his mind, he was equating devil worshipping with chiza, the old Duruma witchcraft for making a person rich. This being the general way of thinking about these matters, there was nothing strange about the fact that many people who were at the burial felt suspicious of Kigoma for prohibiting people from crying at the burial.

Since the death of his first wife in 1988, Kigoma, had been haunted to some degree by suspicions that he practiced witchcraft. However, the death of Lugo gave an opportunity for people who suspected Kigoma to hash over his past episodes and re-narrate them collectively. Previously, when Kigoma’s daughter who had been going to secondary school was impregnated by a young man from a different area, Kigoma had allegedly flown into a rage. Soon thereafter, the man suddenly died. Consequently, young men in the neighboring areas no longer tried to approach (kaatumwa) Kigoma’s daughter. At the time of this writing, even though his daughters were all of marriageable age they remained in his homestead, unmarried. Furthermore, my friend, the son of elder B, had at one time established a mill that subsequently broke down before generating any profits, forcing him to pass it on to someone else. He claimed afterwards that Kigoma was to blame (although he had at first suspected his own father).

On the other hand, as a youth, Kigoma was a silver-tongued leader of the N clan who had fought at the forefront against members of other clans in conflicts and litigations. Both N and K clans had ceaseless land-related struggles with neighboring C clan. In 2001, elder C of C clan, who was rumored to have been a powerful witch, declared the boundaries of his own territory and prohibited the collection of firewood, the drawing of water, and the grazing
of livestock within that territory. His authority to prohibit others from entering was grounded in public fear of his witchcraft. At Kigoma’s assertion, N and K clans banded together and took countermeasures, announcing that they would not sell anything from their own lands to the C clan, and even prohibiting them from boarding buses at the local bus stop. At the time, there were two kiosks on K clan’s land. If the members of C clan could not buy things there, they would have had no other choice but to travel to Kinango, an hour away. In the end, C clan gave in, and brought out cows and palm wine and begged for forgiveness. This would have been a good case for building Kigoma’s reputation as leader. However, today the incident is related as a contest between C and Kigoma’s witchcraft, and the fact that the people of C clan gave in is now said to be evidence that Kigoma’s power superseded that of elder C. It was not people outside of the N clan, but those within it (K and N1) who related it this way.

7. Rachel’s Church

However, in one part of N clan a different narrative circulated. This was related to the recent swift spread of Christianity in the area. In 1911, a colonial administrative official of the Nika District—the name at the time of the area that was home to the Duruma, one of nine tribes of the Mijikenda—commented that converts in the area were “sadly few” considering that 60 years had passed since the establishment of the first Christian church in Kenya (National Archive DC/KFI/3/2: 129). Looking back, in 1851 Reverends Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810-1881) and Johannes Rebman (1820-1876), of the Church Mission Society (CMS), set up a Center in Rabai. This was the first Christian church in East Africa. In 1873, a Methodist church was established in Maseras (a township in the coastal province) where the Duruma and Rabai people’s lands border each other. In spite of the fact that the region spearheaded the Christian mission endeavor in East Africa, conversion of local inhabitants did not make much progress. At the beginning of the 1980s, when I first started my research, the Christian Duruma were an overwhelming minority. It was only in the 1990s that things began to change. The increase of Christians started in 2000 and two churches were established in Kijiji and one in neighboring village G (one is still under construction at the time of this writing). All of them are churches related to Pentecostalism in the wider sense of the term. None of these rely on organizational funds; believers established the churches with their own money. Until the churches were built, they used primary school classrooms, or took turns using believers’ homes, to hold sermons and to gather and pray. Rachel’s Church (a pseudonym) was one such place. There was another narrative regarding Lugo’s death circulating among those related to this church.

