

Traditional Institutions' Management of Sacred Forests
in Tanzania: History, Narratives, and Evidence from
Njombe Region, 1880s-2019

By

Edward Simon Mgaya

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	i
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Abbreviations	vii
Glossary	ix
List of Figures.....	xi
List of Tables	xi
 Introduction.....	 1
Problem statement	5
Thesis aims and argument	6
Literature review	7
Theoretical framework	19
Geography, demography, the scope, and the significance of the study.....	25
Primary sources	29
Human ethics	32
The organisation of the thesis.....	33
 Chapter 1	 35
1.Forests and forestry in Tanzania: topographical, historical, and legal contexts	35
1.1. Tanzania’s vegetation cover today	36
1.2. Pre-colonial forest management (before 1891)	41
1.3. German forestry management in East Africa (1891-1919)	43
1.4. British forest management in Tanganyika, 1919-1961	46
1.5. Post-independence forest management (1961-today).....	50
1.6. Forest categories and forms of management	54
 Chapter 2	 61
2.Traditional ecological knowledge, institutions, and sacredness: A conceptual discussion	61
2.1. Traditions and Traditional Ecological Knowledge.....	61
2.2. Formal versus informal institutions.....	67
2.3. New Institutionalism	73
2.4. Traditional institutions in Tanzania.....	75

2.5. The concept of sacredness	78
Chapter 3	84
3.Traditional institutions and the sacred forests: Formation, development, and management.....	84
3.1. Spiritual foundations of sacredness among the Bena	85
3.2. Formative processes: how sacred forests were formed	89
3.3. Nyumbanitu sacred forest (NSF): main <i>tambiko</i> for the Bena	95
3.4. Rites in the underworld: The sacred cave and its connection to the NSF	103
3.5. Bena ancestral clans and the tale of three sons.....	107
3.6. Migration and the extension of groves in Tanzania's Southern Highland	115
3.7. Folklore: sacred forests' restrictions and repercussions against defaulters	119
Chapter 4	127
4.The changing meaning of sacred forests and practices in Njombe: Colonial encounters, 1880s-1961	127
4.1. One landscape, different perceptions between Africans and Europeans	128
4.2. The land alienation and the change in sacred landscapes in Njombe	133
4.3. Colonial administration and economic systems, and the fate of Bena sacred forest practices.....	140
4.4. Faith blending and the destiny of Bena ritual practices: the role of Christianity	145
4.5. Weakened but not extinct: Resilience in indigenous beliefs and sacred practices	152
Chapter 5	159
5.Sacred forests' dynamics and endurances in the post-colonial Njombe, 1961-2019	159
5.1. From forest to a tree: economic drives versus sacred forest conservation	160
5.2. Cultural politics of sacred forests: Sacred sites as contested terrain	166
5.3. Tourism meets the sacred: emerging tourism interest at Nyumbanitu shrine	174
5.4. Tradition versus modernity: will the young generation adhere to sacred traditions? ...	182
5.5. Rationality for contemporary conservation and management of sacred forests	189
Conclusion	198
Bibliography	208
Appendices.....	233

Abstract

Forest management entails interdependence between nature and society at different levels and systems. In Africa, one example of the interdependence of nature and society is ‘sacred forests,’ groves of trees with special religious importance to a people’s culture. In Tanzania, sacred forests are comparatively small in area, scattered over the entire country, and primarily managed by local village lineages, or kinship groups. In these communities, the close interaction in a small-scale society acts as a monitoring and sanctioning device. The patches of sacred forests have historically been managed as part of local tradition. Their management demonstrates Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), the linkages between biodiversity and cosmology, and the intersection between the social and the natural sciences.

Scholars of traditional forestry in Tanzania have for decades compared sacred woodlands with the state- or private-owned forests. Comparing these different forest management systems cultivated a ‘relic stance’ in much of the scholarship regarding sacred groves. Anchored in the language of ecology, the predominant tone of sacred forest scholarship has been to describe sacred landscapes as static communal sites without exploring their associated constitutive dynamics. In such an interpretation, sacred forests have been regarded as remnants of the primordial past, a frozen view of these fragments of woodlands. Studying sacred groves without considering the institutions that uphold them is problematic, as it assumes traditional institutions have continued to be stagnant, interacting with sacred forests in the same way throughout time.

This thesis studies traditional institutions’ management of sacred forests by the Bena people of Njombe, southwest Tanzania, 1880s–2019. The Bena are a largely unstudied group. The study uses a qualitative, mixed-method research approach, including interviews in Swahili and Bena, documentary evidence from the Tanzania National Archives, anthropological reports, participant observation, and online documentaries. In applying a mixed-method approach, the thesis bridges history, anthropology, ethnography, and ecology to study forest management as an ongoing process of interdependence between nature and society. Rather than exclusively looking at the sacred forests as geographic locations, this study underscores their socio-ecological aspect and asserts traditional institutions’ dynamics as a key in explaining their history in Njombe. Thus, the thesis not only foregrounds the existence of such patches of forests in Njombe but also unpacks the institutional, cultural politics to reveal the contestations and appropriations around the

symbolic, cultural, economic, and ecological value of sacred sites among the Bena community. By using a *knowledge-practice-belief complex systems* lens, this thesis expands beyond simplistic narratives of inertness, to focus on historical, cultural, economic, and political dynamics that are internal and external to communities that have often helped sustain sacred groves' traditions or contributed to their degradation.

The thesis argues that the Bena sacred forests are embedded in a cultural matrix which is very different from the socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological landscapes from which they evolved. While managing sacred forests was traditionally an integral part of cultural systems designed to sustain livelihoods and spiritual well-being of the community, the relationship between the land and culture has shifted dramatically within different historical periods, altering the steadiness of the sites. In pre-colonial Njombe, chiefs and elders controlled the use of natural resources, but the relationships of the inhabitants to the forests changed with shifting social and environmental conditions. During German and British colonial rule, differences in perception of the landscape defined the contest over sacred forests between the indigenous people and the foreigners. The materially driven world has increasingly necessitated redefinition of sacred landscapes in post-colonial Njombe. The meanings attributed to sacred forests, derived from traditional Bena cosmology and which drive current conservation policies, have changed, and adapted to new circumstances. The shift represents the flexibility and evolution of local institutions and ecological knowledge, which illustrates the power of fluid, dynamic local communities. The change also emphasises the divergent approach of current conservation programs, which view sacred forests as static and contained.

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Abbreviations

BMS	Berlin Mission Society
CBFM	Community-Based Forest Management
CDC	Commonwealth Development Co-operation
CF	Community Forestry
CFR	Community Forest Reserves
CPR	Common Pool Resources
FAO	United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation
FBD	Tanzania Forestry and Beekeeping Department
GN	Government Notice
HASHI	Hifadhi Ardhi Shinyanga
IEK	Indigenous Ecological Knowledge
IFRI-CRC-TZ	International Forest Resources and Institutions Collaborating Research Centre – Tanzania
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
KVTC	Kilombero Valley Trek Company
LAFR	Local Authority Forest Reserves
LAMP	Land Management Programme
LCT	Legislative Council of Tanganyika
LEK	Local Ecological Knowledge
MNRT	Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism
NAFORMA	National Forest Resources Monitoring and Assessment
NAFR	Native Authority Forest Reserves
NFR	National Forest Reserves
NSF	Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest
PFM	Participatory Forest Management
REDD+	Reduced Emission from Deforestation and forest Degradation Strategy
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency
SNS	Sacred Natural Sites
TAFORI	Tanzania Forestry Research Institute
TANU	Tanganyika African National Union

TANWAT	Tanganyika Wattle Company
TEK	Traditional Ecological Knowledge
TFS	Tanzania Forest Services
TNA	Tanzania National Archives
TNBA	Tanzania National Bureau of Statistics
TTB	Tanzania Tourist Board
TTSA	Tanzania Tree Seed Agency
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
URT	United Republic of Tanzania
VLFR	Village Land Forest Reserves
WB	World Bank
WDPA	World Database on Protected Areas
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature

Glossary

<i>Albizia schimperiana</i>	Deciduous tree with a flattened or rounded, often umbrella-shaped crown
<i>Axis mundi</i>	A world centre- connecting between heaven and earth or a correspondence between higher and lower realms.
<i>Bateko</i>	Ritual specialist on environmental issues (<i>Ha</i> language)
<i>Bena/Mbena/Wabena</i>	An ethnic group of people who live in Njombe and Wanging'ombe districts, Njombe region in Tanzania
<i>Brachystegia</i>	A genus of tree that is native to tropical Africa
<i>Cupressus lusitanica</i>	Tree species (cypress) native to Mexico
<i>Hutehela/hutabiha</i>	Bena word for traditional ritual practices (also refers to a place where such practices are conducted)
<i>Jumbe</i>	A bottom level representative in the British administration system in colonial Tanganyika
<i>Lausonia lucida</i>	A much-branched glabrous tree widely distributed across Africa
<i>Miombo</i>	Moist woodlands
<i>Mutwa/Vatwa</i>	A Bena title for ancestor/chief (also refers to 'God')
<i>Mystzylon aethiopicum</i>	An African eggplant
<i>Mzee</i>	Swahili word to mean an elder person/ showing respect
<i>Ngimo</i>	A Bena traditional weapon for protection
<i>Ngitili</i>	Traditional dry season fodder reserves
<i>Nguluvi</i>	Bena contemporary word for God
<i>Njuga</i>	Traditional bells worn around the ankles
<i>Pinus patula</i>	Fast growing pines
<i>Rhus natalensis</i>	A plant in a sumac family wide spread in Africa
<i>Saintpaulia</i>	Plant commonly known as African violet. Native to Tanzania and Southeast Kenya.
<i>Shalula</i>	Bena word for the ultimate controller of natural forces and human destiny
<i>Tambiko/matambiko</i>	A Swahili word referring to traditional ritual practice or place (Ancestral veneration)
<i>Teclea nobilis</i>	An unarmed evergreen shrub or tree in rain forest
<i>Ubena</i>	A territory for the Bena ethnic group
<i>Ujamaa</i>	A socialist system of village cooperation based on equality of opportunities and self-help, established in the 1960s in Tanzania
<i>Ukinga</i>	A territory for the Kinga ethnic group

<i>Ungo</i>	A traditional sifting tray
<i>Upangwa</i>	A territory for the Pangwa ethnic group
<i>Urwald</i>	An ancient, undisturbed forest existing in a state of ecological equilibrium
<i>Vangueria infausta</i>	A deciduous tree with a short trunk and hanging branchlets
<i>Vanzagila</i>	Hired administrators during German colonial rule in Tanganyika
<i>Vatehedzi</i>	Bena word for priests or mediators
<i>Vatwa</i>	Bena earthly kins in the spiritual world
<i>Vudzela</i>	Bena word equivalent to traditional knowledge

List of Figures

Figure 1. Figure 1: Levels of analysis in TEK and management practice systems.....	23
Figure 2. A map of Njombe District (1979-2012)	26
Figure 3. Map of Bena homeland and the surrounding language groups.....	27
Figure 1.1 Map of Tanzania Vegetation Distribution	38
Figure 1.2 Map of Eastern Arc Tropical forests	39
Figure 1.3 Map of forest reserves in British colonial Tanganyika	49
Figure 2.1 A Conceptual diagram of a sacred landscape.....	82
Figure 3.1 Map to locate Nyumbanitu sacred forest from Njombe town	97
Figure 3.2 Road signs to locate the Nyumbanitu sacred forest.....	98
Figure 3.3 Nyumbanitu sacred forest.....	99
Figure 3.4 Black chickens inside Nyumbanitu sacred forest.....	100
Figure 3.5 Nyumbanitu sacred cave.....	106
Figure 3.6 A traditional spear at Nyumbanitu sacred forest	109
Figure 3.7 A traditional hoe at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.....	110
Figure 3.8 A traditional tray at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.	111
Figure 3.9 The lineage of Bena Ancestors.....	114
Figure 4.1 Different perceptions of the landscape, vegetation and the environment	131
Figure 4.2 Land alienated by the colonial government, Njombe, 1950s	135
Figure 5.1 A stand-alone tambiko tree.....	162
Figure 5.2 A genealogy linking the Kiswaga clan to the Mbena, first Bena ancestor.....	170
Figure 5.3 Tourism ministers at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.....	178

List of Tables

Table 1.1 Distribution of forest area by category, Tanzania mainland, 2013–2014.....	40
Table 1.2 Forest types and associated ownership/management structures	57
Table 1.3 Forest distribution by ownership and management regime	59
Table 2.1 Overview of differences between informal and formal institutions	70
Table 3.1 Classification of the studied sacred forests.....	94
Table 5.1 Rationality for sacred forests: priority changes with ages.....	194

Preface

I was born and grew up in one of the villages in the Njombe district, the homeland for the Bena, one of the one hundred twenty ethnic groups found in Tanzania. As I grew up, I used to hear terrifying stories about the mysteries of sacred forests. People in the villages were always talking about how various individuals had misfortunes after violating norms set for the protection of groves. As children, we took those stories as truth and exchanged such tales among ourselves. Although we could not grasp what exactly those stories meant, it was evident that fear was created in us such that we could not dare enter such forests to collect firewood or cut trees for making our favourite wooden bicycle-like device for riding. The same kind of stories were common in the early 1990s as I was pursuing my secondary education at a school in a village far from my home. Commonly heard at this time were the myths of the Nyumbanitu sacred forest, a forest considered as the main shrine for the entire Bena tribe. Stories of blood coming out of trees as people attempted to cut trees and trees standing still after being cut were retold. When people got their things stolen at school, they would announce their intention to go to Nyumbanitu to have the ancestors summoned to punish the thief. In some cases, such threats led to the stolen items being returned.

In 2012 I was interviewing people about their participation in labour migration during the colonial period. The interviews were part of my MA research on ‘Labour migration and rural transformation in colonial Njombe district.’ In their narratives, former Bena labour migrants and those who were left home recalled how the Bena, their chiefs, and tribal councils fought and negotiated to spare sacred groves from being appropriated by the British colonial government in the 1930s. It was clear from their stories that when it became evident that these people could no longer resist land acquisition, they negotiated to spare their sacred forests even as they allowed the rest of the land be alienated for large commercial production. Having visited two of these sites by this time, I was stuck by the fact that such forests were not as big as I thought they would be, imagining from the

many stories I had already heard. A question that trapped me from then was why would these people value such patches of forests even at the expense of other more larger fields? Thus, the idea to do the present study was born.

These stories about people and sacred sites, though seemingly common, carry in them a substance of importance when examining people's world views about nature. We can go beyond such stories to discern the socio-cultural, political, and economic setting of the societies in question. We can use these sacred spaces and related narratives to understand groves not just in themselves but as places where the socio-cultural, political, economic, and ecological interests of the groups involved interact and disconnect over time.

At the beginning of my research, I thought of sacred forests as indestructible and steady. The Bena who had spoken to me about them, both while I was growing up and as an adult, conveyed this view of sacred forests. The limited scholarship on sacred forests in Tanzania, which compared their biodiversity favourably with the biodiversity of reserved forests, reinforced the idea of the thriving sacred forest. But it became more and more clear during the research that sacred forest management under the Bena has variably changed, threatening their continued survival.

When I started searching for relevant documents in the Tanzanian National Archive, I found far fewer than I expected. The archive's holdings are largely uncatalogued. Nonetheless, I did locate several key boxes of administrative records from the period of colonial rule. The small number of relevant documents stems partly from the colonial rulers' destruction of some documents especially as Tanzania transitioned from German to British rule and then to independence. There was also a focus on the northeast and northwest as regions to be developed, rather than on the southwest, the area of my study. At this point, I realized that oral history methods, along with use of participant observation, documentaries and anthropological reports were necessary to complete research for the thesis.

Introduction

As part of natural resources, forests are important assets both to nations and to a wide variety of communities and individuals for economic, ecological, and socio-cultural resources. However, millions of hectares of tropical forests have been converted to agricultural fields and pastures worldwide, threatening many species with extinction. Efforts to conserve tropical biological diversity have usually concentrated on setting aside large tracts of forests in National parks and in other protected areas.¹ Yet the World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) reported by 2018 that only 14.7 percent of the world's forest area and 17.1 percent of Africa's land was designated as protected areas.² Because of social, economic, and political constraints, it is difficult to expand protected areas. In Tanzania, for instance, some reserve forests face encroachment and illegal timber harvesting and hunting.³ It has become increasingly clear that a conservation strategy focusing only on large state-protected areas insufficiently meets the conservation needs of some species and systems, and that conservation efforts in the tropics must include forest patches that lie outside large reserves.

As climate change and other extreme events bring dramatic illustrations of human vulnerability, sacred natural sites prove their value as part of the natural makeup of the planet and as places central to knowledge on cultural adaptation and resilience. The promotion of traditional forms of resource management is centred on the management capabilities of local communities and the possible danger of disregarding them. Sacred landscapes—natural sites having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities, provide examples of a complex relationship between people and nature. Linked to culture and cultural heritage, sacred groves and ritual sites represent a potential contribution to the conservation of biodiversity, particularly in fragmented landscapes. For this reason, sacred groves are of great research value for in situ conservation of threatened species.

Studies on sacred forests were on the rise in the 1900s, and throughout much of the twentieth century scholarship on sacred groves often depicted them as ethnographic

¹ John Schelhas and Russel Greenberg, 'Introduction: The Value of Forest Patches', in *Forest Patches in Tropical Landscapes*, ed. J. Schelhas R. Greenberg (Washington, D.C: Island Press, 1996), xv.

² Protected area coverage per country/territory by UN Environment Regions.
<https://www.protectedplanet.net/c/unep-regions> (12 October 2019).

³ Belachew Gizachew et al. 'Deforestation and Connectivity among Protected Areas of Tanzania', *Forests* 11, no. 2 (2020), 2.; Jafari, R. Kideghesho, 'Realities on Deforestation in Tanzania — Trends, Drivers, Implications and the Way Forward,' In *Precious Forests - Precious Earth* (Intech Open Science, Rijeka" 2015), 22.

curiosities and indicators of cultural and ecological continuity.⁴ In recent decades, however, scholars increasingly recognise sacred forests as distinct and locally important common property resources (CPR).⁵ In 2005, for instance, UNESCO, after reviewing case studies of sacred natural resources, declared that government agencies, non-governmental organisations, and researchers in the social and natural sciences need to collaborate to safeguard the cultural and biological diversity of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes.⁶ Given the fact that sacred sites are dependent on communities and on the institutional ideologies that revere them, ecological and cultural stasis would be difficult to maintain. Diverse cultures recognise sacred forests in different ways, encoding various rules for their management at different contexts. Thus, there is a need for studies that look at sacred sites as part of dynamic traditional institutions. This thesis is such a study and examines sacred forests in Njombe, southwest Tanzania.

Tanzania contains such a high level of forest resources that the nation is among the most bio-diverse countries in the world. The country boasts about 11,000 species of plants, many of which are endemic.⁷ While the historical data on forest cover are unreliable, periodic estimates have put forest cover at anywhere from 48% to 55% of mainland Tanzania's total land area in the post-colonial period, 1961-2018.⁸ Approximately 43% of the forested land is classed as a forest reserve, controlled and managed by the state through the Tanzania Forest Service (TFS) Agency. The phrase "forest reserve" implies that the forest is saved, but "reserve" means "reserved for state use" in Tanzania.⁹ The remaining 57% consists of forests found outside the reserve network, forests that lie on the village and

⁴ Peter Castro, 'Sacred Groves and Social Change in Kirinyaga, Kenya', in *Social Change and Applied Anthropology*, eds. M. Chaiken and Anne K. Fleuret (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1990), 277.

⁵ Michael Sheridan, 'The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves: Ecological, Social and Symbolic Processes', in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change*, eds. M. Sheridan and C. Nyamweru (Oxford: James Currey, 2008), 9.

⁶ UNESCO, 'Conserving Cultural and Biological Diversity: The role of sacred natural sites and cultural landscapes', *International Tokyo Symposium* (Paris: UNESCO, 2005), 333.

⁷ IUCN, 'Governance of Protected and Conserved Areas in Tanzania', Paper presented on governance workshop as part of an IUCN-assisted process of assessment and action to enhance governance for conservation and sustainable livelihoods (Dar es Salaam, 21-22 March 2017), 2. The species and sub-species include also primates, antelopes, reptiles, amphibians, invertebrates. The ecosystems include nine major river catchments, mountains, drylands, savannah, and coastal and marine areas.

⁸ Tanzania Forest Services (TFS) Agency, Statement by Dos Santos Silayo, chief Executive secretary, <http://www.tfs.go.tz/index.php/en/about/chief-executives-message> (22 April 2019).

⁹ In Tanzania's 1998 National Forest Policy, a reserve forest is defined as a forest area, either for production of timber and other forest produce or protective for the protection of forests and important water catchments, controlled under the Forest Ordinance and declared by the Minister.

general land.¹⁰ These forests are not included in national laws or district by-laws.¹¹ The traditional and customary management practices have generally supported the conservation and maintenance of some of the forest cover for sacred, religious or social purposes in numerous localities across the country.

Sacred forests constitute part of non-reserved landscapes. These forests are considered sacred natural sites (SNS), generally defined as land having special spiritual significance to peoples and communities.¹² These patches of forests are informally managed as part of a local cultural tradition without much intervention from forest departments. Throughout Tanzanian history, traditional local communities have relied on spirituality and on traditional ecological knowledge (TEK)¹³ to conserve the environment and cope with natural disasters. The communities depend on indigenous knowledge and beliefs to sustainably utilise their natural resources. Menzie and Buttler (2006) maintains that TEK, although traditionally developed, has the potential to contribute to more efficient and sustainable forest management.¹⁴ In African societies in general and Tanzania in particular, designating certain forests as ‘sacred’ plays a significant role in nature conservation base. Traditional societies often work collectively and have formed a variety of institutions to look after the sacred sites. Traditional institutions are relevant custodians of belief systems that have continuously been important in managing sacred forests and other natural resources.

In Tanzania, sacred forests inhabit lands owned by clans, a customary type of land tenure that precluded written documentation about their management systems. Nevertheless, in the past twenty-five years, many scholars have become interested in studying the management of sacred natural resources. Many of these studies show that sacred forests are better preserved and have a higher level of biodiversity and more unique

¹⁰ Andrew Hurst, ‘State Forestry and Spatial Scale in the Development Discourses of Post-Colonial Tanzania: 1961-1971’, *Geographical Journal* 169, no. 4 (2003), 358.

¹¹ Agustina Soledad Alvarez, ‘Mambo ya Zamani? Current Reasons Behind Sacred Forests’ Conservation in North Pare, Tanzania’ (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016), 9.

¹² WWF, *The Sacred Forests of Sakoantoro and Vohimasio: Catalysing Community Based Forest Management to Conserve the Biodiversity of Southern Madagascar Forest Gift to the Earth* (2003), 1.

¹³ ‘a cumulative body of knowledge, belief, and practice, evolving and handed down through generations through traditional songs, stories and beliefs. It is concerned with the relationship of living beings (including human) with their traditional groups and with their environment (F. Berkes, ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Perspective,’ *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Concepts and Cases* 52, no. 5 (1993), 432. [More details on the concept of TEK is presented in chapter two.]

¹⁴ C.R. Menzie and C. Buttler, ‘Understanding Ecological Knowledge’, in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Natural Resource Management*, ed. C. R. Menzie (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 1.

vegetation than state-preserved forests.¹⁵ These conclusions, which are not limited to Tanzania,¹⁶ challenge the conventional conservationist sequence that considered local communities as potential threats to the common pool resources (CPR).

For any meaningful understanding of sacred forests, we need to consider the linkages between the biodiversity and the spirituality of communities. In Tanzania, these linkages have partly been acknowledged but remain unexplored. To be able to understand these connections, we need to study sacred forests alongside the institutions that uphold them.¹⁷ As managers of natural resources, traditional institutions merit investigation because of their potential survival value, flexibility, and their perceived sustainable management strategies.

Sacred forests constitute part of landscapes in numerous communities throughout Tanzania. There is a general notion that these forests are richer in biodiversity compared to forests in reserves. But there is continued decline of sacred forests in Njombe which is indicative of long-term socioeconomic changes that have characterised the Bena society. However, little is known about the changes and continuities manifested in sacred forest traditions in Tanzania. In most cases, even basic information about their quantity, size and conservation value is lacking.¹⁸ The lack of knowledge about sacred forests is also acknowledged by a forest policy document from 2008 which clearly states that ‘little is known about their extent, location and system used to preserve and protect traditional forests’.¹⁹

¹⁵ See for instance, M.A. Njana, et.al., ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania’, *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012): 92-106; S. Mwihomeke et.al. ‘Plant Species Richness in the Traditionally Protected Forests of the Zigua, Handeni District, Tanzania’, *Silva Carelica* 34 (2000): 178-193; S.T. Mwihomeke, T. H. Msangi, C. K. Mabula, J. Ylhäisi, and K. C. H. Mndeme, ‘Traditionally Protected Forests and Nature Conservation in the North Pare Mountains and Handeni District, Tanzania’, *Journal of East African Natural History* 87, no. 1 (1998): 279-291; Michael Sheridan, ‘The Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study’, *African Studies Review* 52, no. 1 (2009): 73-98.

¹⁶ In their study of India, Boraiah et al. reached a similar conclusion that the density of regenerating medicinal plants among sacred groves was almost twice that of reserve forests. (K. T. Boraiah, R. Vasudeva, Shonil A. Bhagwat, and C. G. Kushalappa, ‘Do Informally Managed Sacred Groves have Higher Richness and Regeneration of Medicinal Plants than State-managed Reserve Forests?’ *Current Science*, 84, no.6 (2003), 804.

¹⁷ J. H. Spangenberg identifies institutions as a significant societal and cultural element and an important dimension of sustainability (J. H. Spangenberg, ‘Institutional Sustainability Indicators: An Analysis of the Institutions in Agenda 21 and a Draft Set of Indicators for Monitoring their Effectivity’, *Sustainable Development*, 10 (2002): 104.).

¹⁸ S. T. Mwihomeke, T. H. Msangi, C. K. Mabula, J. Ylhäisi, and K. C. H. Mndeme, ‘Traditionally Protected Forests and Nature Conservation in the North Pare Mountains and Handeni District, Tanzania’, *Journal of East African Natural History* 87 no.1 (1998), 280.

¹⁹ URT, *Participatory Forest Management Guideline* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 2008), 10.

Problem statement

Knowledge about sacred forests in Tanzania has not progressed much since this statement was made in 2008. The few studies to date focus mainly on either north-eastern or north-western parts of the country.²⁰ Only one study by M. A. Njana et al. talks about the South highland part of Tanzania.²¹ The lack of relevant knowledge about the traditional natural resource management systems of diverse communities hinders the formulation of appropriate policies for their protection. Policies that do not interpret the dynamics in traditional institutions' management of natural resources are likely to fail.

In addition to the shortage of studies on sacred forests in Tanzania, there exists a static view of the way traditional institutions maintain sacred forests. Before the final quarter of the twentieth century, African religion, a key to the sacred forest tradition, was understood by many scholars as aboriginal.²² Those who were hostile to African religion called it 'primitive', while those favourable to it called it 'primal'. Both words imply an unchanging continuity with the earlier times. Understanding African culture in either way makes it challenging to treat sacred forest management historically. The ahistorical approach led to the concept that sacred groves are relics of primaeval forests, the property of kin and ethnic groups whose traditional spiritual values made them conserved areas.²³

In Tanzania, despite some proofs to the contrary, ideas of primal forests still typify

²⁰ Studies on sacred forests in Tanzania include G.C. Kajembe, 'Indigenous Management System as a Basis for Community Forestry in Tanzania. A Case Study for Dodoma Urban and Lushoto Districts' (1994); M. Wagner, 'Environment, Community and History, 'Nature in Mind' in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-century Buha, Tanzania', in *Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in The History of Tanzania*, eds. G. Maddox, J. Giblin, and I. N. Kimambo (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996): 175-197; J. Ylhäisi, 'Significance of Traditional Forests and Rituals in Tanzania: A Case Study of Zigua, Gweno and Nyamwezi Ethnic Groups', *Silva Carelica*, 34 (2000): 194-219; G.C. Kajembe et.al. 'The Role of Traditional Institutions in the Conservation of Forest Resources in East Usambara, Tanzania', *International Journal of Sustainable World Ecology*, no.10 (2003): 101-107; M. Sheridan, 'Tanzanian Ritual Perimetric and African Landscapes: The Case of Dracaena', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2008): 491-521; M. Sheridan, 'The Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study', *African Studies Review* 52, no. 1 (2009): 73-98; M.A. Njana, et.al. 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania', *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012): 92-106; Agustina Soledad Alvarez, 'Mambo ya Zamani? Current Reasons Behind Sacred Forests' Conservation in North Pare, Tanzania' (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016).

²¹ M.A. Njana, et.al. 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania', *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012): 92-106

²² M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle, 'Changing Ways of Thinking about the Relations between Society and Environment', in *Beyond the Sacred Forest: Complicating Conservation in Southeast Asia*, eds. M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

²³ The relic view is powerful because it appeals to different constituencies. Conservation practitioners use it to press for better land management, academics use it to assert the validity and wisdom of indigenous practices as opposed to colonial and neo-colonial influences, and sacred forest caretakers use it to claim authority and legitimacy.

some literature. For instance, Njana et al. (2012) used tree and shrub species diversity and forest stocking at Nyumbanitu Sacred forest (NSF) as a measure of forest use rules enforcement and applauded stable NSF and social institutions that revere them.²⁴ A similar claim was made by S. Mwihomeke, C. Mabula and M. Nummelin (2000) who commended “significantly higher number of species in the traditionally protected sacred forests” suggesting their continuity from the past.²⁵ The relatively rich biodiversity of sacred forests compared to state reserve forests fosters the characterisation of sacred forests as steady.²⁶ However, a few studies have emerged to suggest that traditional systems are dynamic, evolving with time and space, and hence altering their relationships with sacred forests.²⁷ The few studies examine the fluctuations in the pre-colonial traditional institutions and their effect on how various social groups conceive of, negotiate and access nature. Although scholars like Michael Sheridan have studied changes and continuities in traditional institutions in the North Pare Mountains, research on the sacred forest tradition as complex and dynamic is still new and mostly unexplored in most parts of Tanzania.

Thesis aims and argument

Institutions evolve by continual marginal adjustments, building upon their prior arrangements. This thesis examines the development of traditional institutions in response to the demands of a globalised world and how such evolution has impacted the traditional belief systems and sacred forests in Njombe, southwest Tanzania. The study underscores the need to unearth the changes and continuities in the ways traditional institutions maintain sacred forests. It analyses the link between wider processes of sociocultural and economic change and the dynamics of sacred forests. Specifically, the study examines four aspects of the management of sacred forests. First, it identifies and analyses the traditional institutions (social rules) and local organisational systems that uphold the status of the sacred forests among the Bena. Next, the thesis investigates the cultural processes for the formation and

²⁴ M.A. Njana, W. Mugasha, and G.C. Kajembe ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania,’ *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012), 100.

²⁵ S. Mwihomeke, C. Mabula and M. Nummelin. ‘Plant Species Richness in the Traditionally Protected Forests of the Zigua, Handeni District, Tanzania’, *Silva Carelica* 34 (2000): 178-193. Also, G.C. Kajembe et.al. ‘The Role of Traditional Institutions in the Conservation of Forest Resources in East Usambara, Tanzania’, *International Journal of Sustainable World Ecology*, no.10 (2003): 101-107

²⁶ In Tanzania, most reserve forests experience huge encroachment and illegal timber harvesting and hunting, thus affecting their biodiversity.

²⁷ M. Sheridan, ‘The Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study’, *African Studies Review* 52, no.1 (2009): 73-98; Agustina Soledad Alvarez, ‘Mambo ya Zamani? Current Reasons Behind Sacred Forests’ Conservation in North Pare, Tanzania’ (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016).

development of sacred forests, keeping in mind the link between the traditional institutions and the ecological characteristics of the sites. After that, the thesis investigates changes in the sacred forest tradition and explores how the colonial encounters shaped the dynamics of the traditional institutions and their practices of safeguarding sacred forests among the Bena. The study then examines sacred forests' dynamics and endurances in post-colonial Njombe, also establishing the extent to which the changes and continuities in traditional institutions have sustained or threatened the protection of sacred forests by traditional institutions in Tanzania.

This study employs Michael Sheridan's concept of 'sacred groves as places where the socio-cultural, political, economic, and ecological interests of various groups interact over time' to understand the constitutive dynamics of sacred forests management. In doing so, I depart from viewing African sacred forests as steady endpoints to examining the resilience²⁸ revealed by a traditional system's self-organising process, facilitated by knowledge development and adaptation. Thus, my thesis argues that the Bena sacred forests are embedded in a cultural matrix which is very different from the socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological landscapes from which they evolved. While managing sacred forests was traditionally an integral part of cultural systems designed to sustain livelihoods and the spiritual well-being of the community, the relationship between the land and culture have shifted dramatically in successive historical periods, altering the stability of the sites.

Literature review

Scholarship on sacred forests focuses on India and Africa. Heightened interest in Indian sacred forests followed the publication of Mahdavi Gadgil's theories (1975) about the vanishing traditions of sacred forests.²⁹ Subsequently, numerous studies have been conducted in various places in India. In Africa, the literature on sacred groves concentrates on four areas: the Guinea-Congolian rainforests of West Africa; the Eastern Arc and the Coastal forests of East Africa; the hill forests in Madagascar; and the hill forests of Zimbabwe.³⁰ The concentration of studies in these areas, except for Zimbabwe, correspond

²⁸ Resilience is defined here as 'the capacity to absorb disturbances and reorganise while changing'.

²⁹ Eliza Kent, *Sacred Groves and Local Gods: Religion and Environmentalism in South India* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4. The literature on sacred groves in India is voluminous. For representative work see Chandrakanth and Room 1991, Chandran and Hughes 1997, Roy Burham 1995, Freeman 1999, and Ramakrishna et al. 1998.

³⁰ Sheridan, 'Dynamics of African Sacred Groves', 10. Michael Sheridan drew a map of African sacred groves scholarship from 1913 to 2006 and located 154 studies across Africa with major geographical zones being West and East Africa.

with their characterisation as ‘hotspots’ of biodiversity in Africa.³¹ Sacred groves also dot the landscape of Ghana, in West Africa, providing about 2000-3000 oases of biodiversity and tradition.³²

Studies show that the histories of sacred forests differ according to the cultural practices of specific communities. Since the 1970s, there have been calls in Tanzania for studies that examine the complex relations that link environmental concerns and socio-economic structures to local sacred forests. For instance, in 1972, Terrence Ranger and Isaria Kimambo’s collection of essays on historical studies of African religion persuasively called for studies on ecology that recognise the importance of traditional religious institutions.³³ In 1988, Juhani Koponen argued that the survival of pre-colonial Tanzanian societies was not a ‘national’ achievement but mostly a ‘local’ affair.³⁴ Elin Torell, building from Koponen, argued, in 2002, that community agency in environmental change should be revealed from the grassroots level.³⁵ Recently, Sheridan (2008) argued that African sacred groves correspond with specific forms of social organisations, typically institutions in which power and authority are local in space and temporary, tied into the lifecycle of kin groups.³⁶ This work responds to the need for local studies about sacred forests while also noting that the social and economic context of local societies affects their structure and drives change as much as the social and economic logic of larger and wider interaction networks.

Scholars’ study of local traditions’ environmental management minimised the problems inherent in attempting comprehensive national coverage. Local microenvironmental studies also helped obviate the pitfalls opened by extending conclusions across time and space, pitfalls evident in environmental scholarship. Drawing on a range of techniques, scholars began to uncover how environment and society have shaped each other. African scholars argued that facilitated by traditional institutions, Africans have historically utilised forest resources via Traditional Ecological Knowledge

³¹ R.A. Mittermeier, N. Myers, and C. G. Mittermeier, eds. *Hotspots: Earth’s Biologically Richest and Most Endangered Terrestrial Ecoregions* (Mexico City, SA: CEMAX, 1999), 29.

³² T. B. Nganso, R. Kyerematen and D. Obeng-Ofori, ‘Review of Biodiversity in Sacred Groves in Ghana and Implications on Conservation’, *Current Trends in Ecology* 3 (2012), 1.

³³ Terrence Ranger and Isaria Kimambo, *The Historical Study of African Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 3.

³⁴ Juhani Koponen, *People and Production in Late Precolonial Tanzania: History and Structure* (Uppsala, 1988), 367.

³⁵ Elin Torell, ‘From the Past to Present: The Historical Context of Environmental and Coastal Management in Tanzania’, *Development Southern Africa*, 19, no. 2 (2002), 283.

³⁶ Sheridan, ‘Dynamics of African Sacred Groves’, 19.

(TEK). Recognition of TEK was also reinforced by the publication in 1980 of the International Union for Conservation of Nature's (IUCN) World Conservation Strategy. The IUCN granted local communities an active role as co-partners in natural resource management.³⁷ C. P. Kala pointed out that TEK developed around sacred forests and helped to explain why sacred forests persisted.³⁸ To better understand the interplay among people, TEK and conservation strategies, M. Hostetler argued that we should recognise the nature-human balance by acknowledging and restoring the traditional interactions that people have with nature.³⁹

African traditional reverence of nature through TEK is consistent with that of many other Indigenous peoples. For instance, Māori of New Zealand, through *Kaitiakitanga*, a way of managing the environment based on the traditional world view, use traditional narratives, each of which embodies an ecological message that teaches and passes on environmental ethics or constructs. Interest in *Kaitiakitanga* has grown today, and tribal groups are working to respond to environmental problems and to renew their own knowledge, culture, and experience.⁴⁰ Because of practices that respect nature, Māori are increasingly involved in attempts to provide appropriate cultural responses to environmental issues. These include efforts to translate and incorporate isolated parts of their traditional ecological knowledge and practises into the prevailing culture.⁴¹ For meaningful incorporation of Māori TEK, much is to be learnt concerning the conceptual world view, traditional beliefs, and practices of the Māori regarding human-environmental relations. Thus, scholars emphasise the need for a Māori perspective on conservation to be seen and heard in the scientific literature.⁴²

Indigenous people's understanding of their environment can be described as a mystical involvement with the natural world. At a landscape level, anthropologists have long recognised the sacred status that cultures have given to nature not only in specific sacred sites but also in larger areas of cultural significance and regarding entire landscapes.

³⁷ W. Adams and J. Hutton, 'People, Parks and Poverty: Political Ecology and Biodiversity Conservation', *Conservation and Society* 5, no. 2 (2007), 163.

³⁸ C. P. Kala, 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Sacred Groves and Conservation of Biodiversity in the Pachmarhi Biosphere Reserve of India', *Journal of Environmental Protection* 2 (2011), 972.

³⁹ M. Hostetler, 'Scale, Birds and Human Decisions: A Potential for Integrative Research in Urban Ecosystems', *Landscape and Urban Planning* 45 (1999), 16.

⁴⁰ TERA, The Encyclopaedia of New Zealand, 'Kaitiakitanga – guardianship and conservation', <https://teara.govt.nz/en/kaitiakitanga-guardianship-and-conservation/page-1> (5 December 2019).

⁴¹ Mere Roberts, Waerete Norman, Nganeko Minhinnick, Del Wihongi, and Carmen Kirkwood, 'Kaitiakitanga: Maori Perspectives on Conservation', *Pacific Conservation Biology*, (1995), 1.

⁴² Ibid.

Bas Verschuuren et al. note that interest in sacred site management and the importance of sacred sites for living cultures has grown since the mid-1990s.⁴³ The recognition of the role of sacred sites in preserving biodiversity led to the exploration of new paradigms and multidisciplinary views, aiding both the understanding and the conservation of sacred sites in different parts of the world. In the 1990s sacred groves began featuring in African conservation scholarship.

In the 1990s, the failure of many state-led conservation efforts led researchers and policymakers to look for ways to empower or create community-based institutions for natural resource management. Sheridan observed that sacred forests epitomised contemporary conservation policy's goals of grassroots participation, socio-cultural legitimacy, and demonstrated ecological efficacy.⁴⁴ P. Veit et al. noted the pressure for conservation agencies and governments to decentralise natural resource management and to build upon existing local institutions.⁴⁵ Accordingly, S.A. Robertson and W.R.O. Luke investigated ways to incorporate sacred groves in Kenya into conservation policy.⁴⁶ Agencies and organisations such as UNESCO, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), and Friends of Earth funded community-based conservation projects organised to protect African sacred forests. African countries responded varying to the call for studying and incorporating sacred groves as an important aspect of conservation.

In Tanzania, starting in the 1990s, there was a new wave of policy and governance of natural resources. The new guidelines aimed to address the problems created by the colonial legacy of centralised forest management. The new resources policy in Tanzania resulted in a National Forest Policy of 1998 and the Forest Act Cap 323 (2002), which promoted Participatory Forest Management (PFM). T. Bloomley and S. Iddi observe Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM) became an important part of the PFM, in which officials recognised traditionally sacred forests as vital to forest conservation efforts, having realised that traditional and customary management practices supported the

⁴³ Bas Verschuuren, Jeffrey McNeely, Gonzalo Oviedo, and Robert Wild, 'Introduction: Sacred Natural Sites the Foundations of Conservation', in *Sacred Natural Sites: Conserving Nature and Culture*, eds. Bas Verschuuren, Robert Wild, Gonzalo Oviedo, and Jeffrey McNeely (Washington, DC: Earthscan, 2012), 4.

⁴⁴ Sheridan, 'The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves', 10.

⁴⁵ P. Veit, A. Mascarenhas and O. Ampadu-Agyei, *Lessons from the Ground Up: Africa Development that Works* (Washington, DC: World Resource Institute, 1995), 68.

⁴⁶ S.A. Robertson and W.R.Q. Luke, *The Vegetation and Conservation Status of Kaya Coastal Forest in Kenya: A Report to WWF* (Nairobi: National Museums of Kenya, 1993), 11.

preservation and maintenance of forest cover for sacred, religious, or social purposes.⁴⁷ Taking advantage of the new policy directions, and the need for ecology studies that recognise the importance of traditional religious institutions, various studies began to emerge.

In western Tanzania, Michelle Wagner was the first to identify the importance of ritual specialists for environmental issues. Her 1996 study on nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Buha long remained the only work to address the interplay between traditional institutions and modes of thought that governed the use of natural resources in pre-colonial societies.⁴⁸ Wagner concluded that nature spirits and *bateko* (ritual specialists on environmental issues) were central components of the ecological history of the Buha region. One cannot examine the local *Ha* community's attitude about the ecological system without involving the ritual environmental specialist. Recognising the fact that many Tanzanian traditional societies are unstudied with regard to their ecological knowledge, Wagner expressed hope that her study would inspire others to study traditional societies' intellectual and ecological history.⁴⁹

Two decades later, building on Wagner's foundation, Salvatory Nyanto explored indigenous beliefs, rituals, and environmental consciousness among the *Ha* society of Western Tanzania. He observed that indigenous beliefs and ritual practices played a significant role in conserving the land, rivers and forests in the kingdom.⁵⁰ Despite such roles, Nyanto argued that 'the introduction of Christianity, the British indirect rule system, and the villagisation program led to a relative decline in beliefs and ritual practices and affected the human-nature relationship'.⁵¹

Northern Tanzania has attracted more studies on its sacred forests than any other region. In his doctoral research, Michael Sheridan examined, in 2001, the changing management of common property resources in the highlands of North Pare, northeastern Tanzania. He demonstrated that indigenous ideologies of political and ecological order

⁴⁷ T. Blomley, and S. Iddi, *Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania, 1993-2009: Lessons Learned and Experiences to date*, URT. Ministry of Resource and Tourism, Forest, and Beekeeping Division (2009), 7.

⁴⁸ Michelle Wagner, 'Environment, Community and History, "Nature in the Mind" in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth-century Buha, Tanzania' in *Custodians of the Land: Ecology and Culture in The History of Tanzania*, eds. G. Maddox, J. Giblin and I.N. Kimambo (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996), 175-197.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 197.

⁵⁰ Salvatory Nyanto, 'Indigenous Beliefs, Rituals and Environmental Consciousness in the Heru Kingdom of Buha, Western Tanzania, 1800s-1980', *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 5, no. 9 (2015), 157.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 163.

influenced land management in changing political contexts.⁵² In 2008 Sheridan argued, in his study case of Dracaena, that landscape boundaries such as hedges were not simply ‘things’ but established social relationships through which people in North Pare negotiated the meanings of land, resources, and property.⁵³ Sheridan demonstrated in 2009 that the sacredness of groves is embedded in social institutions and that ‘the deeply contested nature of these meanings produces African landscapes’.⁵⁴ Aligning with Sheridan’s work, Jussi Ylhäisi (2000) observed various changes in the traditionally protected forests of the Zigua and Gweno ethnic groups in North Pare, even though he noted a high level of endemism and rich biodiversity.⁵⁵ In 2013 Samantha Jones studied the social dimension of conservation in the North Pare Mountains. Jones concluded that sacred forests preserved all that remained of the native vegetation, but their continued protection appeared uncertain due to acculturation.⁵⁶ Recently, Augusta Alvarez studied the motives underlying current conservation of sacred forests in North Pare. Alvarez argued that the environmental ethics of people in North Pare emerge from a fusion of local Pare worldviews and modern discourses of Christianity, Islam, and formal education.⁵⁷ We will revisit the work of Sheridan and Soledad Alvarez in the context of human-environmental dynamics in the context of the Bena community.

While there is considerable scholarship on the Northern region, the southern highland region with its sacred groves, such as the Nyumba-Nitu traditional forests, remains understudied. Only two short articles focus on sacred forests in Southwest Tanzania. M. A. Njana et al. conducted a geographical study documenting the rich

⁵² Michael Sheridan, ‘Cooling the Land: The Political Ecology of the North Pare Mountains, Tanzania’ (PhD diss., Boston University, 2001), vi.

⁵³ Michael Sheridan, ‘Tanzanian Ritual Perimetric and African Landscapes: The Case of Dracaena’, *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 41, no. 3 (2008), 494.

⁵⁴ Michael Sheridan, ‘The Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study’, *African Studies Review* 52, no 1, (2009), 73.

⁵⁵ Jussi Ylhäisi, ‘Traditionally Protected Forests and Sacred Forests of Zigua and Gweno Ethnic Groups in Tanzania, (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2006). The Thesis comprises four different papers all about the Traditionally protected forests in North Pare, North Tanzania. (J. Ylhäisi, ‘The Significance of the Traditional Forests and Rituals in Tanzania: A Case Study of the Zigua, Gweno and Nyamwezi Ethnic Groups’, *Silva Carelica* 34, 2000:194-219; J. Ylhäisi, ‘Forest Privatisation and the Role of Community in Forest and Nature Protection in Tanzania. Environmental’, *Science & Policy* 6, 2003: 279-290; J. Ylhäisi, ‘Indigenous Forest Fragmentation and the Significance of Ethnic Forests for Conservation in the North Pare, Eastern Arc Mountains, Tanzania, *Fennia* 182, 2004): 109-132).

⁵⁶ Samantha Jones, ‘Sacred Forests and the Social Dimensions of Conservation in the North Pare Mountains of Tanzania (MA Thesis, Ohio University, 2013), 3.

⁵⁷ Agustina Soledad Alvarez, ‘Mambo ya Zamani? Current Reasons Behind Sacred Forests’ Conservation in North Pare, Tanzania’ (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016), 5.

biodiversity of the Nyumbanitu sacred forest,⁵⁸ while Stanley Elias wrote about the forest-embedded folklore of the Bena.⁵⁹ Both articles recognise that traditional institutions, together with the surrounding society, have collectively managed the forest sustainably. Yet, neither documented changes over time, signifying a need for studies that look at traditional institutions and sacred forests as dynamic aspects of the society.

Generally, the role of traditional institutions in sustaining natural resources has been praised by most scholars. Studies on ‘*ngitili*’ forests (traditional dry season fodder reserves) in the Shinyanga and Mwanza regions⁶⁰ and on the ‘*mpungi*’ or ‘*mshitu*’ clan forests in the North Pare Mountains⁶¹ illustrate the important role that traditional institutions play in sustaining natural resources. For instance, S. Mwihomeke et al. assert that, regarding plant diversity, many species found in traditionally protected forests do not appear in the surrounding non-protected areas. They further argued that many of the remaining patches of evergreen forests and woodlands in Tanzania and worldwide are traditionally protected.⁶² Ylhäisi’s study of the Gweno and Zigua ethnic groups established that villagers in Tanzania, as elsewhere in Africa and beyond, have traditionally reserved forests for a range of purposes, whether commercial, social, traditional or sacred.⁶³ Other studies commended traditionally managed forests for their high potential for sustaining natural resources, thanks to the traditional institutions’ practice of allowing entrance to forests for permitted purposes only.⁶⁴ The sustainably managed traditional forests attract visitors, who pay entrance fees to the relevant authority, making such traditional forests a vital source of income for the local economy and the well-being of the people.

When compared with state-reserve forests, sacred forests have long been considered by some scholars as examples *par excellence* of ahistorical cultural and ecological

⁵⁸ M.A. Njana., et al. ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumba-Nitu [Sic.], Southern Highlands, Tanzania’, *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no.1 (2012), 99.

⁵⁹ Stanley Elias, ‘Inside Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest: Reinterpretation of Forest Embedded Folklore of Wabena in Njombe’, *Journal of Humanities and Cultures Studies* 3, no. 1 (2018), 1-12.

⁶⁰ B. Kaale et.al., ‘The Potential of *Ngitili* for Forest Landscape Restoration in Shinyanga Region - A Tanzania Case Study’, Paper for International Expert Meeting on Forest Landscape Restoration, Expert Meeting on Forest Landscape Restoration, San Jose Costa Rica, 27-28 February 2002.

⁶¹ G.C. Kajembe, E.J. Luoga., M.S. Kijazi and C.S. Mwaipopo, ‘The Role of Traditional Institutions in the Conservation of Forest Resources in East Usambara, Tanzania’, *International Journal of Sustainable World Ecology* 10 (2003), 106.

⁶² S. Mwihomeke et.al, ‘Plant Species Richness in the Traditionally Protected Forests of the Zigua, Handeni District, Tanzania’, *Silva Carelica* 34 (Joensuu, Finland, 2000), 180.

⁶³ J. Ylhäisi, ‘Traditionally Protected Forests and Sacred Forests of Zigua and Gweno Ethnic Groups in Tanzania’ (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2006); M. Sheridan, ‘The Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study’, *African Studies Review* 52, no 1, (2009), 77.

⁶⁴ J. Ylhäisi., ‘The Significance of Traditional Forests and Rituals in Tanzania: A Case Study of Zigua, Gweno and Nyamwezi Ethnic Groups’, *Silva Carelica* 34 (2000), 196.

equilibria. For instance, Njana et al. used tree and shrub species diversity and forest stocking at Nyumbanitu Sacred forest as a measure of enforcement of the forest use rules. They concluded that traditional institutions demonstrated effective forest management.⁶⁵ The significant role that traditional institutions have played in managing forests should not obscure the fact that over time such institutions might have changed. The clash of different interests in each sacred grove underlies ongoing change within it. D.W. Bromley argues that, with the advent of colonialism and a market economy, ‘the spread of private land and the attendant individualisation of village life have a possibility of undermining traditional collective management regimes over natural resources’.⁶⁶ In his interpretation, the individualization of property may lead to the breakdown of traditional authority and community regulation of shared resources. As a result, common pool resources (CPR) are lost to private developers.

Along with cultural loss worldwide, TEK as a part of local cultures is disappearing. In recent decades, an increasing number of case studies from diverse academic disciplines across the world have provided evidence of rapid TEK degeneration. J.B. Alcorn and V.M. Toledo argue that the degradation of traditional institutions uphold of TEK has potential implications for the status of biodiversity in Mexico’s forests.⁶⁷ Each of the studies in their volume provides a unique set of theoretical constructs and discipline-specific jargon. However, Maffi and Woodley (2010), in their worldwide survey, ascribe the loss of TEK to the loss of most traditional languages which carry cultural values, knowledge, and practices relevant to the environment. Other common factors include external exploitation of traditional land and resources or loss of tenure over such lands and resources, forced or induced assimilation, displacement, outmigration, land improvement, loss of cultural identity, and acculturation to a dominant way of life, integration into market economy and loss of decision-making capacity and self-sufficiency.⁶⁸ Rufe Tang and Michael Gavin (2016) make a comparable list when classifying threats to TEK. They classified loss of pathways of TEK transmission, change of traditional livelihood practices, religion, and

⁶⁵ M.A. Njana, W. Mugasha, and G.C. Kajembe ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania,’ *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012), 100.