Rachel is the wife of Bj, Kigoma’s parallel cousin (FBS) in the N clan, and initially she was a member of a Pentecostal gathering in village G. According to her, a few years back she developed an ugly tumor on her lip and other members made slanderous remarks about it being God’s punishment for misconduct, and they expelled her (other congregation members in village G said that they had merely rejected her because she had wanted to be their
leader). Around that time, she had a dream in which three angels appeared and told her that God had brought about the tumor, and that she had been chosen to spread the word to those who serve him. After fervently praying, the tumor eventually vanished. To show her thanks, she prayed even more zealously. She then had another dream in which she entered the bush and started to preach to the trees. As she did so, the trees transformed into people from Kijiji village. Both elder P and the son of elder B appeared before her. Rachel encouraged them to seek salvation (in other words, to join the church), which they agreed to do. She shared her dream with the congregation members of village G, but nobody paid attention to her. The role of mediating for God belongs to the pastor, they thought, so how could such a simple layperson, who had not even finished primary school, go beyond that and lead the people? She then had another dream in which the angels reappeared and told her that she was the chosen one. It was then that she decided to build her own church. She found a number of supporters, and set about constructing a building—although small—starting with the stone walls. At the time of this writing, only adding the roof remained. She held congregations every Wednesday and Sunday, but upon the establishment of another Pentecostal church in Kijiji led by Pastor M a number of her members left to join the new one.

Quite by chance, at roughly that time—at a church in village ND—she met the pastor Manshuko (a Kamba person, of the Bantu ethnic group, and the headmaster of the primary school in village ND), who led a popular Pentecostal sect called the Fire Ministry.7 She immediately felt that he was the one to lead her church. He agreed, and in 2012 he dispatched a pastor, Paulo, and his servant, Raphael. Rachel’s Church made a new start as a member of the Fire Ministry, and the number of members began to increase. Rachel’s Church had been at the center of much controversy since its initial establishment, and now, the Fire Ministry being a very unconventional Christian sect, the church was giving rise to even more problems in the area.

Pastor Manshuko was famous for healing with witchcraft, such as removing things that had been magically driven into people’s bodies, and dealing with talismans that had been set in homesteads by witchdoctors. Such healing services were also performed at Rachel’s Church. However, it didn’t end there; pastors and believers in trance-like states (filled with the spirit) would single out witches from among the gathered people, and then point out that in so-and-so’s homestead, a witchcraft talisman had been placed. The wife of Kigoma’s brother N3 (taxonomically the sister of B in the K clan), was also singled out for witchcraft. Once, when Rachel was in a possessed state (golomokpwa) she called her out and yelled “Be struck down! Be consumed by fire!”

A commotion broke out after the wife of N3, Kigoma, elder P, and K of the N clan brought Rachel’s case to the police in Kinango. They went to see Rachel, and asked her how she could

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7 Manshuko’s church was referred to by the name of either Fire Ministry or simply, Fire. Amongst the thousands of independent branches of Pentecostalism that exist in Kenya, there are countless similar names that contain the word fire (such as Revival Fire ministry, Fire Gospels Ministries, Omega Fire Ministry). It can be characterized as Manshuko’s own personal sect.
possibly know who uses witchcraft or not, and challenged her to prove it. However, she claimed to have no memory of things that took place while possessed. Nothing could be done, after all, since it was the spirit who was said to be singling people out. Manshuko himself was also summoned for questioning, and as many as five charges were brought against Rachel’s Church in an attempt to shut it down. In the end, Manshuko was given a warning for his responsibility in causing the trouble, but Rachel’s church was allowed to continue to hold congregations as normal.

Rachel stated that the reason why Kigoma and elder P despised the church was because it exposed the secrets of the people of Kijiji—because it clarified who used witchcraft and who kept talismans in their homesteads. Therefore, they wanted to destroy her church, said Rachel. Kigoma’s son, Lugo, had even said at one time that he would have knocked the church down in one go if he had had a tractor. Lugo’s death had occurred, according to Rachel, because these words had brought the wrath of God upon him.

This is a commonplace and easily comprehensible interpretation. However, upon hearing the testimony of one former sect member—one who had left because he had become too busy with work—the story adopted a different perspective. According to him, the Fire Ministry is a very strange church. In the name of God, the parishioners pray for the deaths of their opponents, and of witches: “would that so-and-so, our enemy be met with death.” As a former Catholic, he acknowledged that such things are unthinkable in the Catholic Church. He alleged that Manshuko was able to use prayers to bring harm to others, like a witch, and that Kigoma had foolishly come into conflict with him. He believed that all people who knew about this felt that Lugo’s death was due to this conflict: that his father had “recklessly become involved in” (kagakumbwa) matters of this church. Ambiguity here stemmed from the fact that the church’s battle with witchcraft paradoxically made it look partisan to witchcraft in the eyes of the people. Even elder P and K, who had tried to drive Rachel’s Church from the village, did not allude to the relationship between the church and Lugo’s death. At present, Rachel and her husband have been ostracized by the N clan (alaviwa mbarini—to be forced out from the clan). At the time of Lugo’s burial, Rachel’s husband tried to offer some money toward the costs as a clan obligation, but was refused.

### III. Narratives and Events

1. **The ethnographic development of narratives**

I have presented a brief sketch of all the narratives I heard during a short fieldwork visit of just about 4 weeks. This may have been terribly tedious and intricate for the reader. However, what captivates and infatuates me as an anthropologist (and as a person) in the field are the endless narratives, such as these, that unfurl around a succession of events. For me, the field is a place where we encounter such narratives.

What is actually most surprising about this series of narratives is that these were all
related in no more than just a few weeks after the death of Lugo. In a short space of time, a variety of narratives proliferated at once. I am sure there are more than a few other people who have experienced a similar phenomenon in the field. With such a proliferation of narratives that possess different skeletal frames, which of these will subsequently converge (or fail to converge) to become the dominant narrative—or one of the dominant narratives? What are the reasons for specific narratives to dominate over others, to be carried by people and create a discursive space? Or, what are the reasons for their disappearance? The case in this paper clearly points to a starting point for following these questions and the conditions of a discursive space teeming with multiple variations. Doubtlessly, this is excellent material to explore the dynamics of such discursive space.

Furthermore, this case also offers prime material to allow us to understand what social, economic and spiritual realities Duruma society is presently facing. Devil worshipping, as an unprecedented concept, emerged as a double image of the old-time practice of chiza witchcraft yet also as something completely different. How does the fact that this devil worship is stimulating people's imaginations today relate to the recent Christianization of Duruma society, or to access to new forms of external wealth (in the form of NGOs, etc.)? From some of the narratives, we see a tension between half-brothers within a patrilineal group, and the existence of antagonism between fathers and sons. Yet, is this related to the new wealth and to its connection to the outside world, which are related in the people's understanding of devil worship? While Christianity has spread rapidly through its confrontation with witchcraft, from an outsiders' perspective the practice of Christianity manifests itself as witchcraft. How can this phenomenon be correlated with how the Duruma as a people perceive the source of the spiritual power that holds sway over their fortunes? It is possible to develop our observations on these ethnographic issues.

This case study can also provide us with appropriate material to help us deepen our reflections on narratives in general, on human life and on the narrative meanings found within the development of social events. Let us look in more detail at why this type of ethnographic material is of importance.

2. Narrative ability and events

A narrative relates the connections, correlations and coincidences between events. The attention paid to different connections and coincidences gives birth to differing individual narratives.

The proliferation of the series of narratives seen here indicates a situation where much attention has been paid to a number of confusing incidents that arose surrounding the unexpected event of the death of a promising young man, and subsequent unforeseen events. It was an ironic twist of fate that a man would be electrocuted after making every effort to

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8 The discursive space referred to here is a concept that redefines social space as the object of anthropology, recapturing it from the angle of circulating narratives. For more detail see Chitsujo no Hoho (The Methodology of Order) (Hamamoto 2001: 43-50).
bring electricity to his village: was it pure coincidence, or was it due to the workings of some evil intent? Was it just a coincidence that white people frequently visited his father’s home? Were the two strange deaths of mother and son, separated by 25 years, totally unrelated? Was it a coincidence that Lugo was buried behind his newly built home exactly according to his father’s “curse” resulting from Lugo’s refusal to obey his father and move in with him (for he was in the midst of constructing a home for himself and his wife). Were there some hidden reasons why it was prohibited to cry at the burial? We could go on and on.