⁶⁶ D.W. Bromley, *Environment and Economy: Property Rights and Public Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), 136.

⁶⁷ J.B. Alcorn and V.M. Toledo, ‘Resilient Resource Management in Mexico’s Forest Ecosystems: The Contribution of Property Rights,’ *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanism for Building Resilience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 216-249.

⁶⁸ L. Maffi and E. Woodley, *Biocultural Diversity Conservation: a Global Sourcebook* (London: Earthscan, 2010), 11.

beliefs, loss of traditional rights and change of traditional institutions as constituting direct threats to TEK. For these scholars, government policy and registration, contact with other cultural groups, market influences, colonisation, relocation and economic development pressures comprise underlying threats to TEK.⁶⁹ According to S. Barthel et al. the increase of the so-called ‘great acceleration’ of global environmental change of the mid twentieth century raised the question of whether TEK systems would adapt or disappear in the face of urbanisation, technological development, and market globalisation.⁷⁰

By the 1980s, because of decline of traditional lifestyles and associated knowledge, many doubted whether TEK systems would even survive the millennium.⁷¹ Until recently TEK was largely perceived as a vestige of the past that held—at best—folkloric interest and was bound to disappear with economic development. Yet, recent research from developed and developing countries has found that substantial pockets of TEK persist in many areas that have been subject to modernisation processes.⁷² Thus, the perception of TEK in the academy is shifting from one in which TEK was mainly perceived as existing in a rather essentialised and static form to one in which TEK is increasingly seen as having a hybrid and dynamic nature, more capable of adapting to new internal and external ecological and socioeconomic conditions than previous assumed. E. Gómez-Baggethun et al. argue that the dynamic nature of TEK may be enhanced by accommodating new forms of knowledge and by disregarding those knowledge components that becomes obsolete or less useful for daily life, provided that local people maintain the capacity to apply their knowledge.⁷³ Applying their view, sacred groves, a form of TEK, can act as an adaptive system, adjusting to the dynamic nature of social-ecological conditions in which the knowledge is embedded.

Viewing human-environmental relations as a complex and dynamic process is a relatively new approach in studies of sacred groves. Starting in the final quarter of the

⁶⁹ Ruifei Tang and Michael C. Gavin, ‘A Classification of Threats to Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Conservation Responses,’ *Conservation and Society* 14, no. 1 (2016), 59-63.

⁷⁰ E. Gómez-Baggethun, E. Corbera, and V. Reyes-García ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Global Environmental Change: Research Findings and Policy Implications. *Ecology and Society* 18, no. 4 (2013), [1].

⁷¹ P.A. Cox, ‘Will Tribal Knowledge Survive the Millenium?’ *Science* 287 (2000), 44.

⁷² Barthel et al. call ‘Pockets of social-ecological memory’ those places that having captured, stored, and transmitted through time, the knowledge and experience of managing a local ecosystem and the services it produces, and continue to maintain and foster them despite drastic changes in the surrounding environments. [S. Barthel, C. Folke, and J. Colding ‘Social-ecological Memory of Urban Gardens: Retaining the Capacity for Management of Ecosystem Services,’ *Global Environmental Change* 20 (2010), 263.

⁷³ E. Gómez-Baggethun and V. Reyes-García, ‘Reinterpreting Change in Traditional Ecological Knowledge,’ *Human Ecology* 41 (2013), 645.

twentieth century, a new paradigm emerged to challenge the assumption of nature as static (equilibrium). The new paradigm takes adaptive disturbance as an important entity and emphasises the dynamic, historical, and partly unknowable relations between society and the environment.⁷⁴ Thus, Lindsey Gillson, Sheridan and Dan Brokington emphasised that the best work in this field must look at flux simultaneously in natural and human communities. Applying flux paradigms of nature and culture in their case study of East Africa, the authors described a human–ecological relationship that is non-equilibrial, historically contingent and constantly negotiated at both material and ideological levels by unequal actors.⁷⁵

In this new understanding of nature-human relations, scholars recognise conflict as inherent in conservation. For instance, Dove et al. (2011) emphasise the need for awareness of diversity and of the potential for diverging and even opposed views in local and policy communities. For these scholars, even discord, far from signifying a breakdown in natural resource management, maybe a normal mechanism by which environmental and resource relations are managed.⁷⁶ To this end, to understand sacred groves as places where different interests align and diverge, we need to systematically study the contradictions that such forces create in the landscapes.

One of the best and most comprehensive works in following this new paradigm to date is Sheridan and Celia Nyamweru's volume, appropriately titled *African Sacred Groves* (2008). The essays in this collection span the continent from Morocco to Madagascar and show the surprising pervasiveness of these neighbourhood forests. Sheridan is the best-known scholar to study African sacred forests within the new light of complex social-ecological systems, that is, nonequilibria. In his case study of Pare in northwest Tanzania, Sheridan criticises scholars who treat natural sacred sites as 'relics of an ostensibly pristine ecosystem and unchanged traditional values'.⁷⁷ He instead argues that sacred groves are not static relics but sites where ecological, social, political and cultural dynamics intersect and disconnect over time. He criticises the 'relic theory' for not recognising the fact that

⁷⁴ M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle, 'Changing Ways of Thinking about the Relations between Society and Environment', in *Beyond the Sacred Forest: Complicating Conservation in Southeast Asia*, eds. M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

⁷⁵ Lindsey Gillson, Michael Sheridan, and Dan Brockington, 'Representing Environment in Flux: Case Studies from East Africa', *Area* 34, no. 4 (2003), 371.

⁷⁶ Dove et al., 'Changing Ways of Thinking about the Relations between Society and Environment', 3.

⁷⁷ Sheridan, 'Environmental and Social History of African Sacred Groves', 75.

African ecological systems are dynamic over time and space.⁷⁸ The general idea is that one must focus on change when examining how traditional societies manage sacred forests. There is still great room for studies that follow this line of scholarship.

Following Sheridan's line of argument, Alvarez (2016) asserted in her recent study of North Pare, in northeastern Tanzania, that sacred forests reflect a process of cultural and social change. Using evidence from participatory observation and oral histories, Alvarez argued that starting with colonialism, and more significantly independence, national and other administrative institutions have increasingly usurped the political role of sacred forests in North Pare. Alvarez associates these challenges with a situation in which Pare communities care more about using land to produce food than about preserving the sacred forests that occupy potential agricultural land. Because of Christian and Islamic influences, sacred forests have progressively lost their religious importance.⁷⁹

While building upon Sheridan's view of African sacred forests as complex and dynamic, this study investigates changes in traditional institutions to explain the history of sacred forests. The custodial nature of traditional institutions can determine the character of the sacred forests. This study, therefore, examines changes in rituals, customs and beliefs concerning sacred forests. The effects of these changes on the sacred forests, however, depends on their level of resilience built by the traditional institutions' management. To better understand the institution-forest dynamic, a close examination of specific and often highly localised ecological circumstances is necessary. Hence, this study focuses on the Bena society in the Njombe region of the southern highlands of Tanzania.

The Bena community is meagerly represented in Tanzania's historical literature. The absence of scholarship on southern Tanzania can be noted as one maps the historical literature of Tanzania in general. Thus, when James Gibling wrote a social history of the people of Njombe (2005), he referred to it as 'a history of the excluded' to indicate that his study was one of the first scholarly works on the Bena, a people ignored during the formation of both the colonial and post-colonial governments.⁸⁰ Among early scholars, A.T. and G.M. Culwick (1935) provide a book-length anthropological treatment describing the history of the Bena people and their rulers (with one chapter written by a Bena chief,

⁷⁸ Michael Sheridan, 'The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves; Ecological, Social and Symbolic Processes', in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change*, eds. M. Sheridan and C. Nyamweru (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 13.

⁷⁹ Agustina Soledad Alvarez, 'Mambo ya Zamani? Current Reasons Behind Sacred Forests' Conservation in North Pare, Tanzania' (MA Thesis, University of Leiden, 2016), 31, 51.

⁸⁰ James Gibling, *A History of the Excluded: Making Family a Refuge from State in Twentieth Century Tanzania*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 1.

Mtema Towegale Kiwanga). The Culwicks' work also includes ethnographic observations they made during their time as administrative officers working in Tanzania. They discuss family life, initiation ceremonies, economics, and other aspects of Bena life.⁸¹ Marc Swartz (1964, 1968) examines the relationships between leaders, people, and power.⁸² Derek Nurse (1979) offers a brief linguistic description of the Bena.⁸³ Seth Nyagava (1999)⁸⁴ and James Giblin (1999)⁸⁵ provide a sociohistorical background of Bena society. More recently, Giblin's social history of the people of the town of Njombe (2005) collected a series of oral histories from residents between 1992 and 2002, which he uses to present an account of the town's history and the experiences of its inhabitants throughout the political upheaval of the twentieth century. He begins with colonial German rule and moves through the Maji Maji rebellion (an uprising against German authority in Tanganyika), the British take-over of Tanganyika after World War I, the declaration of independence by Tanganyika in 1961, and the period of Ujamaa ('familyhood', a form of African socialism) that Tanzania underwent from independence until the mid-1980s. Giblin's primary thesis is that, as the residents of Njombe began to feel increasingly marginalised by the state, they began to turn to the family, local connections, and what Giblin refers to as 'rural subalterns' to seek refuge from the state. Giblin claims that it is the animosity of the Tanzanian government against the private sphere that contributed largely to the downfall of Ujamaa in Tanzanian society.⁸⁶ Njana, Mugasha and Kajembe's journal article (2012) alone surveys traditional institutions' management of sacred forests.⁸⁷ Focusing on natural science, this study omits the socio-cultural, political and economic dynamics affecting the sacred grove tradition.

Tanzania, a country with at least one hundred and twenty ethnic groups, is too complex to be compressed into generalisation based on studies done in one part of the country. As Fulvio Mazzocchi suggests, we need to start from what is already known in

⁸¹ A.T and G.M. Culwick, *Ubena of the Rivers* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1935).

⁸² Marc J. Swartz, 'Continuities in the Bena Political System', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, 20 (1964): 241-260.

⁸³ Derek Nurse, 'Description of Sample Bantu Languages of Tanzania: Bena', *African Languages* 5, no. 1 (1979):108-114.

⁸⁴ Seth I. Nyagava, *A History of the Bena to 1914* (Iringa, Tanzania: Iringa University College, 1999). (Reprinted in 2000 by Peramiho Printing).

⁸⁵ James Giblin, 'Christianity and Society: Family Life, Indigenous Culture and Christianity in Colonial Njombe', in *East African Expression of Christianity*, eds. Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo (Oxford: James Currey, 1999).

⁸⁶ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 2.

⁸⁷ M.A. Njana, W. Mugasha, and G.C. Kajembe, 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumbanitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania', *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (2012), 92-106.

one society to open ourselves to hitherto unrecognised knowledge that humans have developed and lived in other cultures.⁸⁸ Acknowledging such societal complexities, Sheridan notes that African land use expresses culturally specific concepts of legitimate political authority.⁸⁹ Grappling with societal complexity, then, requires a flexible approach that maintains a continuous openness and willingness to discover and learn. More sacred grove studies are needed to understand the custodial situation of sacred natural sites in different areas. Scholars have changed their approach from a broad materialist perspective toward a concern for localised political and cultural processes of environmental management and social organisation.⁹⁰

Scholars studying Tanzania have reframed the debate about resource management by calling for case studies that show the intersection of the agricultural systems, political economy, and cultural processes of distinct societies. Tanzania's southern highlands, with its different socioeconomic and environmental context, are not sufficiently illuminated through studies conducted in the Northern part of the country. It is important to consider regional differences within colonial Tanzania, as different societies were unevenly integrated into colonial undertakings. One might expect to find differences between labour-reserve regions and labour-receiving regions. Such differences reflect the concentration of Europeans. For instance, the southern highlands region received only sporadic colonial investment compared to the northeastern and northwestern parts of the country. The way Christianity found its routes also differed among the areas. Since patches of sacred forests persist in many Tanzanian societies, it is important to study the resilience that these communities developed while responding to internal and external pressures, such as colonialism.

Theoretical framework

An active debate is going on about the capacity of local communities to manage their environments. The role of Indigenous peoples and their institutions in the development of landscapes is central to the debate. While in the past, references to population pressure would suffice to explain changes in landscapes, there is today an increasing awareness of the role of historical processes. Since the environmental ethics of Indigenous peoples fuse

⁸⁸ Fulvio Mazzocchi, 'Western Science and Traditional Knowledge: Despite their Variations, Different Forms of Knowledge can Learn from Each Other', *EMBRO Reports* 7, no 5 (2006), 465.

⁸⁹ Michael Sheridan, 'Tanzanian Ritual Perimetric and African Landscapes: The case of Dracaena', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 41, no. 3 (2008): 491.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 492.

local and modern worldviews, we need to regard sacred forest management among the Bena as an ongoing process rather than a fixed point. A framework that incorporates both internal and external influences on sacred forest management will disclose its dynamism.

Scholars have researched human-environmental relationships from different perspectives and disciplines, including political ecology and its predecessor, cultural ecology. Anthropologist Julian Steward posited cultural ecology as a way to understand how humans adapt to a wide variety of environments.⁹¹ The theory frames the interaction between human beings and the environment as the fundamental relationship that underlies conservation, land-use practices, and values.⁹² N.J. Turner argued that human-environmental relationships alter as they respond to socioeconomic constraints and pressures.⁹³ During such a change, cultural ecology examines individuals and groups as active and adaptive agents with behaviours that permit endogenously driven adjustments. Cultural ecology, therefore, emphasises internal factors for change in the human-environment relationship and that all adaptations are short-lived and constantly adjust to local conditions.

While cultural ecology studies societies and how they are part of and shaped by their surroundings, political ecology focuses on the political contribution to environmental issues. As a term, political ecology was first coined in French, *Ecologie Politique*, by Bertrand de Jouvenel in 1957 and in English by anthropologist Eric Wolf in 1972.⁹⁴ As a field, it developed in the 1980s, when cultural ecology and development geography were intensively studied.⁹⁵ Efforts to challenge the prevailing explanations of environmental crisis helped elaborate the theory and gave rise to diverse intellectual currents within the field.⁹⁶ The theory emphasises the relationship among political, economic and social factors in environmental issues. As opposed to cultural ecology, political ecology focuses mainly on the constraints imposed (exogenous) on individuals and groups that impact their actions. It, therefore, frames conservation within the context of Indigenous-external power

⁹¹ Steward Julian *Theory of Culture Change: Theory of Culture Change: the Methodology Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1955), 35.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ N.J. Turner, 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge', in *the Rain Forest of Home: Profile of a North American Bioregion*, eds. P.K. Schoonmaker, B. Von Hagen, and E.C. Wolf (Washington, DC: Island Press, 1997), 276.

⁹⁴ Tom Bauler, Political Ecology, *Journal of Political Ecology* (2013), <http://www.ejolt.org/2013/02/political-ecology/>

⁹⁵ Tim Hayward, 'Meaning of Political Ecology', (Spring 1994), <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/article/the-meaning-of-political-ecology>

⁹⁶ P. Blackie, *The Political Ecology of Soil Erosion* (Harlow: Longman, 1985).

relations and tracks how they have shifted, resulting in a range of socio-ecological solutions.⁹⁷ From the standpoint of political ecology, exogenous factors may change the conditions in which sacred places operate. They may even change the power of individuals and groups to control the place.

Neither cultural ecology nor political ecology alone can explicate the way Bena traditional culture and its institutions have evolved as they respond to disturbances in its sacred forest traditions. Consequently, this study subsumes cultural and political ecologies to analyse traditional institutions' management of sacred forests as complex and dynamic ones responding to both endogenous and exogenous factors. The thesis thus deploys Berkes' (1999; 2008) concept of *Knowledge-Practice-Belief complex systems* as an analytical framework and considers sacred forests as a form of Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). Berkes defines traditional ecological knowledge as a knowledge-practice-belief system, as it comprises the ability of local people to identify components of an ecosystem and to use and manage them, along with a worldview that shapes their environmental perspectives.⁹⁸ By its ability to shape human-environment interactions, TEK becomes a central component of social-ecological systems (SES) and has been widely recognised as playing a critical role in traditional communities' resource management.⁹⁹

Traditional ecological knowledge may be considered as a sub-set of indigenous knowledge, defined as local knowledge held by indigenous peoples or local knowledge unique to a given culture or society.¹⁰⁰ But there is no terminological agreement about Indigenous, local, and traditional ecological knowledge (IEK, LEK, TEK). While TEK is mostly used in literature, some scholars consider that the term "traditional" implies backwardness, and instead favour "indigenous" or "local" hence propose preformulation of TEK as indigenous ecological knowledge (IEK).¹⁰¹ However, the concept of TEK is used in this study because many Indigenous peoples involved in this study see "tradition" in a positive light. They do not take it to mean inflexible adherence to the past but rather to

⁹⁷ Michael R. Dove, 'Bitter Shade: Throwing Light on Politics and Ecology in Contemporary Pakistan', in *Political Ecology at a Crossroads: Methods, Analyses and Application*, ed. L. Gezon, (Special Issue, Human Organization (63) (2003), 229-241.

⁹⁸ F. Berkes, *Sacred ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor and Francis, 1999), 13; F. Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, (Madison, NY: Routledge, 2008), 16-17.

⁹⁹ Ruifei Tang and Michael C. Gavin, 'A Classification of Threats to Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Conservation Responses,' *Conservation and Society* 14, no. 1 (2016), 57.

¹⁰⁰ Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, https://umanitoba.ca/institutes/natural_resources/canadaresearchchair/Encyclopedia%20of%20Religion%20And%20Nature%20Traditional%20Ecological%20Knowledge.pdf, Accessed 16 June 2020.

¹⁰¹ On problems with the label "traditional" see for instance, T. Ingold and T. Kurttila 'Perceiving the Environment in Finnish Lapland. *Body and Society* 6, 3-4 (2000), 183-196.

mean time-tested and wise. As a term, traditional ecological knowledge encompasses the accumulated environmental knowledge, resource management practices, related social institutions and worldview of local and indigenous people.¹⁰² The term recognises that the ‘knowledge is often long-standing and adaptively passed on from generation to generation (“traditional”), and it is fundamentally linked to ecology (“ecological”).’¹⁰³ While TEK has clear intergenerational links, it is also dynamic, and subsequent generations and individual holders continue the adaptation process.¹⁰⁴ As a knowledge-practice belief complex, TEK builds on experience and adapts to change, as societies constantly redefine what is considered “traditional.” It is an attribute of societies with historical continuity in making a living in a particular place. Thus, for instance, Sheridan (2009), acknowledging sacred forests management in Africa as a process, concluded that contemporary sacred forests are more than relics of pre-colonial ideas and practices.¹⁰⁵

Understanding sacred forests as TEK systems allows us to analyse them at different interrelated levels. Scholars agree that traditional knowledge may be considered at several levels of analysis, consistent with the definition of TEK as knowledge-practice-belief complex systems, but they differ in terms of the number of relevant levels. For instance, H.T. Lewis (1993) suggested that TEK begins at the level of taxonomic systems and then proceeds to the understanding of processes or functional relationships.¹⁰⁶ Arne Kalland (1994) identifies three levels: empirical (practical knowledge), paradigmatic knowledge (interpretation of empirical observations) and institutional knowledge (knowledge embedded in social institutions).¹⁰⁷ B.S. Orlove and S.B. Brush (1996) make a distinction among three levels that differ from Kalland’s: indigenous environmental knowledge; management practices based on this knowledge; and religious beliefs about the ritual uses of plants and animals.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰² F. Berkes, *Sacred Ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 5.

¹⁰³ Ruifei Tang and Michael C. Gavin, Traditional Ecological Knowledge Informing Resource Management: Saxoul Conservation in Inner Mongolia, China, *Society and Natural Resources*, no. 23: 3 (2010), 193.

¹⁰⁴ F. Berkes, J. Colding, and C. Folke. 2000. Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management. *Ecological Applications* no. 10:5 (2000), 1251–1262.

¹⁰⁵ M. Sheridan, ‘The Environmental and Social History of Sacred Groves: A Tanzanian Case Study’, *African Studies Review* 52 (2009), 77.

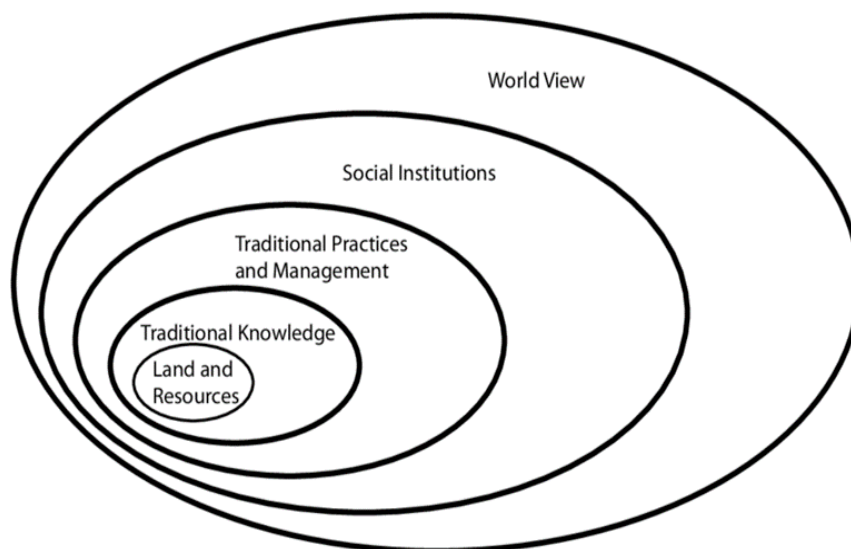
¹⁰⁶ H.T. Lewis, ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Some Definitions’, *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Wisdom for Sustainable Development* (Canberra: Centre for Resource and Environmental Studies, Australian National University, 1993), 8-12.

¹⁰⁷ Arne Kalland, ‘Indigenous Knowledge–Local Knowledge: Prospects and Limitations,’ *AEPS Seminar on Integration of Indigenous Peoples Knowledge*, Copenhagen: Ministry of Environment (1994), 20-23.

¹⁰⁸ B.S. Orlove and S.B. Brush, ‘Anthropology and the Conservation of Biodiversity,’ *Annual Review of Anthropology* no. 25 (1996), 329-352.

This thesis studies traditional knowledge and practices regarding sacred forest management holistically and considers four levels of TEK as presented by Berkes (1999; 2008) (**Fig. 1**). According to Berkes, the first TEK level constitutes the local knowledge people have about plants, animals, soils, and landscapes. This level includes knowledge of species identification and taxonomy, life history, distributions, and behaviours. The second level encompasses a resource management system, in which local knowledge is applied and in which an appropriate set of practices, tools, and techniques evolves locally. This level of TEK requires the understanding of ecosystem processes and functional ecological relationships. To sustain a traditional resource management system requires an adequate social system. The third level of TEK elaborates this system, which includes a set of rules-in-use, and codes of social relationships. In order to function effectively, people have to be socially organised for coordination, cooperation, and rule-making to provide social restraints and rule enforcement. Finally, the fourth level of TEK is the worldview. This includes religious beliefs that shape environmental perception and practices and give meaning to observations of the environment. For instance, the perceptions and knowledge about sacred forests are in part shaped by Indigenous people's values, worldviews, and environmental ethics—religion in the broader sense.

Figure 1: *Levels of analysis in traditional ecological knowledge and management practice systems*



Source: Adapted from Berkes, *Sacred Ecology* (2008), 18.

In practice, the four levels of TEK are not always distinct. The management system and social institution are often closely coupled.¹⁰⁹ It is also notable that there are feedback cycles and interactions among the four levels, as TEK, as a whole, is dynamic—constantly changing with shifts in local conditions. Local knowledge may develop over time, management systems and institutions may adapt, and worldview may be affected by changes occurring at the other levels.¹¹⁰

The present study uses knowledge-practice-belief complex systems not necessarily as a model or theory but as a conceptual framework to help establish and analyse the complex dynamics of sacred grove institutions in Njombe. As R.A. Rappaport wrote, ‘Models describe how things work, whereas theories explain phenomena. Conceptual frameworks do neither; rather, they help us to think about phenomena, to order material, revealing patterns—and pattern recognition typically leads to models and theories.’¹¹¹ As Shashi Kant and Albert Berry (2005) argue, a framework for institutional and environmental analysis that takes into account the complexity of both internal and external change factors is more helpful in assessing changes in institutional management of natural resources.¹¹²

A knowledge-practice-belief complex systems framework allows us to understand sacred grove management as various ongoing processes rather than as an inert entity. When the knowledge about the environmental phenomena changes, the practices and the belief system embedded in them change too and vice versa. The changes may lead to more sustainable practices or degrade sacred forests. Berkes, Colding and Folke have shown that locals use adaptive management to handle their resources and ecosystems.¹¹³ As local communities adapt to changes, so do their use of the environment and their interpretations of human-environment relations. Recognizing sacred forests as TEK and hence knowledge-practice-belief systems helps us analyse sacred groves as potentially historical and tied to the spirituality of particular communities. In this study a sacred site is considered as areas that has access restrictions through spirituality, taboos and myths and its activities

¹⁰⁹ F. Berkes and C. Folke, eds. *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building Resilience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)

¹¹⁰ F. Berkes, *Sacred Ecology*, Madison, NY: Routledge, 2008), 18.

¹¹¹ R.A. Rappaport, ‘Thinking about Home Environments: A Conceptual Framework’, in *Home Environments*, eds. I. Altman and C.M. Werner (New York: Plenum Press, 1985), 256.

¹¹² Shashi Kant and Albert Berry, ‘Organizations, Institutions, External Setting and Institutional Dynamics’, in *Institutions, Sustainability, and Natural Resources*, eds. S. Kant, and A. Berry (The Netherlands: Springer, 2005), 10.

¹¹³ F. Berkes, J. Colding and C. Folke, ‘Rediscovery of Traditional Ecological Knowledge as Adaptive Management’, *Ecological Applications* 10 no. 5 (2000), 1260.

are regulated and maintained by customs of specific groups. Thus, a disregard of the historical and “sacred ecology” aspects of the forests are likely cause depletion of the landscapes.

The flux of nature makes disturbance an integral feature of an ecosystem. In emphasising complexity, TEK also helps explain the resilience of traditional cultures, as they maintain some significant traditions in relating to their sacred forests.¹¹⁴ Hence, over time, traditional institutions have encountered internal and external challenges in managing sacred forests, challenges significant enough to alter those forests. Nonetheless, examining the resilience of traditional institutions helps us understand how they have managed and governed complex linked systems of people and nature. It also enables us to assess the sustainability of the traditional institutions’ capability to maintain forest resources for future generations.

Geography, demography, the scope, and the significance of the study

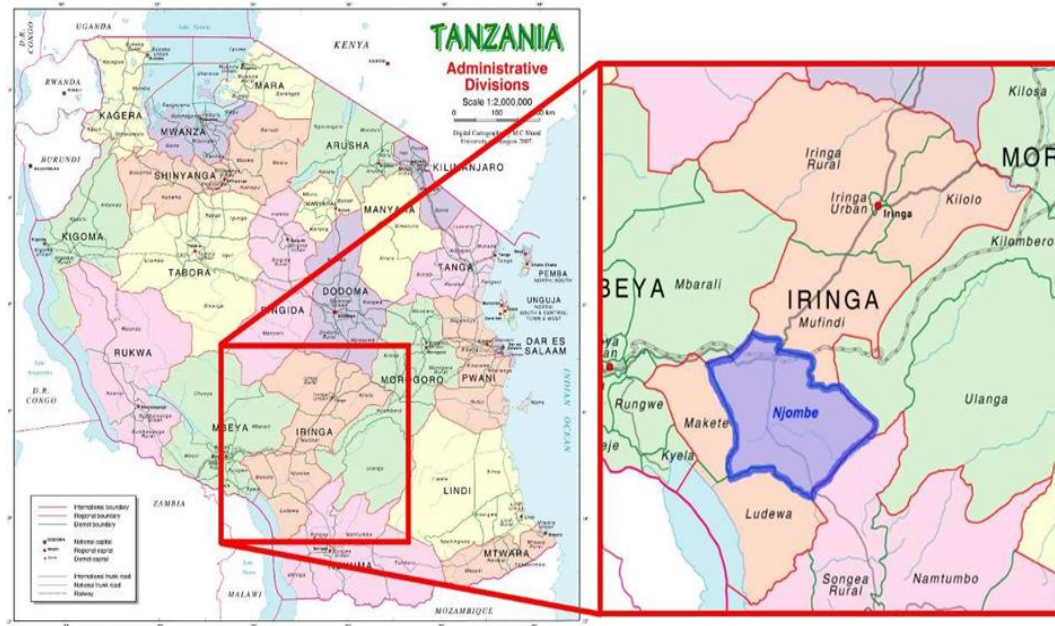
Although both conventional forest management systems and sacred forests are found in almost every society in Tanzania, this study focuses on the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, particularly the Njombe district. The colonial Njombe district was created by British colonial proclamation in 1926. Njombe lies in the Livingstone Mountains of southwestern Tanzania, bordering Lake Nyasa and the Rungwe, Mbeya, Iringa, Mahenge and Songea districts.¹¹⁵ Politically, the district was divided into three sub-tribal areas, namely Ubena, Ukinga, and Upangwa. In the 1970s, these tribal areas became separate districts: Upangwa became the Ludewa district in 1975; Ukinga became the Makete district in 1979, and Ubena became the Njombe district the same year.¹¹⁶ In 2012 Njombe was upgraded to regional status and re-divided into six districts (Njombe urban, Njombe rural, Wanging’ombe, Makete, Ludewa and Makambako). This study focuses on colonial Ubena, the modern (1979-2012) Njombe district (See **Figure 2**).

¹¹⁴ Resilience is taken here as ‘the capacity to absorb disturbances and reorganise while changing.’

¹¹⁵ J. Graham, ‘Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania: A History of the Relations between African Labour and European Capitalism in Njombe District, 1931-61’ (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1968), 3.

¹¹⁶ J. Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 14.

Figure 2: A map of Njombe District (1979-2012)



Generally, the people who live in this area are referred to as *Wabena*. The *Wabena*, hereafter called ‘Bena’, dropping the prefix as is conventional in the literature, are an ethnic group who speak a language in the Bantu family and practice hoe agriculture. The Bena live in the Njombe region of southwest Tanzania. The core of this name, ‘Bena’, combined with various prefixes, designates a variety of different aspects connected with being Bena. The prefix ‘M’- is singular, so ‘Mbena’ refers to one member of the group, while ‘Wa’-is the plural. Hence, ‘Wabena’ refers to more than one group member. Other prefixes are used, so their territory is **Ubena**, and their language is **Kibena**. The Bena live in two different ecozones in the region. One is a high plateau, where the large majority live (Bena of the Hills), and the other is a plain, occupied by a small minority (Bena of the Rivers). The division of the Bena into two groups is, however, not justified in most contexts.¹¹⁷ In both eco-zones, nucleated villages predominate, rather than the scattered settlement pattern characteristic of virtually all other East African agricultural societies. Conclusions in this thesis apply to both groups, but this study features the Bena of the highlands, an area currently comprising the Njombe urban, Njombe rural and Wanging’ombe districts, within the Njombe region in Tanzania.

The Bena population has quadrupled in the past half-century. In 1967 the district officers in Njombe, the administrative centre for Benaland, reported that there were

¹¹⁷ Marc J. Swartz, ‘Bases for Political Compliance in Bena Villages’, in *Political Anthropology*, eds. Marc J. Swartz, Victor W. Turner and Arthur Tuden (Chicago: ALDINE Publishing Company, 1966), 89.

140,000 Bena. In 1988 the Summer Institute for Linguistics estimated the Bena population as almost 600,000.¹¹⁸ Until then, there were no reliable data. Henry Muzale and Josephat M. Rugemalira estimated in 2008 that there were 592,370 Bena speakers¹¹⁹, while *Ethnologue* in 2011 estimated a comparable 670,000 speakers.¹²⁰ It is possible, however, that these numbers were somewhat inflated Bena-speakers as estimates of speaker populations often assume that a person who is ethnically Bena also speaks Bena. Although not specific to the Bena ethnic group, Tanzania's National Bureau of Statistics (TNBS) reported in its 2012 census that the Njombe region had 702,097 inhabitants.¹²¹

Figure 3: Map of the Bena homeland and the surrounding language groups



Source: Bernadette Mitterhofer and SIL International, 'Lessons from a Dialect Survey of Bena Analysing Wordlists', *SIL Electronic Survey Report 2013-020* (October 2013), 24.

Three factors influenced the choice of southwestern Tanzania as the study area. First, the Njombe region includes sacred forests such as Nyumbanitu. This 4-5-hectare sacred forest is surrounded by 30,000 hectares of privately owned wattle trees planted by the Commonwealth Development Corporation (CDC), a UK entity founded in 1949, that

¹¹⁸ Marc J. Swartz, 'Bena of Southwest Tanzania', *Encyclopedia.com*.

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/bena-southwestern-tanzania> (24 October 2019).

¹¹⁹ Henry Muzale and Josephat M. Rugemalira, 'Researching and documenting the languages of Tanzania', *Language Documentation and Conservation* 2, no. 1(2008), 79.

¹²⁰ Paul M. Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.) *Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Seventeenth edition*. Dallas, TX: SIL International (2011). Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>

¹²¹ TZA_Census02, NBS, Population and Housing Census, 2002, National Bureau of Statistics, Tanzania.

managed commercial forest development. The fact that a sacred forest exists amidst commercial forestry creates a fertile ground for studying its resilience as socioeconomic, political, and ecological interests interact there over time. Second, there are few studies on the Bena community. During the colonial period, Njombe was a relatively remote district with a low European settler population compared to the northeast and northwestern parts of the country.¹²² The region served as a labour-reserve zone whose people were taken to work in various colonial projects in the labour-receiving regions in the northeast and northwest, mainly in the Tanga sisal plantations. Most historical studies on Tanzania have been written by European scholars, most of whom focused on areas where Europeans had jurisdiction. Thus, most anthropologists and historians, for instance, studied Tanzania's northern societies, leaving the southern region unmapped. Third, few written sources document pre-colonial and colonial Njombe society, thus necessitating interviews with key informants in the Bena (local) and Kiswahili (national) languages.

The study starts in the early 1880s, shortly before Tanganyika was colonised, examines the German (1881-1918) and British (1919-1960) colonial periods, and concludes during the independence era (1961-2019). A multigenerational study allows one to examine how traditional institutions, and their upholding of sacred forests, have evolved within colonial and post-colonial contexts.

Studying how the Bena have managed their sacred forests is essential for understanding the links between the retention or erosion of traditional sacred ecological knowledge and a variety of both ecological and social factors, including changes in natural resource use and management that have affected the state of sacred forests over time. The thesis makes four major contributions to scholarship. First, it gathers evidence from oral interviews and from published and unpublished work, often in Bena or Swahili, to build the history of the Bena and of their sacred forests. This history adds the Bena to the complex tapestry of Tanzanian history. Second, the thesis adds Bena as a case study for larger issues in sacred grove scholarship. It places Bena sacred forests within wider forest histories in Tanzania and shows that Bena traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) fits into a broader story of expanding conservation and protection of natural resources. Third, the thesis contributes to a holistic understanding of sacred forests. Scholars have commonly approached sacred groves from a single perspective, whether political, ecological, social, or religious, seldom together. Approaching sacred forests holistically results in a nuanced

¹²²J. Graham, 'Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania', 25.

history of changing ideas, institutions, and management practices regarding sacred groves. The thesis proves that contemporary sacred forests among the Bena are not relics of pre-colonial ideas and practices as they have changed alongside changes in institutions that revere them. Fourth, the thesis adds sacred forests to other types of forests in the scholarly discourse, informing Tanzania's move towards community management of forests. Generally, this study brings into the forest-policy debate a historically situated and locally nuanced approach to forest management and highlights the need for institutional arrangements that link local and global biodiversity stakeholders within the changing socio-economic, political, and ecological context of local communities.

This study is multidisciplinary in its nature, making it difficult to explicitly locate in one discipline. I locate this thesis within the discipline of history and the sub-discipline of historical anthropology. Historical anthropology applies methodologies and objectives from social and cultural anthropology to the study of historical societies.¹²³ The British historian Peter Burke, asserts that historical anthropology focuses on qualitative rather than quantitative data, studies smaller communities (such as Bena in this case), and investigates symbolic aspects of culture.¹²⁴

Primary sources

Sacred groves, as examples of cultural and ecological co-evolution, require research based on hybrid methods. This research used a qualitative research design to bridge history, anthropology, ethnography, and ecology. The study deploys an array of methods of data collection, working with both written sources and oral testimony. Fieldwork encompassed archival research and conducting oral interviews in Tanzania.

The Tanzania National Archive (TNA) in Dar-es-Salaam holds a small number of documents written by British colonial administrators during the British occupation of the territory under the League of Nations Mandate (1919-1939) and then under its Trusteeship (1946-1961). These files are not generally on sacred forests per se, but they show how colonial administrators interfered with traditional forest stewardship by carving out hectares of prime land in the Njombe district.¹²⁵ Some groves were part of the land that the British decided to appropriate. Thus, the records contain a few communications between

¹²³ Elizabeth A. Ten Dyke, 'Anthropology, Historical' in *Encyclopedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, Kelly Boyd, ed. (Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), 37.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 38.

¹²⁵ TNA district files are catalogued by accession numbers. The accession number for Njombe is TNA 178.

colonial administrators and the Bena tribal council, as the councillors attempted to save their sacred forests.

Oral interviews with respondents comprised a major part of this study. The use of oral traditions is grounded in a desire to add new, previously marginalised voices, to the historical record.¹²⁶ There is power in working with stories as a means to draw insights and possibilities to indigenous experience and knowledge.¹²⁷ Interviewing required the researcher to determine whom to interview, what questions to ask and not to ask, and most importantly, what were the local social protocols. Between May and September 2018 and July 2019, I conducted interviews in Bena and Kiswahili with forest management policymakers at both national and local levels and with Bena village residents born locally. Interviews began with three officials at the Tanzania Forest Service Agency (TFS) in Dodoma. Meeting with government officials presented an opportunity to solicit their views on community forestry and disclosed policy and legal issues regarding community-based forest management. Multiple interviews with fifty individuals of various ages followed. Consulting focal persons, usually village heads, generated a provisional list of informants. The list expanded through the snowball¹²⁸ method during the interview process. The perceived ability of informants to provide the required information guided their selection. They included a chief, priests of traditional shrines, healers, forest caretakers, and village headmen. This group of informants exercises authority over sacred forests among the Bena. Other community members provided the broader context of the Bena sacred traditions that guide the management of natural resources. These included opinion leaders, church leaders and others who had a holistic picture of the traditional sacred forest.

An interview guide with fifteen open-ended questions loosely structured the interviews. A conversational approach allowed the informants to express themselves as freely as possible with minimal interruptions from the researcher. This approach aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and

¹²⁶ D. Conquergood, 'A Sense of the Other: Interpretation and Ethnographic Research', in *Proceedings of the Seminar/Conference on Oral Traditions*, eds. I. Crouch and G. Owens (Las Cruces, NM: New Mexico State University Press, 1983), 39.

¹²⁷ Jo-Ann Archibald, Jenny Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo, eds. *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (ZED Books Limited, 2019), 2.

¹²⁸ David Morgan explains that the term 'Snowballing' alludes to the process by which a snowball increases in size as it rolls downhill. As a qualitative sampling method, snowballing uses a small pool of initial informants to nominate, through their social networks, other participants who meet the eligibility criteria and could potentially contribute to the study (David, L. Morgan, 'Sampling', in *The SAGE Encyclopaedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa, M. Given (London: SAGE Publication Inc, 2008), 799.

upholds the necessary relations to maintain a collective tradition.¹²⁹ Individuals we encountered typically perceived oral performances as a connection to their past. Participants were usually conscious of both traditional themes associated with the past and the contemporary influences on their oral corpus. The tendency to combine past and present tallies with Ruth Finnegan's observations among South Pacific peoples. She says that individuals are often intentionally playful when mixing traditional or older themes with more contemporary formulaic expressions.¹³⁰ When mixing in older themes, there is a possibility of conflicting views. Where individual interviews yielded contradictory views about sacred forest traditions, I moderated subsequent focus group discussion to identify heterogeneous strands of thoughts. However, I convened focus group discussions rarely and with caution. In such groups I sought a mix of participants, though the socio-cultural setting of Bena society meant that there were more male than female interviewees. Traditionally, Bena women have more restricted participation in public life because of an idea that males are better able to lead and pronounce. Thus, spiritual leadership among the Bena is reserved for males. Because of seclusion, Bena women, sometimes refused to make any statements about sacred forests.

Participant observation in rituals augmented interviews when the opportunity arose. The combined methods constitute what scholars refers to as ethnography, a research approach based on fieldwork consisting of participatory observation and open-ended interviews.¹³¹ During fieldwork, I attended social events in villages and was generously invited to three ritual services, *matambiko*, which were conducted in the sacred forests. My participation in these ritual services revealed the procedures and the contents of forest rituals. Attending these ceremonies also helped me assess my previous experience growing up in Njombe and listening as the old people told stories about the sacred myths.

In most cases, interviews proceeded in people's homes, workplaces, and locations near groves at times they themselves suggested. Informants granted their permission for recording the interviews. During the interviews, I made notes while observing gestures, the surroundings, and the informant's reactions. The interviewees scrutinised the researcher's facial expression and tone of voice.

¹²⁹ Margaret Kovach, 'Conversational Method in Indigenous Research', *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 5, no. 1 (2010), 42.

¹³⁰ R. H. Finnegan, 'Introduction: Why the Comparativists should take Account of the Pacific', in *South Pacific Oral Traditions*, eds. Ruth Finnegan and Margaret Orbell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 12-24.

¹³¹ D.M. Fetterman, *Ethnography Step by Step*. Applied Social Research Series 17 (London: Sage Publishers, 1989), 25.

Conducting interviews presented challenges. Despite being a native Bena, fluent in local languages and cultural idioms and understanding the nuances of inter-social protocols, I still had to establish trust. Interviewees responded better when they heard my life story and the aims of my project. To show respect, I approached the village heads with introductory letters from district administrators. Village leaders act as the gatekeepers, providing access to credibility in the community. Attending village meetings, where such meetings appeared on their calendar, furthered the villagers' confidence in my bona fides. After being introduced by the village head at a meeting, I briefly explained the aims of the study, which laid the groundwork for interviews, facilitating a relaxed atmosphere when meeting them in their homes. Most interviewees approached were willing and happy to be interviewed—even more than once, when asked.

Oral traditions raise the problem of chronology. While the duration and sequence of events need to be established as accurately as possible, orally transmitted history rarely anchors events in time with modern exactness. When asked about the timing of an event, most interviewees, especially old people, situated it in the context of another event preceding or following it. This approach to chronological structure confirms John Mbiti's argument that, in African philosophy, time is simply a composition of events.¹³² Thus, a 'day' is associated with significant events. Documents from appropriate historical periods, where they exist, helped narrow the time frame for events situated in an oral chronological structure. Yet, the absence of datable textual references to sacred forests makes it difficult to determine specific periods. Where no document or oral account exists to determine a time frame, the study assigns approximate dates.

Examining the collected data enabled the researcher to identify significant themes. These themes, together with the initial research questions, guided the analysis of traditional institutions' shifting sacred forest management strategies. Thus, the thesis deploys a comparative historical approach to establish transformations in traditional institutions in their keeping of sacred forests over an extended period.

Human ethics

Because this study incorporated interaction with human subjects, it required approval by the Human Ethics Committee (HEC) of Victoria University of Wellington, which was

¹³² John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 19.

granted (approval number 25386).¹³³ A government approval was required to carry out research in Tanzania. A research clearance was sought and obtained from the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam (reference number AB3/12B), endorsed on behalf of Tanzania's government. The clearance conferred helped secure research clearance from the Tanzania National Archives (TNA) in Dar es Salaam, from the Tanzania Forest Services Agency (TFS) in Dodoma, and authorities from the Njombe region and from the Njombe urban, Njombe rural and Wanging'ombe districts. Participants received information statements¹³⁴ and consent forms to help them make informed decisions about participating in the study. Their participation was voluntary, and they had the option to withdraw their participation at any stage.

The informants were asked if they were willing to have their names mentioned in the study. With few exceptions, informants granted permission to have their names used in the study. Thus, this study only uses the names of interviewees whose approval was obtained. Only the names of quoted interviewees appear in this study.

The organisation of the thesis

The thesis divides into five chapters, excluding the introduction and the conclusion. Except for chapter one, the chapters focus on the study's research questions.

Chapter one backgrounds the general forestry context. The chapter discusses the general topographical, legal, and historical overview of the principal features of Tanzania's forest management. The chapter also provides data on forests and explains how forestry has variably featured in Tanzania's policies from colonial times to present. It also categorises forests. Providing the larger forestry context of Tanzania helps us locate sacred forests within it.

The second chapter, 'Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), Institutions, and Sacredness', examines key concepts and debates around traditions, TEK, institutions, and sacredness. These concepts frame an investigation of traditional institutions' custodial role in managing sacred natural resources. After identifying and describing traditional

¹³³ A copy of Human Ethics Approval is appended in this thesis, together with other research clearances and research tools.

¹³⁴ The statement contained the researcher's identification and contacts, the aims of the project, and a description of help sought from the participants. It also stated what will happen to the information they provided and their rights as research participants. The contact information of Victoria University's supervisor and human ethics was included, so participants could send any complaints regarding the research process.

institutions, the chapter probes their values and functions regarding maintaining natural resources in Tanzania.

The third chapter, 'Traditional Institutions and the Sacred Forests: Formation, Development and Management,' traces the links between traditional institutions and the characteristics of the natural sites. In discussing the Bena spiritual foundations, this chapter identifies a culturally specific spiritual reality. With a focus on Nyumbanitu sacred forest (NSF) and sacred cave (the main Bena shrine), the chapter outlines the processes through which sacred places were founded and the rationale behind their establishment. The chapter also identifies the Bena ancestral clans responsible for maintaining Nyumbanitu forest and makes links between migration processes and the spread of sacred groves in Tanzania's southern highland. The chapter also examines Bena folklore about sacred forest restrictions and the consequences for violators.

Chapter four, 'The Changing Meaning of Sacred Forests and Practices: The Colonial Encounters', reveals how the significance of sacred sites and their associated practices shifted during the colonial period. It analyses differences in landscape perceptions between Africans and Europeans and provides a discourse on how exogenous factors such as colonial land alienation, administration, economic systems, and Christianity shaped the dynamics of the traditional institutions and their practices of upholding sacred forests over time. The analysis illuminates the resilience shown by the Bena in response to alien forms of administration, economy, and religion.

Chapter five, 'Sacred Forests Dynamics and Endurances in the Post-Colonial Era', examines the conservation of sacred forests in post-colonial Tanzania. It explicates various dynamics in the sacred grove traditions in Njombe, demonstrating that beliefs and practices related to sacred forests have altered in the postcolonial period. Thus, the chapter explores economic drives versus sacred forest conservation, the cultural politics of sacred forests and emerging tourist interest in sacred spaces. It also assesses how receptive Bena youths are to sacred forest tradition and examines the rationality behind contemporary management of sacred forests in Njombe. Lastly, the chapter evaluates whether the dynamics of the traditional institutions pose a threat to the sustainability of the forests.

Chapter 1

1. Forests and forestry in Tanzania: topographical, historical, and legal contexts

Environmental history studies human interaction with the natural world over time. It underscores how nature influences human affairs and vice versa.¹ History, because it encompasses all human experiences, relates to other disciplines, including geography. While history views human experience from the perspective of time, geography considers it from the perspective of space.² However, this distinction holds good only to a limited extent as history studies events in both their temporal and spatial dimensions. Beneath the passions of individuals and even the enthusiasm of generations lies some basic characteristics of historical geography and its relation with history.³ Studying geography illuminates the topography of the past and how it has influenced the evolution of people, environment, ideas and policies, thus creating a mental map of the community under study.

Before focusing on natural sacred forests and their management, we first present, in this first chapter, an overview of Tanzania's land and forest policies, 1880s-today. The overview helps to place traditional forestry within the larger topographical, historical, and legal contexts of forests over time. Historical geographers analyse how certain physical features, such as natural vegetation, influence the culture that people adopt. Examining the context of traditional forestry reveals that forests provide loci for human socio-cultural and economic activities and prompt a dialogue between culture and nature.

To explore the limits imposed by the environment, this chapter surveys the vegetation of Tanzania, provides data on forests, and charts the legal and historical context of forests and forestry in Tanzania from colonial times to the present. The traditional forms of resource management that characterised pre-colonial societies lost ground under the state control of forest reserves during the colonial and post-colonial periods. State control increased over time and disregarded traditional management systems, which it perceived as unscientific. However, starting in the 1980s, the role of the community in resource management changed and broadened considerably, because of social, economic,

¹ Donald Worster, *the Wealth of Nature: Environmental History and the Ecological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 293.

² Jan O. M. Broek, 'The Relations between History and Geography', *Pacific Historical Review* 10, no. 3 (1941), 321.

³ Alan Baker, *Geography and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 2003), 2.

environmental, cultural, and political changes. The 1998 forest policy and its legal embodiment, the Forest Act No. 14 of 2002, vested the responsibility for managing forest resources in various stakeholders. Recognition of the multiple players in resource management represented a radical change from the earlier forest policy and legislation that focused on preservation and control under centralised management. However, despite traditional forms of resource management in general, the largely unrecognised ‘shadow’ conservation network of sacred forests remains mostly undocumented. These forests merit greater scholarly attention.

1.1. Tanzania’s vegetation cover today

Tanzania, a country in Eastern Africa within the African Great Lakes region, comprises a series of plateaus of different shapes and heights. The plateaus, most of which range from about 1,200 to 10,000 feet above the sea level, arose through continental uplift, faulting, volcanic activity, and erosion.⁴ The variation of heights helps to determine Tanzania's climate and vegetation patterns.

There are four main climatic zones in Tanzania: the coast, the central plateau, the highland areas, and the high lake region. The coastal area and its immediate hinterland experience high humidity, tropical conditions, with average temperatures of 27°C, and rainfall ranging between 100 and 193cm. The central plateau, mostly dry and hot, receives 50-76 cm of rain. The semi-temperate highland areas enjoy a healthy and bracing climate. Finally, in the high lake region, rainfall ranges from 200-230 cm in the west, with little seasonal variation around Lake Victoria, to only 75-100 cm in the east.⁵

The vegetation of Tanzania mirrors the rainfall pattern. Areas such as the coast and the great lakes region receive high rainfall, while most of the central part receives relatively little moisture. Variations are, however, experienced from year to year in the timing and amount of rain. Influenced by the topographical relief, the highland areas are well-watered compared to lowland areas. High rainfall particularly characterises the southern highlands and the regions around mountains such as Kilimanjaro. Areas near lake shores, such as Lake Victoria, also receive significant rain.⁶ There are two rainy seasons in the north, November to December and March to May. In the south, there is only one rainy season,

⁴ Robert Maxon, *East Africa: An Introductory History* (Morgantown: West Virginia University Press, 2012), 1.

⁵ Tanzania: Topography, <http://www.encyclopedia.com/places/africa/tanzania-political-geography/tanzania#TOPOGRAPHY>, (25/10/2017); Maxon, ‘*East Africa*’, 1.

⁶ Maxon, ‘*East Africa*’, 5.