The human mind is adept at making sense of various regularities, relations and coincidences among events, and this sustains the production of narratives. However, we can also find a reverse relationship between events and narratives. The very existence of a narrative invites people to seek regularities, relations, and coincidences within reality. The two constitute a reflexive relation. In other words, we can say that a narrative is a reflection and product of our human ability to give meaning to the various relations between events. Yet conversely, it is the narrative itself that becomes an instrument that enables people to find connections among events. A person who has repeatedly heard narratives of witchcraft (involving the selfish accumulation of wealth), will find some kind of relation between the suspicious death of a wife and her husband’s subsequent wealth. The person cannot but find meaning there. However, would a Japanese person focus on such relations (perhaps it is comparable to planning a murder for inheritance or insurance money)?

Moreover, to experience reality through a specific narrative is to gain, through the narrative scenario, some expectation for what will come next, or a guide for the next course of action. Through multiple narrative connections and the installing of a scenario we experience our everyday reality through these narrative connections, and anticipate the development of circumstances, which facilitates our actions. Furthermore, if each person behaves consistently with the scenario, people will weave reality according to the narrative together. Thus, reality unfurls in an expected fashion. In this sense, narratives are fundamentally “adaptive” tools for people. Our ability to find—invited by narratives—coincidences and connections among events can itself be considered to be adaptive, overall.

Although we tend to take it for granted, the human tendency for narratives is quite extraordinary. Even if we know perfectly well that something is a work of fiction, at no more than a moment’s notice we can be drawn into the world of a narrative and be left hanging in suspense by the actions of the main character and swing between hope and despair, no matter how we tell ourselves that such a character is not for real. The fact that our minds seem to be designed to receive and make sense of narratives with ease, and be enthralled by them, and to give meaning to the narrative connections that exist between events, suggests in itself that narratives have coevolved as adaptive tools.

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9 As a consequence of this reflexivity, it follows that the common notion that a narrative is merely an interpretation of reality is not correct. It is not an easily understandable two-stage construction in which the perception of reality sans narratives exists from the outset, followed by its interpretation. Relations and coincidences are sought within events. In other words, reality, as an experience of those relations or coincidences, is already entwined with one form of narrative.
However, this is not to say that no problems exist with the correlating ability of narratives. Given any reason to do so, we would be able to construe all bizarre coincidences in a meaningful light. Conversely, we would be able to dismiss them as figments of the imagination, and as accidents. There is no assurance that we cannot avoid two traps: 1) the error of taking two related events and dismissing them as coincidental, and 2) the error of giving weight and attributing meaningful correspondence to two events which are actually mere coincidences. Whichever it is, in most cases we only find out after we have lived through various scenarios, and the chosen path suggested by the narrative with which we are entangled, and proceed with the narrative by our own doing.

The above-mentioned perception of relationality and the reflexivity of narratives increase the risk of falling into these traps. By being caught up in a narrative, we become drawn to a mere accidental coincidence which we would not otherwise have taken any notice of. Conversely, the realization of such a coincidence itself becomes proof for that narrative. As a result of our acting according to the narrative scenario, the narrative becomes actualized as reality. When this kind of vicious cycle begins, the chain of correlating gets out of control.

The types of narratives that bring about these situations—I believe that the narrative of witchcraft is one such type—might be like a rampant virus that exploits weaknesses in the built-in adaptive design of the human mind. Those who are captivated by occult-like narratives experience reality as something mysterious, as a string of incomprehensible coincidences; that is to say, those who live an occult-like reality will see a father who enriches himself on the sacrifice of a son, and experience real feelings of emotional anger and be prepared to take action according to the narrative scenario. As a result, they might allow reality to unfurl according to this narrative scenario.