November to March. In four years out of five, about half of the land area receives less than 760 mm of rain. Only 4% of Tanzania's land receives more than 1270 mm of reliable rainfall per year.⁷

Precipitation levels shape the type of vegetation the land can support and hence its use. Vegetation types vary over a wide range of ecosystems, from semi-arid plateaus to steamy rainforests and from the coastal swamps to temperate mountain peaks. In areas where rainfall is markedly seasonal, open woodland, thorn thicket, or grassland prevails.⁸ Most of Tanzania's vegetation consists of woodland, particularly the *miombo* woodlands (moist wood), the most extensive vegetation type, where the primary plant is various types of *Brachystegia* tree. Miombo woodland grows in areas that experience a single rainy season and a long dry season, many of them in the south-west and southeast Tanzania.

Savannah, an area of tall grasses mixed with trees and shrubs, is another dominant type of vegetation found in Tanzania. Where not grazed, the grass cover usually reaches a height of more than thirty inches.⁹ Savannah extends over much of northwestern Tanzania. Some of the savannah areas derive from an original forest cover as a result of human occupation over time. While savannah, bushland, and thickets characterise the dry central plateau, grasslands prevail in the Serengeti Plain and other areas that lack drainage. South and west of the Eastern Arc range, baobab trees cluster in stands with some beautiful baobab-studded landscapes in Tarangire National Park.¹⁰ On the coast, forest and bushlands are floristically rich and highly endemic, and there are also zones of swamp vegetation with mangrove trees.¹¹ Although not widespread in the area, mangroves have been a significant source of timber for domestic use and export among the coastal people.

Most of the tropical rainforests are in the arc of mountains from the Pare to the Udzungwa. The forest in this range, the Eastern Arc, provides a home to a rich assortment of plants, many of which grow nowhere else in the world.¹² They include the African violet (*Saintpaulia*) and *Impatiens*, which are sold as house plants in grocery stores throughout

⁷ J.F. Griffiths, 'Climate', in *East Africa: Its People and Resources*, ed. W.T.W. Morgan (Nairobi: Oxford University Press, 1972), 106-125.

⁸ John Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', in *International Environmental Law and Policy in Africa*, eds. B. Chaytor and K.R. Gray (The Hague: Kluwer Law International, 2003), 161.

⁹ Maxon, *East Africa*, 8.

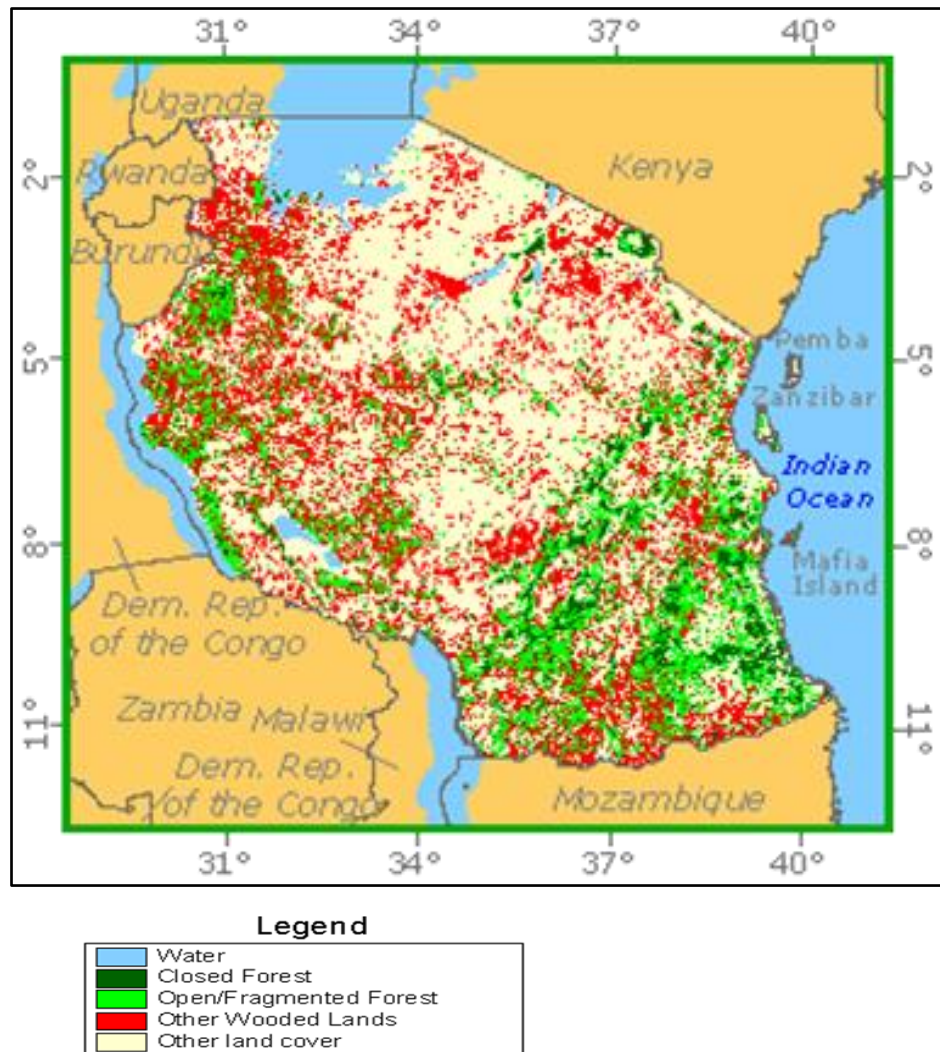
¹⁰ Plants in Tanzania- Lonely Planet Travel Information, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/tanzania/wildlife/plants> (27 October 2017).

¹¹ Robert, E. Perdue Jr. *Climate, Vegetation and Availability of Some Active Plants in the Usambaras and Southern Highlands, Tanzania*, Beltsville Agricultural Research Centre, (Beltsville, Maryland, 1977), 1.

¹² John Lovett, 'Endemism and Affinities of the Tanzania Montane Forest Flora', *Monogr. Syst. Bot. Missouri Bot. Gard.* 25 (1988), 591-98.

the West.¹³ fragments of rainforests also remain in Usambara, Uluguru, and several other areas. The southern highlands also show some forest endemism. These usually large forests include secondary vegetation¹⁴ (Maps 1.1, 1.2). Dense forest vegetation in Tanzania often occupies mountainous regions where lower temperatures reduce evaporation, allowing the soil to absorb the substantial precipitation.¹⁵

Figure 1.1 Map of Tanzania Vegetation Distribution

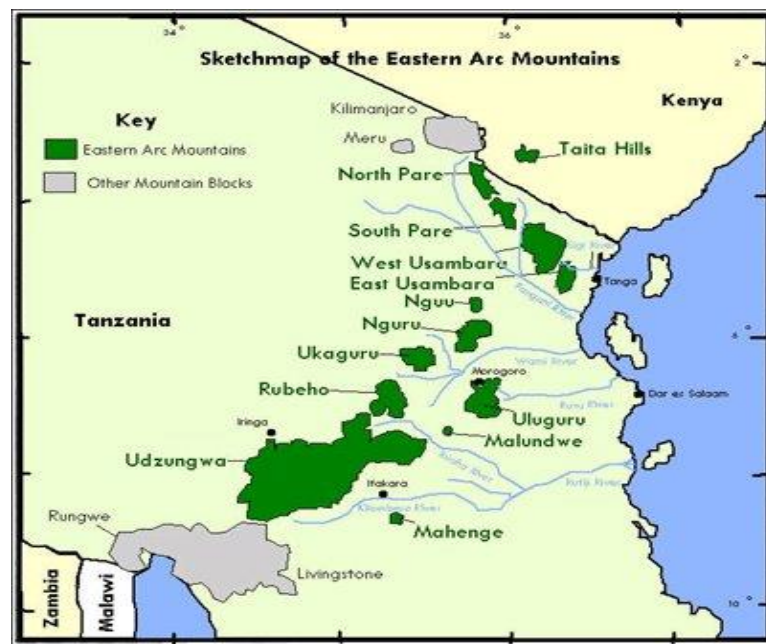


¹³ Plants in Tanzania- Lonely Planet Travel Information, <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/tanzania/wildlife/plants> Accessed 27 October 2017.

¹⁴ Perdue, 'Vegetation, and Availability', 1.

¹⁵ If the term forest is to be understood as a closed stand of high trees that form a dense canopy inhibiting glass growth.

Figure 1.2 Map of Eastern Arc Tropical forests



Source: Tanzania Forest Services (TFS) Agency Website,
<http://www.tfs.go.tz/index.php/en/resources/links/tanzania-forests>

Estimates of forest cover vary in Tanzania. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (2012) estimated the forested area to be 33.188 million ha (35.29%) of the total 94.730 million ha.¹⁶ Akida and Blomley (2008) placed the forest cover at 34.7 million ha.¹⁷ Kihyo (1998) assessed it at 33.5 million ha (37.8%).¹⁸ In 2012 higher figures were reported by Tanzania's National Strategy for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+ Strategy), which published that about 35.2 million hectares (39.9%) were forested.¹⁹ The National Forest Resources Monitoring and Assessment (NAFORMA) project, 2009-2014, determined that forests covered 48.1 million hectares (42%) of total Tanzania's mainland area.²⁰ Before this project, the

¹⁶ FAO, *Global Forest Resource Assessment: Global Tables* [online]
<http://http://www.fao.org/forestry/fra/fra2010/en/> (27 October 2017).

¹⁷ Amina Akida and Rosina Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership, Forest Resource Tenure, and Institutional Arrangements: Are they Contributing to Better Forest Management and Poverty Reduction? The Case Study from the United Republic of Tanzania', Report prepared for FAO (June 2008), 2.

¹⁸ Vincent Kihyo, 'Forest Policy Changes in Tanzania: Towards Community Participation in Forest Management', *The World Bank/WBI's CBNRM Initiative* (1998), 2.

¹⁹ URT, 'National Strategy for Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD+) 2nd draft' (Dar-es-Salaam, 2012), 2.

²⁰ National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), *Environment Statistics in Tanzania Mainland*, (Dar-es-Salaam, September 2015), 47; NAFORMA Main results, p. v. <http://www.fao.org/forestry/43612-09cf2f02c20b55c1c00569e679197dcde.pdf>, (20 April 2019).

government estimated the forest area as 33.6 million hectares (37.5% of the total mainland area).

Different methods for assessing the forested land explain the variation in estimates of Tanzania's forest cover. The early assessments primarily relied on satellite imagery, with little or no ground survey, leading to underestimates. NAFORMA's evaluation of the forest resources of mainland Tanzania employed both satellite data and intensive fieldwork. The five-year project established a higher proportion (42%) of Tanzania's mainland as forested. Of the forested land, 93% comprises woodlands while 7% consists of catchment forests, mangroves, coastal forests, and government forest plantations.²¹

The government categorises forest resources in Tanzania according to type, usage, and legal status. The types include dryland forests, montane, lowland or plantation forests, wetland mangrove forests and woodlands. Tanzania's Forestry and Beekeeping Department (FBD) statistics revealed in 2014 that 93 percent of the total forested area was covered by woods. Lowland forest covered 3.4 percent, humid montane forest 2.0 percent, plantation forest 1.2 percent, and mangroves 0.3 percent. Regarding usage, 60.3 percent counts as productive, whereas 39.7 percent is legally protected of which 23.3 percent has wildlife protection (**Table 1.1**).²²

Table 1.1 Distribution of forest area by category, Tanzania mainland, 2013–2014

Category	Area (1,000 hectare)	Percent
Type		
Woodlands	44,736	93.0
Dryland forests (Montane, Lowland, and Plantation)	3,206	6.7
Wetland mangrove forests	158	0.3
Total	48,100	100.0
Use		
Protected forest area	19,096	39.7
Productive forest area	29,004	60.3
Total	48,100	100.0
Legal status		
Forest reserves	18,711	38.9
Non-reserve forest land	18,182	37.8
Forest/woodlands in National parks	11,207	23.3
Total	48,100	100.0

²¹ Dos Santos Silayo, chief Executive secretary, Tanzania Forest Services (TFS), Agency <http://www.tfs.go.tz/index.php/en/about/chief-executives-message>, accessed on 22 April 2019.

²² NBS, 'Environmental Statistics', 47. Most of the protected forests are in catchment areas and natural reserves.

Source: NBS, *Environmental Statistics in Mainland Tanzania*, (2014), 48.

The physical boundaries of the forest reserves in Tanzania have remained mostly the same through time, but the policies governing them have changed. Forest conservation and use strategies differed among the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. Examining historical patterns shows how the changes have influenced the more recent forest interventions and shaped the experiences, discourses, and strategies of the stakeholders.

1.2. Pre-colonial forest management (before 1891)

Pre-colonial customary rights to natural resources and land use reflected a multifaceted relationship between society and the environment. For example, in the social organization during the Kilindi rule from the mid-18th to the late 19th century over the Shambaa, in today's northeastern Tanzania, the king in principle 'owned' all the land and its forests. He conserved the productivity of the land and was believed to have the power to heal or to harm it.²³ Authority over the forests rested on the customary leaders, who managed the forests for 'the people'.

The rights to forest and other resources varied among societies in Tanzania. The rights to forest practised by the Kilindi dynasty among Shambaa differed greatly from those practised by the Maasai for dry season grazing in mountain forests. Similarly, using a different system of rights and priorities the Hehe and the Bena cultivated the forest land of the southern highland than the Mijikenda employed in the enclosed forest patches on the coast.

There were, however, some common attributes of the established customary rights in pre-colonial Tanzanian societies. Under customary law, forests were preserved for traditional rituals, resource conservation and a source of foods and shelter, as the climate was unpredictable. The forests existed mostly in the margin of the communities' culture and were used to provide farming land and occasionally as an arena for hunting.²⁴ Though the relationship of the dwellers to the forests changed with shifting social and environmental conditions over millennia, the social institutions, such as chiefs and elders,

²³ S. Feierman, *The Shambaa Kingdom: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002), 19.

²⁴ C. Conte, *Highland Sanctuary: Environmental History in Tanzania's Usambara Mountains* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004), 88.

monitored the use of natural resources, which helped to keep the plateaus under constant forest cover.

Existing scientific knowledge on the pre-colonial use of forests in Tanzania is mainly based on archaeological, linguistic, and botanical data. For instance, there is evidence that people inhabited the Usambara Mountains and exploited the forests, although in a localised manner, from the first-millennium A.D.²⁵ Similar shreds of evidence of human occupation have been found around Lake Tanganyika at Gombe²⁶ and on the Mahale Mountains,²⁷ where the forests also show secondary characteristics, and pot-sherds indicate settlements. Cultivation activities were introduced by ironworkers speaking Bantu languages. Groups of agriculturalists also settled on other forested highlands in present-day northeastern Tanzania.²⁸

Agriculture and iron smelting during the last 2,500 years has had a major impact on forests. By 400 CE, iron producers were exploiting the secondary growth of forests, and evidence suggests that during the 5th century there was deforestation, which eventually caused the collapse of the iron industry.²⁹ Pottery in the surface soil layers under the diverse fully grown natural forests of the East Usambara Mountains in north-east Tanzania has also been ascribed to Early Iron Age settlements from 2,000 years BCE.³⁰ However, the exact extent of the early exploitation of the forests is hard to verify, as scholars cannot find surviving evidence.

The long history of forest exploitation was unknown to most of the Europeans who arrived in the area in the late 19th century, as the sites were forested at the time of their arrival. The Europeans saw the forests in Tanzania mainly as *Urwald*, a German word referring to an ancient, undisturbed forest, existing in a state of ecological equilibrium.³¹ Europeans only identified some local patterns of exploitation of the forests. However, Krapf, one of the early European travellers who travelled in the region in the 18th century,

²⁵ P.R. Schmidt, Early Exploitation and Settlement in the Usambara Mountains, in *Forest Conservation in the East Usambara Mountains, Tanzania*, eds. A.C. Hamilton and R. Bensted-Smith (IUCN, Gland & Cambridge, 1989), 93.

²⁶ T.H. Clutton-Brock and J.B. Gillet, 'A Survey of forest composition in Gombe National Park, Tanzania', *African Journal of Ecology* 17 (1979), 135.

²⁷ J. Kielland, 'A Provisional Checklist of the Rhopalocera of the Eastern side of Lake Tanganyika', *Tijdschrift Voor Entomologies* 121, no. 4 (1978).

²⁸ Conte, *Highland Sanctuary*, 88.

²⁹ P.R. Schmidt, 'Archaeological Views on the History of Landscape Change in East Africa', *Journal of African History* 38 (1997), 413.

³⁰ Schmidt, *Early Exploitation and Settlement in the Usambara Mountains*, 73.

³¹ Christopher Conte, 'Nature Reorganized: Ecological History in the Plateau Forests of the West Usambara Mountains 1850-1935', in *Custodians of the Land: Ecology & Culture in the History of Tanzania*, eds. G. Maddox, J.L. Giblin and I.N. Kimambo (Oxford: James Currey, 1996), 97.

reported a shortage of firewood in the Usambaras,³² suggesting that there were times when the use of the forest exceeded its rate of regeneration. Forest exploitation by the indigenous people was also noted by Frederic Elton, a British officer who, in 1874, visited the southeast coast of Tanzania around the Rufiji delta. Commenting on the importance of forests to the local commerce, Elton noted a wide range of products that the local people obtained from forests. The products included wax, rubber, ivory, mangroves, and high quantities of copal, which the locals traded with the Indians and Arabs who settled on the coast.³³ Most of the forest exploitation patterns discovered were of the most recent stages in a series of land-use changes.

Pre-colonial communities' forests, then, were managed through customary practices in which the protection of forests was achieved through traditional knowledge and belief systems. Towards the end of the 19th century, a new and pervasive colonial administrative regime would find the established customary rights to forests and other resources a difficult problem—conflict with local communities being denied their traditional rights was inevitable. Colonial administrators, however, considered customary rights as usufructuary rights, through which the community allocated rights of occupancy and access.³⁴ While ostensibly taking over this allocation for the benefit of the whole community, the colonial state could thus replace the complex indigenous forest management system with national priorities for protection or commercial exploitation. Starting in the late 19th century, the history of Tanzania shows a pattern of intensified use of the forests and the land.

1.3. German forestry management in East Africa (1891-1919)

Today's Tanzania was officially declared German territory in 1891, and the Germans referred to their colony as German East Africa (*Deutsche Ostafrika*). Adding to the ongoing social and environmental turmoil, the German colonisation of East Africa, with its efforts to promote agricultural production and to regulate forest use, increasingly shaped both the landscape and the practices of resource use. Significant interests underlying the colony's

³² Juhan Koponen, *People and Production in Late Pre-colonial Tanzania: History and Structures* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute for African Studies, 1988), 368.

³³ Thadeus Sunseri, 'Reinterpreting Colonial Rebellion: Forestry and Social Control in German East Africa, 1874-1915', *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003), 430.

³⁴ J.C. Lovett and T. Pócs, 'Assessment of the Condition of the Catchment Forest Reserves, a Botanical Appraisal', *Catchment Forestry Report* 93.3, Forestry and Beekeeping Division, Ministry of Tourism, Natural Resources and Environment (Dar es Salaam, 1993), 300.

economic policies promoted plantation agriculture and, ultimately, maximised the financial returns of investments in land.

As in many African countries, colonisation in Tanzania fundamentally altered land tenure from a traditional and customary system to a centralised formal system, eroding the pre-existing common property rights. As early as the 1880s, the Germans laid the foundations for government control of forest use. State control expanded with the DOAG (German East Africa) concession company's efforts to usurp the coastal trade in forest products after 1885. The German East African Forest Ordinance of 1893 legally justified strict state forest control.³⁵ The law led to the creation of forest reserves and scientific forestry, ostensibly for both conservation and commerce.

To commercialise forests, the Germans in East Africa applied scientific forestry to forest reserves (reserved for the government's use) that replaced human settlements. The ideal forest, in the German model, would contain a uniform tree species and size, to be quantified and harvested in rotation to meet fiscal and industrial needs.³⁶ With rotational planting and harvesting of profitable exotic tree species, the forest estate was remade to secure a continuous timber and fuel supply. Eugen Kruger, the first professional forester, arrived in 1892 to establish forestry in German East Africa in conjunction with his supervisor, Dr Franz Stuhlmann.³⁷ In 1899 the Germans started a local forest bureau (*Forstverwaltung*) at Usimbe in Muhoro area near the Rufiji delta, before shifting to Dar-es-Salaam in 1902.³⁸ The bureau would create and manage forest reserves to be exploited by the Germans for scientific and commercial purposes.

Many forest reserves were created to allow scientific forestry. Immediately after seizing control of East Africa, the German colonial state enacted laws restricting the local population's access to the forests and their use of forest products.³⁹ In 1904 an ordinance was passed to initiate the conversion of 7,500 sq.km of German crown land into 231 forest reserves throughout German East Africa. The areas included Marang (356 sq.km),

³⁵ T. Sunseri, 'Fuelling the City: Dar es Salaam and the Evolution of Colonial Forestry, 1892-1960', in *Dar es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*, eds. J.R. Brennan, A. Burton, and Y. Lawi (Dar es Salaam: Mkuki na Nyota, 2007), 84.

³⁶ Thadeus Sunseri, 'Every African a Nationalist: Scientific Forestry and Forest Nationalism in Colonial Tanzania', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no 4 (2007), 890.

³⁷ Hans Schabel, 'Tanganyika Forestry under German Colonial Administration, 1891-1919', *A Special Issue on International Forestry History* (1990), 130.

³⁸ Tanzania Forest (TFS) Agency, 'History Background', <http://www.tfs.go.tz/about/category/history-background>, (7 November 2017).

³⁹ Edward Mgaya, 'Forest and Forestry in Tanzania: Changes and Continuities in Policies and Practices from Colonial Times to the Present', *Journal of the Geographical Association of Tanzania* 36, no. 2 (2016), 47.

Ngorongoro-Olmalassin (894 sq. km), Monduli (60 sq. km), Mt. Meru (442 sq. km) and Mt. Kilimanjaro (1,875 sq. km). Other areas included Chomme in Pare (143 sq. km), both Shume-Magamba (247 sq. km) and Shagayu (83 sq. km) in West Usambara, North Nguru (88 sq. km), Nguru (187 sq. km), Uluguru (278 sq. km) and Ukaguru (140 sq. km). The Lake Nyasa forests in Rungwe totalled 138 sq. Km.⁴⁰ Under the the new Forest Ordinance, all coastal mangrove forests, covering 34,600 hectares, were either given as concessions to investors or used by the Forest Department. Many other smaller reserves were also created. This network of reserves forms a large proportion of the forest estates presently administered by the central government.

In addition to providing the Germans with scientific and commercial resources, the forest reserves also supplied a mechanism to control people who were considered a threat to forests.⁴¹ For example, the Germans attributed the scarcity of forests to the traditional African patterns of shifting agriculture that complemented their use of the forest. Thus, the Germans required people to relocate villages and farms away from forest reserves and therefore to abandon fruit trees, ancestral shrines, and hunting territories. Imperial environmentalism claimed German colonial control of forests as a definite benefit bestowed on colonised peoples because they thought traditional use damaged the forests.⁴² However, in German East Africa, such conservation by exclusion elicited significant resistance and contributed to uprisings and rebellions by the local population. German colonial forest policy and practice fuelled the Maji Maji rebellion (1905-7), in which peoples of the Rufiji basin attacked German authorities, including many who enacted forest reserves.⁴³ Both the process of creating forest reserves and the local responses to them reveal the Germans' high technical competence and minimal knowledge of African cultural practices.

German forest control was not always efficient in practice. In 1895 the execution of Usambara Forest Ordinance which declared control of forest destruction through fines, imprisonment, and corporal punishment, failed. The difficulties in implementing the earlier ordinances were due to German staff shortages in comparison to the local population and the large remote areas they had to cover. There was also an absence of comprehensive forest law.⁴⁴ Despite the failure to completely control the reserves, the reserves themselves

⁴⁰ Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 12-3.

⁴¹ Sunseri, 'Reinterpreting Colonial Rebellion', 432.

⁴² Gregory Barton, 'Empire Forestry and the Origins of Environmentalism', *Journal of Historical Geography* 27 (2001), 529.

⁴³ Sunseri, 'Reinterpreting Colonial Rebellion', 430.

⁴⁴ Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 12.

persisted as a consequence of German forest administration in Tanganyika. The German land ordinance of 1913 (Cap. 113), for instance, declared all land in German East Africa, regardless of current occupation, public land with all rights in it transferred to the colonial state.⁴⁵ Under this land ordinance, the titles to land issued under the customary law was now recognized as a right of occupancy.

For the local communities, German forest administration meant denial of access to forest resources and sites. The indigenous people opposed forest reserve practices that denied them access to forests, an essential resource for their socio-cultural and economic lives. The introduction of new conceptual and physical boundaries between formerly connected elements of the landscape, including forest reserve and public land, remained an important aspect of German forest policies.⁴⁶ German administrators, hampered by a lack of resources during WWI, could not keep indigenous people from encroaching on the reserves.

Following the German occupation of East Africa, the colonial state enacted laws circumscribing locals' access to forests and use of forest products. The policy explains the burgeoning number of reserves over time, which led to various uprisings by the local population. To the local communities, German administration meant denial of access to forest resources important for their economic and socio-cultural needs. Despite their claims to protect forests by establishing reserves, the German administration exploited many of the timber resources and created plantations of exotics that replaced the native tree species. Their thirty-year rule included only eight years of stability, too short a period to have a legacy of forestry for British Tanganyika and independent Tanzania.

1.4. British forest management in Tanganyika, 1919-1961

After WWI, Germany lost its East Africa colony, which was transferred to the United Kingdom and renamed 'Tanganyika'. Britain ruled Tanganyika in 1919, and in 1920 the territory formally became a mandated territory under the League of Nations.⁴⁷ In 1947 Tanganyika became a United Nations Trust Territory under British administration, a status

⁴⁵ Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 6.

⁴⁶ Conte, 'Nature Reorganized', 109.

⁴⁷ Debora Grahame and Mindy Pang, eds. *Cultures of the World: Tanzania* (Tarrytown, NY: Michelle Bison Publishers, 1998), 26; James Read, 'Introduction', *Government Publication Relating to Tanganyika, 1919-1961* (Microfilm Academic Publishers, 2006), 4. [Online], <https://microform.digital/map/guides/R96996.pdf>, (26 June 2017), 1550.

it kept until its independence in 1961.⁴⁸ The British also took control of the island of Zanzibar as a protectorate, ruling through the Oman Sultan from 1873 until 1963, when Zanzibar gained independence, followed by a bloodless revolution on 12 January 1964.

British administrators followed the German forestry policy in vesting ownership of the forests in the government. On 18 December 1920, a forest department was established, and a conservator appointed, and in 1921 a forest ordinance aimed to protect and develop the German forest reserves was passed.⁴⁹ Access to forest produce was strictly controlled. In addition to the previous laws, the 1921 ordinance aimed to found plantations and control forest on private land, control revenue collection and the harvest of forests.⁵⁰ By 1925 there were 212 gazetted forests, covering 3,707sq.m.⁵¹ To protect the economic interests associated with these forests, the British intensified control and the rhetoric of exclusion. However, the restrictive resource-use policies were challenged by territorial governors and by some district administrators. The latter considered that forest conservation proposals disregarded African claims of customary rights.⁵²

Africans' opposition to the state's exclusive use of their resources, backed by some sympathetic administrators, resulted in slight changes in the policies. In 1926, the 1921 law was modified to remove the royalty payable by natives on forest produce.⁵³ In the same year, modifications were made to give forest officers the capacity to issue a written permit for natives to extract a specified quantity of forest produce without fee or royalty. Unlike the Germans, the British deliberately decentralised the control of forests in some specific areas. British forest policy at this time aimed to bring local people into closer contact with forestry and encouraging them to protect forests on public lands and to reforest denuded areas.

The decentralisation of forest control was mainly due to three reasons. First, restrictions excluding indigenous people were not in the spirit of the 1920 League of Nations Mandate for the Tanganyika territory. Under the mandate, the interests of the local inhabitants were paramount.⁵⁴ Second, it aligned with the policy of indirect rule that the

⁴⁸ Robert Heussler, *British Tanganyika: An Essay and Documents on District Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1971).

⁴⁹ Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 16. Gazetted refers to forests officially published/announcement through a public journal or a newspaper of record.

⁵⁰ GN No. 32 of 17th August 1921.

⁵¹ R. Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggle over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 50.

⁵² Mgaya, 'Forest and Forestry in Tanzania', 51.

⁵³ Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 16.

⁵⁴ John C. Lovett, 'The Forest Act, 2002 (Tanzania)', *Journal of African Law* 47, no. 1 (2003), 133.

British had adopted in Tanganyika in 1925, as a step toward independence for Tanganyika. Third, the policy aimed to eliminate local resistance. Accordingly, in the early 1930s, the Native Authority Forest Reserves (NAFR) was established as a means of decentralisation.⁵⁵ In addition to serving the policy of indirect rule, NAFR integrated the indigenous people into the management of forest reserves. Thus, a separate system of reserves to cater for local needs was created, separate from the government reserves that benefited the state and timber concessionaires.

The decentralisation of forest control was unfortunately short-lived. In the early 1940s, the British colonial government reverted to tighter control of forests, mainly for economic reasons. The financial pressures of WWII led the state to emphasise that reserves were resources for the state rather than assets protected for the future.⁵⁶ Consequently, the extraction of forest resources like timber and minor forest products, including wild rubber, tanning bark and gums, doubled.⁵⁷ The greatest increase in timber harvest was for railway sleepers. Increased harvesting during the war resulted in revenue exceeding expenditure, an unusual situation for forestry.⁵⁸

Immediately after WWII, an intervention was launched to increase forest reserves. In the late 1940s the British administrators initiated efforts to restore forests with the aim of extending permanent forest estates from around 1.4% to 14.6% of the total land area.⁵⁹ Forest reserves were gazetted for numerous reasons. First, the government emphasised watershed protection. The move also anticipated increased domestic and international demand for timber products. A Government White Paper presented to the Legislative Council in 1953 recommended that forest policy recognise the importance of forests for water catchment and as sustainable sources of produce.⁶⁰ The Forest Department, which had been rather insignificant, gradually gained importance and the goal was reached within a decade and a half. The effort to increase state-controlled forests was furthered by the Forest Policy of 1953 and the Forest Ordinances of 1953 and 1957. The legislation

⁵⁵ Mgya, 'Forest and Forestry in Tanzania', 50.

⁵⁶ Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 19.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ N.D Burgess and S.B. Mbwana, *Forestry in Coastal Forests of eastern Africa* (IUCN, Cambridge, and Gland, 2000), 265.

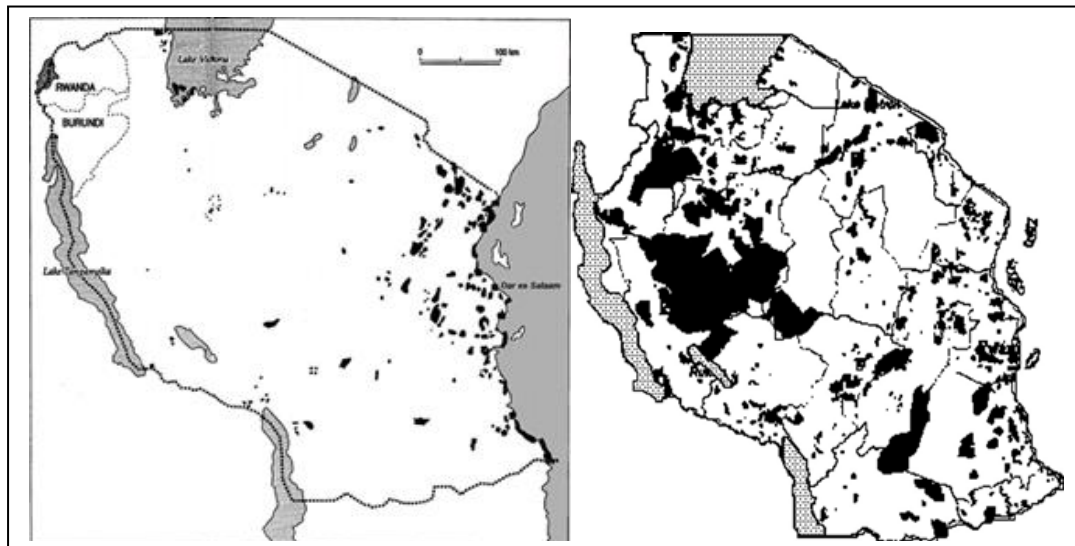
⁵⁹ Forest Department. Forestry in Tanganyika. Statement prepared by the Forest Department for presentation to the British Commonwealth Forestry Conference. (Dar-es-Salaam: Government Printer, 1957); Rasmus H. Pedersen, 'The Political Economy of Private Forestry in Tanzania: A Review', Danish Institute for International Studies -DIIS Working Paper 4 (2017), 7.

⁶⁰ Legislative Council of Tanganyika, Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1953

strengthened the protection of state-controlled forests, which by then occupied around 30% of the forested land in Tanganyika.⁶¹

Most of the gaps the Maji-Maji resistance had opened in the pattern of German reserves were filled by the British after WWII. For example, on the eastern slope of the Udzungwa mountains—later to become the West Kilombero Scarp reserve—the British created the following reserves: the Uzungwa scarp (208 sq. km), West Kilombero (2930 sq. km), Kisinga-Rugaro (143 sq. km), Ugwama (260 sq. km) and Nyumbanitu (62 sq. km). In the southern highlands, new reserves included the Livingstone escarpment (265 sq. km), Ukwiva (546 sq. km), the Kipengere range (340 sq. km) and Uporoto ridge (94 sq. km). In Maasai land, the mountain of Essimigor (60 sq. km) was gazetted as a reserve.⁶² These data, illustrated in **Map 1.3**, signify a very rapid increase in the network of state-reserve forests during the British administration.

Figure 1.3 Map of forest reserves in British colonial Tanganyika, 1945 vs 1961



Note: Forest reserves in 1945 (left) and 1961 (right).

Source: T. Sunseri, 'Every African a Nationalist': Scientific Forestry and Forest Nationalism in Colonial Tanzania,' *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 49, no 4. (2007), 897-98.

In addition to natural forests, plantations of fast-growing exotics were created by the British after WW2. A central silvicultural research station was set up in 1951 at Amani and moved to Lushoto in 1952. At the station, an arboretum of 180 exotic species was

⁶¹ Lovett, 'The Forest Act, 2002 (*Tanzania*)', 7.

⁶² Lovett, 'Tanzania Forest Law', 19-20.

established. Other research stations included Mombo, Rondo Kilimanjaro and Meru.⁶³ Timber continued as the main forest product, necessitating the use of fast-growing pines (*Pinus patula*, *P. radiata*) and cypress (*Cupressus lusitanica*). British administrators determined that commercial, non-destructive harvesting of natural forests gave yields too low to pay for their protection. As a result, logged natural forests such as on Meru, on Kilimanjaro and in the West Usambara were replanted with exotics.⁶⁴ The emphasis on fast-growing trees ignored the importance of non-timber forest products to local communities.

The British administration's forest management, then, changed according to the specific needs of each period. The strict nature of the 1921 Forest ordinance was modified in 1926 and 1930 to allow greater local access to forests, accommodating the aims of League of Nations and the notion of indirect rule. Such entitlements were, however, short-lived. The 1933 Forest Ordinance imposed restrictions which were retained in the 1957 Ordinance. The British expanded the system of state reserve forest started by the Germans, while also continuing to exploit timber. At the expense of natural forests, the British substantially expanded the plantation of fast-growing exotics, such as pines and cypress, to meet future timber demands. Most of the forest reserves established by the British are still operated by the state today. Like the Germans, the British preferred scientific forestry: no attention was given to traditional forms of forest management. During their administration, some sacred forests were wrested from local control and made state-reserves.

1.5. Post-independence forest management (1961-today)

At the time of Tanzania's independence in 1961, there was great hope that numerous sectors would contribute towards the economic development of the country. There was a widespread belief among Tanzanian foresters that state-led forestry would boost the development of the newly independent country. However, compared to agriculture, the forestry sector had less political traction in the early years of independence. Until 1971, forestry was administered under the same ministry as agriculture, an arrangement in which the forestry sector lost out.⁶⁵ Additionally, in the 1960s there was an overemphasis on agriculture at the expense of forestry. During this period, several state-reserve forests were deregistered to allow farming.

⁶³ R.L Willan, 'Natural Regeneration of High Forest in Tanganyika', *East African Agriculture and Forestry Journal* 31, (1965), 45.

⁶⁴ B. Lundgren, *Landuse in Kenya, and Tanzania* (Stockholm: Royal College of Forestry, 1975), 34.

⁶⁵ Pedersen, 'Political Economy of Private Forestry in Tanzania', 10.

When Tanzania gained independence, global conservation organisations worried that insufficient knowledge and resources might jeopardise vulnerable ecosystems. On the contrary, the newly elected president of Tanzania, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, showed his commitment to conservation with the Arusha Declaration of 1967. The declaration, which laid the framework for wildlife and forest conservation policies for the ensuing decades, states:

The survival of our wildlife is a matter of grave concern to all of us in Africa. These wild creatures amid the wild places they inhabit are not only important as a source of wonder and inspiration but are an integral part of our natural resources and our future livelihood and well-being.... The conservation of wildlife and wild places calls for specialist knowledge, trained manpower, and money, and we look to other nations to co-operate with us in this crucial task...⁶⁶

Nyerere understood that ‘wild places’ included forests. In a contrasting move, the Arusha Declaration also acknowledged forests as a major way to raise revenues from timber export and all forests, including some native-reserves, were nationalised. Nationalisation placed forests in the hands of the state with few provisions for community participation.⁶⁷ As a result, there was increased centralised forest management, as resources were to be extracted to benefit the common good. In the first three-years’ development plan (1961-1964), preceding the Arusha declaration, the forest division had expected both plantation and protected forests to be highly productive of timber.⁶⁸ Like the German and British colonial administrations, the Tanzanian government emphasised replacing the slow-growing indigenous trees with fast-growing softwoods. By 1968, softwood plantations had expanded to 22,000ha from 6000 ha at the end of the colonial period.⁶⁹ But many foresters were disappointed that lack of funds restricted forestry endeavours.

The early post-colonial era, like the colonial period, witnessed a continuing tension between the exploitation and the preservation of natural resources. Nyerere continued the top-down approach to conservation introduced by the colonial powers. The new government retained most of the state-reserve forests and continued to use the 1957 forest ordinance which primarily advocated protection of natural forests for water catchment and the use of exotic plantation for production.

⁶⁶ URT, *Arusha Declaration 1967* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 1998), 1-2.

⁶⁷ V. Kihyo, *Forest Policy Changes in Tanzania: Towards Community Participation in Forest Management*. (The World Bank, 1998), 1.

⁶⁸ Mgaya, ‘Forest and Forestry in Tanzania’, 53.

⁶⁹ Thadeus Sunseri, *Wielding the Ax: State Forestry and Social Conflict in Tanzania, 1820-2000* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009).

There were some exceptions in the continuation of British forest policy. The Arusha declaration emphasised that the ‘means of production and exchange—including land and forests, should be controlled and owned by the peasants through the machinery of their governments and their cooperatives’.⁷⁰ A policy to promote village forestry began in 1968. Forests reserves such as Shume-Magamba (12,000 ha), were transferred to village ownership and deforested.⁷¹ In 1969, centrally controlled forest reserves were placed under district authorities.

In the 1970s, the government reversed its move to decentralise forest reserves. For instance, in 1976, realising that the districts were using timber from them to relieve financial pressure, the government decided to once again centralise forest reserves.⁷² During this time, large-scale industrial forest plantations were also established, separate from reserve forests. State-owned sawmilling and wood-processing industry were also established to increase timber exports.⁷³ Thus, government plantation forests expanded during these years, peaking at the end of the 1970s with planting of more than 7,000 hectares in 1978/79. One of the important plantations established was the Sao Hill plantation.⁷⁴ The 1970s was, therefore, characterised by the renewal of the state forestry and state-owned industrial plantations.

In the 1980s, a new discourse around sustainability acknowledged the local community as co-partners in natural resource management. Like the rest of the world, Tanzania started promoting community forestry (CF). Tanzania’s move to participatory forestry resulted from financial pressures facing the Tanzanian government, and foreign donors conditions attached to their funding.⁷⁵ Thus, the economic crisis of the 1980s contributed to the promotion of a decentralised, community-based approach to forest management. In addition, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) World Conservation Strategy (1980), had placed sustainability of resources at the top of the agenda. In 1992, the Rio-Conference and the Third World Parks Congress both featured shared but differentiated responsibilities regarding conservation. From the 1980s, Tanzania

⁷⁰ URT, *Arusha Declaration 1967*, 5.

⁷¹ B. Lundgren, ‘Soil Conditions and Nutrients Cycling under Natural and Plantation Forests in Tanzanian Highlands’, *Reports in Forest Ecology and Forest Soils* 31, (1978), 301.

⁷² J.E. Hermansen and F. Benedict, *Catchment Forestry in Tanzania, Status and Management* (Institute for Environmental Analysis, Bo, Norway, 1985), 12.

⁷³ Pedersen, ‘The Political Economy of Private Forestry in Tanzania’, 10.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ F. Nelson., R. Nshala and W.A. Rodgers, ‘The Evolution and Reform of Tanzanian Wildlife Management’, *Conservation and Society* 5, no. 2 (2007), 254.

adopted an increasingly inclusive idea of forest management, while in practice, change awaited new studies and policies in the 1990s.⁷⁶

Tanzania accelerated its move to community-based forest management starting in the early 1990s. The Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) financed a pilot study done on the Arusha region's dryland *miombo* forest, which suffered from encroachment and overharvesting. Implemented by the Land Management Programme (LAMP), the study aimed to facilitate communities' protection and management of forests and revealed that local communities had great potential as effective forest managers.⁷⁷ The potential for village forestry, together with local opposition to exclusive reserve forests, led to the designation of numerous areas as village forest reserves. A significant milestone in community participation in forest management was reached in 1998, with the revised national forest policy.

The 1998 National Forestry Policy acknowledged that the national forest cover was receding, that ecological services were declining, that there was increased pressure to convert forests to agricultural land, and that demand for forest products had expanded.⁷⁸ The document also admitted the limitations of the forest management capacity and institutional weaknesses as constraints in developing the forest sector in Tanzania. The document recognised the need for broader stakeholder engagement in forestry management. It did not, though, define Participatory Forest Management (PFM), a strategy that would become important for involving the larger community in forest management.⁷⁹ Beyond the formal forest reserves network, the 1998 policy views the mobilisation of local communities as a way to rescue forest resources from unsustainable use. Recognising the array of stakeholders in forestry led to legal reform to suit the new policy direction. The 2002 Forest Act was one of the essential reforms to incorporate diversity in forest categories and management.

Tanzania's post-independence era, then, commenced with great hope for economic development, taking advantage of the country's natural resources. The contradiction between the need to preserve forests and the need to exploit them for economic

⁷⁶ Mikkel Funder, Finn Danielsenb, Yonika Ngagac, Martin R. Nielsend, and Michael K. Poulsene 'Reshaping Conservation: The Social Dynamics of Participatory Monitoring in Tanzania's Community-managed Forests', *Conservation and Society* 11, no. 3 (2013), 220.

⁷⁷ Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 7.

⁷⁸ MNRT, *National Forest Policy*, United Republic of Tanzania (Dar-es-Salaam: Government Printer, 1998), 59.

⁷⁹ Razack B. Lokina, 'Forest Reform in Tanzania: A Review of Policy and Legislation', *African Journal of Economic Review* 2, no. 2. (2014), 126.

development typified early forestry policies, as it did during the colonial regimes. In its early years of independence, Tanzania still relied on the 1957 forest ordinance prepared by the British colonial administration. Thus, Tanzania retained most of the reserves and adopted state-led forestry with a top-down approach to preservation. After the Arusha declaration, some forests transferred to village ownership (1968) and district authorities (1969), while the 1970s witnessed a resurgence in state-controlled forestry. Starting in the 1980s, a new trend towards community-based forestry emerged to achieve sustainability. Thus, Tanzania's 1998 forest policy and the 2002 Forest Act became important documents for participatory forest management because they recognised various stakeholders.

1.6. Forest categories and forms of management

The 2002 Forest Act emanated from the 1998 forest policy and integrated aspects of the international 1992 Biodiversity Convention Act, which recognises the importance of involving people near the forests in forest management.⁸⁰ To facilitate local participation, the 2002 Forest Act recognises seven categories of forests: National forest reserves (NFRs); local authority forest reserves (LAFRs); forests on general (public) land; village land forest reserves (VLFRs); community forest reserves (CFRs); private forests; and traditional/sacred forests.⁸¹

National Forest Reserves, NFRs, are the gazetted forests owned and managed by the central government through Tanzania Forest Services (TFS). They cover about 12.3 million ha, constituting approximately 35 percent of the total forested area.⁸² NFRs include forests managed for conservation purposes (protection forest reserves) and natural and plantation forests (production forests) for timber, firewood, or other purposes. Currently, NFRs are managed by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism through TFS. Besides TFS, other institutions established for specific forestry activities include the Tanzania Forestry Research Institute (TAFORI), for research and development, and the Tanzania Tree Seed Agency (TTSA), for the provision of tree propagation material.

Local Authority Forest Reserves, LAFRs, are also gazetted forests, but as opposed to NFRs, LAFRs are productive and protected forests managed at the district council level. By 2008 there were 169 gazetted (productive and protective) forest reserves controlled by

⁸⁰ Lovett, 'Endemism and Affinities of the Tanzania Montane Forest Flora', 2.

⁸¹ URT, *The Forest Act, No. 14, part II, section 4* (Dar-es-Salaam: Government printer, 7 June 2002),

⁸² Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 3.

local government, covering an area of about 1.6 million ha.⁸³ LAFRs are considered important sources of district revenues, and conservationists have warned about unsustainable charcoal and timber extraction in these forests.⁸⁴

Contrary to NFRs and LAFRs, general land forests, formally known as public forest lands, are non-gazetted/non-reserved lands. Although the Commissioner of Lands manages this category of land on behalf of the president, the forests in that land are under the authority and jurisdiction of the Director of Forests and Beekeeping. By 2008 public forest land in Tanzania covered a total of 17.7 million ha (51 percent).⁸⁵ Public forest land is poorly managed, as people have open-access use rights, characterised by insecure land tenure, shifting cultivation, and extraction pressure for firewood, poles, and timber. Public forest lands are also vulnerable to conversion to other uses, such as agriculture, livestock-grazing, settlements, and industrial development, as well as to wildfires. According to the FAO-UN statistics, the decline in forest cover in Tanzania between 1990 and 2010 averaged 403,350 ha (0.97%) per year and occurred mostly in public forest lands.⁸⁶

VLFRs are the category of forests legalised with the approval of Forest Act No. 14 of 2002. They are forests owned and managed by the village councils on behalf of the village assembly.⁸⁷ VLFRs fall under Community-Based Forest Management (CBFM), a form of Participatory Forest Management (PFM) in which villagers have legal rights to establish reserve forests. Under CBFM, the overall objective of forest reserves could be protection, production, or a mixture of both, depending on their location, size, and composition. The number of villages under CBFM increased from 544 in 1999 to 1,233 in 2012, with forest area rising seven-fold from 323,220 ha to 2,366,693 ha.⁸⁸ VLFRs can either be declared by a village or gazetted by the government. The declaration is made when a village government formally agrees to set aside a forested area within the village land. After a respective district's endorsement of the resolution, the village creates a management plan and by-laws, governing the forest. After three years, the villagers may request that the Forest and Beekeeping Department (FBD) gazette the Village Forest Reserve (VFR). The difference in legal status between the 'declared' and the 'gazetted' forest is, however,

⁸³ Ibid

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 4.

⁸⁶ FAO, 'Tanzania Forest Information and Data,'

<https://rainforests.mongabay.com/deforestation/2000/Tanzania.htm>, (13 November 2017).

⁸⁷ URT, *Community-Based Forest Management Guidelines for the Establishment of Village land forest Reserves and Community Forest Reserves*. MNRT-FBD (Dar es Salaam, 2007), 57.

⁸⁸ Lokina, 'Forest Reform in Tanzania', 135.

unclear, and few villages in Tanzania have gazetted their forests, as the process is voluntary. By 2008, of 329 declared VLFRs, only 53 were gazetted.⁸⁹

CFRs are also found on village land. These forests are similar in many respects to VLFRs except that the CFRs emerge after village councils delegate the management of such forests to groups of people within the community, such as women's groups or charcoal producers. The delegation process transfers the ownership and management of the forests from the village to specific groups.⁹⁰

Extensive private forests are usually on land leased from villagers or on general land leased from the government. The best-known forests in this category include the following: those of the Kilombero Valley Trek Company (KVTC), which has been in operation since 1992 in the Kilombero and Ulanga districts, those of the Tanganyika Wattle Company (TANWAT), which plants wattle, pines, and eucalyptus in Njombe;⁹¹ and a private forest financed by Norwegian investors (Farm Forest Company Limited), which plants pines and eucalyptus for timber and poles in the Mufindi and Kilombero districts. Individuals and households also own forests, generally as a result of agroforestry or, more commonly, the establishment of small woodlots from 0.25 to 3 ha.⁹²

Sacred and traditional forests are the traditional customary or clan forests managed by communities. Sacred forests are protected as burial sites and worship or for religious purposes, while traditional forests furnish dry-season grazing or supplies of local forest produce.⁹³ Despite the slight difference in meaning, both the 'sacred' and 'traditional' forests are traditional and of considerable social importance, both as primary sources for many locally utilised forest products and as cultural bases. They are grouped as they are well protected and, rather than using formal institutions such as village councils, sacred and traditional forests are often managed by clan or village elders and protected by local beliefs and superstition as a way of law enforcement.⁹⁴ Among the Bena, for instance, traditional ceremonies are held annually at Nyumbanitu forest in the southern highlands of Tanzania.

⁸⁹ Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 11.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 3.

⁹¹ Jacob Orr, 'Where Our House was I Found Only Trees: Colonial Development and Shared Memory in the Village of Itulike, Tanzania' (MA thesis, Concordia University, 2016), 1. The two plantations were financed by the Commonwealth Development Cooperation (CDC) founded in 1949.

⁹² Akida and Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership', 3.

⁹³ Ibid, 4.

⁹⁴ Lovett, 'Endemism and Affinities of the Tanzania Montane Forest Flora', 7.

In other parts of the Eastern Arc, the forests are associated with rain and fertility, as the rain-shrines in the Kolelo cult in the Nguru and Uluguru mountains demonstrate.⁹⁵

The reforms introduced by the Forest Act No. 14 of 2002 (Cap. 323) extended forest management to include village governments, communities, individuals and the private sector.⁹⁶ Under CBFM, villages, groups and private entities within villages may declare forest reserves, and thereby transfer management authority over these from the state to the community. The provision includes the right to collect fees for using the forest and to impose and retain fines for illegal use.⁹⁷ Under the classification adopted in 2002, sacred forests are included in the category of traditional forests (**Table 1.2**), although such forests have no formally stipulated legal status.

Table 1.2 Forest types and associated ownership/management structures

Type of forest	Managed/owned by	Type of management
Central and local government forest reserves, including village reserves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central forest authorities Local government authorities Communities (village councils and community groups) Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Forest Management (JFM) for central and local government forest reserves Leaseholds
Forest plantations (Industrial plantations)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government Private sector Tree growers' associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leasehold Concessions Private
Private and community forests (forests on leasehold and village lands, including farms, natural forests on lease-hold lands, and traditional forest areas)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communities (village councils and community groups) Private sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village management Leaseholds Private
Forests on general lands (unreserved forests and woodlands)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Central government Local government Villages Private individuals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Village Forest Reserves Community-based Forest Management Leaseholds Private

Source: Compiled from a range of materials discussed in this section (see footnotes 191-208)

The statistics on sacred natural forests are scant. Only the other six categories of forests appear to be well documented (**See Table 1.3**). Although the 2002 Forest Act recognises traditional and sacred forests as part of traditional forest management,

⁹⁵ A.C. Hamilton, 'Conservation of the East Usambara Forests with the Emphasis on Biological Conservation', *Symb. Bot. Ups.*, (1998), 246.

⁹⁶ Amina Akida, Isaya Mnangwone, and Leonard Lyimo, 'Financing for Sustainable Forest Management in Tanzania: Country Case Study', Paper prepared for UN Indufor Oy Forest Intelligence (Dar-es-Salaam, December 3, 2012), 18.

⁹⁷ Funder et al., 'Reshaping Conservation', 20.

government documents stated in 2008 and 2012 that ‘little is known about their extent, location and the system used to preserve and protect traditional forests.’⁹⁸ The Act also remains unrealised in its call for laws to protect traditionally managed forests.⁹⁹ The absence of legal safeguards discourages the collection of statistics about sacred and traditional forests. A figure that may include some traditional/sacred forests emerged with the Forestry and Beekeeping Division’s report in 2008 that PFM was either being established or operational in over 2,300 villages covering over 4 million hectares of forest land.¹⁰⁰ While forests under PFM stood at 11.6 percent of Tanzania’s public forests, the report failed to specify the percentage of forests managed by numerous clans and villages. The only areas of Tanzania where traditional/sacred forests have been well documented are the north Pare mountain area in northern Tanzania and the Shinyanga Region in central Tanzania. The Norwegian government-funded documentation over an extended period through the *Hifadhi Ardhi Shinyanga* (HASHI) project.¹⁰¹ As a result of the project, more than 350,000 ha of land in the Shinyanga region’s 833 villages have been recognized as *ngitili*.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ URT, *Participatory Forest Management Guideline* (Dar es Salaam: Government Printer, 2008), 10; MNRT, *Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania: Facts and Figures*, (2012), 8.

⁹⁹ Akida and Blomley, ‘Trends in Forest Ownership’, 4.

¹⁰⁰ MNRT, *Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania. Facts and Figures. Forestry and Beekeeping Division* (2008), 13.

¹⁰¹ T. Blomley, and S. Iddi, *Participatory Forest Management in Tanzania, 1993-2009: Lessons learned and experiences to date*, URT. Ministry of Resource and Tourism, Forest, and Beekeeping Division, (2009), 31.

¹⁰² Ibid. *Ngitili* are traditional dry season reserves where use of trees and other vegetation are regulated by either individuals or groups of people. Like traditional reserved forests in other areas, these *ngitili* are generally small (average 2.2 ha) but range up to 215 ha.

Table 1.3 Forest distribution by ownership and management regime

Ownership	Productive		Protective		Total	
	No.	Area (ha)	No.	Area (ha)	No.	Area (ha)
Declared or gazetted forest reserves						
National forest reserves	223	9,292,845	225	2,986,862	448	12,279,707
Local authority forest reserves	95	1,356,204	74	231,470	169	1,587,674
Village land forest reserves	81	136,919	187	319,478	268	456,397
Private forest reserves (company)	3	47,834	1	13,097	4	60,931
<i>Subtotal forests</i>	402	10,833,802	487	3,550,907	889	14,384,709
Unreserved forests						
Proposed village land forest reserves	442	850,417	392	754,144	834	1,604,561
Proposed national forest reserves	15	352,557	50	443,367	65	795,924
Proposed local authority forest reserves	20	64,019	43	102,559	63	166,578
<i>Subtotal</i>	477	1,266,993	485	1,300,070	962	2,567,063
Forest on general land	n/a	17,704,269				17,704,269
Subtotal unreserved forests						20,271,332
Traditional sacred forests	?	?	?	?	?	?
Totals						34,656,041

Note: The distribution shows well-counted categories (but missing counts for traditional forests) and the predominance of state-controlled forest reserves. Table 1.3 places question marks for traditional sacred forests to indicate that their count is missing.

Sources: Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, Tanzania, 2000, 2002 and 2006; A. Akida and R. Blomley, 'Trends in Forest Ownership, Forest Resource Tenure and Institutional Arrangements: Are they contributing to Better Forest Management and Poverty Reduction? The Case Study from the United Republic of Tanzania', Report prepared for FAO, (June 2008), 2-3.

* * *

Generally, since pre-colonial times, communities have managed local forests. Their role was, however, ignored during the colonial and early post-colonial periods, which favoured top-down approaches to forestry management. Despite the dominance of state forestry, traditional institutions continued to maintain the numerous patches of sacred forests throughout Tanzania. Starting in 1998, formal recognition and development of community forest management emerged in response to the decentralisation of forest management. The evolution and diversity of community forestry are characterised by partial de-concentration of government's forest administrative authority from the national to the district level. The process also entails devolution of formal forest management from government authorities to local communities and individuals.

As the authority for managing forests devolved, the need grew to revive the pre-colonial norms and principles of traditional systems of indigenous forest management. Similarly, community participation required formulating policies to help sustain local management practice. The 1998 forest policy became the turning point in recognising local communities as forest managers. The policy gained legal force through the Forest Act No. 14 of 2002 (Cap. 323), which vests the responsibility for managing forest resources in various stakeholders. These two documents recognise traditional/sacred forests as a type of forests but fail to specify a management framework for them. While considerable knowledge is available on the number and management of other forest types, very little is known about the extent, location, and the management system of traditional/sacred forests in Tanzania.

Chapter 2

2. Traditional ecological knowledge, institutions, and sacredness: A conceptual discussion

In a study of sacred forests in Africa, we need to understand traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and social institutions as important foundations for the sacredness that benefits sustainability in resource management. The condition of sacred forests depends on the strength of traditional institutions. The longer practice of managing resources in such institutions creates traditions that can, in turn, influence biodiversity conservation in areas considered sacred. Thus, the relationship among traditions, institutions and nature is complex and deeply rooted.

Because scholars from different disciplines deploy varied concepts when studying pre- and post-colonial African societies, one must contextualise the definitions of relevant concepts. When studying the Bena from Tanzania, the concepts of traditions, Traditional ecological knowledge, institutions, and sacredness assume particular forms. Before examining how traditional institutions manage sacred forests, this chapter explores the relevant concepts by defining traditions, TEK and institutions, by differentiating informal and formal institutions, by surveying new institutionalism, by depicting the traditional institutions among the Bena, and by investigating what constitutes sacredness.

2.1. Traditions and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Our difficulty in approaching the knowledge from indigenous cultures appears in the way we describe and name it, such as the phrase Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).¹ Each of the terms in the phrase carries different connotations, and debate ensues about which one carries the most weight. Thus, in this study of traditional institutions' custodianship of sacred forests in Tanzania, we must devise working definitions of 'traditions' 'TEK' and 'institutions.' The definitions serve as a practical reference in the context of our study. Ruth Finnegan defines tradition as:

‘culture’ as a whole; any established way of doing things whether of any antiquity; the process of handing down practices, ideas or values, the

¹Otherwise called traditional knowledge, local knowledge, indigenous knowledge or science, folk knowledge, farmers' knowledge, fishers' knowledge, and tacit knowledge.

products so handed down, sometimes with the connotation of being ‘old’ or having arisen in some ‘natural’ and non-natural way.²

Finnegan further suggests that what is called ‘tradition’ is often taken to somehow belong to the community rather than to specific individuals or interest groups. It is unwritten and marks a group’s identity.³

Although commonly used, ‘tradition’ is one of the vague terms that scholars deploy in a variety of ways to suit one view or another. To many, it implies notions of static, time-honoured customs. For instance, most anthropologists, folklorists, and historians use the term ‘tradition’ to place emphasis on the transmission of knowledge along with cultural continuity.⁴ However, in emphasising continuity, this definition might downplay the ability of traditional societies to adapt to changing circumstances. The concept of tradition as static creates problems when we attach it as a descriptor to ‘knowledge’. Because environments and living systems are inherently dynamic, knowledge concerning them shifts. The relationships underlying tradition also change. As Pierotti and Wildcat note, traditional environmental knowledge embodies a view that all beings are connected and interrelated. As a result, various rituals and practices emerge that also honour and maintain non-human members.⁵ However, the traditional ceremonies and rituals associated with non-human entities may change as the foundations of the community evolve. In short, as societies change, so do their uses and interpretations of the environment.

The problems created by a static view of ‘tradition’ necessitate a more subtle and nuanced interpretation of it. Rather than understanding tradition as naturalistic or original, the adjusted concept focuses on its indigenous origin and recognises that traditions are not museum pieces—they may change in many ways. For instance, S.M. Hassan comments on its malleability:

Many students of culture and society have concluded that tradition is no longer an ‘authentic’ body of knowledge handed down from one generation to another with only minor alterations due to malfunctioning of memory or skill. Although the past is a powerful authority in culture, human society selectively adds to the past, subtracts from it, or moulds it in its image.⁶

² Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Traditions and Verbal Arts: A Guide to Research Practices* (London: Association of Anthropologists and Routledge, 1992), 70.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Fulvio Mazzocchi, ‘Western Science and Traditional Knowledge’, *EMBO Reports* 7, no. 5 (2006), 463.

⁵ R. Pierotti and D. Wildcat, ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge: The Third Alternative’, *Ecological Application* 10, no. 5 (2000), 1336.

⁶ Salah M. Hassan, ‘The Modernist Experience in African Art; Toward a Critical Understanding’, in *The Muse of Modernity Essays on Culture as Development in Africa*, eds. G. Altbach and S. M. Hassan (Asmara: Africa World Press, Inc. 1996), 45.

Traditions are dynamic and always in the process of change and adaptation. To describe the inevitability of change in a tradition, Okpewho uses the analogy of ‘a man walking a forward march with a backward look over his shoulders’.⁷ A phenomenon described as traditional can, therefore, be understood as existing in or as part of a tradition long established. ‘Tradition’ does not entail a bounded system of knowledge that has remained historically intact from generation to the next. Instead, we recognise culture and tradition as something that is continuously ‘re-constructed in the present’ and not a history that is ‘passively’ passed down from generation to another. Referring to cultural construction in the Pacific, J. Linnekin states that ‘orally transmitted knowledge in the present, and culture cannot be assumed to be a “bounded object” that is readily available for “scientific study”’.⁸ Thus, tradition is a fluid construction pertaining to a specific socio-historical context—not just the product of psychological uniformity.

The sense of long-existing distinguishes the term ‘tradition’ as it is used here. In this study, what people today consider to be their own established practices and rules governing access to land and natural resources qualifies as tradition, as opposed to outside interventions that propose new rules and regulations to which people are unaccustomed. The term distinguishes between indigenous African socio-cultural, political, and economic practices and those from other traditions that have been imported. Such practices are deemed traditional not because they are static but rather because they have their origins in the environment. Consequently, a traditional worldview regarding nature entails a context in which Africans are inculcated with traditional beliefs and practices through a well-defined system of rites of passage. Tradition, therefore, refers to the historical and cultural continuity of resource management, while recognising that societies are constantly redefining what is considered ‘traditional’—including ‘knowledge’.

All societies have a knowledge base which forms a foundation for the activities of everyday life. This knowledge is developed, maintained, and passed on from generation to generation by social institutions, and individuals have access to it in their daily lives.⁹ In the Bena community, this knowledge is called *Vudzela*, Bena traditional knowledge. It is part of what is known internationally as indigenous or traditional knowledge. Traditions

⁷ I. Okpewho, *Myths in African: A Study of its Aesthetic and Cultural Relevance* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 160.

⁸ J. Linnekin, ‘On the Theory and Politics of Cultural Construction in the Pacific’, *Oceania* 62, no. 4 (1992), 251.

⁹ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 15.

are ecological as they represent a complex and intergrated systems of practices and beliefs.¹⁰ Thus, ecological aspect forms an important part of the knowledge base of a society constituting what is referred to as Traditional ecological knowledge (TEK).

The term ecological knowledge presents definitional problems. If we narrowly define ecology as a branch of biology concerned with interrelationships in the biophysical environment as defined in the domain of Western science, then TEK becomes a problematic term. But ecological knowledge becomes tenable if we define it to broadly refer to the knowledge, however acquired, of relationships of living beings with one another and with their environment. This knowledge is what Levi-Strauss (1966) referred to as the native knowledge of natural milieu firmly rooted in the reality of an accumulation of concrete, personal experience, as opposed to book learning.¹¹ Multiple terms are used to describe what the indigenous people know causing its difficulty to define. Apart from TEK, terms such as traditional knowledge, local knowledge, indigenous knowledge or science, folk knowledge, farmers' knowledge, fishers' knowledge, and tacit knowledge are also in use by different scholars.¹² Indigenous people themselves might have their own term, different from those used by experts. For instance, the Bena *vudzela* often refers to their 'knowledge of land' rather than to ecological knowledge. For them, land is more than a physical landscape as it includes the living environment.

To arrive at a definition of TEK it is important to survey the various meanings and elements of the concept. Berkes (2008) sketches the concept from the 1980s, associating its beginning to the development of ethnoscience—the study of species identification and classification, and advanced to human ecology—considering people's understanding of ecological processes and their relationship with the environment.¹³ Implied components in the concept includes local *knowledge* of species and other environmental phenomena, *practice*—the way people carryout their livelihood and *belief*—peoples' perceptions of their role within the ecosystems and how they interact with natural processes. These components are interrelated. For instance, it is impossible to divorce the ecological aspects of Bena tradition from the religious, the aeththetic, or social. Children learn the moral

¹⁰¹⁰ E. Hunn, 'What is Traditional Ecological Knowledge?' in *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Wisdom for Sustainable Development*, eds. N.M. Williams and G. Baines (Canberra: Australian National University, 1993), 14.

¹¹ C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 4.

¹² Mazzocchi, 'Western Science and Traditional Knowledge', 463.

¹³ F. Berkes, *Sacred ecology* (Madison, NY: Routledge, 2008), 5.

precepts that will guide them in their social and ecological relationship by listening to the stories of their elders.

There is no universally-accepted definition of TEK, but by putting together the most salient attributes of traditional ecological knowledge, Berkes (1999) provided a widely-quoted definition:

[TEK is] a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmissions, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment.¹⁴

This definition covers a number of TEK's basic features. Firstly, TEK represents local knowledge which consists of biophysical observation, skills, technologies, and social relationships. It is transferred from one generation to the next. Within the processes of transmission, the body of knowledge is adapted and amended by new observations and practices.¹⁵ TEK takes on various forms, such as stories, legends, myths, songs, dances, rituals and practices.¹⁶ TEK is grounded in moral, ethical, and spiritual world views of a particular locations and groups of people.¹⁷ TEK is often an integral part of local culture.

Scholars are increasingly aware of the complementary role of the TEK and the Western techno-science. However, it is important to reflect that the two knowledge systems often reflect different perspectives and emphases. Eventhough clear boundaries are difficult to make and exceptions exists, traditional ecological knowledge is generally thought to differ from western scientific ecological knowledge in a number of ways. The physical world is approached from opposite ends in each of the two: 'one is supremely concrete, the other supremely abstract.'¹⁸ In many traditional cultures nature is imbued with sacredness. "It is a sacred ecology' in the most expansive, rather than in the scientifically restrictive sense of the word 'ecology.'¹⁹

The fundamental differences between the two knowledge paradigms are characterized by an old African proverb which states 'when a knowledgeable old person dies, a whole library disappears.' As practitioners, guardians and educators of indigenous

¹⁴ F. Berkes, *Sacred ecology: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Resource Management* (Philadelphia, PA: Taylor and Francis, 1999), 8.

¹⁵ M. E. Fernandez-Gimenez, 'The Role of Mongolian Nomadic Pastoralists' Ecological Knowledge in Rangeland Management,' *Ecological Applications* 10, no. 5 (2000), 1318.

¹⁶ J. C. et al. 'Integrating Sacred Knowledge for Conservation: Cultures and Landscapes in southwest China,' *Ecology and Society* 10, no. 2 (2005), 7.

¹⁷ J.A. Drew, 'Use of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in Marine Conservation,' *Conservation Biology* 19, no. 4 (2005), 1287.

¹⁸ C. Levi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), 269.

¹⁹ P. Knudtson and D. Suzuki, *Wisdom of the Elders* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992), 15.

knowledge, the death of key elders (along with the current disinterest of youth to learn traditional ways and languages) can severely limit and threaten existing sustainable livelihoods. Unlike the documented scientific system, much of the remaining traditional ecological knowledge in Africa exists only in oral form, passed on from knowledgeable individuals through shared practice and story-telling. We can provide some theoretical comparisons between the knowledge paradigms of scientists and indigenous societies as in table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Comparison of indigenous knowledge and western scientific knowledge

Comparison	Indigenous Knowledge	Western scientific knowledge
Relationship	Subordinate	Dominant
Dominant mode of thinking	Intuitive (Holistic)	Analytical (Reductionist)
Communication	Oral (storytelling, subjective experiential)	Literate/didactic (academic, objective, positivist)
Data creation	Slow/inconclusive	Fast/selective
Prediction	Short-term cycles (recognize the onset of long-term cycles)	Short-term linear (poor long-term analysis)
Explanation	Spiritual (the inexplicable)	Scientific inquiry (hypothesis, laws)
Biological classification	Ecological (inconclusive, internally differentiating)	Genetic and hierarchical (differentiating)

Source: Modified from Alaska Native Science Commission. 2011. ‘Comparisons between traditional and scientific knowledge.’ http://www.nativescience.org/html/traditional_and_scientific.html.

Traditions and TEK depend for their survival on the social institutions that maintain them. Such cultural practices form the general and common understandings developed by persons and by groups and provide the basis from which ‘institutions’ grow the frameworks of specific rules that structure and govern human behaviour on nature. These institutions include formal or informal procedures imposing shared constraints that human beings devise to shape their daily interactions and transactions. As the traditions change, so do the institutions that uphold them.

2.2. Formal versus informal institutions

Whereas ‘tradition’ is comparatively a recent term in the social sciences, the concept of an ‘institution’ dates to the medieval period. Arnanian-Kepuladze, for example, traces the term back to its use by the English monk Saint Bede (672-735) in the first half of the 8th Century.²⁰ Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) also used the term ‘institution’ in a religious context, speaking of the institution of God and church.²¹ In the middle of the 17th Century, Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) first applied the term ‘institution’ in a political context. In his *Leviathan* (1651), he developed a systematic concept of an institution as resulting from a social contract between people.²² Hodgson traces the history of the term back at least to Giambattista Vico’s *New Science (Scienza Nuova)* in 1725.²³ Since Hobbes, the term ‘institution’ has widely been used in many fields.

Despite its long history of usage, the term ‘institution’ lacks a consistent meaning even among scholars who study institutions. In economics, Searle notes that the ontology of an institution and the understanding of what it constitutes remain unclear in institutional scholarship.²⁴ Hollingworth concurs, emphasising that scholars disagree as to a clear definition of an institution.²⁵ Douglass North composed a widely cited description when he defined an institution as ‘rules of the game in the society, or more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interactions.’²⁶ Although North focuses on formal rules which are created by polity, he also recognises informal norms as part of cultural heritage. Building on North, Ostrom defined an institution as ‘a set of rules used by a set of individuals to organise repetitive activities.’²⁷ In the same vein, Singh defined institutions as formal or informal rules about who makes what decisions, according to which procedures, what actions are permitted, what information must be provided and what

²⁰ In his famous manuscript ‘The Ecclesiastic History of English People’ completed in 731, Bede paid attention to Church institutions where he mentioned ‘an ancient institution of the fathers.’ He distinguished between ‘Good institutions’ which need to be imitated and ‘Imperfect institutions’ which need to be removed by the church. (Tamila Arnanian-Kepuladze, ‘Institutions: Uncertainty in Definition of the Term. A Brief Look at History: 1890-1930,’ *Quarterly Journal of Economics Policy* 9, no. 4 (2014), 82).

²¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* 1 (1256) 307 Retrieved from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/aquinas-the-summa-theologica-of-st-thomasaquinas-part-i-qq-i-xxvi-vol-1%20>, (2 December 2017).

²² Arnanian-Kepuladze, ‘Institutions’, 82.

²³ Geoffrey Hodgson, ‘What are Institutions?’ *Journal of Economic Issues* XL, no. 1 (2006), 1.

²⁴ J.R. Searle, ‘What is an Institution?’ *Journal of Institutional Economics* 1, no.1 (2005), 1.

²⁵ J.R. Hollingworth, ‘Doing Institutional Analysis: Implications for the Study of Innovations’, *Review of International Political Economy* 7, no. 4 (2000), 598.

²⁶ Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 3.

²⁷ Elinor Ostrom, *Crafting Institutions for Self-Governing Irrigation Systems* (California: ICS Press, 1992), 19.

payoffs will be assigned to individuals.²⁸ Singh's understanding of the power of institution is shared by Grace et al., who argue that institutions might either include or exclude an actor or group from access to resources.²⁹ Islam defined institution as rules and enforcement mechanisms that govern economic, social and political interactions.³⁰ Islam's understanding of institutions, like that of many other scholars, shows the broad application of the concept of 'institution'.

Generally, studies looking at the relationship between traditions and institutions tend to isolate the two causal aspects. A more promising research agenda needs to emphasise a feedback effect between the two—given their interdependence, both institutions and traditions co-evolve. Tradition and institutions are related variables, determined by geography and historical processes of a given society. The concept 'tradition' entails a fluid construction of socio-cultural, political, and economic practices pertaining to a specific socio-historical context. But, for traditions to survive, relevant institutions are needed to maintain them. Like traditions, 'institutions' evolve from the necessity to comply with certain conventionalities by individual subjects. Traditions and institutions should be viewed and discussed in the context of the disciplines through which they are analysed. Arrow, an American economist, suggests that scholars should adopt a fluid definition of institutions to incorporate new, ongoing research in their respective fields.³¹

A lively debate persists about the relative importance of formal and informal institutions in natural resources management. Formal institutions constitute written or codified rules such as a constitution, laws, regulated markets, and property rights. Informal institutions are the rules generated by behavioural norms in society, family, or community. Informal institutions include sanctions, taboos, traditions and codes of conduct.³² They are the informal constraints that are part of people's cultural heritage.³³ The term 'informal'

²⁸ Katar Singh, *Managing Common Pool Resources: Principles and Case Studies* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994), 42.

²⁹ C. Grace, A. de Heana, D. Den, A. Konde, H. Seba, A. Shankland and A. Sinclair, 'Sustainable Livelihoods in Ethiopia', *Research Report 44* (Brighton, U.K: Institute of Development Studies, 2000), 12.

³⁰ Reumeen Islam, 'One More Time: What are Institutions and How Do They Change?' *Policy Research Working Paper 8422*. World Bank Group. European and Central Asia Region (2018), 2.

³¹ K. Arrow, *The Limits of Organisation* (New York: Norton, 1974), 224.

³² J. Mowo, Z. Adimassu, K. Masuki, C. Lyamchai, J. Tanui and D. Catacutan, 'The Importance of Local Traditional Institutions in the Management of Natural Resources in the Highlands of Eastern Africa', *Working Paper No. 134* (2011), 2.

³³ North, 'Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance', 3.

has often been a residual category equated to whatever is not nation-wide.³⁴ ‘Informal’ often means ‘local’, and the local has positive characteristics that outweigh its limited geographical scope. The local provides a basis for collective action and for building consensus. In addition, it mobilises interpersonal solidarity, an asset in coordinating and managing responsibilities. At the local level, there is more rapport and a sense of belonging, as people know each other better. A sense of belonging provides an opportunity for cooperation and collective action in managing natural resources on an independent basis. Although in many countries, informal institutions have governed natural resources, such institutions have largely been overlooked.

To better understand the behaviour of informal institutions, as they contrast to formal institutions, we consider how they differ when mapped against various characteristics. Scholars studying sustainable common-pool resource management in sub-Saharan Africa have employed aspects such as ‘the nature of evolution’ or ‘the control mechanism’ to help map institutional differences. Following Yami, Vogl and Hauser, formal institutions, for example, evolve exogenously whereas informal institutions evolve endogenously. A colonial official might dictate policy from above—an exogenous impact on an institution. By contrast, endogenous changes evolve slowly over time with customs and traditions. Similarly, a formal institution might have written rules and regulations that function as a ‘control mechanism’, whereas an informal institution relies on unwritten traditional norms, values, and beliefs.

To these aspects established by Yami, Vogl and Hauser, we can add ‘creation’, ‘ownership’, and ‘purpose’ to help further distinguish how formal institutions differ from informal institutions in the context of Bena history. Focusing on these aspects demonstrates the contrast between informal and formal institutions (**See Table 2.1**). Development practitioners have tended to prioritise institutions, viewing informal ones as separate and often detrimental to development outcomes. In practice, however, formal, and informal rules and norms can complement, compete with, or reinforce each other.³⁵ Neither formal nor informal institutions are strong/weak or exclusive/inclusive by nature.

³⁴ N. Uphoff, ‘Local Institutions and Participation for Development: Defining the Community in Mozambique’, in *Forests, Chiefs and Peasants in Africa: Land Management of Natural Resources in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Mozambique*, eds. P. Virtanen and N. Matti (Silva Carelica: University of Joensuu, 2000).

³⁵ A. Leftwich and K. Sen, ‘Beyond Institutions: Institutions and Organizations in the Politics and Economics of Poverty Reduction - A Thematic Synthesis of Research Evidence’, *Consortium on Improving Institutions for Pro-Poor Growth* (IPPG) (Manchester: University of Manchester, 2010), 17.

Table 2.1 Overview of differences between informal and formal institutions

Aspects	Formal institutions	Informal institutions
Creation	Deliberately by top management	Spontaneously by members
Purpose	To fulfil the ultimate objectives of the institution	To satisfy social and psychological needs
Ownership	State	Local community
Nature of evolution	Exogenous	Endogenous
Control mechanism	Rules and regulations	Norms, values and beliefs
Functional and structural Arrangements	Common at a district or national level	Site-specific
External input and material support	High	Low
Consideration of social and cultural embeddedness	Low	High
Enforcement and monitoring	Legally by state	Based on community agreement

Note: Aspects such as ‘Creation’, ‘Purpose’ and ‘Ownership’ were created by the author to apply to the Bena case study. The aspects of comparison are randomly arranged.

Source: Modified from M. Yami, C. Vogl and C. Hauser, ‘Comparing the Effectiveness of Informal and Formal Institutions in Sustainable Common Pool Resource Management in Sub-Saharan Africa’, *Conservation and Society* 7, no. 3 (2009), 154.

Scholars disagree on how to prioritise the importance of informal and formal institutions. Some scholars support the ideas of North, who argued that both informal and formal institutions help to achieve sustainable Common Pool Resource (CPR) management.³⁶ And, that long-standing informal institutions like social taboos have similar functions to those of formal institutions.³⁷ Other scholars give more priority to informal institutions, arguing that local institutions are more effective, as they engage the energies and social relations of ordinary citizens and increase their willingness to invest in the public good. For instance, Dixon and Wood contend that local institutions are more efficient in promoting sustainability as they are dynamic, flexible, and responsive to societal and environmental change.³⁸

³⁶ E. Koku and J. Gustafsson, ‘Local Institutions and Natural Resource Management in South Tongu District of Ghana: A Case study’, *Sustainable Development* 11 (2003), 22.

³⁷ J. Colding and C. Folke, ‘Social Taboos: Invisible Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation’, *Ecological Application* 11 (2001), 585.

³⁸ A.B. Dixon and A.P. Wood, ‘Local Institutions for Management of Wetlands in Ethiopia: Sustainability and State Intervention’, in *Community-based Water Law and Water Resource Management Reforms in Developing Countries*, eds. Barbara Van Koppen, Mark Giordano, and John Butterworth (CAB International, 2007), 132.

Early assessments of traditional institutions' CPR management were pessimistic. Hardin's 'Tragedy of the Commons', published in 1968, marked the beginning of the pessimistic view regarding CPR management.³⁹ Hardin argued that CPRs had been overexploited due to maximised usage by individuals, leading to tragic ecological outcomes.⁴⁰ In Hardin's view, privatisation or state regulation of CPRs could solve the problem, as he saw common property resources like free or open-access resources.⁴¹ For more than forty years, 'the tragedy of the commons' remained the dominant paradigm with which social scientists assessed natural resource issues.⁴² Scholars embraced the paradigm and thereby imposed their own economic and environmental reasoning on other social systems with contrasting forms of decision-making.

Despite its influence in conceptual debates, Hardin's work did not escape critique. Contrasting with the 'tragedy of the commons', scholars showed that many user groups had successfully managed common resources by developing and maintaining self-governing institutions.⁴³ For example, Elinor Ostrom won the Nobel Prize in economics by demonstrating the ways local communities were able to manage their resources without top-down regulations. To challenge Hardin, Ostrom argued that when non-locals took over commons, self-governing institutions no longer work.⁴⁴ Other scholars argued that Hardin misinterpreted common property as an open access system, that the concept of sharing the resource could restrain an individual's use of it. These critics identified sporadic cases of resources that had no property system yet retained their value through sustainable use.⁴⁵ Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons', although discredited by scholars, survived in political rhetoric as a way to discount the long-standing self-regulatory resource use by local communities. An example of a community practising self-regulation was described earlier

³⁹ G. Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', *Science* 162 (1968); J. Baland and J. Plateau, *Halting Degradation of Natural Resources: Is there a role for Rural Communities?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 168.

⁴⁰ The tragedy was a term used to describe a situation in a shared-resource system where individual users acting independently according to their self-interest behave contrary to the common good of all users by depleting or spoiling that resource through their collective action.

⁴¹ Hardin, 'The Tragedy of the Commons', 1247.

⁴² D.W. Bromley and M.M. Cernea, 'The Management of Common Property Natural Resources: Some Conceptual and Operational Fallacies', *World Bank Discussion Papers* (1989), 6.

⁴³ E. Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); M. McKean, 'Success on the Commons: A Comparative Examination of Institutions for Common Property Resource Management', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 4, no. 2 (1992), 247; T. Dietz, E. Ostrom and P. Stem, 'The Struggle to Govern the Commons', *Science* 302 (2003), 1907.

⁴⁴ 'Elinor Ostrom – Facts'. www.nobelprize.org, 10 November 2018).

⁴⁵ T. Haller, 'Understanding Institutions and their Links to Resource Management from the Perspective of New Institutionalism' 2nd edition', *NCCR North-South Dialogue*, no. 2 (2007), 7.

in the 1890s by Frederick Engels. In his account of the ‘mark’, he described how the commons-based communities in parts of pre-capitalist Germany regulated resources:

The use of arable and meadowlands was under the supervision and direction of the community ... Just as the share of each member in so much of the mark as was distributed was of equal size, so was his share also in the use of the common mark. ‘The nature of this use was determined by the members of the community. At fixed times and, if necessary, more frequently, they met in the open air to discuss the affairs of the mark and to sit in judgment upon breaches of regulations and disputes concerning the mark’.⁴⁶

Historians and other scholars have broadly echoed Engels’ description of public management of shared resources. Cox falls into this group, criticising Hardin in 1985 for adopting too narrow a time frame:

What existed was not a ‘tragedy of the commons’ but rather a triumph: that for hundreds of years, and perhaps thousands, although written records do not exist to prove the more extended era—land was managed successfully by communities.⁴⁷

Critique of Hardin’s ‘tragedy of the commons’ led to alternative theories about informal institutions, including the common property theory, a theory of collective action, the social capital theory and game theory. Though there is no single widely accepted or unified theory on the relevant institutions for CPR management,⁴⁸ scholars have altered the ‘tragedy of the commons’ paradigm. The explanatory power of ‘the tragedy of the commons’ further weakens when one considers a society that has cultural and social institutions that mediate all human-environmental relationships.

Returning to the main theme of the section, an institution can be understood as any form of constraint that human beings devise to shape human interactions. Institutions can work through both formal constraints, such as written rules, and informal constraints, such as conventions and codes of behaviour. While formal institutions can work effectively in well-established democracies to manage resources, informal institutions become important natural resource managers in traditional societies with fragile government systems. In a setting where societies have capably managed their natural resources by devising their constraints, Hardin’s paradigm of the tragedy of the commons does not fit. As the next

⁴⁶ F. Engels, ‘The Mark’, Pamphlet Written between September and December 1892 in German and published as an appendix to the English edition of ‘Socialism, Utopian and Scientific’, 1892. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1892/12/mark.htm>, (10 November 2018).

⁴⁷ S.J.B. Cox, ‘No Tragedy of the Commons’, *Environmental Ethics* 7, no. 1 (1985), 60.

⁴⁸ A. Agrawal, ‘Common Property Institutions and Sustainable Governance of Resources’, *World Development* 29, no. 10 (2001), 1651.

section will show, ‘New Institutionalism’ offers one alternative to explain CPR management as practised by people in different parts of the world.

2.3. New Institutionalism

Where environmental issues arise, the resulting debates often misrepresent how local people manage/mismanage their resources. The tragedy of the commons still dominated the thinking of most government officials in early post-colonial Africa. Privatisation campaigns, by increasing social stratification, land grabbing and resource degradation, showed that the existing CPR management had been serving society better.⁴⁹ New Institutionalism offered a different perspective on the performance of traditional institutions, situating them within the patterns of resource management emerging in the 1970s.

Developing in the 1960s and 1970s, New Institutionalism explains why and how institutions emerge in a certain way within a given context.⁵⁰ At least since Ostrom’s response to Hardin’s ‘tragedy of the commons’ in 1990, questions about institutions and natural resources have been heavily intertwined, and the study of natural resources has helped to strengthen and broaden scholarship on the institutions.⁵¹ New Institutionalism suggested that scholars should place more emphasis on the conditions under which local communities sustainably manage their resources.⁵² The main argument of the theory is that institutional arrangements provide mechanisms to manage CPRs sustainably. For instance, studies have found that in most situations, a high level of social capital among CPR users and collective action arrangements can solve CPR management problems.⁵³ The evidence so far suggests that there is a need to better understand traditional institutions’ role in natural resource management interventions. In this study on Tanzanian sacred forests, traditional institutions are recognised as forms of social and political authority which have their historical origin in pre-colonial states and societies.

⁴⁹ Maryam Niamir-Fuller, ‘The Resilience of Pastoral Herding in Sahelian Africa’, in *Linking Social and Ecological Systems: Management Practices and Social Mechanisms for Building resilience*, eds. Berkes, Fikret Carl Folke, and Johan Colding (2000), 255.

⁵⁰ P.J. DiMaggio and W.W. Powel (eds), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5.

⁵¹ T. Bartley, K. Anderson, P. Jagger and F.V. Laerhoven, ‘The Contribution of Institutional Theories to Explaining Decentralization of Natural Resource Governance’, *Society and Natural Resources* 21 (2008), 163.

⁵² North, ‘Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance’, 3.

⁵³ Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18; J. Pretty, ‘Social Capital and the Collective Management of Resources’, *Science* 302 (2003), 1912.

New Institutionalism does not constitute a unified body of thought; it varies by discipline. Hall and Taylor identify three main variants: economic/rational; historical; and cultural/sociological.⁵⁴ Though all three share a commitment to understanding the origins and consequences of institutions, their conception of institutions, perception of traditional institutions and analytical emphasis vary.

The 'economic and rational choice model' typically focuses on the relationship between the 'rules of the game' and the preferences of individual actors. It posits that 'relevant actors have a fixed set of preferences or tastes and behave entirely instrumentally to maximise the attainment of such preferences'.⁵⁵ The emphasis is, therefore, placed on the role of strategic interaction in determining the organisational outcome. However, the model fails to predict outcomes where informal institutions are constraining behaviour.

While rational choice models apply the scientific deductive method, historical institutionalists apply the inductive models of the social sciences. Historical neo-institutionalism examines how the legacies of the past condition the present. It views institutions as path-dependent and considers the way institutional arrangements in one arena reinforce those in another.⁵⁶ For historical institutionalists, institutions are 'formal or informal procedures, routines, norms and conventions embedded in the organisational structure of the polity or political economy'.⁵⁷ This view brought about more widespread recognition that institutions matter and examination of how they matter. The weakness of the model lay in its ranking formal above informal institutions in significance.

Contrary to economic/rational and historical institutionalism, the cultural/sociological approach broke down the conceptual divide between 'institutions' and 'culture'. Sociological institutionalism contends that 'many of the institutional forms and procedures used in modern organisations are culturally specific practices, like [the] myths and ceremonies devised by many societies. That means such forms are not simply adoptions of rational choices'.⁵⁸ Institutions absorb cultural practices as they form. The cultural/sociological approach thus redefines 'culture' itself as a set of 'institutions'. This model's understanding that 'culture' and 'institutions' intertwine makes it relevant for our

⁵⁴ P.A. Hall and R.C.R. Taylor, 'Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms', *Political Study* 44 (1996), 936-37.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 944.

⁵⁶ Bartley, et al., 'Contribution of Institutional Theories', 164.

⁵⁷ Hall and Taylor, 'The New Institutionalism', 938.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 946.

study, which investigates how traditions have created institutions that protect natural resources.

Looking back at the development of New Institutionalism, then, the theory examines the broad and resilient aspects of social structure. It considers the process by which structures, including schemes, rules, norms and routines, become established as official guidelines for social behaviour.⁵⁹ Components of institutionalism, therefore, explain how these elements are created, diffused, adopted and adapted over space and time—and how they fall into decline and disuse. Cultural New Institutionalism analyses the context from which institutions evolve locally. Although most practitioners of neo-institutionalism still focus on formal institutions, many now recognise traditional institutions as significant natural resource managers.

2.4. Traditional institutions in Tanzania

In Tanzania, sacred forests occur in comparatively small stands scattered over the entire country and are largely managed by local village lineages or kinship groups. In these communities, the close face-to-face interaction in a small-scale society acts as a monitoring and sanctioning device. To understand the management of sacred forests, it is necessary to identify the traditional institutions that guide the use of natural resources.

Scholarship on traditional institutions in Tanzania indicates that, before independence in 1961, the principles of resource access and management were linked closely to chieftainship. Even the British colonial government recognised the role of chiefs in traditional institutions and incorporated them as native authorities.⁶⁰ However, during the early years of nation-building (1961-1965), Mwalimu Nyerere, Tanzania's first president, considered chieftainship and tribal identities detrimental to the objective of building national unity. In 1963, just two years after independence, the state abolished native authorities and dissolved chieftainship. To replace the structure of tribal authority, Nyerere and his advisors instituted an elaborate system of overlapping local committees.

⁵⁹ W. R. Scott, 'Institutional Theory', in *Encyclopaedia of Social Theory*, ed. George Ritzer (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004), 408.

⁶⁰ S. Kiwanuka, 'Colonial Policies and Administration in Africa: The Myth of the Contact', *African Historical Studies* 3 (1970), 297; E. Kisangani, 'Development of African Administration: Pre-Colonial Times and Since', *Social and Economic Development* 6 (2010), 223.

All the established systems related to the single-party governing Tanzania.⁶¹ The decision to abolish chiefdoms made traditional institutions officially inactive across the country.

The aims behind stripping tribal chieftainship in Tanzania were misunderstood even among government officials and chiefs themselves. President Nyerere wanted to remove the executive governing powers of the chiefs rather than their cultural influence. Before chieftainship was abolished, chiefs could collect revenue and act as judges. Responding to a question about the ban of chieftaincy in Tanzania, George Sangija, secretary to the Tanzania Union of Chiefs in the 1960s, recalled in March 2018

People misunderstood the prohibition. They thought that chieftaincy had been abolished altogether. So, some chiefs were given other jobs. Others, with some education, decided to look for greener pastures. I was one of them. I did not see any reason to be crowned chief after the death of my father. So, I decided to join the army, where I worked for 30 years and rose to become a general.⁶²

The government's ban on chieftaincy had different effects from region to region. In some areas, the institution of chieftaincy declined entirely, while in other regions it persisted, at least by retaining traditional cultural roles. In these areas, chiefs were viewed as sacred persons. The physical well-being of a chief was identified with the welfare of society and its resources. Some forms of traditional leadership still prevailed and were still useful in some areas. Nevertheless, during the creation of a 'modern' Tanzanian state, traditional/informal institutions were generally neglected in favour of formal institutions.

The decentralisation process that took place in most parts of the Third World in the 1990s helped strengthen formal institutions in Tanzania. The government sought to empower formal institutions all the way down to the local level. But in most cases, the sustainable resource management envisioned through decentralisation suffered from an unclear division of responsibility and power among the newly created institutions.⁶³ The abolition of chieftainship, therefore, weakened natural resource management, particularly at the local level. As a result, the 1998 Tanzania forest policy has not achieved its aim of

⁶¹ Emma Hayward, Customary Law and Group Rights: The Incomplete Centralization of Tanzania's Post-Colonial Judiciary, <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/andrea-mitchellcenter/sites/www.sas.upenn.edu.dcc/files/uploads/Hayward-Tanzania.pdf> . (10 October 2018).

⁶² George Sangija, Chief of Mwanza Region, Interviewed by John Chirwa, The Nation Online, 3 March 2018. <https://mwnation.com/top-lesson-tanzanian-chiefs/>

⁶³ R.Y.M. Kangalawe, C. Noe, F.S.K. Tungaraza, G. Naimani and M. Mlele, 'Understanding of Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Institutions on Sustainable Land Management in Kilimanjaro Region, Tanzania', *Open Journal of Soil Science* 4 (2014), 472.

ensuring ecosystem stability by conserving forests.⁶⁴ The dissolution of traditional local institutional arrangement was not followed by the establishment of more effective formal institutions, and in most cases the national government did not adequately substitute for the former resource management. Thus, for instance, the past twenty years, deforestation has continued through encroachment by agriculture, overgrazing, wildfires, and general over-exploitation of wood resources, all leading to disappointing results from forest conservation policy.⁶⁵

The unsatisfactory outcomes of forest conservation policy in Tanzania led to the shift in thinking among scholars, forest practitioners and government officials. The new direction in forest conservation inspired studies examining the relationship between local informal institutions and resource management.⁶⁶ Studies to date have attributed poor resource management to intrusive state policies and reliance on technological interventions that neglected the social and cultural dimensions of technological adaptation.⁶⁷ Intrusive policies interfered with local requirements and hence undermined traditional institutions' ability to regulate resource use.

Although chieftainship has never been officially re-established in Tanzania, various forms of traditional informal institutions persist that help regulate resources such as sacred forests and wildlife sanctuaries. In Tanzania, traditional institutions comprise norms and procedures that shape people's actions. Codes of conduct that define practices, assign roles, and guide interactions constitute traditional institutions. They include taboos, prohibitions, beliefs, restrictions, and rituals. Other traditional institutions are myths and recurring symbols that guide natural resource management and rural development.

Taboos are a subset of locally devised informal institutions. In the context of the Bena, where community property rights exist in natural resources, taboos restrict use. Temporal taboos ban access to resources during a set period, while 'segment taboos' prevent individuals of a given age, sex, or social status from using certain species. Anthropologists refer to such taboos as 'specific food taboos.'⁶⁸ Among the Bena, such taboos frequently pertain to pregnant women, children, and parents of newborns. For

⁶⁴ URT, *Tanzania National Forest Policy*, Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT), Tanzania (Dar-es-Salaam: Government Printer, 1998), 59.

⁶⁵ Kangalawe et al., 'Understanding of Traditional Knowledge and Indigenous Institutions', 472.

⁶⁶ C.C. Gibson, M.A. McKean, and F. Ostrom, (eds), *People and Forests: Communities, Institutions, and the Governance of Forests* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1999).

⁶⁷ United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRSD), 'Environmental Degradation and Social Integration', *Briefing Article* No. 3, (2004), no page numbers.

⁶⁸ Johan Colding and Carl Folke, 'Social Taboos: 'Invisible' Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation', *Ecological Applications* 11, no. 2 (2001), 586.

example, eggs are widely denied to Bena women.⁶⁹ The ban arose through cultural perception, customs, and beliefs about risks to human health. The Bena believed that if a pregnant woman ate eggs, the infant would never grow hair. Some anthropologists hypothesise that segment taboos may serve as a strategic response to prevent resource depletion.⁷⁰ Interestingly, some of these taboos could also help the powerful group subjugate others. For instance, the taboo against pregnant women eating eggs deprives them of a readily available protein, forcing them to rely on others, such as men, who can obtain meat.

Beliefs are the lived practices of African traditional religion. They include belief in divinities, belief in ancestors and spirits summoned for the practice of medicine and magic. People have maintained these beliefs for generations. When considering traditional belief, peoples' experiences matter most. Symbols are connected to symbolic actions, namely rituals.⁷¹ The Bena, as do other Africans, celebrate their experiences and expectations through symbolic actions. These rituals dramatise lived reality. Among the Bena, they bridge verbal symbols and people's daily activities. Rituals help people understand the established order and accept rules in society.⁷² Among the Bena rituals, initiation features prominently. Mystery forms a crucial element in initiation rituals, which aim to integrate the initiates into the mystery. Initiation rituals include puberty rites, spirit initiation, or initiation to a mystical vocation. Most take place in sacred forests, which explains why those forests are valued and protected.

The traditional institutions among the Bena operate in diverse contexts including land, livestock, labour, mutual assistance, and health. The relationships among traditional beliefs, rituals, spiritual leaders, and other institutions—and the sacred sites in the southern highland of Tanzania, particularly forests—will be examined in the next chapter.

2.5. The concept of sacredness

Before investigating sacred forests, it is necessary to explore the concept of 'sacredness.' Investigating the concept of sacredness will help us differentiate a 'sacred forest' from other forests. The examination will survey definitions of the sacred, the multi-layered

⁶⁹ Scondina Mgeni and Chezolina Mgao, Interviewed by Edward Mgya, Igosi, 12 July 2018.

⁷⁰ Colding and Folke, 'Social Taboos', 586.

⁷¹ Elia S. Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion, A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene: Oregon Resource Publication, 2013), 31.

⁷² John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, Second Edition (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1991), 132.

meaning of sacred landscapes, a multicultural perspective on them and the meeting of human and suprahuman realms in them.

In various cultures around the world, past and present, many natural and cultural sites are deemed sacred. The reasons for making those sites sacred and their levels of significance vary among sites and cultures. Sacred places are found in mainstream faiths, indigenous faiths, and non-religious contexts.⁷³ In deeming a place sacred, people have historically honoured a deity, provided sanctuary for spirits, viewed a landscape as a living expression of a god or protected a sanctified historical site. Historical sacred places are valuable community assets, as they express culture and provide a focus for the community.

The term 'sacred' comes from Latin *sacer* meaning restricted or set off.⁷⁴ Various languages may have a term that correlates with *sacer*. For example, in Bena, the term is *matehelo*, in Swahili, *Matambiko*, in Arabic, *Muqaddas* and in Māori, *wāhi tapu*. While scholars differ in defining what makes a place holy, they coalesce in identifying a sacred site as one that stands out from other places and induces a feeling of awe and wonder.⁷⁵ Bailey comments on the speciality of sacredness by noting that something deemed sacred should have four characteristics: 'by experience, it should be special, and even unique; in value, it is important, even all-demanding; in consciousness, it is fundamental, even primordial; and, in communication, it is dynamic, yet ineffable'.⁷⁶ In his original discussion of sacredness (1954), Emile Durkheim asserted that 'the sacred thing is *par excellence* that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity'.⁷⁷ Eliade observes that the sacred always manifests itself as a reality different from ordinary realities and that we become aware of the sacred when it shows itself as something different from the profane.⁷⁸ However, as Michael Sheridan cautioned, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is more of a European logical construct dating from the mid-nineteenth century,

⁷³ T.S. Bremer, 'Sacred Places and Tourist Places', in *Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys*, eds. D.J. Timothy and D.H. Olsen (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), 25-35.

⁷⁴ Christopher Witcombe, 'Sacred Places: Sacredness', (1998), 1.
<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredness.html>, (25 October 2018).

⁷⁵ E. Isaac, 'Religious Geography and the Geography of Religion: Man, and the Earth', *Series in Earth Sciences* no. 3 (Boulder, CO: University of Colorado Press, 1965).

⁷⁶ Edward Bailey, 'Sacred', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Society I*, ed. Swatos, William Jr (Lanham, MD: Alta Mira Press, 1998).

⁷⁷ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1954), 40.

⁷⁸ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion: The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture*, translated from the French by William R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1961), 11.

and not all societies organise their worlds using such categories.⁷⁹ For instance, the sacred versus profane categorisation may be difficult to apply in the African context where sacred forests are simultaneously ecological, social, political and religious phenomena.

In examining sacred landscapes, scholars tend to concentrate more on what happens in them than on their indwelling sacredness. Research on sacred landscapes has largely focused either on their religious geography, examining their establishment and associated religious traditions, or pilgrimages, or emphasised their role in ecological conservation.⁸⁰ Scholars have devoted less attention to a landscape's sacredness and its embedded social meanings and values. As Singh stated, a sacred landscape is a 'faith-scape', which embodies not only physical features and its significance for culture but also intangible spiritual elements. In this regard, sacredness can be viewed as an inherent characteristic of the place due to the presence of spiritual forces. As Bianca argues, many traditional cultures believe that sacredness is directly attached to a place.⁸¹ Symbolic rituals and practices are also important components in a sacred landscape, as they reflect local people's worldviews and cultural identity.⁸² The meaning of a sacred landscape is, therefore, multi-layered and subject to individual understanding and experience.

In addition to understanding the many layers of a sacred landscape, Levi and Kocher argued that a 'cross-cultural perspective of sacred places' could aid planners seeking to preserve important community assets. They defined a sacred place as a behavioural setting, an aspect of place identity, and an experiential phenomenon.⁸³ These three overlapping definitions provide varied perspectives on sacred site. Combined, they explain why a place is considered sacred. As behavioural settings, sacred places must provide meaning, support, and context for performing religious activities.⁸⁴ The meaningfulness of the place arises from its use by the people, while the place helps to structure social relationships and

⁷⁹ Sheridan, 'The Dynamics of African Sacred Groves: Ecological, Social and Symbolic Processes', in *African Sacred Groves: Ecological Dynamics and Social Change*, eds. M. Sheridan and C. Nyamweru (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 13.

⁸⁰ J. Li, D. Wang, H. Yin, D. Zhaxi, Z. Jiagong, G.B. Schaller, C. Mishra and Z. Lu, 'Role of Tibetan Buddhist Monasteries in Snow Leopard', *Conservation Biology* 28, no. 1 (2013), 89; R. Shepherd, L. Yu, and H. Gu, 'Tourism, Heritage and Sacred Space: Wutai Shan, China', *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 7, no. 2 (2012), 145-161.

⁸¹ S. Bianca, 'Resources for Sustaining Cultural Identity', in *Historic and Sacred Sites*, eds. I. Serageldin, E. Shluger and Martin-Brown (Washington: World Bank, 2001), 18-21.

⁸² S. Singh, 'Secular Pilgrimages and Sacred Tourism in the Indian Himalayas', *GeoJournal* 64, no. 3 (2005), 215.

⁸³ Daniel Levi and Sara Kocher, 'Cross-Cultural Perspectives Toward Historic Sacred Places', *Focus* 7 (2010), 23.

⁸⁴ A. Rapoport, 'Sacred Places Sacred Occasions and Sacred Environments', *Architectural Digest* 52, no. 9/10 (1982), 76.

activities. As an ‘aspect of place identity’, a sacred place refers to the meanings and feelings associated with a place by a group of people.⁸⁵ A sacred place as ‘an experience’ arises from people’s interactions with a place.⁸⁶ Like the perception of beauty, sacredness does not exist in the person or the environment, but rather in the relationship between the two. As Shackley argues, the experience of sacredness exists only for those who can perceive why the place was delineated as sacred by the local culture.⁸⁷

A diagram that shows the complex relationship between the realms of suprahuman and human beings can help explain the concept of the sacredness of a landscape (See **Figure 2.1**). A sacred landscape may encompass several sacred sites in which the same worldview operates. We can draw a diagram mapping various aspects of worldviews/spiritual beliefs, sacred sites, and sacred practices. Combining spiritual beliefs with a site makes the sacredness of a landscape. In such a diagram, we can show the downward movement from the abstraction of worldviews to the actual practices emanating from such beliefs. The highest abstract level includes four aspects: suprahuman entities; general behavioural guidelines; separateness; and emotion-oriented aspects. A general behavioural guideline might occur when a traditional society imposes taboos on the sacred landscape. For instance, a principle guideline to ‘respect the home of the spirits’ is abstract as it does not specify what to do or not do.

A sacred site occupies a middle position between the abstract and the concrete. A site combines both physical and cultural features. Natural landscape, sometimes referred to as wilderness, denotes that which existed before it was acted upon by human culture.⁸⁸ As landscapes untouched by human activity are now hard to find, reference is made to the degree of naturalness within a landscape. The World Heritage Committee (WHC) defines cultural landscape as a cultural property that present the combined works of nature and man.⁸⁹ So, a cultural landscape can be a natural area designed and created intentionally by man, valued because of religious or cultural associations with the natural elements.