Nakai Hideo wrote the Japanese detective fiction “Kyomu he no Kumotsu” (An Offering to Emptiness) (Nakai 1974) which has been ranked as one of the three most bizarre books (Sandai Kisho). I shouldn’t steal the pleasure of reading this novel by providing a perfunctory introduction here, but I will say that the story develops around a macabre serial murder behind locked doors where the main characters, themselves aficionados of mystery novels, refer to a plethora of plots and eruditions from different detective stories from East and West, even referring to the history of the multi-colored Fudo deity. At the end of the novel the sleuths name the real culprit, who confesses to his crime. According to this, there was only one true murder, and the rest of the narratives were born simply because the detectives had connected unrelated accidental deaths and suicides to a macabre serial murder. Yet, an alternative reading is possible: the “real killer” had merely responded to the expectations of the sleuths who wove the narrative and gave himself up as the culprit out of despair (and there is also the possibility of a great misreading on my part). In fact, the author makes the “real killer” declare that none other than the reader is the culprit, rendering a brazen-faced ending to the novel. Knowing that it is fiction, we—as readers—

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10 Sandai Kisho (三大奇書) refers to the three most bizarre works in the Japanese detective fiction genre. Nakai Hideo’s (1922~) is one of them.
can be completely taken in by the author's strategy and become enthralled, correlating the various events and elements, creating in our minds a serial murder narrative, and then finally realize that it was none other than ourselves who demanded and created a killer where no murder had taken place. Narratives can thus run out of control and even create murderers in order to complete the narrative. In some sense, this is the same process as the narrative of witchcraft, which by accusations of witchcraft create a previously non-existent “real” killer as a witch. This is merely an offering to emptiness.

3. The sphere of narrative circulation

I want to draw the reader's attention to the following. The narratives introduced in this essay are a different class from mere pretend-to-be detective intellectual games and the irresponsible gossip that the audiences of TV shows pursue over scandals among people to whom they are unrelated. Rather, these are a series of narratives associated with ethical and practical consequences, by demonstrating how actors confronting their reality take various plans of action to deal with it. If we put aside the “thunder witchcraft” narrative (even this narrative had the potential of increasing conflict among the clans in Kijiji village and pushing events in a politicized direction), among others that dealt with Lugo’s death, the majority were those that were produced and proliferated at the hands of close blood relatives of the deceased. These were far from being mere gossip for play: they were narratives that compelled people to focus on how to deal with problems and resolve them, and that held the potential to lead to retribution, confessions, and demands for compensation. To put it rather dramatically, they were narratives that related to matters of life and death. They were not to be narrated to a non-descript audience. Those who listened and gave consent, at the least, ended up approving of the actor's choices of action and giving support. To somewhat exaggerate, the narratives questioned the partisanship of those who listened. This of course, leads to the question who the people who share the narratives are. Furthermore, it is connected to questions regarding my “research” in the field.

In the process of introducing the narratives that dealt with the death of Lugo, I may have given the reader the impression that these constitute an alternative set shared between people, and that among these, each narrator chooses the narrative that he or she most strongly supports. Yet, if this is the case, the question arises as to how Kigoma felt about the unfounded narrative that he was the murderer of his own son. In fact, I do not even know if these stories reached Kigoma, who was at the center of all of this. Of course, this was difficult to confirm. After all, how could I have asked him?

Yet, the witchcraft thunder narrative that circulated in another area—that B of the K clan was a witchdoctor—appeared to come as news to my friend, the son of B (it was none other than I who had carelessly delivered him this information, as I had been misguided by his blaming of his bad luck on his father's witchcraft). Just as in this case, it is quite possible that these widely whispered rumors were not known to the persons involved. As with my friend, even if they had heard the rumors, they could have rejected and disregarded them by
simply saying “they are wrong.”

Even with the rumors that related to Kigoma, and within Kijiji village, there were people who had never heard them. This also became quite apparent to me through my own mistakes. Of course, I could not ask each person; this would have been tantamount to indiscriminately spreading rumors, and if I had done that, trust in me within my network would have plummeted. In contrast to when I am in Japan, among the Duruma I am renowned for discretion, for keeping things confidential. However, I took it for granted that the women at Katana’s house where I was staying (and since Katana himself was well aware of the rumors), knew about the rumor and carelessly asked them for their opinions. I was shocked to discover that they knew nothing, and found myself in the awkward position of explaining it after having prefaced it by saying it was a totally unfounded story. It was all news to them. The worst part was that they started to say that it was possible, and then in a panicked state I frantically ran around trying to limit the damage. The women and Katana also went to the Methodist church in Kinango that Kigoma also goes to on Sundays, and in all probability those members had not been exposed to the circulating rumor. It would mean that even though Katana knew of the rumor, he had not said one word to his family.