Concrete practices, in our conceptual diagram of a sacred landscape, include specific behavioural restrictions, worship rituals, special events and religious festivals. A

⁸⁵ C. Hague, ‘Planning and Place Identity’, in *Place Identity, Participation, and Planning*, eds. C. Hague and P. Jenkins (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10.

⁸⁶ D. Carmichael, J. Hubert, and B. Reeves, ‘Introduction’, in *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*, eds. D. Carmichael, J. Hubert, B. Reeves, and A. Schanche (New York: Routledge, 1994), 1-8.

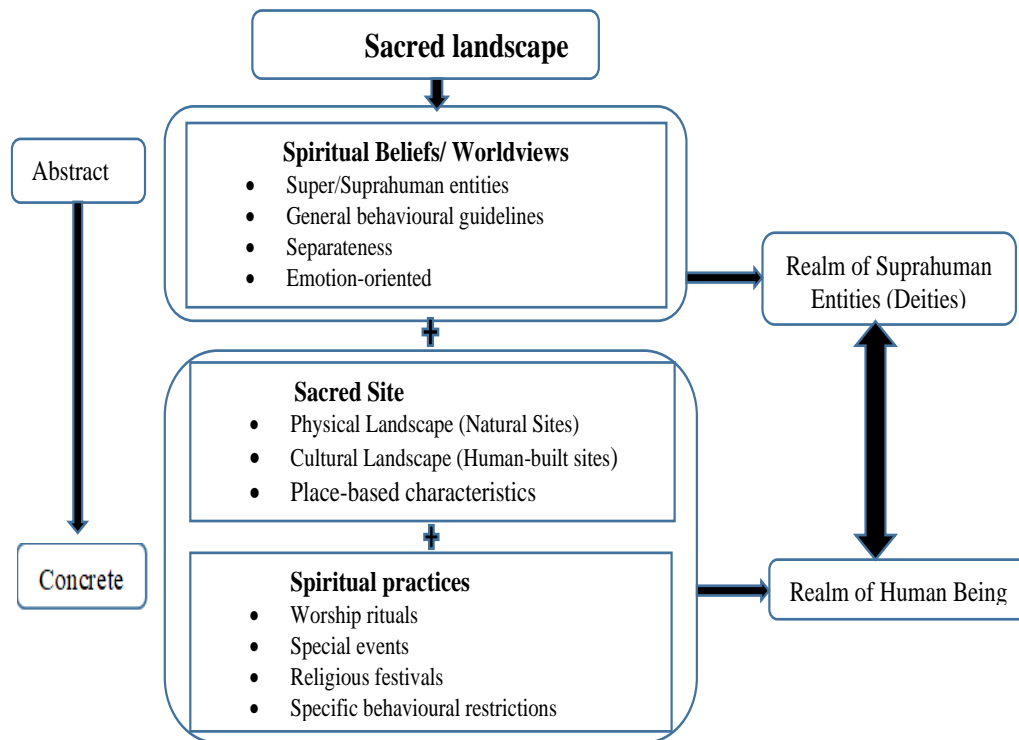
⁸⁷ M. Sharkeley, *Managing Sacred Sites* (Padstow: Thomson, 2001).

⁸⁸ Carl, O. Sauer, ‘The Morphology of Landscapes’, *University of California Publications in Geography* 2 no. 2 (1925), 25.

⁸⁹ UNESCO, *Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention* (Paris: UNESCO World Heritage Centre - WHC. 12/1, 2012), 14.

special event would be a marriage or a circumcision ceremony. Worship rituals can include ancestral veneration while honouring war victories and harvests would be part of religious festivals. To qualify as a sacred landscape these practices, which constitute the realm of human beings, need to be connected to the realm of supranatural entities.

Figure 2.1 A Conceptual diagram of a sacred landscape



Source: Synthesised from the literature review by the author. For references, see footnotes 60-74

The preceding exploration shows the complex nature of a sacred landscape. Soutter et al. tried to synthesise what they referred to as common attributes of sacred sites' definitions. These include access restrictions through taboos and myths and activities that are regulated and maintained by custom.⁹⁰ Nevertheless, sacredness needs to be defined in the context of those who consider something sacred. While bearing in mind the definitions offered by scholars, it is still reasonable to argue that the best interpretation of a sacred landscape should draw insights from the perspectives of local insiders, who personally experience and interact with the landscape daily.

⁹⁰ R. Soutter, Y. Ntiamoa-Baidu, J. Smith and D. Rana, *Recognising the Contribution of Sacred Natural Sites for Biodiversity Conservation*. Presented at the World Parks Congress in Durban, South Africa (September 2003).

* * *

Returning to the broader goals of the chapter, a theoretical overview of institutions, with a focus on traditional institutions, helps us understand traditions and institutions as dynamic aspects of society. In the present study, we interpret what is traditionally established as a cumulative body of knowledge, practices and representations that describe the relationships of living beings with one another and with their physical environment. Tradition has evolved by adaptive processes and has been handed down through generations. From the perspective of new institutionalism, a mainly sociological stance, traditions, culture, and institutions should be understood in connection. Locally devised institutions manage resources. Understanding how institutions and culture intertwine places us in a better position to examine how traditional institutions such as taboos, rituals, and folklore, among others, have worked to resiliently manage natural resources in societies where formal institutions are still fragile. It is within the realm of these informal institutions that traditional societies imbue specific natural sites with sacredness.

Chapter 3

3. Traditional institutions and the sacred forests: Formation, development, and management

Before entering Nyumbanitu sacred forest (NSF) in 2018, Bena elders and shrine priests gave a briefing on the history of the worship shrine. As the briefing began, we were interrupted by a group of six people who also came to visit the shrine, now ten people altogether. The priests recounted the history and wonders of the forest and how ancestral spirits protected it. They displayed great knowledge as we entered the forest and then a cave near the woods. We were asked to preserve all the questions until later when the tour had finished. We were told to declare the reasons for our visit to the forest so that the priests could tell the ancestors of our intents. Any bad intent, we were told, would do harm to oneself. Women on their menstrual cycle were warned not to enter the shrine. We all took off our shoes and hats, as directed by the priests, and entered the forest.

When entering the forest, the priest asked for permission from the ancestors by saying a special prayer mentioning the Bena ancestral list, and then spit on a leaf picked from the forest. He stated our intentions to enter the forest, and we were all ready to enter, except one lady who chose to remain behind. We were amazed by the beauty and biodiversity richness of the forest. The priest described the forest as the main place of worship for the Bena, and from the forest, other temples were established in other places all over southern highland Tanzania. Taken to the cave, we were astonished by the structure of the caves and the descriptions found in it. There were many stories about how NSF was formed, its development and how it is protected.

The narratives we heard from the priests and elders, and the natural beauty of the forest revealed a long process of establishment of groves and the custodial role of traditional institutions. Scrutiny of sacred forests as an outcome of traditional institutions' custodial history is, therefore, vital in studying the history of groves. As such, chapter three explores the link between traditional institutions and the characteristics of the natural sacred sites. It contextually studies the spiritual foundations of sacredness among the Bena and discusses how traditional institutions formed and managed sacred forests. The chapter uses oral traditions to establish the Bena ancestral clans responsible for maintenance of Nyumbanitu forest. In so doing, we address four questions. What are the fundamentals of sacredness among the Bena? How did the Bena create, sanctify, and manage sacred groves?

What is the ancestral genealogy responsible for the forest? And what are the folklore traditions of nature reverence used to conserve patches of sacred forests?

3.1. Spiritual foundations of sacredness among the Bena

It is essential to understand the spiritual foundations of sacredness for specific communities as the worldviews of such societies are deeply rooted in those foundations. Such fundamentals help us appreciate the spiritual reality which can be culturally specific and is beyond our materialistic understanding of reality. The spiritual and materialistic truths can fuse to develop an attitude of respect for and cooperation with nature in its wholeness. Such an attitude requires the perspective of human purpose that unifies material and spiritual realities bounded in sacredness.

We usually think of sacred places as necessarily religious places. But, in an African context, a site might be spiritual but not religious. Among the Bena in Tanzania, forests, caves, mountains, and rivers can qualify as sacred provided they are gateways to the underworld.¹ The presumption is that the divine or some supernatural or spiritual forces manifest itself to the beholder, who feels privileged thereby. The perception of the divine might completely convince the beholder, who can become instantly a believer in whatever supernatural forces of divinity are made and manifest.² Therefore, the manifestations of the sacred are invariably interpreted or identified within the context of the beliefs of the beholder.

One can best understand the meanings and values of the sacredness of the landscapes among the Bena by examining the roles such scenes play in the Bena culture. Sacred aspects are embedded within the cosmology, religion, and spirituality of the Bena, and differences remain between the many clans. One of the distinct differences resides in how groups deal with their ancestors, especially their burial and afterlife. Some clans establish sacred burial places while others do not. Nevertheless, all Bena share a general cosmology and most aspects of spirituality.

The traditional Bena cosmology consists of animate and inanimate life forms, each possessing a life force. Like many other traditional groups all over the world,³ the Bena perceive these life forms as equal and interdependent. The only primary separation between

¹ Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu Village, 10 May 2018.

² Christopher Witcombe, 'Sacred Places: Sacredness' (1998), 1.
<http://witcombe.sbc.edu/sacredplaces/sacredness.html> (25 October 2018).

³ A. Escobar, 'Whose Knowledge, Whose Nature? Biodiversity, Conservation, and the Political Ecology of Social Movements', *Journal of Political Ecology* 5 (1998), 55.

constituents of the universe is between the visible and the invisible. The visible world constitutes the living, while the invisible world is that occupied by the ancestors and spiritual beings. Although the two worlds are superficially separate, they are perceived as continuous since the members of each world interact to form a harmonious existence. The members of both worlds are interested and involved in matters concerning the members of the other. Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, a Bena chief, underscores the inseparability of the two worlds as he stated in May 2018:

There is a great and direct relationship between us [the living] and the ancestors. They are with us in times of cry and laugh. We respect them, and they love us. As such, we do conduct various traditional sacrifices and rituals that help keep our co-existence thriving. This is our way to communicate with them. They were here before us all and so they are full of wisdom and blessings that we always seek to get.⁴

Members of the invisible world had once lived in the visible world. Through death and other rites of passage, each person in the visible world would eventually ascend into the spiritual world. The inhabitants of the visible and invisible worlds are, therefore, perceived to constitute a community. A balance is required between the two worlds to maintain the harmonious existence of the community. The balance is achieved through various forms of communication. Members of the community, the spiritual as well as the living, share a joint responsibility to maintain this balance.

The cosmology that links the living and the dead is profoundly common among all Bena clans as it is for many native Africans and other indigenous groups all over the world.⁵ The cosmology has translated into common values of respect for the life of animate and inanimate. Although there are different ontological categories—God, spirits, man, animals and plants, phenomena and objects without biological life—man is at the centre of the world.⁶ In that regard, respect for life, elders and ancestors forms the core of the culture and the spiritual foundation for sacredness among the Bena.

The Bena also believe in a god whom they call *Shalula*—contemporary name, *Nguluvi*. To the Bena, *Shalula* refers to the ultimate controller of natural forces and human destiny. He is the creator, Alpha and Omega (*ye alwe finu fyonda*). *Shalula* is a supreme being who is imminent and transcendent at the same time. The supreme being becomes

⁴ Chief Eliasi Mkongwe interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, 23 May 2018 at Ilembula Village. (English translation, Edward Mgaya).

⁵ John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*, 2nd edition (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 20.

⁶ A. Juntunen, M. Nikkonen, S. Janhonen, 'Respect as the Main Lay Care Activity among the Bena in Ilembula Village in Tanzania', *International Journal of Nursing Practice* 8 (2002), 212.

visible when exercising power over creatures in regulating nature.⁷ The supreme being for the Bena have gained new naming in the Christian era. Although the name *Shalula* is still used during ritual ceremonies, *Nguluvi* is mostly used in other everyday references to God. The worship of *Nguluvi* among the Bena is not more vivid today. Rather, people recognise the existence of spirits and ancestors through whom the living are connected to those in life after death and hence are connected to *Nguluvi* their creator. According to the Bena, *Nguluvi* is unknowable and unapproachable but is experienced through the works of controlling harmony in the Bena society.⁸

The Bena, in believing in the continuity of life, view death as a rite of passage to the next world, the spiritual world. Although the body perishes upon death, the spirit lives. The Bena also believe in reincarnation. Children, who are believed to be reincarnated of dead family members, are given the names of the deceased.⁹ For these and other reasons, it is crucial for every Bena clan to know and remember their ancestors, and to be able to communicate with them whenever necessary.

Among the spiritual beings, ancestors (*Vatwa*, Sing. *Mtwa*) are viewed as the closest to humans. Through them, the spiritual world becomes closer and personal to humans. *Vatwa* represents the earthly kins in the spiritual world. As they were in the physical world, *Vatwa* are viewed as ideal intermediaries because they understand the needs of the living. They still hold an interest in family affairs and are, therefore, guardians of customs, traditions, and ethical norms. There is a give-and-take relationship between the Bena and their *Vatwa*. It is believed that ancestors expect some care and appreciation from their earthly kin and vice versa.

Contrary to Christianity—with its God-followers' relation, in which the child receives love and care and appreciates the parents—the Bena summon and reprimand *Vatwa* when they are not carrying out their responsibilities. In that regard, spiritual beings are not always superior to the living: they are sometimes dependent on the living to facilitate their life as spiritual beings. For instance, an ancestor who died and was buried outside of the home or sacred sites needs the living kin to perform rituals to bring them back home.

⁷ Elia S. Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion, A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene: Oregon, Resource Publication, 2013), 59.

⁸ Alex Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu Village 10 May 2018.

⁹ If a child would cry endlessly, especially at nights, the mother, grandmother, or any other adult would call out the names of family ancestors. If the child becomes quiet at the mention of a name, it was believed that the child was a reincarnation of that ancestor. The child would eventually be called by that name onwards.

Sacrifices and offerings mark the centre of Bena worship rituals. The sacrifices and offerings are made to *Nguluvi* through *Vatwa*—the powerful spirits to human beings. The religious aspect of respect relates to the rituals that confirm unity with the ancestors and the dead family members. The villagers following the Bena traditions are expected to visit and worship at the graves of their living dead ancestors and to ask for blessing and forgiveness.¹⁰ The *Vatwa* are believed by the Bena to be their mediators between them and God. When the need for sacrifice arises, particular elders are set for the purpose. Why are sacrifices offered? As Mbiti states, sacrifices

are also acts and occasions of making and renewing the contract with God and man, the spirit and man. When they are directed to the departed, they are a symbol of fellowship, a recognition that the left is still a member of their families and token of respect and remembrance of the departed.¹¹

Among the Bena, these elders who direct sacrifices are called *Vatehedzi*—priests or mediators. The action of sacrificing is called *hutehela* or *hutambiha*. The materials offered for sacrifices differ among clans, but cereals (strictly finger millet) and animals are common across all Bena clans. At Nyumbanitu forest, which is the origin for all Bena, the animals accepted for sacrifice are black cows, black sheep, and black chickens. The meaning behind the colour choice, black, links to the darkness of the cave found in the forest and the colour of cloths used for ritual ceremonies. All the sacrifices are made at a designated sacred site in the forest.

There are different types of sacred sites with varying levels of sacredness. Based on their studies of Mormon culture, Jackson and Henrie classified sacred sites into three categories. First, ‘mystical-religious sites’ refer to places where people feel that they are in direct contact with God. Such sites include temples, shrines, cathedrals, and sacred groves, and are regarded as most sacred. The second type, with the second level of sanctity, is the ‘homeland’, a place representing the roots of individuals and groups. These places are regarded as sacred by such groups. Third, and least sacred are ‘historical’ sites which are assigned with a modest level of sanctity. These sites are chosen because historical events, important to the group of people, occurred there.¹²

¹⁰ Juntunen, Nikkonen, and Janhonen, ‘Respect as the Main Lay Care Activity among the Bena’, 216.

¹¹ John Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa* (London: SPCK, 1970), 59. Mbiti’s study, though African-wide, applies to Tanzania and our Bena case study.

¹² R.H. Jackson and R. Henrie, ‘Perception of Sacred Space’, *Journal of Cultural Geography* 3, no. 2 (1983), 97.

Sacred sites among the Bena, however, are ‘mystical-religious homelands.’ In this study area, these are places where families and clans buried or still bury their ancestors and perform rituals and sacrifices. Such places are more than just ‘homelands’ in that they are not only ancestral lands but places where one can communicate with the supernatural—a characteristic which also qualifies them as mystic-religious, as per Jackson and Henrie’s categorisation. Most of these ancestral burial sites have developed into patches of forests, today referred to as sacred groves. The level of sacredness differs between forests. Among the Bena, the Nyumbanitu sacred forest is the most sacred and respected by all Bena clans as it is considered the home of the supernatural ancestors, not only for all Bena but also for other nearby tribes.

Spirits may exist anywhere, but for the Bena, places qualify as sacred if characteristics distinguish them from the profane and potentially link the visible and invisible worlds. Spirits are most likely to be found in big trees/forests, bushes, caves, rivers, and mountains.¹³ Forests are the most common sacred places, as designated by clans. These sites are believed to have supernatural guardians usually taking the form of an animal. An animal would be the reincarnation of a great ancestor, usually the leader of the clan and one buried in the site. Clans believing in multiple sacred forests assign different levels of sacredness between the sites, based on the activities performed in each. For example, the Sanga clan in Lupila has three sacred groves—Igajilo, Uswimwa and Upakilwa.¹⁴ Different rituals are performed, as the clan leaders direct, in each of the three forests.

The spiritual foundation of sacredness among the Bena, then, emanates from the links between living creatures and the underworld. The respect to the ancestors marks sanctification of the places of their dwelling and all that surrounds it. Through such a foundation, eco-spirituality becomes the direct consciousness and experience of the sacred. For the Bena, spirituality becomes a religious concept which is an integral part of the sacred and the holistic worldview. The emphasis of such worldview comes about in anthropomorphism, ancestral worship, mystical powers, ritualism and totems.

3.2. Formative processes: how sacred forests were formed

In a study of sacred forests among the Bena, one must look at the meaning and relationship between past events and the material or landscape features emanating from those

¹³ Juntunen et.al., ‘Respect as the Main Lay Care Activity among the Bena’, 212.

¹⁴ Adomeni, Imelda and Claud Sanga, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Lupila 20 June 2018.

developments. Such connection can be attained through reflection on some available ethnographic and historical evidence regarding the processes through which the sacred forests in the study area were formed and consecrated. Such means can better be examined through the light of long-term socio-political dynamics of the societies in question. How were sacred forests formed?

A sacred forest refers to woods of varying sizes, which are communally protected, and which usually have a significant religious connotation for the protecting community. They represent an important long-held tradition of conserving specific land areas that have cultural significance.¹⁵ They are areas of forests historically protected by local people (versus government) for its spiritual and ecological values. Sacred groves differ from a village forest, which is owned and managed by the local government. Given a sacred forest's spiritual value, the discovery and the revelation of sacred forest possesses existential worth for the spirituality of the traditional societies. As argued by Eliade, 'nothing can begin or be done without previous orientation and any orientation implies a fixed point.'¹⁶ Bena are not an exception in fixing their spiritual home in the 'world' they live.

Traditionally, the Bena always sought to fix their spiritual abode at 'the centre of the worlds'¹⁷ which needed to be found if the world was to be lived. The quest for a fixed spiritual point among the Bena implied a cosmological value of the virtual orientation and construction of sacred spaces. Like other traditional societies, a sacred place among the Bena constituted a break in homogeneity of spaces. The break was symbolised by an opening through which passage from one cosmic region to another was possible.¹⁸ One expresses the communication between the two regions via specific images, what Eliade calls '*axis mundi* pillar'.¹⁹ Historically, the Bena considered forests, caves, mountains and rivers as great things that can serve to locate the 'centre of the world'. Of the four, forests

¹⁵ Alison Ormsby and Shonil Bhagwat, 'Sacred Forests of India: A Strong Tradition of Community-based Natural Resource Management', *Environmental Conservation* 37, no.3 (2010), 320; 320–32.

¹⁶ Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion: The Significance of Religious Myth, Symbolism, and Ritual within Life and Culture*, translated from the French by William R. Trask (New York: Harper & Row, 1961):22.

¹⁷ The idea of the centre of the world comes from the two worlds cosmology, that is the world of the living and the world of the dead. For the dwellers of these two worlds to be able to communicate, there is a need to have a fixed point here referred to as the 'centre of the world' where the communication between the earth and underworld can be expressed.

¹⁸ For example, a passage from earth to the underworld breaks the homogeneity of spaces.

¹⁹ Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 37. The *axis mundi*, in certain beliefs and philosophies, is the world centre, or the connection between Heaven and Earth. At this point correspondence is made between higher and lower realms. From here, communication from lower realms may ascend to higher ones and blessings from higher realms may descend to lower ones and be disseminated to all.

have always assumed the pre-eminent position in setting up sacred places for *matambiko* (rituals).

Sacred forests have traditionally been established through different processes. In West Africa, social scientists found a relationship between old settlements sites and sacred groves. For example, Rattray, an early twentieth-century British anthropologist, learned about the sacred grove of Asantemanso in Kumasi, Ghana, a spot where ‘the first human beings came forth from the ground.’²⁰ In 1964 Davies reported to have identified settlement sites in Ghana using patches of forests. As he wrote: ‘I have picked up from clumps of forest in orchard-bush village-sites which were probably abandoned in the XVIIIth century, in the Afram Plains, the Mo Plains, the Davi valley and near Kete Krachi.’²¹ Although the identified sites might be surviving patches of pristine tropical forests, they could also save as pieces of evidence of human beings as historical makers who are capable of creating and modelling such forests.

The sacred forest can be either ‘pre-existing’ or ‘created.’ However, Chouin argues that the two typologies mask the complexity underlying different processes that created sacred forests. He instead suggested four categorisations of sacred groves based on their ways of founding. First are the groves ‘discovered’ during the clearing of a new settlement or agricultural lands. Second, are groves used for ritual purposes by a group within the community. Third, are groves associated with a specific trauma which revealed the sacred character of the forest to the community. And fourth are groves used as burial grounds.²²

The categorisation of sacred groves suggested by Chouin, though providing useful insight on the complex phenomena at work, fails to properly mirror local categories of thoughts as manifested among the Bena people of Njombe. The Bena differentiate between the sacred forests associated with ‘burial places’ and those associated with ‘nature spirits.’ While the former is seen as habitats of departed spirits, the latter is considered as habitats of spiritual powers inherent in nature.²³ Some forests associated with burial grounds are also incidentally associated with old settlements.²⁴ While forests with burial and settlement origins can provide archaeological traces, the sacred forests associated with nature spirits

²⁰ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti* (New York: Negro University Press, 1923), 121.

²¹ O. Davies, ‘Archaeological Exploration in the Volta Basin’, *Bulletin of Ghana Geographical Association* 9, no. 2 (1964), 29.

²² Gerald Chouin, ‘Sacred Groves in History: Pathways to the Social Shaping of Forest Landscapes in Coastal Ghana’, *IDS Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (2002), 41.

²³ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa and Hallan Mfugale, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu and Ilembula, 19, 23 May 2018, respectively.

²⁴ As shall be discussed later, Nyumbanitu sacred forest provides an illustration of forests that are associated with both as burial ground as well as old settlements.

show no archaeological remains other than those eventually produced by ritual practices. This correlation is not universal, however: not all archaeological sites in the study area are signalled by sacred forests.

Among the Bena, sacred forests emerged from migration, burial activities, and ritual practices. For instance, the Bena settlement in Ubena area was a result of various waves of migration from about 1100 AD to the seventeenth century.²⁵ Remembered Bena genealogies normally go 13-14 generations back and cover the period where different groups gathered and were established and consolidated under clan leadership.²⁶ Their agricultural life accelerated social formation in kinships and clans, and people began to be collectively known as Wabena, to mean those who live in Ubena and speak Kibena. The Bena social formation necessitated the establishment of sacred forests. It was a tradition for the first comers to establish a sacred shrine, the *tambiko* forest after arriving in the new area. Such forests served to connect the Bena with the ancestors and legitimise the immigrants' rights to land. From such processes, thick walls of greenery grew fast in some favourable weather conditions of Ubena.

Other sacred forests emerged from burial activities and few from ritual practices emanating from associating some places with 'nature spirits.' It was a Bena custom for a tree to be planted when a head of the family or a chief was buried. Mtema Towegale Kiwanga of the Ubena of the rivers, explained such customs in witness to chief Ndaliwali's son, Mzawira, planting a tree on his father's grave:

And so, when Ndaliwali died, Mzawira followed customs and buried his father in his hut, planting a tree on his grave. Not until the tree had grown so that it forced its way through the roof of the hut were the people and the other relatives informed that the Mtema Ndaliwali was no longer in the world.²⁷

The seeds coming out of the first planted tree could make other trees germinate around the axis tree. A ritual ceremony could also be done to plant other trees to make a patch of forest to house the spirits of the departed.

A landscape dressed in a wonderful splendour of magical beauty—decorated with fascinating features like boulders and caves, for instance—or endowed with uncommon

²⁵ Seth Nyagava, *A History of The Bena to 1914* (Iringa: Iringa University College, 1999), 31.

²⁶ Ibid, 34.

²⁷ Mtema Towegale Kiwanga, 'The Kingdom of the Wakinimanga', in A.T & G.M. Culwick, *Ubena of the Rivers* (London; George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935), 31.

plant and animal species, is said to belong to ancestors.²⁸ Among the Bena clans, some sites associate with both burial and ritual processes. Some clans established more than one of such places but assigned them different levels of sacredness, depending on the first ancestor to be buried at a specific site. A table classifying such forests based on why they were established can help show how some forests are associated with multiple processes.

One can map fifteen sacred forests against the clans responsible for managing them, the reasons why clans established them, their dates, sizes, and locations (**Table 3.1**). The largest sacred forest, Nyumbanitu, about 3–4 acres, was established near Mlevela village in the seventeenth century. All Bena clans maintained some responsibility for Nyumbanitu, but the Kiswaga, Mkongwe and Fute clans managed the forest historically, and today. The remaining fourteen forests descended from Nyumbanitu and so had a socio-cultural and political connection to it.

²⁸ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa and Hallan Mfugale, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 19, 23 May 2018 at Nyumbanitu and Ilembula, respectively.

Table 3.1 Classification of the studied sacred forests

no	Name	Responsible clan	Why established	Date	Size	Location
1	Nyumbanitu	All Bena clans but managed by Kiswaga, Mkongwe and Fute clans.	Settlement, burial and ritual	c.1600s	3-4 acres	Mlevela village
2	Uswimwa	Sanga clan	Settlement, burial and ritual	c.1850s	2/3 acre	Lupila
3	Iditima	Maswamu Bena	Burial and ritual	c.1650s	3 acres	Lupembe
4	Igangitololi	Luoga (Pangwa)	Burial and ritual	c.1650s	½ acre	Igangitololi
5	Ukwama	Sanga (Sanga mhemu)	Burial and ritual	c.1700s	½ acre	Ukwama
6	Kuwaluka	Kiwuka (Sangu)	Ritual	c.1800s	2 ½ acres	Kuwaluka
7	Igajilo	Sanga clan	Burial and ritual	c.1900s	2 acres	Lupila
8	Luhuyo	Chaula clan	Burial and ritual	c.1800s	½ acre	Luhuyo
9	Nsalagatu	Lwila clan	Burial and ritual	c.1850s	2.5 acres	Lupila
10	Luhulu	Ilomo clan	Burial and ritual	c.1800s	2 acres	Luhulu
11	Malaganga	Ilomo clan	Burial and Ritual	c.1850s	½ acre	Malaganga
12	Upakilwa	Sanga clan	Burial and ritual	c.1800s	½ Acre	Upakilwa
13	Matamba	Bena of Sovi	Rituals	c.1600s	½ acre	Matamba
14	Malangali	Bena of Kilawugi	Rituals	c.1650s	½ acre	Malangali
15	Lupembe	Maswamu Bena	Rituals	c.1650s	1 acre	Lupembe

Note: The classification is based on the purpose of the establishment of the forests.

Source: Data compiled by the researcher from interviews and visit to the sites. Note: the table is ordered according to ways by which the forests were established, from a combination of factors to a single factor.

In the case of sites associated with settlement and burial practices (as in number 1 above), the process began by abandoning the old settlements due to various reasons, such as intertribal wars and shifting cultivation. In the 1960s the main reason for relocation was

the *Ujamaa*²⁹ villagisation program engineered by President Julius Nyerere. The old settlements, which in some cases were also burial places no longer in use for burial, were not cultivated. For some time, the forest recolonised the old cemetery, which then was made sacred, as it associated with the departed. As rituals continued, the institutionalisation of the sacredness of the forest intensified through taboos, folklore and other institutions saving the purpose of fortifying the forests.

The burial sites usually began with the internment of the household head (the great ancestor). All other family members were then also buried in the same places. The grave of the great ancestor was, in most cases, spaced further away from the rest to indicate his authority and respect.³⁰ Regarding how a location of sacred forests was chosen, some interviewees reported that the head of the family/clan chose a spot to which he would be buried, and thereafter it became a sacred place. Instructions were given by leaders of family/clans regarding locations and procedures for their burial. Clan members who do not bury their deceased family heads in the chosen land welcomed misfortunes in their families.³¹ However, others interviewed could not remember how particular locations were picked.

The process of forming a sacred forest among the Bena, then, was far more than a complex ecological process that created a forested landscape. Its sanctification as the spiritual device was a historical event that induced the transforming of a sacred forest as a social reality. Community members identified specific areas of landscape, made it a point of contact between the visible and the invisible worlds, and established a ritualised alliance with spiritual entities that dwelled there.

3.3. Nyumbanitu sacred forest (NSF): main *tambiko* for the Bena

We need to see how specific forests were established and eventually consecrated. From such studies, we can reduce overgeneralisation emanating from our limited experience of social processes that occurred in past societies. Nyumbanitu shrine, which comprises a sacred forest and a cave, stands as an important reference for Bena sacred landscape. Commenting on the prettiness of Nyumbanitu sacred forest, an anonymous observer wrote,

²⁹ Ujamaa was a socialist system of village cooperation based on equality of opportunities and self-help, established in the 1960s in Tanzania. As a political concept it asserted that a person becomes a person through people or community. As such people were forcefully relocated from their small isolated communities to form bigger village communities in planned areas.

³⁰ Halan Mfugale (71), Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu Village, 19 June 2018.

³¹ Simon Mgaya, Scondina Mgeni, Victory Mgaya and Chezolina Mgao, group interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Igosi Village, 10 July 2018.

‘a day visit inside Nyumbanitu natural forest in Njombe would be an exciting and memorable adventure worth reckoning.’³² Although the comment derives from adventurous kind of satisfaction, it still gives a note of how special is the forest in question and so provide a promising case study of sacred forests among the Bena.

Nyumbanitu sacred forest illustrates how sacred forests were established and managed, and how *matambiko* [ancestor propitiation (sing. *tambiko*)], sacrificial and ritual services for the worship of *Nguluvi* are conducted by the Bena ethnic group.³³ NSF qualifies as an important case study as it was the most known and respected forest from which most of the sacred forests in Southern Highland Tanzania’s were connected as sub-sacred forests.³⁴ NSF is found at Mlevela village, Mdandu ward, Imalinyi division, Wanging’ombe district in Njombe region Tanzania. It is twenty-five kilometres west of Njombe town (**Figure 3.1**).

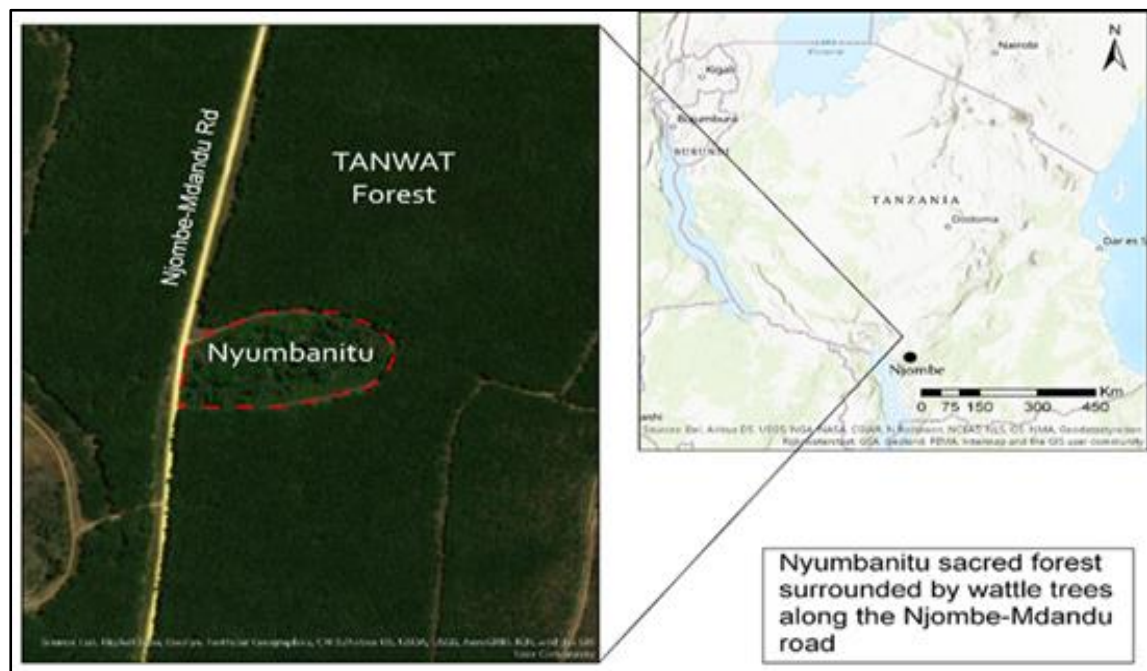
Perhaps the most striking aspect of NSF is the contrast it makes with its surroundings. On one side of this 3-4-hectare grove faces the motor road that runs between Njombe town and Mdandu. On its other three sides, there are a neatly cleared and precisely aligned rows of about 30,000 hectares of private Wattle trees owned by Tanganyika Wattle Company (TANWAT), a successor to the Commonwealth Development Co-operation (C.D.C) founded in 1949 as a U.K. entity for forest development (**Figure 3.1**).

³² Anonymous, ‘Nyumbanitu Natural Forest’, <https://www.tanzaniatourism.go.tz/destination/nyumba-nitu-natural-forest> (20 January 2018).

³³ The description presented in this section/chapter are based on (7, 9, 19 May 2018) research visits to Nyumbanitu sacred forest carried out by the researcher together with research assistants Stephen Mwingira and Ernest Nyika. We learned, through interviews, observation and participation, the great treasure of Bena traditions preserved at Nyumbanitu worship shrine a clear illustration of Bena traditional worship culture.

³⁴ James Griblin, *A History of the Excluded: Making Family a Refuge from State in Twentieth Century Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 228.

Figure 3.1 Map to locate Nyumbanitu forest from Njombe town



Note: The dotted lines demarcate NSF from the surrounding TANWAT forest. The Njombe-Mdandu road pass through the forest.

Source: Esri, Airbus DS, USGS, NGA NASA, CGIAR, N Robinson, NCEAS, NLS, OS NMA, Geodatastyrelsen, Rijkswaterstaat, GSA, Geoland, FEMA, Intermap and the GIS user community

Along the road, a sign marks the NSF— a forest which survived the tractors of the Colonial Development Cooperation (CDC), which had alienated most of the Bena land during the British rule in Tanganyika (1919-1961). The sign displays the name and describes the forest and the village and district in which the forest is located. There are also pictures of black chicken, sheep and cow, the animals used for *matambiko*. A depiction of Vangameli Msigwa is also on display to signify one of the 1990s well-known custodian priests of the forest (See Figure 3.2). Three names, Kiswaga, Fute and Mkongwa, are placed on the sides of the block posters (not seen from the photo) to show the three sub-clans from Kahemele clan.³⁵

³⁵ Kahemele was the ninth Bena ancestor from whom the worship at NSF is mostly known.

Figure 3.2 Road signs to locate the Nyumbanitu sacred forest



Note: Right: the old sign with a Chief and an assistant standing. Left: the new signpost with researcher sitting.

Source: Photo on the left is from google images; Right photo was taken by Stephen Mwingira during fieldwork.

Nyumbanitu, ‘Blackhouse,’ is a word coined from Bena words *Nyumba* (House) and *Nitu* (Dark/ Black). There are varied accounts regarding the origin of the name Nyumbanitu. Some accounts link the name to the pre-colonial inter-ethnic wars when Bena fought with their nearby ethnic groups such as Sangu and Hehe. The Bena believed that they could hide within the forest without being seen by their enemies, even though the Bena themselves could see their enemies as they passed by them. The enemies could not see them, as the ancestors who dwell within the forest protected them by creating darkness to the enemies.³⁶ In this case, the forest (see **Figure 3.3**) stood as a ‘protective house’ where the Bena took refuge in the time of war and misfortune.

³⁶ Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 83, Julius and Alex Msigwa, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu 10 May 2018.

Figure 3.3 Nyumbanitu sacred forest.



Note: **Left:** a section of Nyumbanitu sacred forest (NSF) from the East; **Right:** Entering the forest is by single file led by the shrine priest.

Source: Photographs taken by the researcher during fieldwork.

The darkness is also connected to black chickens, present in that natural forest, as well as to the black sheep and birds brought by people who were punished after they disobeyed the taboos associated with forest.³⁷

The trees and forest, in general, demonstrate the linkages between biodiversity and cosmology and the interaction between the social and natural sciences. Because of strict access in the forest, NSF harbours vegetation in its climatic formation and probably constitutes the only representation of forest in the near-virgin condition in parts of Njombe. NSF is a repository of unique and rare plants grown on fertile soil due to humus resulting from the composition of leaves that fall from trees. A survey undertaken in 2002 by International Forest Resources and Institutions Collaborating Research Centre (IFRI-CRC-TZ) found a total of 31 tree and shrub species in NSF. Dominant species were *Teclea nobilis* (34%), *Rhus natalensis* (13%), *Albizia schimperiana* (9%), *lawsonia lucida* (9%), *Mystzylon aethiopicum* (12%), *Vangueria infausta* (9%) and *Ekergea capensis* (14%) among others.³⁸ Seventy percent of the tree and shrubs found in NSF are not found

³⁷ B. Kiwale, 'A Myth About Nyumbanitu', (2016). <http://kiwale1990.blogspot.com/2016/06/a-myth-about-nyumbanitu.html> (12 July 2018).

³⁸ IFRI (International Forest Resources and Institutions Collaborating Research Centre), 'About Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest and the Cave', *IFRI Outreach Series* 1 (2002).

elsewhere within the area.³⁹ Most of the village land is planted with exotics or used as farmland and hence limiting any possibility for indigenous plants to grow.

The forest is also decorated by mystic black chickens that dwell in the forest. The priests narrated that these chickens mostly appear during the harvesting season and disappear afterwards. Most of the interviewees do not know from where the chickens came. But, according to the general narrative, ‘a long time ago, as people slaughtered many chickens for their meat, some birds decided to go back to the wild where they control different natural forests in the world including Nyumbanitu.’⁴⁰ Whether the narrative is true or not, the fact remains that chickens are part of the NSF ecosystem, making it home to flora as well as fauna.

Figure 3.4 Black chickens inside Nyumbanitu sacred forest



Source: Photo taken by the researcher during his visit at NSF, 9 May 2018.

In NSF, wild chickens live in communal groups which are dominated by a dominant cock followed by subdominant cock and many hens with their chicks. Such an organisation mirrors a traditional hierarchical system of life which establishes its leadership through dangerous fights involving almost all cocks in the flock until one of them set up himself as a victor. The declaration of a leader is made through unique crowing sounds which

³⁹ M.A. Njana, W. Mugisha and G.C. Kajembe, ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumba-Nitu, Southern Highlands Tanzania’, *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (June 2012), 97.

⁴⁰ Reginald Stanislaus, ‘Tanzania: The Mysterious Life of Wild Chickens of Nyumbanitu Natural Forest’, *Tanzania Daily News* (Dar es Salaam: 3 August 2015) <https://allafrica.com/stories/201508030571.html> (23 August 2017).

announce and describe the dominant cock. To justify his position as a leader, while making a clucking sound, the dominant cock will lead his flock to the area with good pasture.

The description of how the black chickens live in the NSF reflects how the forest is complete and self-sustaining through the power of ancestral spirits that dwell in it. Although chicken is a source of protein for most Bena, the chicken found in the forest are considered part of the ancestral forest spirits and so cannot be eaten.⁴¹ Culturally, the black chickens signify mystical power and consecration. The chickens are not fed by anyone as they survive through what is naturally provided by the forests. The Bena believe that the unseen and masters who control the forest, and everything in the community, is seen in black chickens.⁴² For the Bena community, therefore, NSF equalled life and security. The hierarchical and patriarchy of the chickens reflects the social organisation of the Bena society, which is also the case for the ancestors who are also arranged in a hierarchy. The list of the significant Bena ancestors reflects a patriarchy society, as all were males.

There are accounts which show that Nyumbanitu was a settlement place before the forest developed and subsequently, sanctified. For example, the Mbena clan traditions tell of this clan as having migrated from Idete to settle temporarily at Ilongo before they came to settle at Nyumbanitu, establishing themselves in the area to make Nyumbanitu their sacred grove.⁴³ Bena settlement in the area was also proved by Ehret (1958) who, as cited by Nyagava, explained that the Bena originated from the East African coast. As they were searching the source of Rufiji river through Ulanga and Kilombero districts for agricultural reasons, they lastly settled in Nyumbanitu area.⁴⁴ When interviewed by James Giblin in 1994, Chief Joseph Mbeyela testified that Nyumbanitu was an old settlement and a burial place.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 20, May 2018. My interview with the two forest priests (Julius and Alex) was made at a forest poster outside the forest before we entered the forest. As we talked about chickens, the priests said to me that they were not sure if the chickens could be seen on that day. To our surprise, one small black chick came out of the forest following the very only path we had to take to enter the forest. The chick crossed the road all the way to where we stood and stopped there. It remained there until we finished our interview and started entering the forest. The priests said that we seem to be lucky as the ancestors had send the spirit in form of chicken to welcome us.

⁴² Stanley Elias, 'Inside Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest: Reinterpretation of Forest embedded Folklore of Wabena in Njombe', *Journal of Humanities and Cultures Studies* 3, no. 1 (Jan. 2018), 5.

⁴³ Daniel Kiswaga and Menaald Mkongwa, in MF/JD. Graham. Ulembwe and Igominyi respectively, August – September 1966.

⁴⁴ Ehret as quoted in Seth Nyangava, 'The History of the Bena up to 1908' (PhD diss., University of Dar es Salaam, 1988), 84.

⁴⁵ Chief Joseph Mbeyela said, on 29th June 1994, interviewed by James Giblin, that the place became forested after people had lived there for long-time and buried their people there. On being abandoned, the place became important for the main *tambiko* which connected all the Bena from wherever they relocated. Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 228.

The traditional ritual practices at NSF are cooperative ceremonies whereby many people participate under the shrine priest. There are two major ritual ceremonies in which many people attend: one during the beginning of the year (asking for blessings) and the other at the end of the year (Thanksgiving). Other sacrifices for individual people do not require many people and are conducted throughout by the priests. That is true also for unusual circumstances such as droughts, hunger, or other calamities whose rituals do not follow the regular schedule. The nature of the ceremony depends on who wants to offer sacrifices and why they want to make offerings.

Within the NSF, the Bena cosmology found it necessary to have a central pole or post. Although the forest forms the middle/central world for the Bena, such forest comprises many trees, grasses, birds, and other living creatures. Thus, in the middle world of the Bena traditions, we find a central post that is assimilated to what Eliade called the *axis mundi*.⁴⁶ The central pole had an important ritual role; at the foot of it, priests sacrificed animals to honour supreme celestial beings. For the Bena, the central pole was usually a large tree located in the middle of the forest. At NSF, a large centrally located tree served as an altar during *matambiko*. When approaching this holy place, one must take off shoes and hats or veils.⁴⁷ Women who are on their menstrual period are strictly not allowed to enter NSF.

The central pole is adorned with symbolic items. At NSF, the altar is decorated with a traditional hoe, spear, flour, a three-legged chair, a small pot, a black robe with three marks of the cross, one behind and one each side just before the shoulders, and a black and white necklace. Every symbol has a precise meaning. For instance, a spear symbolises wars that the Bena fought during the intertribal wars and the Maji Maji war with Germans. A hoe symbolises agriculture, the main economic activity for the Bena. The flour made from finger millet symbolises the traditional food for the ancestors. A three-legged chair signifies the kingdom or priesthood; one who presides at worship must sit on such a typical royal Bena chair. A small pot expresses the preservation of old Bena traditions, as the ancestors used such pots to keep milk. The black robe symbolises how priests intercede in people's problems. The black and white necklace stands as a symbol of the power of prophecy.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 48.

⁴⁷ As I was doing my research, I followed all these procedures. I was also able to see one of the journalists who could not enter the forest after the announcement was made to warn women on their menstrual period not to enter as they would encounter opposition if they entered.

⁴⁸ Julius and Alex Vangameli Msigwa (resident NSF Priests). Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 10 May 2018; Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 84-85.

Black is a vivid symbolic colour at Nyumbanitu shrine.⁴⁹ Black cloth, black animals used for sacrifices, black chickens that dwells in the forest and the black robe are examples of colour symbolism found at NSF. The accounts collected revealed that the black colour connotes the power of ancestors to control the affairs of the living people. It is believed that when people act against their ancestors, darkness surrounds them, and they encounter problems in their lives.

The meaning of NSF, then, is twofold. Firstly, the forest links the soil and environment with memories in the form of ‘founding myth’ as the starting point of the Bena history. Secondly, NSF is the Bena ancestors’ land which can belong only to locals. Nyumbanitu was known as the point of both dispersal and gathering (Nyumbanitu-*igavilo* and Nyumbanitu-*kiteko*). It was a gathering point, as it brought together different clans from different places to conduct *matambiko* at the shine. It was a point of dispersal because from there various tribes and ethnic groups dispersed and formed communities elsewhere.⁵⁰ Throughout history, the many groups who split from Nyumbanitu, despite establishing small sacred forests in their new areas, still adhered to their original place of the main *tambiko* at Nyumbanitu. The sacrifices and rituals at NSF were hence practised not only by Bena who resides in the area but also by the nearby ethnic groups who historically originated from Nyumbanitu. Such ethnic groups include the *Kinga*, the *Wanji*, *Sangu*, *Hehe* and *Pangwa* ethnic groups.

3.4. Rites in the underworld: The sacred cave and its connection to the NSF

In the Bena ontology, a shrine includes many other things apart from the land and trees. A cave found near NSF occupies a special significance in relation to NSF worship of *Mulungu*. The sacredness of NSF is incomplete without the nearby caves. Despite the information that can be collected from a wealthy cave, the site itself might be misunderstood, especially if the cultural aspects of the cave’s use are underrepresented. Including such facets in our analysis of sacred forests, therefore, brings the holistic understanding of the sacredness of the landscapes and the cultural practices performed

⁴⁹ Colour symbolism is common in African traditional religions. Theo Sundermeier describes more colours used in African traditional religion to symbolise different things. For instance, white colour to symbolise mother’s milk (food), men’s semen (fertility), and the power of the ancestors who are above normal living people, and the red colour to symbolise menstrual blood of a woman and her fertility and family links. [Theo Sundermeier, *the Individual and Community in African Traditional Religions* (Hamburg: LIT, 1998), 46].

⁵⁰ Traditions of dispersal in the Southern Highlands from Ubena are mentioned in Monica Wilson, ‘The Peoples of Nyasa-Tanganyika Corridor’, *Communications from the School of African Studies*, N.S. no. 29 (University of Cape Town, 1958), 48.

there. As such, a cultural study of NSF calls upon our focus of ritual use of Nyumbanitu cave which is associated with the forest.

Geoscientists William White and David Culver define a cave as ‘a natural opening in the Earth, large enough to admit a human being, and which some human beings choose to call a cave.’⁵¹ Similarly, John Gunn notes that the term cave is ‘commonly applied to natural openings, usually in rocks, that are large enough to permit entry by humans.’⁵² Both authors stress the human–cave interaction as important to their very definition, suggesting that caves are defined by human perceptions of them and cannot be defined in terms of their geology alone. The word cave can, therefore, generally be considered in a non-scientific context.

Nyumbanitu cave is a historical cave found about a kilometre away west from the NSF. It is believed that the cave was discovered around the 1550s by Mkilavugi, the third Bena human ancestor.⁵³ Mkilavugi was known for his hunting skills. While there is consensus on crediting Mkilavugi for the discovery, different narratives exist about the activity that lead to the spotting of the cave. Some accounts reveal that the cave was exposed while Mkilavugi was hunting;⁵⁴ others say that the cave was discovered as Mkilavugi embarked into various wars with neighbouring clans.⁵⁵ The Bena believe that Mkilavugi spotted the cave because ancestors wanted to show him a place of refuge in times of war. It is believed that the Bena hid in the cave during tribal wars with rival tribes and later from German forces during the Maji Maji War, 1905-1907.⁵⁶ The cave is sufficiently large to shelter 300-400 people.

The Nyumbanitu forest and the cave form the two main parts which together make a complete sacredness. Although the two places are almost a kilometre apart, they are considered one as they are both dwelling places of the Bena ancestral spirits; together they form what is known as Nyumbanitu worship shrine.⁵⁷ Regardless of the kind of rituals

⁵¹ David Culver and William B. White, *Encyclopaedia of Caves* (Burlington, MA: Academic Press, 2004), 81.

⁵² John Gunn, ‘Introduction’, in *Encyclopaedia of Caves and Karst Science*, ed. John Gunn (New York NY: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2004), vi.

⁵³ The time of discovery is my own estimation based on the information gathered from the interviews with chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe and the NSF priests, Alex, and Julius Vangameli Msigwa.

⁵⁴ These narratives were mainly by people who are not directly related to the shrine. For example, Ernest Nyika who claimed to have been told about the cave by his late father Mzee Nyika.

⁵⁵ Alex and Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu 11 May 2018.

⁵⁶ It was an armed war fought in the southern part of the present-day Tanzania against the German rule. It involved the use magic power which it was believed that it could turn bullet into water. Water in Swahili language translates to *maji*. So, whoever could hear the bullet sound had to say *maji* and the bullet could turn into war.

⁵⁷ Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 78.

needed to be conducted, the service must always commence at the sacred forest and usually concludes at the cave. One cannot enter the forest or cave without asking permission from the ancestor. On being permitted to enter the forest, one must take off his shoes and hat and respectfully walk in a single file. The priests emphasised that once the permission is provided at the entrance of the forest, one does not require another authorisation to enter the cave, as the cave is a continuity of the same shrine sacredness. However, depending on the seriousness of the problem, most of the services end in the forest—particularly for problems attended for the first time. For major problems, the priests conduct special services at Nyumbanitu cave.

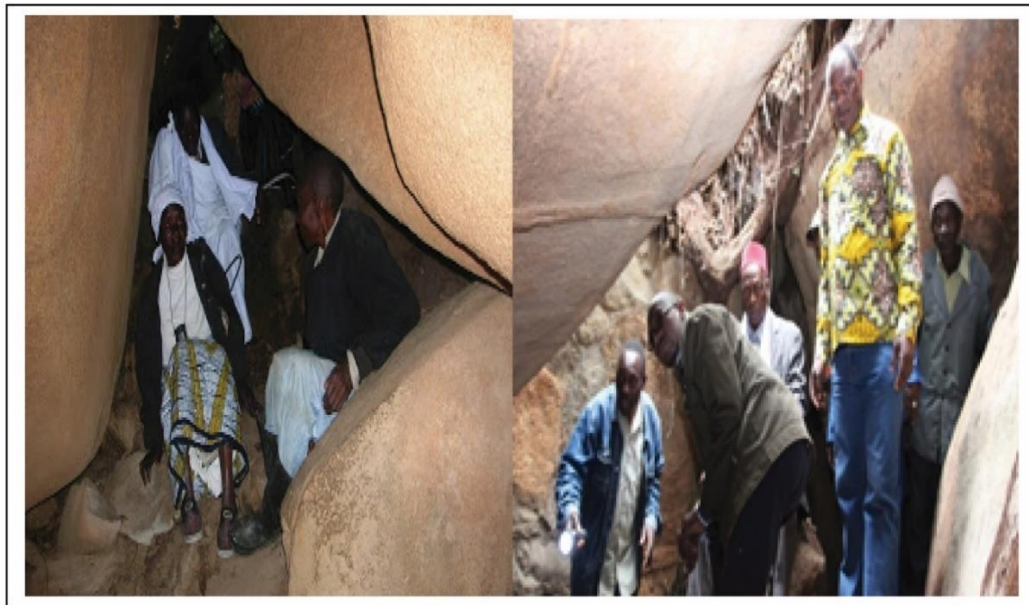
The Nyumbanitu caves are more ancient than the forest. Oral accounts relate that the grove had not existed until much later. In an interview with James Giblin, in 1994, Joseph Mbeyela revealed that the forest grew after people had lived there for a long time. Afterwards, *matambiko* began to be performed there.⁵⁸ Thus the reputation which Nyumbanitu forest enjoys throughout the Southern Highlands, both as for the location of important *matambiko* and as a point of dispersal⁵⁹ from which various peoples were scattered to settle in different parts of the region, likely originated from the amazing cave (**Figure 3.4**). The cave was associated with the traumatic periods of wars, hence it revealed itself to have the sacred character to the Bena community who found refuge in it.

Deep inside the cave a sacred spring water exists. The priests narrated that the water possesses special healing and purification properties. It is believed that a person's misfortune can be cleansed through entering the cave where a priest performs a special purification prayer. The person then washes his hands and legs as a sign of taking off the misfortunes. The cave has entrance and exit doors. Each door needs to be used for its specific purpose. After purification, the person must go out through an exit door. Going out through the entrance door could allow the bad spirits to attack the person once again. The rule also applies to any other person who enters the cave.

⁵⁸ Paramount chief Joseph Pangamahuti Mbeyela II as interviewed by James Giblin, 29 June 1994, Mdandu. James Giblin, *A History of the Excluded: Making Family a Refuge from State in Twentieth Century Tanzania* (Oxford: James Currey, 2005), 228.

⁵⁹ For reputation outside Njombe as a point of dispersal, Seth Nyagava, 'A History of the Bena to 1908', (PhD diss., University of Dar es Salaam, 1988), 69-70, 85-87, and *A History of the Bena to 1914* (Peramiho: Peramiho Printing Press, 2000), 39, 45-46.

Figure 3.5 Nyumbanitu sacred cave



Note: Left - Elders at the Nyumbanitu cave's entrance; Right: Tanzania's MNRT deputy minister (Hasunga) together with Mkongwe, the Bena chief, exploring the cave with the help of the shrine priest.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher during fieldwork.

The Nyumbanitu cave is full of the wonders of God's creative power. When the Bena talk about *Shalula* as the creator of all that exists, they mostly refer to wonders revealed at Nyumbanitu. The creation of Nyumbanitu cave and the shapes of the rooms inside it evokes faith in the existence of Shalula (Nguluvi) among the Bena. The analogy of darkness in the naming of Nyumbanitu forest also associates with the darkness found in the cave near the NSF.⁶⁰ The cave is very dark, hindering sight, which relates to the myth of mysterious cows that dwelt in the cave. Within the cave, there is a large sitting room and other rooms of which one room is considered very special (and the darkest). Only priests can enter the darkroom when special prayer is required, but they must purify themselves first.⁶¹ That way, the room is considered holy of holies. When comparing this sacred place with Christianity, Mligo associated the room with the temple in ancient Jerusalem when the Jewish priest entered the temple once per year to pray for people's sins.⁶²

⁶⁰ The further you go into the cave the darker it becomes. We had to use lamps and phone touches to be able to get a bit far. Inside the cave is full of bats that dwell in it.

⁶¹ For instance, if they had quarrels or misunderstandings with their wives at home, their relatives or neighbours, they were not allowed to enter the room. It is strictly forbidden to attempt entering the room while the priest has had sex out of their official marriage.

⁶² Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 82.

The Nyumbanitu forest and the cave formed an interdependence for the wellbeing of the spirits. According to the descriptions of the priests of the shrine, the cave was the sleeping place of mystic cattle of the shrine, and the forest was where the mystic animals stayed during the day.⁶³ The mystic cattle are said to have navigated between the two sacred places but without being seen by anyone. The cattle were surrounded and cloaked by the heavy mist.⁶⁴ People could only see a heavy fog passing and hear the voice of cattle and the cattle bells and voices of the keepers. Since the cattle were not normally visible, the people understood them as ancestral spirits and protectors of the people.

The Nyumbanitu cave, then, is a natural cavity inside the earth which offered both protection and shelter for the ancestral spirits and the Bena hence given a sacred status alongside NSF. As a location, however, the cave became more than a mere place of habitation and temporary refuge. It stands out from other places within the landscape; although physically situated within, the cave is separate from the wider world. Culturally perceived as a boundary between the world above and the world below, Nyumbanitu cave is well suited to the Bena ontology. Linked to the NSF the cave has long been a place of ancestral veneration and appears frequently in both mythology and religious stories among the Bena.

3.5. Bena ancestral clans and the tale of three sons

Genealogy, the art and science of tracing one's ancestral roots, helps us know who our ancestors were. It provides insight into history through the scholarly study of families and documents such as by understanding families that founded and influenced the community. There are several stories about ancestors, which survive in families for generations as part of an oral tradition. However, many stories go undocumented and hence become easily forgotten. Documenting such genealogies helps preserve them for reference by future generations. Remembering and documenting the Bena ancestral clans helps us understand the essence and development of traditional worship at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.

Oral accounts reveal that there are eleven Bena ancestral clans responsible for the NSF. Listed in chronological order, the major Bena ancestors are Shalula, Mbena,⁶⁵ Tevele, Mkilavugi, Mponda, Ng'anzagala, Malova, Mafyata, Ngiliviga, Kahemele, Muhimba and

⁶³ Julius and Alex Vangameli Msiwaga (resident NSF Priests). Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 10 May 2018 at Nyumbanitu Village.

⁶⁴ Mlilo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 79.

⁶⁵ Mbena was the first human ancestor. It is from him that all Bena people originated. It was because of him that the name of the entire ethnic group became 'Wabena' to show that they are the descendants of Mbena.

Shalula.⁶⁶ The NSF priests explained that the double mention of Shalula, at the beginning and end of the list, reflects his being the highest of all the ancestors.⁶⁷ The Bena believed that Shalula created the world and all that is in it (*ye alwe ifinu fyonda ifilimunyi*). Shalula is unknown and unapproachable, and so is an attribute of *Nguluvi*, the God of the Bena. Shalula, the first and last ancestor, reflects the *Alfa* and *Omega* of God in Christian faith.⁶⁸

Eight of the ten Bena human ancestors (Mbena, Tevele, Mkilavugi, Mponda, Ng'anzagala, Malova, Mafyata and Ngiliviga) were all buried at Nyumbanitu site, which was later abandoned, giving a chance for the grove to develop. The burial of these great Bena ancestors at Nyumbanitu, therefore, explains why the forest was proclaimed sacred. To use Eliade's concepts, Nyumbanitu became 'a place that constituted a break in homogeneity of space by creating a special space (centre of the world) where the communication with the underworld had to be expressed.'⁶⁹ The other two ancestors, Kahemele and Muhimba, were buried at Ihanzutwa and Ihanja, respectively, and so made two sub-sacred sites, also patches of forests.

There are few accounts about the early history of traditional worship at NSF. Although the practice of sacrifice and rituals began as early as the first ancestor (Mbena) who was buried at Nyumbanitu, there is very little, if any explanations about the nine ancestors before Kahemele. Accounts are missing because either families had no children or had only girls. The Bena, as most Bantus in mainland Tanzania, are a patrilineal society where lineage is through males and property belongs to the male family members.⁷⁰ Because of the patriarchy of the Bena society, women and girls were excluded from history.⁷¹ For these eight ancestors, only names survive—there are no family histories and scant information about ritual and sacrifice practices at NSF. So, oral histories give us a list of names but little historical material.

The existing accounts of the traditional worship at NSF begin with Kahemele (9th ancestor). As he approached death, he wanted to give inheritance and divide responsibilities

⁶⁶ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 23 May 2018 at Ilembula Village; Elia S. Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion: A Textbook for Students of Comparative Religion* (Eugene, OR: Resource Publishers, 2013), 73.

⁶⁷ Shalula never lived in the real world. When the priest recites the names of the ancestors to ask for permission to enter the forest, he must always start and end with Shalula.

⁶⁸ With the coming of Christian teaching, the eleven ancestors started being equated to the twelve disciples of Jesus as described in the Bible.

⁶⁹ Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 37.

⁷⁰ P. Van Pelt, *Bantu Customs in Mainland Tanzania* (Tabora: TMP Book Department, 1982), 2.

⁷¹ Julius and Alex Vangameli Msigwa (resident NSF Priests). Interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, 10 May 2018 at Nyumbanitu Village.

to his three sons. To do so, Kahemele placed a hoe, a spear, and a small sifting tray – *ungo*—before his sons (inside NSF).⁷² He told the three sons to go after the objects and competitively pick only one each. Kahemele did not provide them but instead made them choose whatever they perceived of importance to each of them. Then Kahemele gave his sons names according to what object each of the sons had picked.⁷³

The youngest son dashed to the objects and picked a traditional spear. Kahemele gave him the name ‘Mkongwa,’ as he would be responsible for guarding and protecting all the Bena in wars and misfortunes. Kahemele’s words of installation to Mkongwa were: ‘*Ukongage avayago Vonda, uhomage amagoha pamwinga navo*’ (guide your fellow citizens, fight the wars with them).⁷⁴ With such installation, the Mkongwa sub-clan from Kahemele clan became the rulers of the Bena and the nearby tribes that worship at NSF. From there the Mkongwa lineage became the line of kings and chiefs for the Bena tribe.

Figure 3.6 A traditional spear at Nyumbanitu sacred forest



Note: The traditional spear (held by researcher) was used as an installation symbol of leadership for Mkongwa sub-clan.

Source: Photo taken by Stephen Mwingira during a research trip to Nyumbanitu.

⁷² All the three representations were placed at the main tree centred within the Nyumbanitu sacred forest.

⁷³ Ibid

⁷⁴ Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 74.

The eldest son was the second to reach the destination and picked a traditional hoe. He was named ‘Fute’ as he would be responsible for feeding and sustaining the livelihood of all the Bena people. Kahemele’s words of installation to Fute were ‘*futilage uhulima; lisage avayago vonda*’ (work hard in your farming; feed all your fellow citizens).⁷⁵ The priests narrated that for the Bena, feeding and cultivating meant more than a mere farming work as the words also denoted ‘protection.’ The hoe provided to Fute was itself a symbol of what the Bena called *Ngimo*, a traditional weapon for protection. The Fute sub-clan would, therefore, be responsible for food supply and protection of the Bena people.

Figure 3.7 A traditional hoe at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.



Note: A traditional hoe (held by a priest) was given to Fute as a symbol of his responsibility to protect and feed the Bena.

Source: Photography taken by Stephen Mwingira during fieldwork.

The second son, who was last to reach the destination, picked the sifting tray—*ungu*. He was then given the name ‘Kiswaga’ as he would be responsible for all *matambiko* (traditional worship) of NSF. The words for his installation were: ‘*uswagage avanu vonda vikalage pa litambiho lya Nyumbanitu*’ (lead all people towards adhering to the worship at

⁷⁵ Alex Vangameli Msigwa (Assistant resident NSF Priest). Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 10 May 2018 at Nyumbanitu Village; Mligo, *Elements of African Traditional Religion*, 75.

the Nyumbanitu shrine).⁷⁶ The wooden sifting tray became a symbol for rituals and sacrifice (priesthood) to the ancestors at NSF. Kiswaga sub-clan was hence given a direct responsibility to lead and guide the sacredness of the Nyumbanitu forest.

Figure 3.8 A traditional tray at Nyumbanitu sacred forest.



Note: A traditional tray (held by an assistant shrine priest at the back) was given to Kiswaga as a symbol of his priesthood at the Nyumbanitu main shrine for the Bena.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher during fieldwork research at Nyumbanitu shrine.

After the three sons had their installation done by their father Kahemele, he asked them as to whom they considered having the most important responsibility.⁷⁷ Though oral accounts do not reveal the answers given by the sons, Kahemele explained to the three that none was more important than the others: they needed to depend on one another equally. It was stated that Mkongwa should not declare war without consulting Kiswaga; a *tambiko* at Nyumbanitu shrine required the approval from the ancestors. Similarly, for a successful war, Mkongwa needed supplies from Fute. Fute could not farm during war (which Mkongwa needed to protect) and drought (which Kiswaga had to protect through *tambiko* to please the ancestors).

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ The same question was asked to the researcher. The priests were eager to hear my opinions on whom I would say is more important than the other. As I was responding to the question the priests were smiling and nodding their heads as sign to agree with what I was saying.

The power division between the three sub-clans from Kahemele was, however, not stable throughout life after Kahemele. Although Mkongwa, Kiswaga and Fute sub-clans from Kahemele were expected to work as equals, sometimes conflict arose over power, mainly between Mkongwa clan, who considered themselves as rulers, and Kiswaga, who as leader of *matambiko* also thought themselves to possess the right to rule.⁷⁸ As such, there was a time in the 1920s, with the help of the British, when a chief came from Kiswaga sub-clan. The installation of Daniel Kiswaga as Bena paramount chief brought discontent among the Mkongwa sub-clan who considered themselves to have an exclusive right to chieftaincy.

The influence over the main *tambiko* forest was also contested between the two sub-clans. In linking their clan with a prestigious *tambiko* site known throughout Njombe and the Southern Highlands, the Mkongwa chiefs were elaborating their discourse of clan hierarchy. The association of the grove with the Mkongwa clan was, however, questionable. Following the tale of the three sons of progenitor Kahemele, the Kiswaga sub-clan, rather than the Mkongwa sub-clan, was given direct responsibility for Nyumbanitu shrine. In addition, it was generally acknowledged that the family of Mbeyela Mkongwa, Joseph Mbeyela's farther, neither buried their dead nor practised *matambiko* at Nyumbanitu shrine. Instead, oral evidence reveals that the site was originally the veneration place of the Kiswaga ancestry.⁷⁹ Paramount Kiswaga's son claimed that the site initially became famous as it was associated with his grandfather, paramount Kiswaga's father, who possessed a medicine that protected crops from locusts.⁸⁰ To support their claim, the Kiswaga sub-clan referred to forerunner Kahemele's installation of Kiswaga as shrine priest—a position which gave him power to lead all the traditional worship practices conducted at Nyumbanitu.

However, in 1932, the Mkongwa sub-clan reclaimed their Bena chieftaincy, and the Nyumbanitu grove became more affiliated to the Mkongwa ancestors linked to the discourse of clan hierarchy. From 1949 when Joseph Mbeyela became paramount of Ubena, Nyumbanitu turned out to be a source of vulnerability for the paramount.

⁷⁸ The struggle for power between these two sub-clans, as shall be discussed in chapter four, stood as one of the challenges over the stable stewardship of the Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest. The Mkongwa sub-clan, through its being rulers (chieftaincy) also wanted to take direct control of rituals at NSF, a function that was originally given to Kiswaga sub-clan.

⁷⁹ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, interviewed in Kiswahili by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 23 May 2018; Hallan Mgufale, Jonas Nyika and Julius Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 19, 7, 10 May at Nyumbanitu.

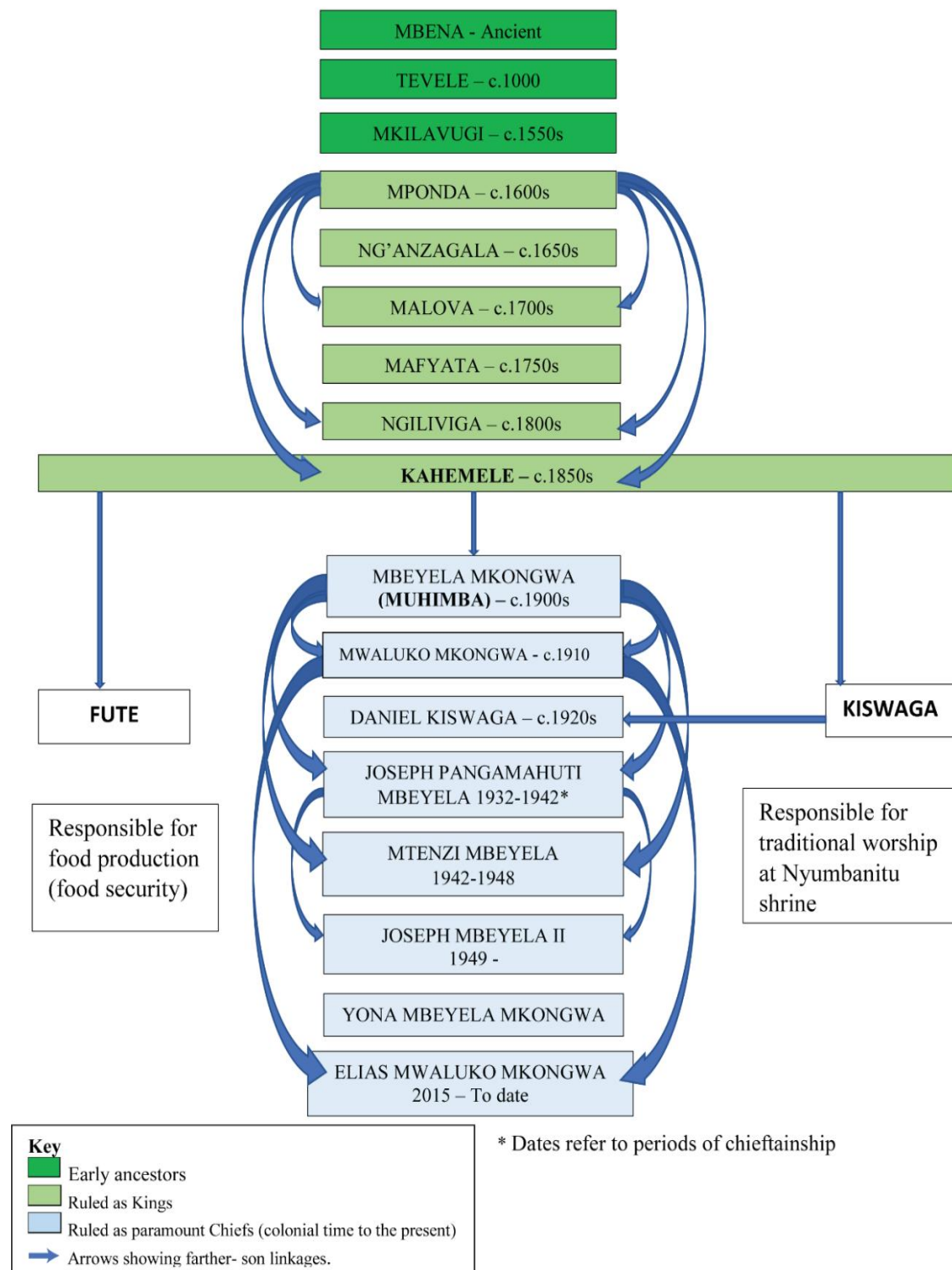
⁸⁰ Daniel Kiswaga, 'Habari za Nchi ya Ubena Hapo Kale', *Mss. Afr. S.* 2047, Rhodes House Library, (1933), copy of which is found in Tanzania district archive (Njombe).

Descendants of the first paramount, Kiswaga, claimed that Ubena could not prosper if the paramount and the leader of the Nyumbanitu *tambiko* were not members of their lineage.⁸¹ Mbeyela needed to convert Nyumbanitu forest from a liability into a source of authority. Because he could not personally lead the *matambiko*, Mbeyela opted to gain prestige by showing that he had saved the grove from the Colonial Development Cooperative's (CDC) destruction. Being widely known and recognised by all Bena, Nyumbanitu sacred forest became a symbol of Bena tribal identity. By linking with the NSF, Mkongwa aimed to strengthen his acceptance as Bena paramount. It was also a way to claim a special relationship with the most powerful ancestral spirits of the Bena and ultimately stand at the apex of the Bena clan hierarchy. Constantly worried about the fragility of the Bena tribal feeling, Mbeyela made the opportunity to intensify his clan's link to NSF work for him. The government and the CDC shared Mbeyela's interest in intensifying tribal identity through NSF so he would help them to acquire more land. Since 1949, the Mkongwa clan has resumed the position of Bena chieftaincy.

One can illustrate Bena ancestry through a diagram in which we can list names of the nine human ancestors and add the four chiefs who preceded them. In the diagram, we can also position the three sons of progenitor Kahemele—Fute, Mbeyela Mkongwa and Kiswaga—as they are told via traditional, oral accounts. As seen in **figure 3.8**, since Kahemele, eight chiefs have come to reign. While the political title used for the early three could not be retrieved, the next eight used the title of King, and the last five served as Chiefs, a title which was adopted during colonial time and used subsequently. Today, Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa is paramount chief, an eighth-generation descendant from Mbeyela Mkongwa c. 1900.

⁸¹ Tanzania National Archive (TNA) 178/A.2/2/a: 'Raiya wako Tulio huku Mapolini' to District Commissioner (Njombe), 21 September 1959.

Figure 3.9 The lineage of Bena Ancestors



Note: The lineage includes Kings and Chiefs from the First (Mbena) to the current. Due to lack of written sources, most of the dates are estimates based on the oral accounts.

Source: Oral traditions collected and designed in a diagram by the researcher.

The tale of the three sons of Kahemele embeds the socio-cultural, political, and economic aspects of the life of the Bena. While the clans' leadership structure may not be relevant today, the tale remains significant to the social cohesion and division of labour of the Bena. The division of responsibilities among the three sons only meant that in each work there was to be a leader to guide others, but they all had to do all the three main tasks: defence, rituals, and production. Kahemele's advice to his three sons has historically remained a reference to all the Bena people. The Bena believed in the division of labour between gender and age. Such division, however, only means giving each member of the society a space to show his contribution to the general growth of the entire society. Among the Bena, it is everybody's responsibility to work hard for the prosperity of the community. The tale also emphasises agriculture, historically the main economic activity of the Bena.⁸² It comments on the cultural identity of the Bena in aspects of beliefs, traditions, customs, religion, social organisation as well as rituals—*matambiko*.

The Bena ancestral lineage, then, helps us to understand the essence of traditional worship at Nyumbanitu shrine and the groves connected to it. Although accounts are missing regarding most of the ancestors' worship practices at the shrine, it is generally acknowledged that each of the ancestors in the list had, at his own time, played a key role in upkeeping the forest and the traditional practices undertaken in the forest. As such, the sacred forests became a place where the Bena ancestors, while alive and in the afterlife, connected the Bena community. The tale of the three sons of progenitor Kahemele became a great point of reference for the Bena's respect to one another and to the division of labour. Through it, it was understood that everyone in the society is destined for a certain kind of task and skills to contribute to the wellbeing of the whole society. The installation of the three sons' roles, performed inside the Nyumbanitu forest, was an important indication that the socio-cultural, economic, and political landscapes of the Bena people had their essence in the forest—which, therefore, needed to be respected and protected by all members of the community.

3.6. Migration and the extension of groves in Tanzania's Southern Highland

When people move from one area to another, they carry with them socio-cultural aspects that link to their origins. So did the people who split from Nyumbanitu. Wherever they

⁸² Elias, 'Inside Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest', 8.

migrated, they did not abandon their cosmology of establishing a centre of the world through which they could communicate with their ancestors. One must, therefore, examine the way other sacred sub-forests for *matambiko* were installed in different parts as an extension of the NSF.

The people who scattered from Nyumbanitu to form communities in various places comprised two main categories. In the first category were those who departed to escape various intertribal wars that the Bena fought with neighbouring ethnic groups. For instance, the migration of the Bena of the Rivers in colonial Tanganyika was significant for the emergence of sacred forest traditions in various places of the lowland Benaland. The Bena of the Rivers emerged ‘from the shadows into the light of day’ when they undertook a great migration from the forested hills of the Iringa highlands to the treeless floodplain of the Kilombero valley in the late 1800s.⁸³ According to ethnographers, the phrase (from the shadows into the light of day) had two meanings—on one level, it described the physical relocation of the Bena from the shadows of the forest to the open floodplain. On another level, ‘light of day’ was a metaphor for the remembered cohesion of a distinct Bena tribal identity, distinguishable from the ‘shadows’ of prior ethnic obscurity.⁸⁴ In fact, Bena migration to the valley was not created in a single battle but took place over an extended period. The actual number of migrants was not as significant historically as the movement of Bena culture and chiefly authority to a new location in the valley after 1860. Those who did relocate were able to retain trade, marriage, and other relationships with those who remained behind, including their connection through newly established sacred forests.

The second group of Bena migrants were those who travelled as part of Bena territorial expansion. While the first category of migration was a forced one, the second category of people who migrated from Nyumbanitu was mostly intentional and concerns the establishment of sacred sub-forests in places to where they journeyed. Oral accounts reveal that when the Bena territory was well established, Mponda, the then king of the land, wanted to expand his territory. He divided Ubena into sub-areas, namely Kilawugi, Sovi and Maswamu.⁸⁵ Each of these areas was given to one of his subordinate Bena clans to help strengthen his authority. As part of Bena culture, the sub-chiefs would create places of

⁸³ Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, ‘Historia ya Kabila la Wabena na jinsi Kabila hilo Lilivyotawanyika katika Makabila Mengi na Walivyoweza Kumuondoa Mjerumani’ (unpublished manuscript prepared by and in custody of Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, Ilembula).

⁸⁴ A. T. and G. M. Culwick, *Ubena of the Rivers* (London, 1935), 61.

⁸⁵ Mkongwe, ‘Historia ya Kabila la Wabena’,

ancestral worship in their respective areas of administration, and hence they established sacred sub-forests.

Kilawugi was given to Mponda's sons Ngiliviga, Malova and Kahemele. The area was later occupied by Kahemeles's sons, Kiswaga, Fute and Mhimba, who then passed it to Mwaluko, Mbanga, Mwalyosi and Mbeyela sub-clans. These sub-clans continued as a direct link to the main *tambiko* at Nyumbanitu. Kilawugi was also given to other clans such as Hingi, Luhimbo, Mbudzi, Ngongomi and Mwangela. The forest for *matambiko* for these clans was installed at Malangali. The Maswamu area was given to Mbanga, Kinyunyu, Kihaka, Wigenge and Mng'ong'o sub-clans. Their forest of *matambiko* was installed at Lupembe.⁸⁶ The Malangali and Lupembe forests, therefore, were extensions of the NSF within the Bena territory.

From Ukena, Mponda also extended his influence on nearby ethnic groups such as the Hehe, Pangwa, Kinga and Sangu, all of whom trace their origin to Nyumbanitu. Mponda would spread his clan by appointing men from his area to travel and install *matambiko* in those areas. The process of establishing sacred forests in other areas, apart from Nyumbanitu, was in some cases accomplished through ritual ceremonies to transfer some ancestors and re-bury them in the new claimed areas and install *tambiko*. But in most cases, it was done by providing a traditional hoe (*ngimo*), which once established in a chosen place marked an extension of territory.⁸⁷ For example, Chota was given a hoe to install at Kalenga, marking the beginning of *matambiko* forest for Chota, Kalinga, Kikoti, Mdemu, Kalenga, Chavala and Kalemwani clans. All these clans were Wandzungwa with Bena origins.

Luoga took a hoe from Nyumbanitu and installed it at Igangitololi, now part of Upangwa. At Igangitololi, Luoga was joined with Mwinuka, Dzilo, Tweve, Mhagama, Mlawa and Ndendya sub-clans. They together established their forest at Igangitololi, which then became the *matambiko* for the Pangwa ethnic group.⁸⁸ Similarly, Kiwanuka took a hoe from Nyumbanitu to install *matambiko* forest at Ukwama—a part of Ukinga and then becoming the *matambiko* forest for the Kinga ethnic group. Kiwanuka was then joined by

⁸⁶ Mkongwe, 'Historia ya Kabila la Wabena,' 2.

⁸⁷ Jonas Nyika, Halan Mfugale, and Keneth Msigwa. Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 7 May 2018, Nyumbanitu.

⁸⁸ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 23 May 2018 at Ilembula. Such narratives are also found in his unpublished pamphlet 'Historia ya Kabila la Wabena', 3.

Nyambarafu, Ngeliama, Mjengwa, Ngwando, Mtamu, Gala, Mengele, Fwila, Sikovahinu, Ngamilaga and Mlagalila.⁸⁹

The *matambiko* forest for the Kinga ethnic group was established at Ukwama in Ukinga. Khando was the one who was given a hoe by Mponda to launch a sub-territory in Ungonde, an area bordering Malawi. On reaching there, Khando met Msigwa, Chaula, Tweve, Luvanda and Sanga who were leaders of the area. Kyando organised them all and made the Ukwama *tambiko* be connected to the NSF where they were to report and attend the main *tambiko* regularly, as required. While Msigwa, Chaula, Tweve and Luvanda were ethnically Kinga, Sanga was of Hehe origin. Oral accounts reveal that Sanga ran from Uhehe for the wrongs he did there (which were not clear). His name 'Sanga', therefore, derived from his running from Uhehe [*Sanga mhemu* (Sanga the tracker)].⁹⁰ After wandering in different places, Sanga settled in Ukinga where he joined Kyando and others to adhere to the Ukwama *tambiko* forest and ultimately the NSF as their main *tambiko*. Several other forests, such as Uswimwa, Igajilo, Luhuyo and Upakilwa in Lupila among the Kinga, were established along the same line of extension of the NSF to neighbouring ethnic groups.⁹¹

The installation of sacred groves in various areas of Bena land and beyond enabled Mponda and other Bena chiefs to expand their socio-political authority. The chiefs used rituals to define political territories and legitimise their authority by referring to the order of ancestral settlement of new areas. As such, sacred groves can explain the Bena dynamic patterns at different scales in time and space. Instead of always being a patchwork of classic tribes, sacred groves were one of the key mechanisms for recreating social and ecological order on the frontiers. Such processes explain the presence of sacred forests across Tanzania's Southern Highland region.

In addition to the ritualization of the already existing forest, chiefs also planted ritual trees to mark their authority. For example, the paramount Bena chief in Nyumbanitu appointed various sub-chiefs who planted trees in rituals to mark their authority over indigenous commoners in areas they settled. The resulting thickets became their gravesites and developed into sacrificial groves where subsequent leaders legitimised their authority. In such a way, sacred groves became present in Ukinga, Upangwa, Uhehe and Usangu,

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid

⁹¹ Adomeni Sanga, Imelda Idfonce, Otomali Kibakuli Chaula and Claudio Sanga, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 20 June 2018 at Lupila.

marking the ritual connection to the main Nyumbanitu shrine. Such rituals focused on the unity of kin groups precisely because they were the language for assimilating unrelated groups into polities.

Establishing forests for *matambiko*, then, enabled Bena chiefs to extend socio-political power as Nyumbanitu shrine became the main centre of connection with the great ancestors of the land. Sacred groves were used as devices to manage socio-political, military, economic and demographic crises. Apart from their being a problematic threat to the development of the community, conflicts were also understood as spiritual messages in need of interpretation. The patches of forests that were installed over the Southern Highland made a web of forests socio-politically connected to Nyumbanitu. To use an analogy with Christianity, such forests were sub-temples all connected to the main temple at Nyumbanitu.

3.7. Folklore: sacred forests' restrictions and repercussions against defaulters

A study of groves calls for scrutiny of the important traditions of nature reverence used to conserve patches of forests dedicated to gods/goddess or ancestral spirits. Such discussion is imperative especially when we consider that, through traditions, local communities have always delimited and protected sacred forests. Keeping those landscapes in a relatively undisturbed state expresses an important relationship of a human with the divine or with nature. One such tradition worth recognising is folklore—the traditional beliefs, customs and stories of a community, passed through generations by word of mouth.

Folklore reveals people's descriptions of the world and reflects their culture. According to Putman, folklore includes 'the traditional elements of the way of life of people and the creative expressions developing naturally as part of this way of life.'⁹² It also comprises the generally held beliefs of members of the group and their activities resulting from such views. Initiatives to study folklores in relation to natural artefacts such as groves are, therefore, prompted by the fact that the cultural heritage of illiterate societies is preserved in such artefacts as well as in oral traditions.⁹³ Folklore as culturally encoded, connect into shared meanings and social practices of a community.

⁹² John F. Putman, 'Folklore: A Key to Cultural Understanding', *Educational Leadership*, 365. http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/journals/ed_lead/el_196403_putnam.pdf (17 December 2018).

⁹³ Resenmenla Longchar, 'Oral Narratives of Ao-Nagas: Constructing Identity', (PhD diss., University of Hyderabad, 2011), 8.

Most of the indigenous Bena residing near the sacred forests were illiterate. As such, they carefully nurtured their traditional customs, rituals, ceremonies, and a way of the forest through folklore. For these indigenous people, taboos, rituals, and beliefs were supplemented with mystic folktales associated with sacred forests. Folklore gave rewards and blessings for good behaviour and punished the non-believers. Application of such folklore made people believe that any damage to the sacred forests or falling trees from the sacred forest, could bring anger to gods who could, for instance, cause diseases and failure of crops. Therefore, people did not dare to remove even dead wood from the sacred forest and did not dare to harm the fauna residing in it. It was equally important to prepare sacred forests in pristine condition.

Sacred forests and folklore are historically interwoven. As argued by Guerin, forests have traditionally contributed to a considerable repository folkloric knowledge of the community.⁹⁴ Among the Bena, several stories were told to depict various facets of life and culture of people and how groves are self-protected through the ancestral spirits. For example, NSF was spared while all the surrounding land was confiscated for the wattle project—a story told throughout Njombe generations. These stories all say that European attempts to clear the grove were abandoned as their efforts were confronted by mysterious forces, more powerful than their bulldozers. ‘When the trees were felled’, contended one man,

They spilt blood. That is why the African employee of the CDC left those woods alone. When the Europeans said to them, ‘you are all liars’, they said ‘no, leave those woods alone.’ So, the Europeans went to look for themselves, and there were evil spirits there.⁹⁵

Others claim that European employee of the CDC disappeared in the grove, never to be seen again.⁹⁶ But the Europeans did not believe in any of the mythologies they were told.

When Europeans did not believe what they were told by African employees, ‘they decided to go clear the land themselves’ said Allan Mfugale. ‘But they were unsuccessful in clearing the wood’ added another man: ‘when they sent in their bulldozers, they all stuck.’ ‘One day,’ elaborated another, ‘those Europeans had pitched their tent there, and that night they heard people playing *njuga* [bells worn around the ankles]. That is when

⁹⁴ Karen E. Guerin, ‘The Fairy Tale of the Forest: Mythic Passages’, *The Magazine of Imaginations* (2006). http://www.mythicjourneys.org/newsletter_dec06_guerin.html (17 December 2018).

⁹⁵ Lumuliko Pandisa Lugalla, interviewed by James Gibling, Dar-es-Salaam, 20 August 1997, *History of the Excluded*, 230.

⁹⁶ Anna Nayamule and Felister Mgaya, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu 6 June 2018.

those Europeans ran away, leaving their tent'.⁹⁷ Lutengano Fute, a leader of the Nyumbanitu ancestral worship in the 1990s, explained that when the Europeans cleared the land, they surprisingly found all the trees standing once again the next morning.⁹⁸ The narrative of the cut trees standing again was also told by Julius and Alex Msigwa—the current shrine priests—and by many others interviewed.⁹⁹ 'Europeans were very reluctant to believe in the power of ancestral spirits', said Elias Mkongwa, who added that 'after they failed to cut down trees, they decided to set fire to burn the grove. 'Although the grove did not completely burn', he continued, 'there followed, in 1949, a drought that lasted for a full year. That is when the Europeans believed that there were great powers that they could not compete with.' The elders told the Europeans that rain would not come unless they paid for the destructions they caused:

The elder's counsel told the Europeans to pay one black cow, black sheep and chicken and money [amount not mentioned]. The Europeans agreed to pay, and once the payment was made, the elders conducted the great *tambiko* to appease the ancestral spirits. Just the next day, the rain started.¹⁰⁰

These stories about European failure to clear the grove due to various setbacks are retold throughout Bena generations. The stories built-in peoples' minds that traditions were more powerful than the modernity that came to destroy the culture embraced by the community. From such stories, doing any harm to the groves will be followed by punishment from the ancestors.

Apart from tales about Europeans, there were also other narratives connected to the forest that help instil into people's mind the idea of the awe in the forest. The mythical black chicken, introduced earlier in this chapter, is one of the retold narratives throughout Njombe. The existence of these chicken in the forest is believed to be guided by unseen ancestral powers: the chicken signifies mythical powers and consecration. It is thought that since chickens stayed in the forest, the forest was sacred. People were expected to respect the chickens and their dwelling place. People at Mlevela Village commented that 'even when it happens the chickens enter our village, no one dares to catch them because we fear

⁹⁷ Allan Mfugale, Michael Asangile Mkongwa and Jonas Nyika, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Mlevela 21 May 2018.

⁹⁸ Lutengano Fute and Vangamere Msigwa, interviewed by James Giblin, Nyumbanitu, 24 July 1994, *History of the Excluded*, 230.

⁹⁹ Julius and Alex Msigwa interviewed by Edward Mgaya, at Nyumbanitu, 20 May 2018.

¹⁰⁰ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 23 May 2018.

them’.¹⁰¹ Black chicken, as for black cow and sheep, have entered the canon of forest folklore as myths, legends, tales and rituals.

Legends, retold to promote cohesion, preserve tribal memories, and strengthen social relations, also carry customs, traditions, and warnings. For example, interviewees retold a legend of a businessman who stole chickens from the sacred forest. He mixed them with other chickens he planned to sell in Njombe town. All chickens were sold—except for the ones taken from the forest. The ‘businessman could not lift those chickens from his container put on the bicycle as the chickens became heavier as time went on’, narrated Julius Msigwa. Alex Msigwa added that ‘the man decided to return the chickens to the forest. As he approached the forest, he fell with his bicycle, and the chicken ran into the forest’.¹⁰² The man had to see the shrine priests to apologise. Related to that tale was the story of a driver who hit the chicken of the forest as he passed by. The priests narrated that ‘the driver continued to go even after he hit the chicken, but after short drive his car got problems. The villagers advised him to go back and apologise, which he did and continued with the journey afterwards’.¹⁰³ To show that there was no exception to punishment for disrespecting the ancestral spirits, some interviewees recounted the story about the son of Vangameli Msigwa, a known shrine priest in the 1990s. ‘Vangameli’s son’, recalled *Mzee* Allan Mfugalle, ‘became lunatic after he stole a chicken from the forest’.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, this narrative did not appear in our interviews with Julius and Alex who are also sons of Vangameli.

Similarly, gathering firewood in sacred groves was not allowed. In one narrative, two women entered the forest to collect wood and returned from the forest. They soon realised, however, that they had carried big snakes together with the firewood. The ‘woods were too heavy with snakes in it’, narrated Felister Mgaya. ‘Realising that the two women threw the firewood they carried and run to the village where they told other people of what had happened.’¹⁰⁵ In our interviews, I tried to ask if the interviewees would dare collect firewood from the grove. The common answer was NO! as they believed in stories told about the danger of entering the grove.

A good example of prohibitions upon entering sacred forests concerns the recent history of some Christian groups. Most interviewees narrated that in 1992 a group of fanatic

¹⁰¹ Mlevela Villagers, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, at Mlevela, 18 June 2018

¹⁰² Alex and Julius Msigwa interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu 6 May 2018.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Allan Mfugalle, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Mlevela, 19 May 2018.

¹⁰⁵ Felister Mgaya and Anna Nyamule, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 6 June 2018.

Christians from Ihanzutwa entered the grove as they were travelling to Ukalawa—now Amani Lutheran Centre. When they saw a road sign locating the NSF, they said, according to priests interviewed, ‘here is where the evil spirit stays, let us go and destroy them.’ Then they entered the forest and destroyed the altar and took all the money that was placed under the main tree. They took the money to their priest at Amani, but the priest refused to accept it and told them that what they did was wrong. They instead complained that their priest was not fully saved by God as he feared to accept money from the shrine which needed to be purified by prayers. When they were told to apologise and pay for the destruction made at the shrine, they refused. On their return home, those Christians were unable to read the scripture properly and some of them became mad as they repeatedly mentioned ‘Nyumbanitu’. Their relatives went to Nyumbanitu shrine to apologise and pay for the destruction. A special *tambiko* was made for them, and they recovered. Related to that was a story of three charismatic Catholics who entered the forest for prayers to destroy what they considered to be evil spirits. The storytellers said those people continued to shout in the forest but did not manage to come out until the shrine priest was called for help.¹⁰⁶ Although Christians interviewed associated *matambiko* with superstition and did not agree with the story, they still seemed reluctant to enter the forest.

Beliefs and taboos featured in most of the interviews with Bena elders. There are beliefs and taboos (*Imani ni miiho*) related to how to behave when entering the forest. It is believed that acting against the established taboos will be followed by a disaster: getting lost in the forest, harm to the life of an individual or the whole family of the defaulter, or even death.¹⁰⁷ As such, people are cautious not to challenge such taboos. For instance, if a woman who is in a menstrual period enters the sacred forest, it is believed that she will menstruate daily for the rest of her life. Women allowed to visit the grove are cautioned about the taboo before they enter the forest. This taboo concerns hygiene as taking off shoes and hats signifies respect.

It is believed that if one enters the forest without permission, he/she will get lost or suffer other related problems. Before entering the forest, the priest-in-charge needs to ask for permission. He picks a leaf from the forest and spits on it. He then says [in Bena language], *Vamuhimba, Hiswaga na Mkongwa, mkong'omale panyuma pesu panavagenzi va Mtwā, vandzile hulola inyumba iyi, twisuha vingile salama vahume salama*’ which

¹⁰⁶ Jonas Nyika, Alex, and Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu 6, 7 May 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Elias, ‘Inside Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest’, 8.

translates to ‘Muhimba, Kiswaga and Mkongwa, stay at our backs, these guests of the chief have come to see your house, we ask that they enter and come out safely.’

Collecting medicines from NSF without permission is strictly forbidden. NSF is a well-known source of medicinal plants. Nearly all plant species found in the forest are medicinal¹⁰⁸ and are used by traditional healers to heal various human and animal diseases.¹⁰⁹ As argued by Mgumia and Oba, tropical forests as NSF form a kind of botanical garden where the traditional healers can find rare medicinal plants, often essential for their pharmacopoeia.¹¹⁰ Though NSF is not set for economic exploitation, the gathering of herbs to help heal people is generally allowed. However, one must seek permission from the ancestors through shrine priests. It is believed that if a traditional healer enters to pick medicines from the grove without permission, the medicine will not heal the intended ailment and the fame of such healer will completely disappear in the community. Traditional healers are also warned not to collect an excessively large amount of medicines from the forest. Most of the taboos provide conditions for sustainable use of the forest resources.

The killing of totems is a taboo among the Bena. Totemism, according to one definition, is ‘a complexity of ideas, practices, legends, fears and kinship patterns which refer to the connection between human beings and animals and plants’.¹¹¹ As an anthropomorphic term, totemism refers to the common belief that some supernatural forces control all living forms and that some lesser creatures exist as totems of some ethnic groups, clans or individuals.¹¹² As such, one identifies a particular natural object or animal and makes it the symbol (totem) of a particularly special group or clan. In totemism, certain animals and natural objects are considered as relatives or ancestors of their respective social units. The killing of such kinds of creatures believed to be totems is a taboo.¹¹³ Among the Bena, some clans believe in the relationship between totems and human hosts.

¹⁰⁸ Njana et al, ‘Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources?’ 96.

¹⁰⁹ To access such medicinal plants, one needs a special ritual to be allowed to pick and only at the amount allowed by the spirits without which, it is believed that the medicine will not cure the intended diseases.

¹¹⁰ F.H. Mgumia and G. Oba, ‘Potential Role of Sacred Groves in Biodiversity Conservation in Tanzania’, *Environmental Conservation* 30, no. 3 (2003), 264.

¹¹¹ S. Gumo, S.O. Gisere, E. Raballah and C. Ouma, ‘Communicating African Spirituality through Ecology: Challenges and Prospects for the 21st Century’, *Religions* 3 (2012), 533.

¹¹² Ekpe Inyang, *The Forest: An African Traditional Definition* (Bamenda: Langaa Research and Publishing, 2015), 9.

¹¹³ Ibid.

There are common animal, bird, and plant totems. There is a belief that the destruction of habitat contributes to the termination of animal species, including totems.¹¹⁴ As such, efforts to protect some patches of forest areas or water bodies aim to safeguard the lives of totems that belong to such communities. There also is a taboo, honoured by most Bena clans, not to eat certain animals or birds or not to use certain plant species for firewood. For example, the Mgaya clan have a taboo against eating *hivatesa* [a bird] and Dembe clan has a taboo against an elephant. Every clan has a taboo inherited concerning at least one animal, plant, or bird. Adherence to taboos and totems helped to increase the need for management of traditional protected areas. It also helped to sustain population growth of certain plants and animal species.

There are characteristics inherent in folklore materials that make them appropriate for application in resource management for less advanced societies. Colding and Folke spotlight resource-related taboos, for instance, ones that provide for low monitoring, enforcement, and sanctioning costs.¹¹⁵ Similarly, North points out that with the use of taboos, transaction costs or ‘the costs of protecting rights, policing and enforcing agreements’ are kept low by the inherent enforcement characteristic of informal institutions.¹¹⁶ The conservation value and practices of traditional societies do not come from law enforcement but from spiritual and social responsibility based on stipulated ways on how humans should utilise nature.¹¹⁷ Beliefs and taboos, being at the centre of life as a whole, therefore, provide a spiritual worldview in respect to nature, reverence for forests, and animals, and provide it in a less costly way.

Taboos, religious beliefs, sacred rites, and totems provided a framework for defining acceptable resource use among the Bena. Their base is linked to the spiritual world that streamlined these practices. These traditional practices, taken together, create an ecological balance, which ensured the rational use of animals and plants for food and other purposes. They guided the philosophy of resource utilisation, conservation, and environmental protection. Therefore, there is a symbiotic relationship that exists between folklores and natural artefacts. Whether the legends and folktales told truly happened or not, such folklore materials have been useful in conserving natural features such as sacred

¹¹⁴ Elias Mkongwe, Penzeli Mwajombe and Ernest Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, Makoga and Njombe, on 23 May, 12 July, and 13 July 2018.

¹¹⁵ Johan Colding and Carl Folke, ‘Social Taboos: ‘Invisible’ Systems of Local Resource Management and Biological Conservation’, *Ecological Applications* 11, no. 2 (2001), 595.

¹¹⁶ Douglass North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

¹¹⁷ Gumo et al. ‘Communicating African Spirituality through Ecology’, 527.

forests from man's destruction. As a result, sacred sites survived over generations, acting as a reservoir for biodiversity. As an inherent enforcement characteristic of informal institutions, resources and habitats, taboos provided low monitoring, enforcement, and sanctioning costs. These characteristics render informal institutions feasible in countries where financial constraints make biodiversity conservation ineffective.

* * *

The spiritual foundation of the sacredness of places is culturally specific. Among the Bena, the sacredness of a place was founded on the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. It is such relations that led to the formation of various mystical-religious homelands' sacred places. The forest is the most common sacred place, fixed as centres of communication between the two worlds. Such forests originated from migration, settlement, burial activities, and ritual practices or both. Nyumbanitu sacred forest, being the central sacred forest among the Bena, illustrates that the sacred forest is an area for *matambiko*—it is a place where socio-cultural and political interests meet. The forest equalled life for people and animals and carried the history of the entire Bena society, which spread in various places through the installation of sacred sub-forests as a sign of new community life. Ancestors are considered central to the sanctification and guiding of sacred forests via ancestral spirits and folklore. While formal institutions use laws to enforce nature conservation, folklore materials played a crucial role in administering nature conservation among the Bena.

Chapter 4

4. The changing meaning of sacred forests and practices in Njombe: Colonial encounters, 1880s-1961

Because of the dynamism of traditional societies, changes in sacred forests are inevitable. While some forests show great resilience, others have been transformed to open canopies and, some new forests have emerged. The changing status of sacred groves and cultural practices in Njombe reveals a shift in the belief system due to internal and external factors, both historical and current. The variations show that groves have always existed at the intersection of multiple socio-cultural, political, and economic processes. The processes range from localised division of labour by gender, age and kinship to regional politics and global economics. Explaining how these sacred groves can both be fundamental social institutions and threatened green patches requires an approach that can account for their existence and their shifting social significance from colonial times. Although changes in sacred forest practices might have been experienced even in pre-colonial times, the colonial experience had unprecedented effects in the way traditionally sacred forests were maintained afterwards.

In 1885 the Germans began taking over what came to be known as ‘German East Africa.’¹ Led by Karl Peters, the Germans formed the German East Africa Company (*Deutsch-Ostafrikanische Gesellschaft-DOAG*), a chartered colonial organization responsible for the establishment of German East Africa. Although Peters acted independently of the German government, his government approved his actions.² The mainland became part of the German East Africa in 1886, and in 1891 the German government took direct control of the region. After the First World War, in 1920, German East Africa was transferred to the United Kingdom as its mandated territory under the League of Nations.³ Although the borders drawn by Germans were maintained, the name

¹ Following the 1885 Congress of Berlin, which delimited European spheres of influence in Africa and so set the ground rules for the Scramble for Africa, ‘German East Africa (German: *Deutsch-Ostafrika*, GEA)’ was established as German sphere in the African Great Lakes region. By 1890 German East Africa comprised the modern-day territories of Tanganyika (mainland part of Tanzania), Rwanda and Burundi.

² John Iliffe, *Tanganyika under German Rule, 1950-1912* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), 90.

³ Debora Grahame and Mindy Pang (eds), *Cultures of the World: Tanzania*. (Tarrytown, NY: Michelle Bison Publishers, 1998), 26; James Read, ‘Introduction’, *Government Publication Relating to Tanganyika, 1919-1961* (Microfilm Academic Publishers, 2006), p.4. [Online], <https://microform.digital/map/guides/R96996.pdf>, Accessed on 26 June 2017, 1550.

of the colony was changed to ‘Tanganyika.’ In 1947 Tanganyika became a United Nations Trust Territory under British administration, a status it kept until its independence in 1961.⁴ Meanwhile, the British had taken control of the island of Zanzibar as its protectorate, ruling through the Sultan from 1873 until 1963 when Zanzibar gained independence followed by a bloodless revolution on 12 January 1964. The revolution was made by Afro-Shiraz Party (ASP) after noting that the freedom obtained was for Arabs rather than Africans. In 1964 Tanganyika united with Zanzibar to form the United Republic of Tanzania. The seventy years of colonial rule in Tanganyika (1891-1961) led to multiple impacts, including on the belief systems that were vital for the establishment and management of sacred groves by the indigenous people.

Chapter four discusses the shifts in sacred sites’ meaning and practices over time within colonial encounters. It provides a discourse on how exogenous factors shaped the dynamics of the traditional institutions and their management of sacred forests over time. I start by discussing indigenous peoples and foreigners’ different perceptions of an African landscape, a distinction which was a key to how the two groups interpreted each other and related to the environment. I then proceed to discuss factors that shaped the original sense of holy places and practices and how such changes may have led to ecologically harmful practices. The discussion focuses on the impact of the colonial encounter as we consider it as the primary source of cultural change among the traditional people of the study area—as in the case of colonised communities throughout the world. There are various aspects of colonialism that shaped traditional cultures, but for this chapter, I discuss factors such as land alienation, colonial administration, economic systems, and Christianity. I indicate how each factor contributed to changing Bena culture and sacred traditions. In examining change, I will spotlight examples of Bena resilience in response to the alien forms of administration, economy, and religion.

4.1. One landscape, different perceptions between Africans and Europeans

People’s perception of a landscape and the environment differ in geography and culture. When considered as part of a larger landscape that includes mountains, forests, streams, shrines, animal habitats, and myriad resources and threats, the land takes on a different meaning. At the time of African colonisation, one of the significant differences between

⁴ Robert Heussler, *British Tanganyika: An Essay and Documents on District Administration* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1971).