On the other hand, they asked me some worrying questions. Apparently, there was a story circulating that I had kept company with Kigoma a long time before I had known Katana, and I was asked if this was true. This story had not reached me at all. I denied the rumor but afterwards started to worry about why such a rumor was circulating. The frequent visits by white people were also elements of the narrative concerning Kigoma’s association with the devil. Did this mean that I was suspected of being associated with the devil? I couldn’t deny the possibility that some people might harbor such suspicions.

Various rumors in a closed circulatory sphere exist in multiple folds. Even among those who live in the same locale, and/or members of the same family or kin group, there are occasions where they are left outside the sphere of specific narratives. It is impossible to comprehend the dynamics of the circulatory sphere of narratives—of not knowing that there are narratives circulating that are different from those among oneself, of knowing but not showing any cause for concern, of making indirect and unknowing inquiries. This is just as true for the anthropologist from outside the area, such as myself, as it is for the people who reside there. It is important to remember that it would be a terrible mistake to say that just because we are anthropologists we have a completely objective overall perspective (of course, I believe that this kind of illusion disappeared from among anthropologists long ago). In a similar fashion to people in the community, or even less, are we able to view things from merely an extremely limited perspective.
IV. Fieldwork and Anthropological Knowledge

The preceding discussion should be seen not as pointing out the limits of fieldwork knowledge, but rather as proof of the power of fieldwork. Let us consider whether or not other sociological research methodologies can present a clearer articulation of the dynamics of the circulating narratives argued in this paper. No one would suggest we use a random sampling questionnaire. More fundamentally, I want readers to consider how a researcher can encounter the kinds of narratives I have introduced here. Questionnaires and such are out of the question. Interviews or surveys would be the first possible answer, but it is hard to imagine that a complete (and foreign) stranger who suddenly appears and tries to investigate this sort of subject could come across such narratives. Even among local people, this is a subject that is broached with care. It took me more than four years before people began to tell me stories related to witchcraft in connection to specific names.

As Malkki points out, fieldwork is first and foremost the practice of living with and among people, and it takes time exactly because of this. It takes time just to be able to start living daily with the people. In the beginning, we acquire little significant insight into the society in question. With plenty of free time, we draw maps of the area, plot the position of homesteads, make efforts to learn the language, take headcounts of livestock, and even if we are not invited, we show up at every possible meeting and ritual (which we may not even understand), ask about kin relations, survey all households, and of course we must unknowingly commit various faux pas which are lacking in protocol and frowned upon in the everyday life of the locale. We do this to a degree without overstepping the mark (but we never know where the mark is beforehand). And when it all seems like too much work, we just sit back and take everything in. That is all that an outsider can do. And then there are the interviews. We ask all manner of bizarre questions to the bemusement of our informants,11 fail to get the answers we are looking for, and experience moments of frustration. If we strike upon an interesting story, we must follow it through to the end. Eventually, as we become proficient in the language, we can start to have somewhat better conversations.12

Whenever I would talk to people for the first time, or to people from other areas, I would fall back on the interview style. I would also ask acquaintances to mediate for me. Yet after having spoken to the same people a few times over, I would repeatedly visit them and what started as a relationship in an interview subsequently becomes one of mutually visiting acquaintances or friends. The conversations are no longer interviews, but idle banter and small talk. The relationship becomes not one of work (that of anthropology), but something

11 Dwyer’s (1987) work, rather than an experimental ethnography, is a very interesting and courageous publication exposing poorly framed questions and regrettable exchanges with informants that tend to take place in the early days of fieldwork. I do not have such courage.
12 These are all my own personal experiences. Of course, at the time I felt miserable, and in those days what little confidence I still held hit rock bottom.
enjoyable in itself. Malkki states that ethical issues emerge when living in the field, yet as with everyday life in Japan, obligatory visits, ritualistic offerings, appropriate conduct and acceptable responses, the fulfillment (or not) of promises, accommodations for others, and expressions of trust and concern (and not necessarily that of the Japanese type) are always issues. The most troublesome part is that when we become intimate with some people, we inevitably create distance with others—an unavoidable limitation of social relations. There is a need to respond to people’s trust. This can sometimes contradict neutral positions, and striking a balance can be difficult. As a result, I become far more discreet, generous and obliging than when I am in Japan (for those who know me in Japan, this might come as a surprise, but it is the truth). We may be liked or doubted by some or completely despised by others. The series of narratives surrounding Lugo’s death that I have presented here mostly derived from conversations and unsolicited accounts from intimate informants gained through a protracted process.