Africans and Europeans was their moral attitudes towards nature. Such differences were strongly shaped by their different conceptions of reality. As such, there are interlinked lines of analysis that bear consideration for understanding the relationship between coloniser and colonised, from the time of the first contact through the colonial era. It is from such analysis that we can invert colonial stereotypes that celebrated western knowledge and lamented Africans as environmentally wasteful.

In traditional African thought, objective reality does not exist independent of its being known by anyone. Truth is what was known or experienced by humans' communion with it.⁵ In African ontology, reality seeks to maintain an equilibrium among the network of life forces in nature.⁶ African religious practices aim to preserve the harmony that existed between nature, reality and the natural community of things. Because African traditional beliefs were founded on nature, they had strong connection with the landscape. A practical example of an African understanding of nature was their consideration of physical objects as divine and as things in which gods, deities, spirits, and ancestors are made to manifest. Because God is the guardian of everything in nature, it was perceived that people do not have the freedom to destroy landscape merely to satisfy their needs and interests. Similarly, as Millar states, in many traditional African worldviews, earth or nature is not an individual property to which one can freely dispose of as they please.⁷ This moral view became a dominant theme in many African thought systems, including the Bena.

While for Africans nature was a worthy object for humans to morally respect, for Europeans nature was an external or objective reality and impersonal system for sole exploitation to their interests.⁸ As such, Africa's rainforests and jungles were to be harvested for export. Land and forests were to be converted into industrial and real estate complexes or into farms and plantations to produce cash crops for export.⁹ Fairhead and

⁵ Polycarp Ikuenobe, 'Traditional African Environmental Ethics and Colonial Legacy', *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* 2, no 4 (2014): 4.

⁶ Leopold, S. Senghor, 'Negritude: A Humanism of the Twentieth Century', in *I Am Because We Are: Readings in Black Philosophy*, eds. F.L. Hord and J.S. Lee (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts University Press, 1995), 49.

⁷ David Miller, 'Traditional African World Views from Cosmvision Perspective', in *Food for Thought: Ancient Visions and New Experiments in Rural People*, eds. B. Haverkort and W. Hiemstra (London: Red books, 1999), 131. The African moral attitudes towards nature partly contributed to European stereotypes that Africans are savages, uncivilised, barbaric, irrational, underdeveloped, and backward.

⁸ Vernon Dixon, 'World Views and Research Methodology', in *African Philosophy: Assumptions and Paradigms for Research on Black Persons*, eds. L.M. King, V. J. Dixon, and W.W. Nobles (Los Angeles: Fanon Centre Publication, 1976), 58.

⁹ Indigenous landscapes' misunderstanding was also experienced in other parts of the colonised worlds. For example, in his study of the Mexican landscapes in the Veracruz lowlands, Sluyter explains how Europeans misread the environment and the indigenous systems of resource management. Andrew Sluyter, *Colonialism*

Leach testify on the case of West Africa that, in the nineteenth century, Europeans misunderstood the meaning of indigenous intact forests and environments.¹⁰ They misunderstood African perception of the landscape in part because they encountered a culture where written traditions, norms, laws did not exist and so colonial officials, for example, needed to rely on semiotic interpretations.

The perception of natural resources and the sacredness of the landscape differed between Africans and Europeans. For instance, what the Europeans considered as a ‘bush’ played an active role in the social reproduction and lineage of the Africans. To indigenous peoples, supernatural beings, who influenced the life of the people in the surrounding area, inhabited the ‘bush’. Such land was emotionally identified with the ancestors as ‘sacred trust.’¹¹ The inhabitants’ meaning of the bush as the sacred place was not apparent to the colonisers who understood it as wilderness and areas of open access.¹²

We can illustrate the different perceptions of the landscape between Europeans and Africans through a diagram showing an understanding of landscape as mostly open access (European) versus landscape as a fully occupied with no public access (African). To foreigners (Europeans), areas of settlement differentiate from all other lands, whether fields or grazing lands or bush. These ‘outer’ lands to Europeans were lands in which any types of economic activity could occur. By contrast, indigenous peoples did not consider any lands as ‘open space’. First comer sites played particularly important roles in connecting the migrants with ancestors and legalising them to the lands they occupied. *Tambiko*, for example, was an important landscape in which all aspects of the Bena life were connected to the ancestors and between the kinsmen. In Figure 4.1, the darkened black line indicates different land usage, as perceived by foreigners and indigenous peoples (**Figure 4.1**).

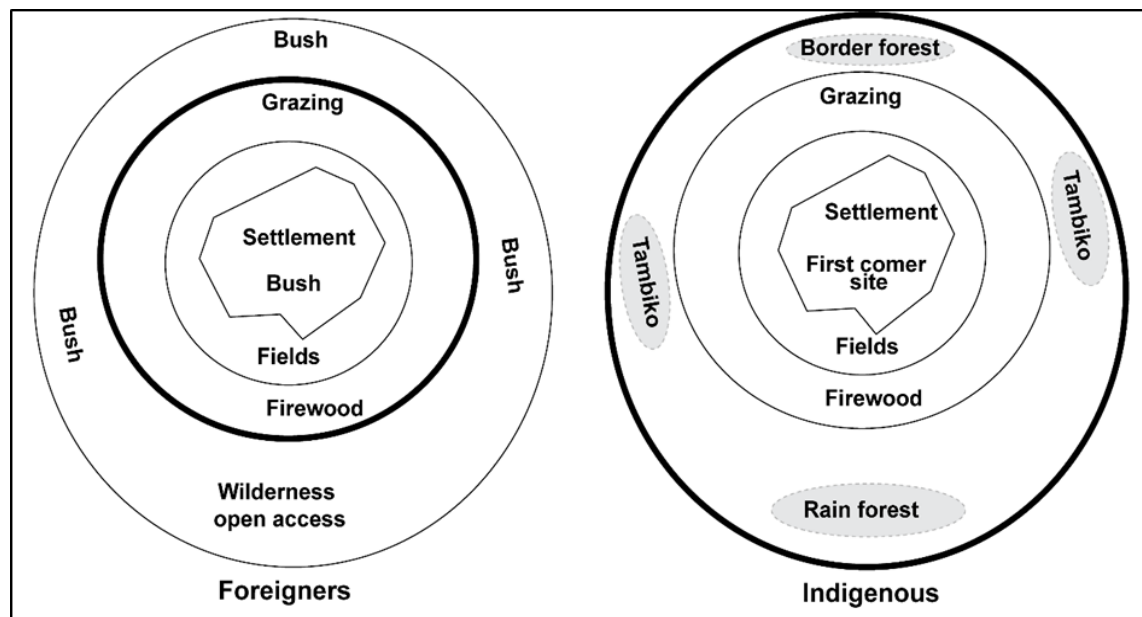
and *Landscape, Postcolonial Theory and Applications* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002), 267.

¹⁰ J. Fairhead and M. Leach, ‘False Forest History, Complicit Social Analysis: Rethinking some West African Environmental Narratives’, *World Development* 23, no.6 (1995), 1027-28.

¹¹ J.M. Balad and J.P. Platteau, *Halting Degradation of Natural Resources: Is there a Role for Rural Communities?* (Oxford: FAO, 1996), 193.

¹² J. Ylhaisi, ‘Traditionally Protected Forests and Sacred Forests of Zigua and Gweno Ethnic Groups in Tanzania’ (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2006), 8.

Figure 4.1 Different perceptions of the landscape, vegetation and the environment



Note: Landscape was perceived differently between the foreigners (Europeans) and indigenous (Africans). The bold lines indicate the border of the local community as seen through the two perceptions.

Source: Diagram adapted from J. Ylhäisi, 'Traditionally Protected Forests and Sacred Forests of Zigua and Gweno Ethnic Groups in Tanzania' (PhD diss., University of Helsinki, 2006), 8. Terms such as foreigners, indigenous and *tambiko* have been used by the author to fit the context of this study.

For locals, the landscape embodied with personal and social meanings, and their livelihoods closely intertwined with the physical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the lands. For outsiders, the African landscape were open lands ripe for economic exploitation.

Europeans colonised Africa to acquire raw materials for their industries and thought that Africans lacked the intellect to exploit their natural resources. Various historians have explored the environmental consequences of the colonial appropriation of natural resources such as wildlife, forests, minerals, and land.¹³ Some environmental problems facing Africa trace to their colonial experience as epiphenomena of its socio-cultural, economic, and political engagements with Africa.

The environmental and resource problems experienced in Africa raise the issue of the complex nature of colonialism and the complexity of the problems it created. Ekeh argues that we should understand colonialism as an event that created social structures, a culture, and a system of values and norms, sufficiently powerful and pervasive to determine people's actions and ways of life. Colonialism, he adds, manifested as relationships

¹³ William Beinart, 'African History and Environmental History', *African Affairs* 99, no. 395 (2000), 271.

between the elements of European culture and indigenous culture destroyed the existing traditional African social structures and left behind an unusual hybrid culture, which Africans could not fully understand and manage.¹⁴ Ekeh pinpointed the anomalous, enduring, pervasive, active and intractable nature of the relics of colonialism:

The impact of colonialism cannot be terminated abruptly in one day or one year...Colonialism, therefore, implies that the social formations could be traced to issues and problems that span the colonial situation into post-independence social structures in Africa.¹⁵

The invented tradition imported from Europe not only provided whites with models of command but also offered many Africans models of 'modern' behaviours which distorted the past. As argued by Terence Ranger, such traditions became in themselves realities which a good deal of colonial encounter was expressed.¹⁶ Because of the unhealthy mix of European and African cultures, we can question the conceptual adequacy of the notions of 'decolonisation' and 'neo-colonialism.' One may argue that because colonialism happened many years ago, the current environmental problems facing Africa cannot find traces to it. However, the enduring nature of colonial legacy makes such an argument specious. Among the Bena, the impact of the alien system in the traditional management of natural resources began with land alienation.

The African and European perception of landscape, then, needs to be understood through the socio-cultural prism of the two groups. Europeans lacked a proper understanding of African culture and vice versa. The rich symbolic differentiation between wilderness and settlement, the wild and the tamed, land exploitable or sacred, was differently understood. Despite their poor knowledge of the indigenous culture, European representation of African landscape still dominated in the decisions to occupy land; for Africans, those lands were not unoccupied, as the ancestral spirits resided there. European ideas and their failed effort to understand the wider psychological function of the African environment fuels the argument that the colonisers' appropriation of African nature contradicted indigenous understanding of human-landscape relations.

¹⁴ Peter Ekeh, *Colonialism and Social Structure, An Inaugural Lecture* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1983), 4.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Terence Ranger, 'The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa', in *The Invention of Tradition*, eds. E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 212.

4.2. The land alienation and the change in sacred landscapes in Njombe

Colonialism in Njombe may best be understood as indigenous peoples' forced disconnection from land and culture by another group. As Europeans took a firm hold of the region in the late nineteenth century, the seizure of indigenous land for resource extraction began. Colonial forest officers and land commissions confiscated land—including forested and potentially forested. Not surprisingly, the Bena contested appropriation of sacred forests such as Nyumbanitu and Iditima. The extent to which land alienation separated the Bena from their sacred landscapes or changed their views about sacred practices needs to be explored.

The experiences of colonial land alienation in Njombe began in the 1880s. It started when the Berlin Mission Society (BMS) acquired large holdings in the most fertile spots in different parts of Njombe.¹⁷ Under British colonial rule, at least one early British district officer argued for terminating the Society's lease. In 1938, BMS remained in possession of 11,973 acres in Njombe district, lands earmarked to support missionary work.¹⁸ By 1939 a total of 34 square miles in Ubena and 83 square miles in Njombe district as a whole had been alienated.¹⁹ In the same year, the British colonial government commissioned a new survey which resulted in what was known as the Northcote report. The report asserted that 'extreme poverty of soil' rendered most of the district useless for farmers.²⁰ In contrast, the 1940 Department of Agriculture report, while also commenting on poor soils, concluded that the district contained plenty of fertile soil and was well suited for cattle.²¹ The claims of poor soils by the authorities advanced the justification for further land alienation that would be frequently used after the Second World War.

Although there was opposition to land alienation since German colonial rule, tensions over land became more apparent after the Second World War when new threats of large-scale acquisition occurred. For instance, in 1947, a British private company sought 100,000 acres for wattle-growing. Meanwhile, the government tripled the size of 500-acre

¹⁷ Tanzania National Archives (TNA) 28/21: District officer (Njombe), 'Tour Report no 20', 4-16 December 1928.

¹⁸ TNA 28/19: Holdings in 1938 from Northcote, Report Number 1: General Land Report, p. 14. Although the Germans were interned by the British in 1917, they were later, in 1925 allowed to return and continue with their missionary work in Tanganyika.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ TNA 178/A.2/5.: District Commissioner (Njombe), 'Natural Resource Development and Rehabilitation Plans' (6 October 1952). The Njombe district commissioner echoed the Northcote report in 1952, commenting that the soil of the district was 'so utterly useless', and that most of Ubena 'is barren and of little practical use to man or beast.'

²¹ TNA Secretariat 12573. H. Wolfe (Deputy Director of Agriculture), 'Ubena Open Grasslands.'

parcels that were granted to European pyrethrum farmers in 1939.²² In 1949, with the expectation of an increase of non-African settlers, the Njombe district commissioner set aside land near Makambako for maize growing by the pyrethrum farmers.²³ In 1952 the British colonial government alienated an additional 9,000 acres south of Njombe town for pyrethrum and considered making further concessions for softwood and tea growing.²⁴

The permits for pyrethrum and maize production added to the 44,000 acres granted to the Colonial Development Cooperation (CDC) in 1949 for wattle plantation. The decision to plant wattle followed the practices of the Bena, who had been planting silver wattle for fuelwood since the early 1930s. The CDC judged Njombe district as suitable for black wattle, which contains an extract for tanning leather.²⁵ The government used the compliance of reluctant chiefs—compliance deemed as popular consent—to alienate the CDC land. For instance, when the Njombe District Commissioner reported on the project, he represented the chiefs' compliance as the consent of the people:

The Bena Tribal Conference was held at Imalinyi on October 17-20 [1949], one of the chief items of agenda being the acceptance by the Native Authorities of Ubena of the alienation of land for CDC Wattle Scheme. The Provincial Commissioner attended this meeting and after pointing out the merits of the scheme obtained the full support of the people for the alienation.²⁶

Obtaining chiefs' compliance to control lands for commercial agriculture was not easy. From the first days of indirect rule in the 1920s, land alienation placed the Native Authority chiefs in a dilemma. Opposition to land alienation was widespread among their subjects. Refusing to assist the British in expropriating land meant dismissal, and cooperating meant losing the respect of subjects. With or without the help of the chiefs, by the end of the 1950s a good part of prime farmland was controlled by the British colonial government (see **Figure 4.2**), including essential areas of ancestral veneration such as Nyumbanitu and Iditima sacred forests which, as shall be discussed, were the most contentious land seizures.

²² TNA 178/P.4/6/i: Njombe District Annual Reports, 1947, 1951 and 1952.

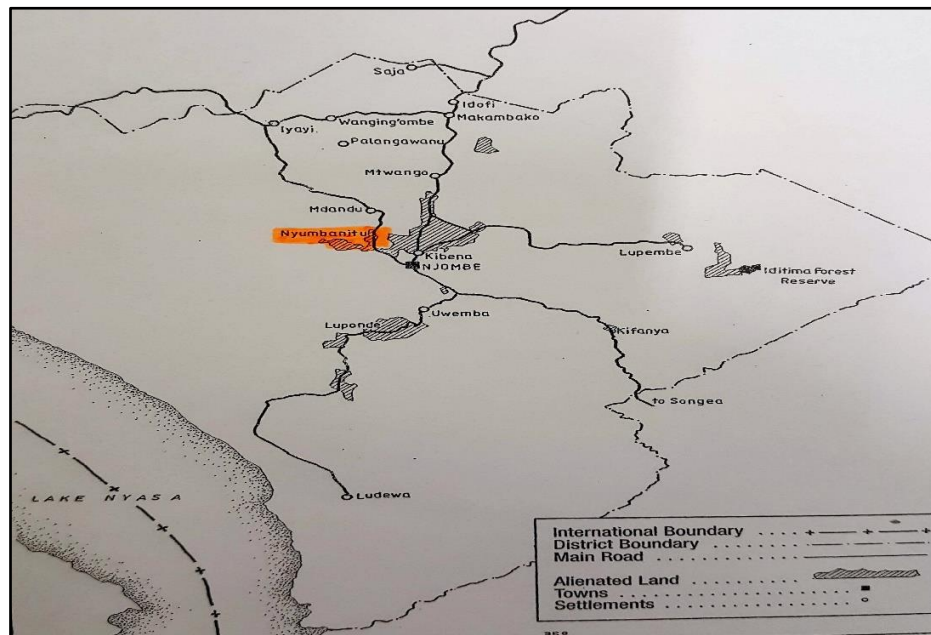
²³ Because maize fared poorly in Uwemba, the settlers sought farmland in less rainy areas where they could produce food for their workers.

²⁴ TNA 535/L.20/2: District commissioner (Njombe) to provincial commissioner (Mbeya), 5 October 1949, also, District commissioner (Njombe) to L.A. Notcut, Chairman, Uwemba Farmers' Association (25 April 1950).

²⁵ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 213.

²⁶ TNA 178/P.4/6/i: Njombe District Annual Reports, 1949.

Figure 4.2 Land alienated by the colonial government, Njombe, the 1950s



Source: Extracted from Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 211.

There were a widespread dissatisfaction and discontent directed at local chiefs, who many believed directly benefited from the Europeans' land alienation. The critics of the chiefs referred to the Colonial Development Cooperation concessions as partly a result of the chief selling the land. Giblin quotes Mwasumilwe, a then Bena subject of Chief paramount Mtenzi. He says

The government officials talked only with the chiefs... This is what caused problems. They took a very large area, in which people were living everywhere with their livestock... So, they moved to another place where they were not used to the conditions, and many of them died, together with their livestock.²⁷

The land alienation for CDC began in the 1940s during the reign of chief paramount Mtenzi who died before the alienation was completed. The evictions that followed were facilitated by Mtenzi's successor, chief paramount Joseph Mbeyela. The local villages received orders from the colonial government through their chief. Full expropriation was demanded of any area which the company determined it needed for its plantation.²⁸ In his interview with Giblin, chief Joseph Pangamahuti Mbeyela said in 1994 that he wished to oppose the evictions, but he was undermined by the villagers who eagerly took the cash compensation

²⁷ M.R. Mwasumilwe, quoted in Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 214.

²⁸ Jacob Orr. 'Where our Houses was, I Found only Trees'. Colonial Development and Shared Memory in the Village of Itulike, Tanzania' (MA Thesis, Concordia University, 2016), 37.

paid by the CDC.²⁹ Although Giblin seemed convinced by the chief's account, it is difficult to rely on only one informant. The claim that the villagers willingly sold their land conflicted with common Bena version of the story. Most interviewees pointed to the fact that the paramount chiefs who joined the British colonial government evicted the villagers from lands.

British administrators, greatly worried about the impact of CDC concessions on chief paramount Mbeyela and the sub-chiefs, made various efforts to use villagers' opinions regarding Bena labour migration in favour of the Colonial Development Cooperation. As they already understood the problems of labour migration that the Bena faced, the administrators portrayed the Wattle project as an alternative to labour migration. They claimed that the CDC would provide many jobs and cash income for smallholder wattle growers who would sell bark to their factory. As a source of employment, however, CDC was very disappointing: by 1955 the workforce was only 700 and rose to only 800 a decade later.³⁰ The company preferred hiring women at low wages rather than offering men wages comparable to those earned on sisal estates in distant Tanga. The low employment rate and low wages betrayed the promise made by the CDC and escalated other tensions between groups.³¹

After World War Two there existed great tension between clans and nationalists groups over clan identity. In their efforts to revive the declining ideas of the clan, chiefs wished to place land under the control of tribal authorities, but the nationalist favoured national authorities. The danger of land seizure made land—rather than national sovereignty—the most urgent political issue in Njombe in the 1950s.³² For instance, European land alienation in Ubena directly threatened the lives of the Bena people and the survival of sacred groves in some parts of Njombe. The area of the CDC concessions is the Nyumbanitu sacred forest—the central ritual forest for the Bena tribe. The Nyumbanitu sacred forest area was one of the most disputed areas during the CDC land alienation process. Nyumbanitu was politically more sensitive as it directly involved both the CDC and Joseph Mbeyela, the paramount of Ubena. Nyumbanitu, therefore, signified clan identity for the Bena, thus, it was important to be protected.

²⁹ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 214.

³⁰ Ibid, 216.

³¹ Orr, 'Colonial Development and Shared Memory', 38.

³² Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 209.

In the 1950s various efforts attempted to save Nyumbanitu ancestral veneration site from acquisition and destruction by the British colonial government. Political means were used apart from the folklore that associates the failure of Europeans to clear the sacred forests with ancestral spirits' mighty powers. Accounts show that chiefs agreed to give more land to Europeans for a condition that they spare the wood for *matambiko*. The area surrounding the grove was under Chief Joseph Mbeyela, who sold it to the CDC in 1949 with an agreement not to destroy the forest.³³ John Mhavile, one of the prominent political figures of the 1960s, affirmed that the groves were not removed due to more prosaic political considerations. 'I am sure,' Mhavile recalled in 2018, 'that the leaders conferred with the CDC so that [Nyumbanitu] would not be destroyed. I think there was an agreement. It is not that the tractors were unable to clear the area.'³⁴ The idea that there was an agreement between the chief and the CDC can be substantiated by the fact that Nyumbanitu and the tribal identity were primary sources of legitimacy for the paramount chiefs on whom the government and the CDC relied, persuading many villagers to vacate their homes and farms. As such, the government and the CDC arguably could have spared the NSF to support Mbeyela's legitimacy. Although NSF survived from being destroyed, the land that constitutes the forest was still included under the CDC lease; later it was transferred to Tanganyika Wattle (TANWAT) Company as CDC's successor.³⁵

The politics of land of the 1950s changed the Nyumbanitu sacred forest landscape. Although the Bena could continue their traditional worship at NSF, issues of ownership remained. The CDC and its successor TANWAT left the management and use of the sacred forest to the Bena clan leadership, who were thought to be the owners, but from the 1950s the TANWAT remained the *de-facto* owner of the land. The fact that the Bena clan had access to use and not own the property, which constitutes the sacred forest, altered the traditional management of the forest. Historically, clans owned sacred forests via ancestral ties. Although few problems have occurred regarding such arrangements, the caretakers attested to repeated threats by the company to seize the forest today.

European land alienation policies, 1880s-1950s, threatened not only the NSF but also the nearby Iditima traditional forest. Whereas the chiefs succeeded to save the NSF,

³³ M.A. Njana, W. Mugisha, and G.C. Kajembe, 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from NyumbaNitu, Southern Highlands Tanzania', *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation* 82, no. 1 (June 2012), 95.

³⁴ John A. Mhavile, interviewed in Kiswahili, by Edward Mgaya, Njombe 10 May 2018.

³⁵ Njana, Mugisha and Kajembe, 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources?' 95.

they failed to protect the Iditima ancestral veneration site. In 1954 the British colonial government decided to make the Iditima woodland a Forest Department reserve.³⁶ The decision to alienate the Iditima forest worried the Bena chiefs for three reasons. First, the process triggered a new round of expropriation—an act that would provide their critics with a new weapon. Second, the reservation of the forest would lead to its alienation to settlers. Third, the wood was an important symbol of chieftaincy authority, as the forest contained the site where the clan of the sub-chief of Lupembe requested their ancestors for rain on behalf of the entire sub-chiefdom. Iditima forest, therefore, symbolised the chief's position in the hierarchy of the Bena clans. Thus, the chiefs proposed that the grove remains in the hands of the Native Authority office themselves.³⁷ However, the British still justified their need to alienate the land on soil and forest conservation bases. In the early 1950s, the district administrators contended that the soil needed protection from harmful African farming practices. They held to that view even when advised by British agronomic experts that African farming did not degrade the land. British officials created the Iditima forest reserve following their belief in the superiority of British conservation policies.³⁸

The Iditima forest reservation remained the most contentious issue before the Native Authority officeholders, who at various times sat on the Bena Tribal Council and Njombe African District Council. The tribal councillors contended that government seizure of the forest would cause an environmental disaster. From the evidence of multiple witnesses from the Native Authority, it became clear in 1955 that the grove was for a long time conserved by local people and that *matambiko* took place in the forest each year. As Council meeting minutes in May 1955 summarised:

The local people celebrated the chieftdom's *matambiko* there in times of various problems such as famine and drought, in the war when they would pray for peace, and when different illness occurred among the crops as well as people...We safeguarded this forest very well so that it would not be

³⁶ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 226.

³⁷ Since late 1920s, various traditional chiefs in Tanganyika were designated as Native Authorities. Native Administration office, in first place administered the people through the instrument of their own indigenous institutions where they still existed and still functioned with the assent of the people. In this structure the order is the order of the Chief or the Council, whatever the indigenous institution may be, conveyed to their own people who are willing generally to obey the authority because they acknowledge its ascendancy. According to Sir Donald Cameron, the then British Governor for Tanganyika, the Native administrative system would expand as the people became better educated and, with delegated powers gradually extended as the people progress, that type of administration would become more comparable to British own form of local government. Such system entails more direct method of administration where the order means the order of the Central Government conveyed through its own officers, European or African, or through boards or councils set up by that government.

³⁸ TNA 178/P.4/6/i: Njombe District Annual Reports, 1951 and 1952.

harmed by fire, animals, or uncontrolled cutting of wood for construction, because of their reverence for the *matambiko* of the chiefdom.³⁹

The tribal councillors further argued that if the British colonial government wished to take over the forest without regard to local custom, the people would experience drought, famine, many deaths and other catastrophes.⁴⁰ Despite all the appeals by the chiefs and councillors to spare the Iditima forest, the British government acquired and reserved the forest in 1955. In the meetings that followed the seizure of Iditima forest, the councillors described the harm that had occurred. They argued that the seizure of Iditima forest removed the authority of the chiefdom of Lupembe and that lions and elephants began entering the forest and appearing in people's homes, destroying livestock, and eating some people. Such animals, the councillors stated, never dared enter the woodland before. They emphasised that it is an awful thing to destroy the ancient customs which were given to local people by God.⁴¹

The tribal councillors insisted that the chiefs could better preserve the Iditima forest than the Forest Department of the colonial government. The government promised that they could allow the *matambiko* to continue in the woods. In response, the African District Council argued in 1956 that 'simply allowing the *matambiko* is not sufficient to allow the local people to fulfil the responsibility placed upon them by customs.'⁴² The elders argued that since ancient times the forest was so well safeguarded that even its big trees thrived. The councillor's arguments seemed all more persuasive as the Forest Department could not effectively prevent fires, charcoal making, woodcutting or farming in its reserved areas.⁴³ Despite all the evidence in favour of the traditional forest management system, the British colonial Forest Department finalised the gazettelement of Iditima forest in late 1956.

The alienation of Iditima forest signified defilement. The Bena tribal councillors believed that the sacredness of the forests relied on the direct traditional custodianship. The forest would lose sacredness qualities if ownership and control transferred to colonial

³⁹ TNA 465/L.5/8: Minutes of meetings of Njombe African District Council, 5-7 May. Similar notes appear in the 25-27 October 1955 minutes from the same file.

⁴⁰ TNA 465/L.5/8: Minutes of meetings of the Bena Tribal Council, 3-6 August 1954, 4 April and 15-18 August 1955 and Minutes of meetings of Njombe African District Council, 5-7 October 1954, 5-7 May and 25-27 October 1955, and 6-8 June 1956.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² TNA 465/L.5/8, Minutes of meetings of Njombe African District Council, 5-7 October 1954, 5-7 May and 25-27 October 1955, and 6-8 June 1956.

⁴³ TNA 178/13/12, 'Game elephants and other shamba raiders'; TNA 178/12/A, 'Agricultural Reports.' TNA 77/12/18: 'Report for September-October 1952 of the Southern Highlands Forest Division', The Forest Department officials often attributed the difficulties in protecting the forest to the insufficiency and corruption of its forest guards

administration. Such seizure and unwarranted entry into the forests contaminated the sacred places.⁴⁴ Special services were needed to re-sanctify the forests to qualify for *tambiko*. The lack of control of the forests by Bena traditional leaders explains why they were unwilling to do *matambiko* in such forests even when Europeans would allow them to do so.

The language and procedures used by chiefs to rescue the alienation of the sacred forests clearly show that they were deliberately shifting discourses. They were moving into different phrases calculated to appeal to men and women whose experience was dominated by relationships of kinship and ancestors. Some arguments contained a finely tuned combination of expressions intended to appeal to both officials and subjects. As such, when the government decided to make the Iditima woodland a Forest Department reserve, the chiefs responded in the 1950s in a language that combined western conservationism with a traditionist view of a forest landscape.

Land alienation, then, stands as one of the colonial episodes that had lasting effects in Tanzania. The process was embarked on what was widely known in the colonial lexicon as ‘the native problem.’ By this phrase, the colonial administration justified their claim that natives were to be brought out of their jungles and shown the light. Under such pretence, and as far as the conservation of forest was concerned, the Germans and British in Tanzania carved out a considerable number of hectares of local and community forests as forests reserves.⁴⁵ However, the reservations restricted access to Africans rather than to Europeans. In appropriating the lands, Europeans desecrated the shrines and sacred forests which existed long before colonial administration. By defiling sacred forests, colonial officials gave no space to indigenous forms of environmental conservation. Such an ideology of control introduced a categorically secular view of forest value to their new possession. The Bena people resisted by talking about cultural aspects among themselves and turning to conservation aspects when they needed to confront the colonial administrators.

4.3. Colonial administration and economic systems, and the fate of Bena sacred forest practices

In colonial Tanzania, German and British administrations applied systems of direct and indirect rule. To understand how these systems impacted on sacred practices of the Bena, one must study the role that colonial administration and economic systems had in

⁴⁴ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 June 2019.

⁴⁵ These forests were reserved from African accessing them but Europeans still exploited the forests they claimed to have reserved.

assimilating or hindering the sacred practices of Bena culture. The fate of sacred practices in Ubena, Njombe District, provides an important case study to illustrate how exogenous factors altered belief systems that were vital for maintaining sacred forests.

The Germans who first ruled Tanganyika as part of German East Africa territory (1880s-1918) resorted to direct rule. In this system, the traditional authorities were replaced by hired administrators who, in Ubena, were popularly known as *Vanzagila*. The *vanzagila*, mostly employees of the government, were in most cases recruited from outside the region. For instance, by 1890 the highlands of Njombe were already divided into territories controlled by the Hehe, the Mshope Ngoni and the Sangu.⁴⁶ Following the defeat of Mkwawa in 1894-6, the German officer von Prince at Iringa removed large portions of territory, including northern Njombe, from Hehe authority. The Hehe *vanzagila* in the northern sections of Wanging'ombe were replaced with Sangu representatives who reported to German authorities at Iringa.⁴⁷

The Bena chiefs hired as local administrators worked as employees of the government rather than as traditional rulers—and so, were *vanzagila* as well. Thus, their power and survival depended on their effective handling of account books and collection of taxes from their subjects rather than the possession of traditional regalia. By working as government employees, chiefs could not exercise their regular duties as leaders of traditional *matambiko*. They stood at the middle between serving the government and their subjects. Those chiefs who were not employed by the Germans as *vanzagila* continued in their traditional roles but were ignored by the government, as they were not part of the colonial administration.⁴⁸

Bena leaders disputed the administrative arrangement to use employed representatives. For example, in 1897, when Wanging'ombe was given to the Sangu representatives, Mwangela, a chief whose family claimed historical control over Wanging'ombe, strongly opposed the decision. He took his complaint to the Berlin missionary, Cristoph Bunk, at Kidugala station who offered to represent Mwangela's case with the German authorities, which he did.⁴⁹ Mwangela saw the Berlin missionaries as his 'political liberators' and actively sought to ally with them.⁵⁰ Believing that he had the

⁴⁶ Nyagava, *History of the Bena*, 194.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 195.

⁴⁹ Jamie Monson, 'The Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania', 1870-1918, *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (1998), 105.

⁵⁰ Mwangela and his followers trusted Christoph Bunk than German officials. They considered him as their white 'chief' and 'lord'

support of Bunk, Mwangela then attacked the Sangu *vandzagila*, causing a period of ‘constant unrest, outbreak and war.’ Mwangela was ultimately led off to the Iringa garrison in chains. Disappointed in Bunk’s failure to come to their aid, the Mwangela clan turned against the Berlin mission.⁵¹

Germany colonial administrators resorted to attempting to control sacred forest traditions, as sacred forests held a multifaceted use—cultural, political, and economic value. Sacred forests were very important in uniting people during the Maji Maji War against German occupation in Tanzania’s Southern Highlands. Before the rebellion, German authorities were inclined to allow Africans to maintain the graves of the deceased in forests that they declared as reserves.⁵² But, the room for conducting sacred traditions closed after the rebellion. Sacred forests were feared among some German officials, not only as arenas for organising resistance but also for housing malevolent spirits. The German Governor’s Council understood the uniting cultural role of the forests, which is important in considering the post-Maji Maji period when the administration asserted control of the forests aggressively, sometimes targeting forests that had a spiritual meaning.⁵³

Unlike the Germans, the British—the second colonisers of Tanganyika (1919-1961)—employed an indirect rule system that heavily relied on the native authorities. Nevertheless, the British still introduced the native treasury, a poll tax, regulations, and court fees that together weakened the traditional power of the chiefs. In Ubena, the indirect system eroded the traditional hereditary succession of leadership, which was crucial for the continuity of *matambiko*. A chief was chosen by colonial state subject to meeting their qualifications, which included literacy and administrative experience. As such, the British could pass over a person who traditionally would succeed as a chief. For example, Mwangela served as leader of *matambiko* and British-appointed sub-chief in the 1920s. He was retired in 1929 for inefficient tax collection. Under the Bena traditional leadership succession system, Matumula would assume his father’s position as leader of *matambiko* and sub-chief. But he missed the Native Authority appointment, which went to his brother.⁵⁴ Matumula became a *Jumbe*—a bottom level representative in the British administration system. In 1942 the British again passed over him when selecting a sub-

⁵¹ Monson, ‘The Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania’, 105.

⁵² Thaddeus, Sunseri, ‘Reinterpreting Colonial Rebellion: Forestry and Social Control in German East Africa, 1874-1915’, *Environmental History* 8, no. 3 (2003), 433.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ TNA 178/A.2/5: Report of Mtwa Mkuu wa Ubena on a meeting with Jumbe Adamu Hingi and Magungila Ngera, 6 December 1956.

chief of Wanging'ombe. In 1945 they dismissed Matumula, replacing him as the *jumbe* of Iyayi with his younger brother, Ulaya.⁵⁵ To many villagers, the series of events explained why Matumula travelled to Bemba country in Zambia to obtain medicine that enabled him to summon lions and set them raiding across the countryside for human prey—attacks which they believed, ceased after the British replaced Ulaya with another brother, Magungila, whom Matumula was able to manipulate.⁵⁶

By 1950s, the sacred connections of chieftainship were not extinct but rapidly declining. With the British indirect rule, some of the individuals who held positions could not perform traditional rituals and so were not recognised by locals. British-appointed chiefs had no spiritual association with the groves found in areas of their leadership. The frustrations caused by the British indirect rule system to their subjects in the colonies are well summarised by Thomas Beidelman in his study among the Kaguru in Kilosa district, eastern Tanzania. He spotlights two issues. First, the indirect rule was a divide and rule system through which ethnic groups could not be integrated into a national state where citizens could hold common values. Second, although the system was said to operate based on traditional forms of authorities, customs and values that were held in many societies were poorly understood by officials who supervised native affairs. Consequently, many Africans lost hope and trust in chieftaincy as a sacred institution and Native authority in general.⁵⁷

Related to the colonial administrative system was the imperial economic system in which labour migration was integral. Regional differences within colonial Tanganyika led the Germans to establish labour reserves and plantations along the colony's coast and in the northeast.⁵⁸ Generally, both the planters and settlers required large numbers of workers for their built projects. Labour reserves were deliberately created in some regions of the colony to obtain sufficient and reliable supplies of labour. The creation of labour reservoirs, however, did not transform producers in these zones into migrant labourers. The process was also mediated by direct and indirect forms of coercion, notably the imposition of taxes to be paid in cash. For example, many men from Njombe travelled to sisal plantations in

⁵⁵ TNA 77/26/6: District Officer (Njombe) to Provincial Commissioner (Iringa), 15 December 1942 and 7 December 1946.

⁵⁶ Simon Mgya and Scandina Mgeni, interviewed by Edward Mgya, Igosi, 30 July 2018.

⁵⁷ Thomas O. Beidelman, *The Culture of Colonialism: The Cultural Subjection of Ukaguru* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 17-21.

⁵⁸ M.J. Mbonile, 'Towards Breaking the Vicious Circle of Labour Migration in Tanzania', *UTAFITI* 3 no.1, (1996), 91.

northeastern Tanzania during 1906-9, when tax collection became more thorough following the suppression of Maji Maji war.⁵⁹

After the First World War, British officials reinforced the structure of investment, production and trade that emerged during the German period. The colonial pattern of development was the only way to ensure a constant supply of labour to the plantations. In a colonial context, Njombe became a labour reserve district in the Southern highland zone of Tanzania, and many Bena from Njombe became labour migrants. Although no record exists to document precisely when labour migration began in Njombe district, records show that by the mid-1920s long-distance travelling for wage labour had become regular. By 1926, 20% of Njombe adult males were working outside the district, and the proportion remained between 20% and 30% through the 1930s.⁶⁰ During the interwar period, labour migration by Njombe people increased. Apart from the sisal plantations of northeastern Tanzania, labourers from Njombe were also in demand in other regions. The new areas of employment included: Iringa district, where European farmers depended on 70% of their migrant force from Njombe by 1924; Mufindi, where European settlers started growing tea in the early 1930s; and Chunya, where a gold rush attained thousands of panners and miners from Njombe.⁶¹ By the 1930s the Bena had provided workers as far as the South African gold mines, the Lupa gold mines and even the Northern Rhodesia copper mines.⁶² In 1938, for example, 7,700 of the 12,000 labourers who found work in the Lupa mining centre were men from Njombe.⁶³ In 1943 the Njombe district officials noted that only about a third of adult males resided in their home villages.⁶⁴ The number of absent men further increased during World War Two when the demand for plantation labour competed with demands for soldiers.

The migration of Bena labourers to various working places within and outside Tanzania transformed the sacred site's systems. Leadership within sacred traditions changed as men who were predominantly the custodians of the sacred traditions within

⁵⁹ James Giblin, 'Christianity and Society: Family Life, Indigenous Culture and Christianity in Colonial Njombe', in *East African Expression of Christianity*, eds. Thomas Spear and Isaria Kimambo (Oxford: James Currey, 1999), 311.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Edward Mgaya, 'Acquiring Human Capital Skills through Labour Migrancy: The Case of Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s', *International and Multidisciplinary Journal of Social Sciences* 5, no. 1 (2016): 58. Labour migration first was a process for men also become one for some Bena women.

⁶³ Giblin, 'Christianity and Society', 311.

⁶⁴ Ibid

clans left for employment.⁶⁵ Most of the sacred sites' male guardians whom I interviewed in this study had worked as migrant labourers before they returned home to retire. Most Bena clans replaced migrated male custodians with trusted substitutes. Substitutes, though, could not make significant decisions or lead the actual sacred practices. The real guardian was still expected to come home and lead major rituals at least once a year.⁶⁶ There were instances where the absence of the male guardian, and lack of a facilitator within the family, resulted in temporary neglect of sacred sites. For example, the Ukwama sacred forest practices were abandoned for about three years when most adult male family members were migrant labourers.⁶⁷ During this time, the family members claimed, there were many misfortunes associated with the ancestors 'demands.' The practices resumed after they sent a family member to summon Sanga, who was considered responsible for the *matambiko*.

Colonial authorities, then, replaced indigenous institutions with the state administration, weakening the socio-cultural and political powers of Bena chiefs. The colonial economy, by preferring male migrant labourers, threatened traditional practices related to the keeping of sacred forests in Njombe. The prolonged absence of Bena heads of *Matambiko* became a challenge which, although temporarily solved by a substitute male member, made it difficult to conduct traditional ceremonies at the sacred sites. The absenteeism of leaders of *matambiko* led, in some cases, to temporarily neglect of sacred sites.

4.4. Faith blending and the destiny of Bena ritual practices: the role of Christianity

The introduction of Christianity in Africa in the 19th Century accompanied colonialism. In Tanzania, Christianity was introduced between the 1880s and early 1900s by various missionary societies from Germany. Christian missions wanted to bring 'civilisation' through their teachings to what the Europeans referred to as 'primitive cultures' of Africans who needed complete acculturation.⁶⁸ To that end, the missionaries considered that their divinely-inspired mission would benefit the local people whom they met. The introduction of Christianity into African communities, who had for centuries practised their traditional

⁶⁵ Edward Mgaya, 'Labour Migration and Rural Transformations in Colonial Njombe District, 1900-1960s' (MA thesis, University of Dar-es-Salaam, 2015), 88.

⁶⁶ Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 June 2018.

⁶⁷ Adomeni Sanga, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Lupila, 20 June 2018.

⁶⁸ Farles Ilomo, 'Lutheran-Roman Dialogue: Reflections about Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)', a Lecture at University of Iringa, Tanzania (n.d), 1.

religion, had a profound impact in the way Africans would interact with their environment and amongst themselves. Faiths were blended, as a close study of the Bena demonstrates.

Compared to other areas of Tanzania, the southern regions were the last to receive missionaries. Berlin missionaries, first to be established in Njombe, set to work in the southwest part of the country. They were stationed at Kidugala and Yakobi.⁶⁹ Despite the delays, in Njombe Christianity had great influence compared to Islam, which despite its early introduction in Tanzania in the 9th century, by the 19th century was only dominant on coastal areas.⁷⁰ When the Bena began their massive migrations to the northeastern plantations for work, missionaries in Njombe worried that their converted Bena Christians would become exposed to the Islamic world. The missionaries acknowledged that they were competing with an expanding Islam, and, in such competition for religious dominance, urgency demanded extensive evangelisation and an adaptive approach rather than creating closed communities.⁷¹ As Bishop Vogt of the Holy Ghost Fathers wrote in 1912, 'our principal duty at present is to occupy the country by rural schools, to close it to Islam and the Protestants.'⁷² However, Islamisation was one aspect of social change in colonial Tanzania which was noticeably minimal in Njombe District.⁷³ An important appeal of Islam, sometimes mentioned by Bena Muslims who converted from Christianity, was its acceptance of polygyny. Nevertheless, Christianity remained the foreign religion that impacted on the social-cultural practices of the Bena.

Colonial Njombe was divided into two Christian parts: The Protestants, mostly Lutherans, constituted the majority in the highlands (northern region) while the Roman Catholics constituted the majority in the lowlands (southern region). The Lutherans managed all schools in Njombe, except for that at Manda.⁷⁴ There was great competition between the two Christian denominations. The Lutherans established first in Njombe, tried to prevent Catholics from setting up mission stations in Njombe and nearby areas by forming alliances with chiefs. For example, on 2 June 1933, two Catholic missionaries from Tosamaganga, a Consolata Catholic mission in Iringa, asked chief Mwemutsi in Ukinga for

⁶⁹ Jamie Monson, 'The Politics of Alliance and Authority in the Southern Highlands of Tanzania, 1870-1918', *The Journal of African History* 39, no. 1 (1998), 105.

⁷⁰ Abdulaziz Lodhi and David Westerlund, 'African Islam in Tanzania', March 1997. <http://www.islamtanzania.org/articles/islam2.htm> (4 January 2019).

⁷¹ John Illife, *A Modern History of Tanganyika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 218.

⁷² Bishop Vogt as quoted by Illife, *Ibid.* 218.

⁷³ James Graham, 'Changing Patterns of Wage Labour in Tanzania: A History of the Relations between African Labour and European Capitalism in Njombe District, 1931-61' (PhD diss., Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1968), 37.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

permission to establish a mission station. The chief asked them if they were Catholics. The two missionaries decided to conceal their real identity saying that they were ‘*Vapadele*’—‘padres’. However, the chief completely refused their request. He revealed that he had given his land to a Lutheran missionary named Tramp, and so he could not allow anybody, without consulting Tramp, to settle in the area.⁷⁵ Tramp thus established himself in the area and allied with the chief.

Although there were efforts by Lutherans to prohibit Catholic missions in Njombe, by 1950s Catholic stations were established alongside Lutheran Missions. For example, the Consolata father’s society successfully created a Catholic mission station in Tandala, three kilometres from the Berlin Lutheran mission post. With time, the Catholics became more influential than the Lutherans, as they provided many services, including building the Ikonda Consolata hospital—still the biggest private hospital in the Southern Highlands. In 1960, in one of the mission stations established by the Berlin missionaries at Igumbilo there was also a Catholic Benedictine mission in a neighbouring Sunji village.⁷⁶

Conflicts between the Lutherans and the Catholic missionaries continued as they competed for influence among African Christians. At Igumbilo, the Berlin missionaries built an elementary school that accepted children from both denominations as well as non-Christians. However, Fr. Octavian, a Catholic priest, refused to allow African children converted to Catholicism to attend such a school.⁷⁷ Towards the end of World War Two, missionaries from the United States and Scandinavian countries took over the missions established by the Germans. The relationship between Lutherans and Catholics remained divisive, however. The few available Lutheran missionaries kept their distance from the Catholic church.

The hostile relationship between the Lutherans and the Catholics missionaries in Ubena puzzled the Bena. Historically, the Bena communities welcomed foreigners who visited them. Even during religious rituals, passers-by were invited to take part in sharing a communal meal. For them, such ecumenism during religious rituals signified that God had accepted the offering or sacrifice. Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe, a Bena chief, emphasised that

⁷⁵Farles Ilomo, *Christianity: A secondary Religious Experience Among the People of Livingstone Mountains* (Soni: Vuga Press, 2011), 32-3.

⁷⁶ Ibid

⁷⁷ Farles Ilomo, ‘Lutheran-Roman Dialogue: Reflections about Evangelical Lutheran Church in Tanzania (ELCT)’, a Lecture at University of Iringa, Tanzania (n.d), 2.

Our *Vatwa* [ancestors] loves every humankind. The act of sharing a communal meal is therefore rejoiced. If someone passes-by the *tambiko* gathering where food and drinks are served, we cannot let them go with empty stomach. We shared whatever we had, and the ancestors always blessed the communal act. Welcoming strangers was our norm.⁷⁸

One can argue, therefore, that the foreign missionaries who came to establish their mission activities did not face much opposition from indigenous peoples because of the hospitality of the Bena. Howard Olson, an experienced missionary (1944-1988), confessed that hospitality in African communities is based on African ‘Ubuntu’—an African understanding of personhood in which the identity of the self is understood to be formed in a cooperative relationship with other human beings.⁷⁹ A person with Ubuntu is open and available to others and belongs to a greater whole.

The introduction of Christianity in Ubena transformed some indigenous beliefs and ritual practices which were key to the keeping of sacred forests. At the start, the missionaries converted some Bena chiefs. For example, in Njombe, the paramount chief Mbeyela II converted to Christianity and was baptised with the name ‘Joseph.’ Because chieftaincy was an important custodial institution for traditions, the conversion of the paramount chief signalled a significant challenge in the continuity of traditional beliefs and rituals related to sacred forests. Chiefs such as Mbeyela found themselves caught between adherence to traditions, which was necessary for their legitimacy to their subjects and adhering to Christian traditions, which would comfort European missionaries but weaken their traditional legitimacy. For instance, in the 1950s Mbeyela wanted to strengthen Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest (NSF) as a source of his authority as Bena paramount ruler. But as a Christian, he could not lead the *matambiko* personally, but instead had to leave it to the Kiswaga sub-clan.⁸⁰ Missionaries expected converted chiefs to abandon traditional practices in favour of Christian faith and help to convince their subjects also to convert. Contrary to expectations, however, most chiefs and their subjects opted to blend traditions and Christian practices to please Bena and missionaries.

Missionaries were astonished by the unwillingness and stubborn refusal of most Bena to be open to the new Christian religion and their lack of appreciation for the sacrifices the missionaries were making. A certain level of pressure was exerted to convert the Bena

⁷⁸ Eliasi Mwaluko Mkongwe, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula 26 May 2018.

⁷⁹ Farles Ilomo, *African Religion: A basis for Interfaith Dialogue Today* (Dar es Salaam: Dar es Salaam University Press, 2013), 103.

⁸⁰ Julius Vangameli Msigwa and Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu and Ilembula, 10 and 23 May 2018, respectively.

into Christianity and abandon *matambiko*. For instance, in the 1890s, after the missionaries acquired extensive holdings in the most fertile land in Njombe, they required that Africans who wished to live on this prime farmland to renounce polygamy, attend Christian services, send children to missionary schools and refuse participation in ‘pagan’ dancing and rituals.⁸¹ The missionaries used the very same land alienated from the very same Africans to persuade them to denounce their sacred practices and adopt Christianity. To African converts, the missionaries established in Njombe were functioning as ‘chiefs’ in their mission stations. There were instances when they frequently preached that their converts should no longer obey the rule of their *vatwa*.⁸²

The conflict between traditional protection and Christianity was common in African societies with sacred grove traditions. In most cases, such conflicts led to the cutting of some sacred groves. In a seminal essay, Lynn White (1967) argued that the Judaeo-Christian worldview was at the root of ecological crisis. Specifically, on sacred forests, White wrote:

To a Christian, a tree can be no more than a physical fact. The whole concept of the sacred grove is alien to Christianity and to the ethos of the west. For nearly two millennia Christian missionaries have been chopping down sacred groves, which are idolatrous because they assume spirit in nature.⁸³

However, colonial Christianity was never a single, simple, or monolithic environmental connotation. Referring to colonial New Zealand, James Beattie, and John Stenhouse (2007) argued that “Christian and environmental discourses interpenetrated in irreducibly diverse, complex and contingent ways.” They challenged Lynn White’s claim of harmful Christianity and argued instead that most Christians considered themselves to have a duty to conserve nature.⁸⁴ Complex as it was, Christianity had both positive and negative impacts to nature in Njombe. For instance, while in most Christian missions Bena converts were encouraged to plant trees and conserve nature, missionaries were very instrumental in clearing forests that were associated with ancestral veneration –*matambiko*. Sacred forests among the Bena was not compatible to Christian environmental meaning. Mzee Jonathan Chaula recalled the incident in which their sacred grove was cleared:

After I was converted to Christianity [Catholic] often the priest used to visit my house and talk about the word of God. One day he realised that we had

⁸¹ Giblin, *History of the Excluded*, 212.

⁸² S. Nyagava, *A History of the Bena to 1914* (Peramiho: Peramiho Printing Press, 2000), 245.

⁸³ Lynn White, ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis’, *Science* 155, no.3767 (1967), 1206.

⁸⁴ James Beattie and John Stenhouse, ‘Empire, Environment and Religion: God and the Nature World in the Nineteenth-Century New Zealand,’ *Environmental History* 13, no. 4 (2007), 414-15.

a *tambiko* to which I was a leader. From that moment the priest did not stop telling me to abandon the *tambiko* tradition and clear the forest—which he said had ‘bad spirits.’ After a long time of resisting, in 1952 the forest was cleared under the help of other converts sent by the priest himself. There followed, however, a great conflict between me and my clan members who still wanted to practice the traditions.