The above is very much de rigueur for anthropologists who have experienced long-term fieldwork, and there may be no need to put this down in writing. Fieldwork is a time-consuming process of forming enduring relationships with people, and the methods, trajectories and the shapes of the resulting networks will be different for each anthropologist. Yet, the best anthropological knowledge, whatever the form, is created through such personal relations, and it is a kind of knowledge which cannot be obtained in any other way.

As the authors of the two unconventional discussions of fieldwork I introduced in the beginning argue, fieldwork is a source of knowledge for anthropologists that cannot be reduced to a set of teachable methodologies. The particularities and superiority of anthropological knowledge has its roots in the characteristics of the fieldwork experience. However, such particularities are not exhausted by the unpredictability of the fieldwork experience, the inevitable errors and surprises, the ceaseless rewriting of previous understanding through unexpected events, and the improvisation that it demands. These are certainly associated with fieldwork, yet when compared to other forms of sociological methodologies there is no assurance they will bring a different quality of knowledge. What distinguishes fieldwork is that it is a process where the researcher participates in other people’s social lives, creates a new human network from scratch, and obtains knowledge about a society through the generation of a network of human relationships. This, and no other, is the reason why anthropological fieldwork cannot be standardized in a textbook manual. It would be an impossible task to teach standardized ways of getting along with others and forming human relationships, which vary across different societies. Yet, this acquisition of knowledge is qualitatively different from survey-type questionnaires or interviews (irrespective of whether they are structured or open-ended). As Malkki explains, the “inescapably social” is “inextricably embedded in relationally structured social lives, quotidian routines, events that become events” (Cerwonka and Malkki 2007: 177, k2782-2783) and the contextual knowledge we obtain through such practices are ultimately unique in their own right.
V. Afterword

Society exists as a space where circulatory spheres constituted of various narratives separate and fold upon each other. Within each circulatory sphere, individuals are driven by narratives and take action in the world. Like multiple ripples on the surface of water left in the wake of a passing ship, they produce a chain of subsequent events. Reality is transformed into complex shapes and retold through a new set of narratives. Anthropologists too, search for the divergences and convergences of these kinds of events and narrative links with the aim of understanding the social spaces they reside in. The situated narratives brought to the researcher through the practice of fieldwork become the starting point.

Yet, in essence, the fact that those internal narratives are limited in circulation presents ethical issues for an anthropologist’s activities. No simple solution exists for these, but by attempting to understand the micro-processes of unfurling social reality through narrative formation and circulation in face-to-face situations, and by theoretical elucidation, I seek answers in my own way. What clues exist for solutions to those issues that affect human society everywhere, not only in face-to-face situations, but also in media and internet-driven narratives and their dissemination which drive people to intense indignation and hatred, inflicting harm upon one another, forming oppositions and ultimately resorting to violence such as genocide? If we can obtain whatever possible method that can deal with these issues, then maybe those ethical questions that continuously arise from the field can be answered in some way.

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Translator’s notes:
1 In the original Japanese paper, the author uses the kindle version of these cited material, and therefore the numbers indicated with “k” were given in the original Japanese version. The translator has gone back to the printed versions of these material, and in the citations, both the printed page as well as the kindle line (“k”) are indicated.
ii Goshiki Fudo (五色不動), the five-colored Fudo. Fudo is a Japanese Buddhist deity, representing Mahavairocana. In the Edo period, five Fudo shrines in Edo city were said to have been designated as the Goshiki Fudo by the shogun. These are used as a setting in the novel referred to by the author.