Declaration against sacred forests by Christians is not new-found in history. Emperor Theodosius II, issued an edict in the fifth century that sacred groves should be cut down ‘unless they had already been appropriated for some purpose compatible with Christianity.’⁸⁵

The increased influence of the missionaries to the local people eroded the sustainability of the Bena beliefs and rituals related to sacred forests. Converts’ allegiance to Christianity placed chiefs’ control of their subjects in jeopardy. Although missionaries may not have seen themselves as colonisers, the Bena and their chiefs usually did not separate missionaries from other European groups who subjugated and overpowered the native people. For this reason, in 1904 *Mtwa* Pangamahuti Mbeyela planned an independent attack on the mission at Yakobi before the Maji Maji war began.⁸⁶ Dissatisfied with the mission’s interference with Mbeyela’s leadership, the Berlin mission in Nyikolwe to the south became the target of an armed assault. In September 1905, *mtwa* Pangamahuti Mbeyela and his two sons, Ngosingosi and Mpangile, led an armed assault on the Yakobi mission in Unyikolwe.⁸⁷

Apart from interference in local leadership, missionary teachings increasingly changed the Bena perception of their ancestral spirits. Missionaries taught the existence of one superior monolithic God that treated ancestral spirits, deities, and other essences as false and useless. They condemned as evil witchcraft any practices that involved consultation with ancestral spirits in sacred forests. De-sacralisation of nature, therefore, became the norm for the introduced Christian religion. In addition, traditional healers were labelled as witchdoctors⁸⁸—a term that undermined their role as medical practitioners on whose services locals depended. With Christian teachings, the local cultural practices,

⁸⁵ J.D. Hughes, ‘Sacred Groves: The Gods, Forest Protection, and Sustained Yield in The Ancient World’, in *History of Sustained-yield Forestry: A Symposium*, ed. H.K. Steen (1984), 336.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 246.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Elias Mkongwe (Chief and Regional chairperson of the traditional healers in Njombe), interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 May 2018.

including sacred traditions, were considered idolatry.⁸⁹ The Bena cosmology of life after death changed from the belief of one becoming ancestors upon death to the notions of heaven and hell—holy places of afterlife for people who converted to Christianity, and those who did not, respectively.

Christian religion changed the traditional Bena culture of burying the dead. The missionaries encouraged their converts to bury their dead in public cemeteries. As such, some converted Bena abandoned their tradition to bury the dead around their homesteads—except for infants, who were born prematurely.⁹⁰ Burying dead converts at public cemeteries was considered a hygienic practice. Further, the exercise allowed a Christian ceremony to be performed. In this regard, Christian teachings ridiculed the myth and taboos of the Bena traditions, which were instrumental in natural resources management. Weakened traditional institutions would ineffectively manage sacred sites.

Christianity provoked class tensions among the Bena groups. It created a class of indigenous elites whose status emanated from their alignment with the colonisers' culture—Christianity, rather than their own. Indigenous people who maintained their sacred traditions were assigned a lower-class status, as they were considered backward and primitive. Their practices were deemed evil as they worshipped the spirits of the dead. Thus, as argued by Wolfgang Gabbert in the case of Nyakyusa of Tanzania,⁹¹ in Ubena, Christianity was particularly attractive to younger men and women. Older males, who had privileged access to ancestors and functioned as mediators between the young and the spiritual forces, continued the old practices of *matambiko*.

Membership to the 'progressive' class of Christians offered material benefits. These benefits were important to the Bena whose other modes of survival were limited due to colonial government dispossession of their ancestral lands.⁹² Njombe, though a marginal position within the colonial economy as a labour reserve, was an important area for Christian conversion. The absence of opportunities to enter the colonial economy created widespread enthusiasm for missionary education and patronage among the Bena, a process documented in other parts of the world. For instance, in his studies on Amazonian Indians

⁸⁹ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd Edition (Oxford: Heinemann, 1989), 72. Mbiti argues that African rituals to appease ancestral spirits are not form of worship.

⁹⁰ The burying of the dead in public cemeteries, as required by Missionaries, was contrary to the traditional practices of burying on family or clan home yards—a practice which was the essence for the formation of most sacred forests among the Bena.

⁹¹ Wolfgang Gabbert, 'Social and Cultural Conditions of Religious Conversions in Colonial Southwest Tanzania, 1891-1939', *Ethnology* 40, no. 4 (Autumn, 2001), 304.

⁹² Marjorie Mbilinyi, 'City' and 'Countryside' in Colonial Tanganyika', *Economic and Political Weekly*, 20, no. 43 (1985), 90.

in Brazil and on Aborigines in Australia, Pollock points out that the introduction of a cash economy accelerated the conversion to Christianity among the natives.⁹³ Christianity offered schooling, where schools were lacking. The opportunity to gain education and better living conditions, associated with conversion to Christianity, appealed to some Bena. In Ubena, the Mkongwa were one of the privileged clans who converted early to Christianity and strengthened their political position.⁹⁴

Christianity, then, was an alien religion which impacted on the way the pre-colonial Bena interacted with their ancestors through *matambiko* practised in sacred forests. Rather than a relic of pre-colonial ideas and practices, African religion fused modern religious traditions with new beliefs and practices. From the time of colonial contact in the late 1880s, Europeans misconceived African religion and people's adherence to it. For Europeans, African beliefs and sacred practices were satanical. For the Christians, the believers of African religion were 'pagans'—as 'Kafir' for Muslims. As such, missionaries taught the indigenous people new Christian values that, as discussed in the following section, would replace the traditional sacred practices that were key to maintaining sacred forests among the Bena. While adherents of African religion considered co-existence of the two faiths, they never received the same appreciation. Instead, the missionaries believed that Africans must convert to Christianity and thought that the process must be rapid. But they instead encountered a prolonged process of social change and gradual Christianisation.

4.5. Weakened but not extinct: Resilience in indigenous beliefs and sacred practices

Flemming Hansen, a Danish pastor, lived and preached among the Bena of Ulanga, Tanzania from 1986 to 1996. He studied the tensions between traditional Bena religion and Lutheran Christianity and offered the following insight:

Due to the historical course and problems in communicating the Gospel contextually, a parallel structure has gradually developed among the Christians between traditional Bena religion and Christianity in belief, thinking and cultic mode of expression. For many Christian Wabena, the present outcome is that both religions still, largely without interfering with one another or being mixed, contribute in forming their identity and world view.⁹⁵

⁹³ D.K. Pollock, 'Conversion and 'Community' in Amazonia' in *Conversion to Christianity*, ed. R. Hefner (Berkeley, 1993), 171.

⁹⁴ Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 May 2018.

⁹⁵ Flemming Hansen, 'Mission, Church and Tradition in Context: Emic Perspectives on the Encounter and Tension between Traditional Bena Religion and Lutheran Christianity in Ulanga, Tanzania' (PhD diss., University of Aarhus, 2004), 14.

Hansen's observation denotes the presence of a dual religious systems, where people simultaneously follow the religious practice of two distinct systems. Thus, a new religion co-exists with the old religion rather than replacing it.

Previous social science discussions frequently considered systematic reorganisation of individual beliefs and radical personal changes to characterise change processes. The total transformation conceptualisation misses the fact that the alteration from one belief system to another does not necessarily imply a fundamental transformation. Although colonialism reformed the human-nature relationship in the Bena society, the host societies were not all-passive: they did not wholly adapt to the new culture and abandon their own. As resilience scholars would argue, one should not conclude that the alien culture extinguished indigenous beliefs and ritual practices. One must, therefore, examine the kind of resilience these communities had as they encountered the foreign culture. We can study such resistance by exploring how the indigenous people responded to exogenous factors, the changes they made in their sacred practices and how such changes were justified in the context of traditional beliefs to allow continued sacred site practices.

Bena sacred forests could have completely lost their sacredness if the site owners entirely lost control over the sites. Such a total loss did not occur among the Bena even as the colonial government alienated their prime lands. Because of the importance of the 'centre of the world' where ancestors could be communicated, the Bena always sought to establish sacred forests even as their former forests were seized or made forest reserves by the government. For instance, when the British government in 1955 made the Iditima sacred forest a forest reserve under the forest department, the Lupembe chieftaincy established and sanctified new forests for ancestral veneration.⁹⁶ Land alienation, therefore, led to re-allocation of some sacred sites rather than to discontinuation of tradition.

The weakening of leadership within sacred site-owner families did not lead to the demise of sacred forests. When the male guardians of the sacred sites were recruited for work in distant places, most families envisaged ways to remain connected to the traditions. They found interim leaders and guardians.⁹⁷ It was essential to maintain the practices, as for believers ancestral spirits protected those at home from evil spirits and protected their migrated members from unknown spirits in the workplaces. Both the direct German rule and British indirect rule systems, despite their weakening of traditional leadership systems,

⁹⁶ Elineus Msambwa interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Lupembe 30 June 2018.

⁹⁷ Lunodzo Mwalongo, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Igosi 15 July 2018.

failed to make the Bena abandon their attachment to their *Vatwa*—a vital aspect in their socio-political and economic wellbeing.

Similarly, for all Bena to abandon their traditional practices and completely adopt a new religion required the conviction that ancestral spirits do not exist, or that they do not have any role regarding maintaining the wellbeing of their living kin. Christianity taught about life after death, with Christ, the mediator. Although the Christian teaching about afterlife aimed to create and impart new faith, the afterlife concept held less appeal to some Bena. Instead, the instructions reinforced the Bena worldviews about the afterlife and made them consider their worldview as like those of their counterparts. The Christian concept of continuity of life, humanity, supernatural power, and celebration⁹⁸ complemented rather than replaced the Bena traditional beliefs and practices. Thus, for those whom Christianity appealed, they converted, but others continued with traditional worships in sacred forests sustaining the *matambiko* (singular *tambiko* for ancestral veneration).

Related to African religious continuity was the presence of only a few European missionaries. By 1930s there were only about ten European missionaries in the entire Njombe district.⁹⁹ As such, the spread of Christianity in Ubena was not exclusively a confrontation or communication between European missionaries and Africans. Because of their limited number, the success of missionary work largely depended on Africans who worked as missionaries on their own.¹⁰⁰ In Ubena, European missionaries had little control over bush schools and outstations. In these places, African evangelists acted independently.¹⁰¹ Thus, the kind of Christianity they preached integrated numerous elements of African religion. Hence, remarkable continuities in the traditional worldview could be detected in Bena Christians. For example, the conventional idea of social control through spiritual means survived among the Bena converts, though the power to inflict sanctions by expressing a curse was ascribed to the pastors or other church authorities as opposed to lineage elders in a customary way. In some areas, particularly those settled by Catholics, missionaries fostered what Nutini called ‘guided syncretism’ in a context of 17th century Mexico.¹⁰² Catholic fathers in Ubena emphasised similarities between Bena traditional religion and Catholicism, and they associated ancestral spirits to the angels of

⁹⁸ Calvin Richer, ‘Christianity as an African Religion’, in *African Religions: A Symposium*, ed. N.S. Booth (New York: NOK Publishers, 1977), 267.

⁹⁹ Gabbert, ‘Social and Cultural Conditions of Religious’, 305.

¹⁰⁰ Gregory H. Maddox, ‘African Theology and the Search for the Universal’, in *East African Expression of Christianity*, eds. T. Spear and I.N. Kimambo (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 29.

¹⁰¹ Simon Mgya, Interviewed with Edward Mgya, Igosi 30 July 2018.

¹⁰² H. Nutini, *Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala* (Princeton, 1988), 77-83.

Catholic Christianity. The analogy appealed to some Bena who thought that the new faith complemented rather than replaced their traditional beliefs.

For individuals to whom Christianity appealed, conversion followed, but they were mostly quasi-converted. For instance, while missionaries viewed sacred groves and *matambiko* as hindrances to Christianisation, most Bena converts found it difficult to separate from the practices of their ancestors. Their reluctance to completely abandon their traditional methods explains why convergent-divergent tendencies were common among the converts. The Bena exhibited a form of accommodation and syncretism.¹⁰³ Although data compiled by David Barrett, a well-known missionary statistician, implied that African traditional religion was moving towards extinction,¹⁰⁴ the reality of it in Ubena seems to point to the opposite. Among the Bena, the religious practice became more of parallelism between two thought systems, an official—Christianity, and a popular—traditional. For instance, Christianity is mostly applied by the Bena to gain eternal life while at the same time using traditional means to manage the present world. Since the present constitutes what is ‘real,’ it established the popular belief. When commenting on the process of Christianisation in Africa, Magesa emphasised that ‘Changes may take place during the process, but mostly only on the surface level, as the traditional worldview still forms the basic concept and essential background, and still exerts deep influence on the Africans; much more than many Christian leaders and western or westernised academics care or dare to admit.’¹⁰⁵

The custodians of *matambiko* kept two identities: they practised Christianity while still leading cultural practices within their families and clans. For example, although chief Joseph Mbeyela converted to Christianity, he could not abandon his attachment to the *matambiko* practices at NSF, which justified his position as a Bena traditional leader.¹⁰⁶ Similar to the practice of most of his converted subjects, Mbeyela attended church services on Sundays and kept to old practices on regular days—a tradition which frustrated the

¹⁰³ I adopt the term accommodation to explain a situation where two opposing cultures co-exist without conflict and syncretism to mean a blending practice from two different cultures to form a new trait.

¹⁰⁴ David Barrett’s (1927–2011) had travelled to nearly every country in the world, compiling information on the religious status of ‘every soul on earth’. The result was the *World Christian Encyclopaedia* (WCE) 1982, a thousand-page volume listing 20,000 Christian denominations and recounting the history of Christianity in every country from the time of Christ to the present. Barrett also provided a detailed snapshot of the status of all religious affiliations, the first time such a comprehensive treatment had been achieved. In the years that followed, the WCE was cited extensively in both Christian and secular publications.

¹⁰⁵ Laurent Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis books, 1998), 18.

¹⁰⁶ Julias and Alex Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgya, Nyumbanitu, 10 May 2018.

missionaries who thought that by converting the chief, his subjects would convert more rapidly.

The Bena did not see a difference in aims between missionaries and the colonial governments. They still believed that missionaries could ruin their society's cultural practices. Consequently, when the missionaries prohibited the converts from dual traditions, Bena mostly ignored the prohibition. Chief Elias Mkongwa recalled people's reaction to missionaries saying '*Nde tuhelele hunyiliha Inguluvi hukanisa ja vasungu avatwa vasivipa? Kiba tunyilihage vondi.*' [If we worship white people's God in the church, shall we not be troubled by the ancestors' spirits? We would instead worship the two].¹⁰⁷ The double identity assured people that they would benefit from the two worlds—Christianity and traditional religions. Most Bena found that Christianity could not replace the long-held traditions of their ancestors.

Christianity failed to provide people with adequate services for their daily lives. It taught about abandoning traditional healing practices and *matambiko*, but by 1940s, there was only one very old government hospital serving the region—a hospital in Njombe town.¹⁰⁸ In the 1950s when the government put great efforts to construct cattle dip to improve cattle health, paramount Mbeyela and other councillors responded by asking why administrators did not demonstrate equal concern for human health by acting upon their request for health services. Moreover, most could not afford the high charges for medical services offered in the hospitals. For the Bena, full adoption of Christianity implied a more difficult life than before. Emphasis on instant payment upon treatment was a strange concept for the Bena. In the traditional system, in which healers freely obtained medicine from sacred forests, later payment would be arranged with the conventional healer if a patient could not pay for the treatment received. It was considered dangerous for a healer to refuse a patient for not being able to pay instantly.¹⁰⁹

Christianity did not offer holistic healing. In African culture, a healer should focus on both spiritual and physical healing. By contrast, modern medicine was seen to be able only to cure physically. Also, missionary medicine could not cure 'magical' and 'indigenous' diseases—which were cured through *tambiko*. These were diseases that modern medicine did not recognise. Halan Mfugale recalled people complaining that 'their

¹⁰⁷ Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 May 2018.

¹⁰⁸ Jacob Orr, 'Where our house was, I found only trees' Colonial Development and Shared Memory in the Village of Itulike, Tanzania', (MA Thesis, Concordia University, 2016), 47.

¹⁰⁹ Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, (Chief and Njombe regional Chairman of the traditional healers) interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 26 May 2018.

medicine only cures their diseases, ours cures both'.¹¹⁰ Missionary medicine, therefore, created a vacuum among the Bena who felt deprived by the new form of healing. As such, it was difficult for the Bena to abandon their *matambiko*. To cater to African healing needs, some so-called 'healing churches' started to emerge in Africa in the 1950s established by Africans themselves.

Therefore, neither the colonial administration system nor their economic system radically changed traditional sacred beliefs among the Bena. Similarly, although Christianity aimed to replace traditional religion, its adoption by the Bena did not lead to the abandonment of sacred site practices. The approval of Christianity was based on individual convictions rather than the whole community, but even conversion did not radically change personal beliefs. For those who converted, Christianity could not provide much congruence with most aspects of their African religion. Many Bena became quasi-Christians who espoused Christianity while maintaining traditional practices. Sacred site guardians did not completely adopt Christianity, a conversion that would have jeopardised the sacred practice for the whole family or clan. Only a few full Christian converts lost respect for the sacred sites practices.

* * *

Between the 1880s and 1961, German and British colonial administrations, often aided by missionaries, placed considerable pressure on Bena traditions and ways of life. In many contexts, the colonial state produced an elite group of natives beyond the traditional royal families, some of whom deviated from keeping traditional practices. The state alienated the fertile lands—some of which contained sacred forests. Some of those forests were made forest reserves, prohibiting access for cultural traditions even when the native councillors resorted to western environmental discourses to explain the importance of cultural practices for sustainability of the forests. The colonial administration system re-ordered the traditional leadership systems to suit the administrative objectives of the government. Hence, some tribal leaders lost power, with implications for ownership of sacred sites. The economic system compelled household male members, some of whom were sacred sites guardians, to migrate to distant workplaces. Christian teachings changed the way some Bena perceived their ancestors, their environment as well as sacred practices.

¹¹⁰ Halani Mfugale, interviewed by Edward Mgya, Nyumbanitu, 23 May 2018.

Despite colonial pressures, many Bena traditions survived. While undermining Bena cultural conception of their landscapes, colonial administrative and economic pressures, migration, and Christianity did not completely alter sacred site practices. Our examination of Bena beliefs in ancestral spirits and the magical powers of sacred site show that sacred practices and sacred forests survived colonial interventions. The continued presence of such places in various parts of Ubena suggests that none of the exogenous factors resulted in complete abandonment of the sacred practices among the Bena. Thus, while changes took place during the process, the changes were mostly on the surface as the traditional *matambiko* persisted as essential background exerting deep influence on the Bena relation with their landscapes.

Cultural survivals differed by time and place. Areas that suffered colonial land acquisition witnessed less survival of sacred groves as forests were confiscated and declared reserves or cleared for farming. Similarly, areas where Christianity gained numerous converts, experienced more neglected cultural practices than areas where Christianity was still at infant stages. The German colonial period pressured Bena cultural practices less than the larger period of British rule in Tanganyika.

Chapter 5

5. Sacred forests' dynamics and endurances in the post-colonial Njombe, 1961-2019

Understanding contemporary African landscapes requires analyses that build upon ideas of change (and continuity) to explore the contemporary postcolonial environmental history of specific communities. While the traditional Bena communities held nature to be sacred, growing pressures exist to view forests as a source for profit exploitation. Increasingly the materially driven world necessitates separation between religion, spirituality, and nature protection. Chapter five discusses economic drives against sacred forest conservation and explores sacred sites as contested terrain among and between owners, other locals and local government authorities and the emerging tourist business. It tests whether the young generation of Bena follows sacred traditions and discusses the growing ecological consciousness behind current conservation of sacred groves. The chapter argues that while the culture of managing sacred sites by traditional Bena has stood the test of time, it has and continues to redefine itself systematically. In examining traditional institutions' flexibility to accommodate conflicting socio-cultural, economic, political, and ecological interests, we question whether the dynamics of the conventional institutions pose a threat to the sustainability of sacred forests.

Some scholars of traditional resource management have suggested that sacred natural sites have an unchangeable, eternal divine nature that cannot be ruined by changes in the material world. Other scholars have acknowledged changes in the traditional systems of management of sacred sites but ascribe the changes to external factors such as colonialism and introduced religions. Little is said, therefore, regarding the broader socio-political and economic issues emanating from the societies' internal dynamism. It is thus important to examine various dynamics that happen in the sacred grove's traditions. As noted by Arnold and Gold, 'sacred landscapes may be constructed, manipulated, otherwise reimagined through cultural politics.'¹ In examining such fluctuations among the Bena of Njombe, we consider changes in beliefs and practices related to sacred forests as a

¹ P.P. Arnold and A.G. Gold, 'Introduction: Re-rooting Religion and Nature Studies', in *Sacred Landscapes and Cultural politics: Planting a Tree*, ed. P.P. Arnold and A.G. Gold (Aldershot, U.K: Ashgate Publishing Ltd, 2001), xv.

characteristic also of the postcolonial period. In doing so, we recognise the complexity of history.

5.1. From forest to a tree: economic drives versus sacred forest conservation

With political ambiguities that followed Tanzania's independence in 1961, most traditional institutions which had reinforced the preservation of common property resources collapsed. In some parts of the country, these regimes turned into open access situations. The ambiguous nature of authority during *ujamaa* (familyhood)² delineated management based on kinship or chiefly hierarchies as 'backwards,' while the 'modern' state was unable to manage the same resource effectively. The neglect of traditional institutions in postcolonial Tanzania fuelled the abandonment of some sacred groves—a process which began during colonial rule.

Sacred forests, just like a well-built house, needed to be compact. Their protection by Bena communities was based on the belief that keeping them in a relatively undisturbed state would express an important relationship of human beings with spirits and nature. A typical sacred grove was, therefore, expected to be thick with natural trees of various species. A conflict, however, arises from competing spiritual values: sacred groves as the abode of ancestors who protect the clan and must not be disturbed contradicted exploiting the land for crop production and other commercial activities. These conflicting interests increasingly characterise postcolonial Bena society's redefinition of a sacred site.

In the last few decades, more intensive agricultural methods have replaced traditional slash-and-burn farming practices. Such changes increased the pressure on the remaining natural resources, reduced the size of forest remnants, modified their structure and composition, and created ever-smaller forest fragments. When forests connecting these patches decline as well, these forests start an inevitable slide towards ecosystem degradation and biodiversity loss. Although many of the Bena historically preserved sacred groves for their cultural, religious, and ecological significance, their present condition as 'biodiversity hotspots' is precarious. In sacred forests such as Nyumbanitu, the conditions are better because sacred forests are more significant, connectivity with other forests

² Ujamaa is a Swahili word for 'familyhood.' It was the social and economic policy developed by Julius Kambarage Nyerere, first president of Tanzania from 1964 to 1985. It was centred on collective agriculture, under a process of villagization. Ujamaa also called for nationalisation of banks and industries and increased level of self-reliance at individual and national levels. The policy was set out in the Arusha Declaration of 1967.

functional and the forest stewardship function of traditional authorities remains relatively stable. But that is not the case in other sacred groves with less practical stewardship.

Economic pressure has necessitated encroachment in sacred groves. The sacred groves' surrounding fields are increasingly becoming more significant with woods becoming smaller. Financial stress has characterised the move from understanding sacred sites as dense forest to focusing, in some locations, on only one or few trees as enough for the *tambiko* (ancestral veneration)³ and, therefore, justifying economic activities to take place on the rest of the land. This changing trend is not specific to Tanzania. In south India scholars have reported a shift from nature worship towards icon worship, a change that has led to temple buildings replacing groves.⁴ Although temple building does not exist in Njombe, the upholders' slash of their forests occurs.

Evidence from this study on the Bena indicates that the sacred site management systems are effective in fending off non-members, but less restrictive to sacred site owners, who seem to be causing most ecological damage on sites. For instance, three of the five sacred sites visited in Ukwama village, previously sacred forests with numerous trees, now have only one or two main trees used for *tambiko*. Commenting on the situation in Ukwama, Lwila, an elder and former custodian recollected in a sad mood,

there used to be a forest here for the *tambiko*, it was about three acres and so beautiful. We obtained herbs in the woods. But look now, look! Only two big trees are left, and that is where the Lwilas perform their *tambiko* now. Ancestors have been left bare, completely bare because of the greed of those who were entrusted to take care of the sites... In such a situation, I do not think the ancestors will listen and attend to the problems we ask them to help. See, rain is not properly raining now....⁵

The phrase 'ancestors have been left bare' signifies cleared sacred forest which, in the Bena cosmology, was crucial as it housed the ancestral spirits who, by means of rain, cooled the Bena land.

Some custodians have overemphasised preserving the main *tambiko* tree, the axis tree, at the expense of other trees that together made a sacred forest. It is true that among the Bena the main *tambiko* tree was traditionally chosen, and it usually was a big tree at the centre of the sacred grove. Such a tree was saved as an altar for prayers, but it was to be

³ *Tambiko* (singular) or *Matambiko* (plural) is a Swahili term that refers to the place and the practice of ancestral worship.

⁴ Claudia Rutte, 'The Sacred Commons: Conflicts and Solutions of Resource Management in Sacred Natural Sites', *Biological Conservation* (2011), 6.

⁵ Nendambali Lwila, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Njombe, 25 July 2018.

within a forest and not a stand-alone tree. Thus, the prominence of the *axis Mundi* depended on its relationship to other trees. Over time, however, population and economic pressures forced some Bena clan leaders to begin clearing trees they once protected, turning them into agricultural fields. For example, the once-respected sacred grove in Ukwama was, by the time of this research in 2018, already turned into agricultural fields, and only one widely branched tree was preserved for *tambiko* (**Figure 5.1**).

Figure 5.1 A stand-alone *tambiko* tree



Note: Sunflower planted fields surround the tree and replace the former sacred forest venerated by Msigwa clan.

Source: Photograph taken by the researcher during fieldwork in May 2018

Although the local government joined the elders to argue for the protection of sacred forests, the legal and traditional procedures to stop people from cutting a grove became difficult, time-consuming, and expensive. The process became particularly problematic in the 1970s when the Tanzanian government urged farmers to maximise production.⁶ Although the government did not encourage clans to clear groves, it could not impose restrictions on their use by the owners. Under such circumstances, farmers legally cut groves and replaced them with crops in demand by a larger population. The offenders insisted that they had been following the government policy of '*Siasa ni Kilimo*' (Agriculture is Politics) which was initiated by Tanganyika African National Union

⁶ Helge Kjekshus, 'The Tanzanian Villagization Policy: Implementational Lessons and Ecological Dimensions', *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 11, no. 2 (1977), 277.

(TANU) and declared in Iringa in 1972.⁷ With the emphasis on agricultural production by government officials, sacred forests appeared more important as patches of fertile soil than as shrines for ancestral veneration. Some land users began to nibble away at their borders. The caretakers' defence of sacred forests became more threatened in the late 1980s when the Tanzanian government began to liberalise its economy under pressure from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

In the 1990s, justification started to emerge as to why a lonely standing tree was adequate for *tambiko*. Elders of some *tambiko*, mainly youths, claimed that one tree could satisfy the need to conduct ancestral veneration, provided that the tree was sufficiently large to cover ancestral spirits. 'The spirits dwell in big trees,' said Sijaona Mfugale, a younger elder who emphasised that a forest was not a necessary feature to have the *tambiko* held and accepted.⁸ Similarly, Alphonse Msigala, also a younger elder (aged 42), supported the legitimacy of one big tree:

from the beginning, a single indigenous tree stood as a vital plant at which our forefathers made their sacrificial prayers to the ancestors. These trees were planted alongside burial sites of the significant clan-heads who died. The trees were ritualised alongside burial ceremony signifying its importance for linking the dead and the living.⁹

Explanations given by Mfugale, Msigala and other elders signified that embracing the axis *tambiko* tree entailed going back to the origin of the groves, which began with the planting of a key tree. Their claims validate the process of reducing the size of forests to allow cultivation to take place. Generally, those who supported deforestation believed that using part of the sacred land to produce food was a correct decision because it ensured a food supply to the living—something with which the ancestors would agree.

The sustenance discourse was useful in, for instance, justifying the clearing of sacred forests in Ihanzutwa village twenty years ago.¹⁰ In 1997 there was land conflict among the clan members. Some suggested that the size of the sacred grove should be reduced from two acres to half an acre to allow food production alongside *tambiko*. After a lengthy discussion, a decision to spare the forest was reached. However, two years later,

⁷ TANU, *Siasa ni Kilimo* (Iringa, 1972). In 1972, the Iringa Declaration of *Siasa ni Kilimo* (Agriculture is Politics) placed the ruling party, TANU, in the centre of agricultural education and transformation. The TANU National Conference of November 1973 decided that the entire peasantry should live in *ujamaa* villages within three years, underlining the regime's long adherence to the view that agriculture is the central element in the country's development.

⁸ Sijaona Mfugale, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ulembe, 20 July 2018.

⁹ Alphonse Msigala, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Igosi, 12 June 2018.

¹⁰ Ihanzutwa is a village located in Mdandu Ward in Wanging'ombe district, Tanzania.

in 1999, the decision to keep the wood in its original size was abandoned. *Mzee* Andreas Kilima associated the abandonment to the passing of *Mzee* Fute, an elder who was very influential in keeping the *tambiko* traditions and the status of the forest. In 2018 *Mzee* Kilima recalled

It was for the wisdom of *wazee wa mila* [elders who preserved customs] that the grove stayed intact for so long. But, in 1999, when *mzee* Fute died, the family members cleared a large part of it. They started agricultural fields there. We told them it was a wrong thing to do, but [they] did not listen. They said the remaining few trees were enough for *tambiko*.¹¹

To most Bena, claims over the legitimacy of clearing sacred groves were inadmissible. Most elders interviewed vehemently opposed such claims which they associated with greed and neglect of traditions. For instance, Elias Mkongwa, a Bena chief, clarified that the planting of a key tree during a burial ceremony did not mean that the planted tree should stay alone. Instead, the tree should stand as a beginning of trees that would house the ancestral spirits.¹² Another elder added that the more the trees would germinate after the first tree, the more the ancestors' home becomes abundant in medicinal plants. *Mzee* Nyika stressed further that the ability of the traditional healers to be exposed to the proper herbs depended on the richness of such plants. 'The best of such herbs can only come from the sacred groves,' he added.¹³

For most Bena elders, the idea of a big single stand-alone *tambiko* tree signals vanishing traditions. It was clear during interviews that elders were concerned that, although such practices were still not dominant, measures needed to be taken to halt such a move. As a Bena chief (Mkongwa) cautioned

if we allow such belief to continue, we will be welcoming the end of our culture and, for that, we will not be safe. Trees germinate, grow, and finally die. The Bena and even the ancestors themselves cannot stop the tree to fall when its time comes. So, if you rely on a single tree, no matter how big it is, it will one day fall. Where will you do your *tambiko*?¹⁴

Elders believed in the succession of axis trees, like the succession patterns in traditional leadership. Such a sequence, according to Mkongwa, could occur only in a forest with trees of varying sizes and ages. The Nyumbanitu sacred forest exemplified the practice of tree

¹¹ Andreas Kilima interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ihanzutwa, 28 July 2018.

¹² Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, Interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Ilembula, 21 August 2019. In Mkongwa's view as for most Bena elders, a thick forest was desirable for a proper *tambiko* and that the ancestors feel respected when the forest is kept intact.

¹³ Jonas Nyika interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 19 May 2018.

¹⁴ Mkongwa, Interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, 21 August 2019.

succession. At the centre of the forest situates a big tree, the altar, used for *tambiko*. Forest keepers Julius and Alex Msigwa testified that the main tree currently in use was a second one after the first one fell some years back. Once the main tree falls, the priests said, the elders would gather to select and officiate another tree to be an axis tree.¹⁵ This long-lived tradition is only possible in places where traditional institutional arrangements still exist to firmly hold the customs.

In some Bena clans a new form of power, an economic power, supported by the same sacred entity, the custodians, has risen. It is the corresponding spiritual custodians who grant access to commercial forest exploitation. Certain rituals performed today do not benefit the community. For example, there are ceremonies conducted for politicians and others seeking prosperity or revenge—and these services pay very well, I was told.¹⁶ Those wielding the sacred power sometimes use it to claim ownership over the resource.¹⁷ Thus, one needs to take caution when idealising indigenous culture and its supposed ‘harmony with nature.’ As some cases in this study show, people are quite able to destroy their natural resources after contact with the market economy, dominating culture and new knowledge.

The resource exploitative nature of some custodians has led to a feeling of non-ownership of sacred forests by other community members. When asked, most respondents expressed their perception that the forest that belonged to the whole clan now belonged only to the group of forest keepers. Some of these keepers were blamed for using the forest for their gains—a practice which further reduced people’s belief in taboos and myths related to the management of sacred groves. People formerly believed that the ancestors would punish whoever engaged in acts that destroyed the forest. Some now ask ‘why won’t the ancestors punish the greedy forest custodians for their deviant behaviour and for allowing unsustainable activity, at least inside the groves?’¹⁸ In post-2000 Tanzania, there are increasingly more and more people who question the taboos and the whole tradition of *tambiko* forests. The increased distance people keep from *matambiko* reveals the great influence education, modern religions and the market economy has on the traditional

¹⁵ Julius and Alex Vangameli Msigwa interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgya, Nyumbanitu 10 May 2018.

¹⁶ Keneth Msigwa, interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgya, Nyumbanitu, 7 May 2018.

¹⁷ Castellanet and Jordan commented in 2002, in the case of Brazil, that conclusive links between indigenous religious institutions and management of natural resources were then not yet in place. C. Castellanet and C.F. Jordan, *Participatory Action Research in Natural Resource Management: A Critique of the Method Based on Five Years' Experience in the Transamazônica Region of Brazil* (New York: Taylor & Francis, 2002), 7.

¹⁸ The scepticism about the power of ancestors to punish the sacred forest defaulters was common among respondents who viewed sacred forests myths as outdated.

culture. Some of those who claim ownership of groves have themselves abandoned some traditions and use the woods for economic gains.

Government officials acknowledged the tension between reducing poverty and maintaining customs and traditions. During interviews at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, a forestry officer emphasised that if people do not have food on their table or money to pay school fees, it would be more difficult to put resource conservation at the top of a hypothetical value scale. On the contrary, people would be inclined towards disregarding local moral norms in favour of, for example, cutting down trees from sacred groves for timber and cash revenue.¹⁹

The political and economic situation in post-colonial Tanzania, then, have compelled significant changes in the sacred landscape in Njombe. Because of financial pressures, some sacred forests have been cut down and replaced with agricultural fields. From the 1970s, the clearing of some groves was reinforced by the political move of *siasa ni kilimo* (politics is agriculture), a national policy that emphasised the farmers' maximisation of production. The national economic system, coupled with population growth, increased the demand for more agricultural land. With the new pressures, some clans needed to redefine their *tambiko* traditions to focus on single big trees than on traditional forests. Thus, a new form of economic power rose in some groups, supported by the same sacred entity, forest custodians, who began exploiting groves for financial gains.

5.2. Cultural politics of sacred forests: Sacred sites as contested terrain²⁰

Sacred places are sites of contestation, as they are intertwined with personal identities, collective memory, and cultural politics. By cultural politics, we mean 'the way a culture—including people's attitudes, opinions, beliefs and perspectives, as well as the media and arts—shapes society and political opinion, and gives rise to social, economic and legal realities.'²¹ However, sacred grove scholarship in Tanzania has focused on ecology and tends to understand sacred groves as communal sites without exploring the associated

¹⁹ Deusdedit Bwoyo, Assistant Director Forestry and Beekeeping division (MNRT), interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Dodoma, 22 June 2018.

²⁰ Material presented in this section mainly emanates from researcher's participant observation and conversation with the Mkongwa-Kiswaga-Fute and Msigwa clansmen. To avoid any prevailing suspicion between the groups, the researcher interviewed anonymously and separately members of the dominant clans. For such reason, the identity of the interviewees remains closed.

²¹ Steph Newell, 'What is Meant by 'Cultural Politics?' in *The Cultural Politics of Dirt in Africa – 1880-present* (1 April 2014). <https://blogs.sussex.ac.uk/dirtpol/2014/04/01/what-is-meant-by--politics-by-prof-steph-culturalnewell/> (13 August 2019).

constitutive politics. This section expands our understanding of the sacred forest management beyond simplistic narratives to focus on present-day cultural politics that are internal to custodial communities that often sustain or ruin groves. This case study of sacred forest management examines the limited research on forest management from other lands or countries, particularly from Zimbabwe. Regarding Southwest Tanzania and the Bena, we rely on interviews with forest keepers and other stakeholders. Identifying underlying conflicts and processes of ongoing threats is an essential first step for finding potential solutions to sacred grove management. We spotlight issues concerning Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest (NSF) to survey some of the constitutive politics and contestations.

From the mid-nineteenth century the responsibility of custodianship and priesthood of the Bena main shrine, Nyumbanitu, was vested to Kiswaga sub-clan who needed to collaborate with Mkongwa and Fute sub-clans. Kiswaga's power over shrine worship emanated from the progenitor Kahemele. The direct shrine custodianship by the three key sub-clans worked well until the end of the 1950s, the last years of British colonial administration in Tanganyika. By then two of the three sub-clans had relocated away from Nyumbanitu. The Kiswaga moved to Ulembwe/Igagala (20 km away) and the Mkongwa to Ilembula (30 km away).²² The Fute sub-clan established themselves in nearby Mlevela village but had little influence regarding the Nyumbanitu shrine rituals.²³ The long distances between the NSF and the places the two sub-clans chose to settle posed a challenge for the proper management of NSF and the conduct of rituals, particularly the rites that were frequently administered for people who needed the service. Thus, after a lengthy discussion, in c.1952, the three sub-clans agreed to appoint the Msigwa clansmen, who settled at Nyumbanitu area, as custodians and priests.

The Msigwa clansmen undertook the NSF resident custodial role and became responsible for liaising the three main sub-clans with the people in need of the spiritual services from the site. The Msigwa clan were also entrusted with keeping all the tools²⁴ for *tambiko* and were required to make the tools available for use by the Kiswaga sub-clan, whenever needed. The Msigwa were expected to receive and host all the people who went

²² It is not very clear as to why the three sub-clans' men relocated but search for more larger fields for agriculture can partly explain their move as it was a characteristic of most Bena, typical farmers. In most cases the clan's men established strong socio-economic and political influences in areas they migrated to.

²³ Although their progenitor Kahemele wanted the three sub-clans to consider themselves equals, the Mkongwa and Kiswaga sub-clans, considered rulers and priests respectively, associated themselves to the sacred grove practices more than the Fute sub-clan who were traditionally designated with farming role to ensure sustenance of the Bena. Thus, Fute's role has throughout been undermined.

²⁴ Tools used during *tambiko* includes a traditional tray, spear, and hoe. Others are a three-legged wooden chair, a black cloth, clay pot and millet flour.

to seek services at NSF and connect them to the Kiswaga, who would then be summoned to go to Nyumbanitu to undertake the services the people needed.

The resident keepers of the NSF from Msigwa clan were to be approved by the three main sub-clans. Knowledge of the Bena traditions and the sacred practices of the NSF became important qualities for one to be considered for the resident custodial role. In 1952, Bena elder Mwapesa Msigwa became the first resident custodian of the NSF. Because Mwapesa was a periodic labour migrant, his wife Lyamudzwe Senyamule was approved to take a limited role during her husband's absence. Not much is recalled about how Mwapesa managed his position as first resident custodian of the forest. On his death, Mwapesa was succeeded by his son Ng'ombe-ulaya. Like his father, Ng'ombe-ulaya was not very well-known to most Bena. By then the Kiswaga clansmen could regularly execute rituals of the sacred forest directly. Ng'ombe-Ulaya was then succeeded by his son Vangameli Msigwa who, in the 1990s, became a very famous custodian of the NSF. People associated the grove to Vangameli more than they connected it to the sub-clans Kiswaga, Mkongwa or Fute who maintained traditions as shrine custodians.

The fame that Vangameli established became a source of conflict between the primary custodians and the invited resident custodians of the forest. Although Vangameli portrayed allegiance to his superiors and agreed that he only served as invited custodian of the forest and Bena customs, his fame raised jealousies from descendants of Kahemele. Though not openly expressed, the three sub-clans feared that Vangameli could finally claim a total connection to and ownership of the forest, a right which the sub-clans thought was exclusively theirs. There were claims by the primary custodians that Vangameli fined people who violated customs of the forest but did not report or declare such collections to the main custodians. Despite the emerged distrust, Vangameli's fame as successful resident custodian of the NSF continued through the 1990s, a reputation furthered by his additional role as shrine priest.

After 1990, the Msigwa clansmen were entrusted with the limited priesthood in addition to their role as resident custodians of the NSF. In their new role, the Msigwa would conduct all initial forest rituals for people who needed help. For instance, if a person came to ask whether he/she had an ancestral connection with the Bena ancestry shrine at Nyumbanitu, the resident custodian would take that person to the ancestral forest and perform rituals to seek answers over the belongingness of the person. One of the practices that identified one as a descendant of Bena ancestors was for the priest, after saying some words, to throw a winnowing mat latitudinally. The final position of the mat would tell if

the visitor belonged to the Bena ancestry. An upright position signified ancestors' acceptance of the person, and the upside-down position would mean rejection. Only accepted visitors could receive the next services from the shrine, which would require the Kiswaga clan, rather than Msigwa, to administer.

Discontent arose over the priesthood arrangement between the traditional custodians and the resident forest keepers. The custodial clans claimed that the forest keepers performed ritual services which were not approved by them. Although no reference was made to specific incidents, the members of the three main sub-clans—Mkongwa, Kiswaga and Fute—generally accused the resident forest keepers of going beyond the priesthood level they had agreed upon. For instance, ritual services that would require the offering of an animal bigger than a chicken would be conducted under the presence of representatives from the three sub-clans together with the forest keepers. However, there was suspicion that the Msigwa clansmen benefited from the forest beyond what the owner clans would allow.²⁵ Although they talked about forest rituals, their complaints reflected more about material gains accruing from the services provided than the actual ritual practices. Because of the conflict of interests between groups, the landscape became a complex and dynamic site located at what Moore called, in the case of Zimbabwe, 'the cross-cutting matrixes of culture, power, and history.'²⁶

Nyumbanitu shrine became embedded in cultural politics between the clans involved. The site developed into a significant political instrument used for substantiating claims to indigeneity mainly between the Mkongwa and Kiswaga sub-clans. These claims, although not very public, trace from the 1920s when the two sub-clans of Kahemele contested over dominance at Nyumbanitu shrine. For instance, the Kiswaga clan demanded the top right of the shrine, claiming that the site initially became famous as it was associated with their grandfather, who possessed a medicine that protected crops from locusts.²⁷ In support of their claim, the Kiswaga sub-clan referred to forerunner Kahemele's installation of Kiswaga as shrine priest—a position that gave him the power to lead all the traditional worship practices conducted at Nyumbanitu. In his diary, now in custody of his son Elly Daniel Kiswaga, Sub-chief Ibrahim Aggrey Kiswaga (alias Daniel Kiswaga) wrote, on 6

²⁵ These allegations were, nevertheless, made with the informants cautioning the researcher not to disclose their identity.

²⁶ D.S. Moore, 'Subaltern Struggles and the Politics of Space: Remapping Resistance in Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands', *Cultural Anthropology* 13, no. 3 (1998), 346.

²⁷ Daniel Kiswaga, 'Habari za Nchi ya Ubena Hapo Kale', *Mss. Afr. S. 2047*, Rhodes House Library, (1933), copy of which is found in Tanzania district archive (Njombe), uncategorised.

June 1973, a genealogy linking a lineage from the Mbeni, first Bena ancestor through Kahemele to Kiswaga himself (**Figure 5.2**) to claim the link with Nyumbanitu shrine.

Figure 5.2 A genealogy linking the Kiswaga clan to the Mbeni, first Bena ancestor

Swahili Margin	Genealogy List
Niliko	1 Ibrahim AGGREY Kiswaga, 1910
Toka na	2 Alizalwa TEMALINGA (Chief Kiswaga)
Kizazi	3 Temalungi, Alizalwa, Mkulakungi
Changu	4 Mkulakungi Alizalwa Kwa Sinaluwande
	5 Sinaluwande Alizalwa Kwa Kiswaga I
	6 Kiswaga I, Alizalwa Kwa Kahemele
	7 Kahemele, Alizalwa Kwa Chavua
	8 Kahemele, Alizalwa Kwa Ngilivya
	9 Ngilivya, Alizalwa Kwa Malova
	10 Malova Alizalwa Kwa Mafiata
	11 Mafiata Alizalwa Kwa Mponda
	12 Mponda Alizalwa Kwa Mkilanga
	13 Mkilanga Alizalwa Kwa Tevele
	14 Tevele Alizalwa Kwa Mbeni

Notes: On the left margin, the written Swahili words translates to ‘Where I come from and my siblings). The list is arranged in descending order, from the most current on top to the earlier ancestor at the bottom. Number six directly links Kiswaga I to Kahemele, the ninth Bena ancestor.

Source: Abraham Aggrey Kiswaga’s memoir presented to the researcher by his son Elly Daniel Kiswaga on 23 August 2019 at Ulembwe Village. Image reproduced here by permission from Elly Daniel Kiswaga.

On the other hand, the Mkongwa sub-clan associates their rights over Nyumbanitu grove by linking it to the discourse of clan hierarchy traced from the same forerunner Kahemele.

The cultural politics around NSF signify the inseparability between forest rituals and Bena politics. Among the Bena, NSF serves as the primary political institution throughout the region, and a Bena elders’ council, inherited representatives from key clans and led by the chief, would be established to ensure continuity of Bena traditions. By establishing a special council of elders to supervise the content and ritual practices for the entire tribe, the Bena chiefs directly controlled the local politics through political legitimacy gained through their link to the shrine. The blend between sacred groves’ tradition and politics among the Bena agrees with Sithole’s suggestion of sacred sites’ links with politics. In his study of sacred groves in Dambos in Zimbabwe, he concluded that sacred sites are

significant ‘political instruments’ to their societies.²⁸ Sacred sites benefit the rural elite, most of whom also participate in politics. Among the Bena, the custodians of these sacred forests constitute an important group of privileged. As the elders’ councils meet less and less frequently, some caretakers of sacred forests in some parts of Njombe started using their sites as private resources. They formed a group of rural elders with influence in village lives.²⁹

Disputes over ownership and use of sacred places in Njombe exists between the site guardians and other Bena inhabitants. For instance, although the Nyumbanitu sacred forest is generally understood as the *tambiko* shrine for all Bena, an increasing number of Bena do not associate themselves with it. Shifts in religious beliefs and increased access to education have resulted in questioning the practices related to sacred forests in some parts of Njombe. There has been thinking that the site caretakers themselves do not believe in their practice anymore, but they want to maintain control over the sites to serve their material and selfish needs. For example, sacred site wardens are usually authorised to cultivate lands surrounding sacred sites as a mechanism to protect the sites from intrusion. It is asserted that the sites are likely to be at risk if the surrounding areas are controlled by non-owners. However, the use of surrounding land by site owners seems to concern other villagers who feel that managers preserve sacred forests to keep access to surrounding croplands and forest resources—not to maintain traditional rituals and customs. These contesting views question existing assumptions by some scholars that sacred forests characterise homeostatic systems where nature and culture harmonise to create peaceful village societies.³⁰

Weakening belief in the sacred traditions of *tambiko* has resulted in the diminishing power of traditional authorities. Traditional authorities in charge of sacred forests, particularly those whose authority derives from their practice of *tambiko* rituals and their

²⁸ B. Sithole, ‘Scared Groves on Dambos in Zimbabwe: are these Private Resources for the Rural Elite?’ *Forests, Trees and Livelihoods* 14 (2004), 132.

²⁹ By their association with important sites, these custodians were also advantaged economically, socially and politically.

³⁰ Claims of a harmonious relationship between African societies and their natural environments dominated the early postcolonial African scholarship and typified a ‘Merrie Africa’ stance which is still present in some literature, describing African sacred forests as remnants of primeval past cultures. For example, in 1960s Jomo Kenyatta described how sacred forest ceremonies functioned to integrate the Gikuyu society and noted that most of such trees were cut down when Europeans took possessions of Gikuyu land (Jomo Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 235. Meyer Fortes described Tallensi sacred groves in Northern Ghana as a material expression of group solidarity and social equilibrium, an equilibrium which was distorted by colonial rule and economic change (Fortes Meyer, *The Dynamics of Clanship among the Tallensi*, London: Oxford University Press, (1945): 101, 250).

enforcement of ancient taboos, are increasingly being challenged by the social and economic status conferred by modern religions, the loss of followers, the questioning of secret societies and the changing significance of rituals. In such cases, taboos are challenging to enforce, the social status of *tambiko* priests is eroded, and the power of local chiefs diminished. Faced with the weakening of traditional leadership and the religious practices associated with the conservation of sacred forests, reversing current religious and cultural trends is not achievable. But implementing forest conservation mechanisms that strengthen the forest manager role of traditional authorities and other stakeholders might be possible. From such support, it is hoped, stronger stewardship of forest resources can occur, resulting in biodiversity conservation. Thus, although the Tanzania Community Based Forest Management (CBFM) policy, introduced in the 1990s, allowed communities to manage forests on their own, there has been a rise in local government authorities' involvement in matters concerning traditional forests.

Local Njombe officials have begun collaborating with leaders of traditional institutions managing sacred forests. By invitation or through own initiatives, some village authorities in Njombe have assumed responsibility for the management of sacred forests located within their jurisdiction. For example, from 1998 authorities of Mlevela and Nyumbanitu villages collectively became, in one way or another, part of the management of Nyumbanitu sacred forest. There exist different opinions about allowing village officials to participate in grove management in Tanzania. Many states that communities lack the technical capacity and financial resources to properly perform the role of forest managers. Government officials thus need to intervene. Interviews, however, reveal how village authorities received monies collected by forest managers. As a forest priest Julius Vangameli Msigwa stated:

From 1998 we started giving the two villages, 'Mlevela and Nyumbanitu', a share of what we get from our shrine visitors. We do not get much because there is no fixed amount of fee and we do not receive many visitors here. It is also not mandatory for visitors to pay. We usually send such amounts as a contribution to projects of public interest. We recently sent 50,000 Tanzania shillings to help in the cost of buying desks to Mlevela primary school.³¹

Entrance fees are now collected at NSF. Although the shrine priests did not mention the fixed amount for one to pay when visiting the forest, in 2012, the entrance fee for visitors and researchers was TZS 50,000 (USD 32.3). From the collected amount, TZS 30,000

³¹ Julius Vangameli Msigwa (Shrine priest), interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 16 August 2019.

(USD 19.4) went to ritual leaders, and the rest went to the village government for funding various development activities.³² Because of their economic and political importance, sacred forests attract political meddling. Where such interventions are severe, neglect of groves by the communities occurs. The local government in Njombe, however, avoided confronting traditional authorities over the use and conservation of sacred forests.

NSF, as the case for other sacred groves in Njombe, move beyond the trappings of a static cultural and ecological paradise. Such narratives bring a danger of exclusive blame for the changes in sacred groves and sites on external factors such as modernisation and the development of a market economy. A simplistic narrative would block inquiry into the internal mechanisms of cultural politics by which sacred groves are either threatened or sustained. Although descriptions of longstanding forests have succeeded in bringing recognition to sacred groves as a traditional, alternative, and decentralised forms of conservation in Tanzania, this study finds that the cultural politics involved in sacred forest management do not guarantee their continued survival. The political aspects of sacred groves in Njombe are particularly evident as clans contest how to divide management rights and labour. Thus, as markers of social differences that often relate to crucial institutions, sacred groves, as well as other sacred sites in Njombe, function as political arenas in different historical contexts.

Sacred natural sites, then, relate closely to personal identities, collective memory, and various incentives. As such, there exists a complex and inevitable interplay of human values and behaviour, institutional arrangements, and ecology. The associated dimensions signify that sacred sites are not immune to cultural politics and contestations between interested parties. During colonial times, the colonial government, the Bena tribal elders' council, and the Mkongwa-Kiwaga clans contested over NSF. Post-colonial Njombe has seen a replacement of colonial rule by local government and the emergence of Msigwa clan as an essential stakeholder the NSF traditions. The continued existence of NSF has depended mainly on the ability of interested groups to settle their conflicts. Understanding

³² M.A. Njana, W. Mugisha and G.C. Kajembe, 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources? Experience from Nyumba-Nitu, Southern Highlands, Tanzania', *Tanzania Journal of Forestry and Nature Conservation*, 82 no. 1 (June 2012), 97. ³² Dümcke and Gnedovsky state that groves that are of unique attraction become not only cultural heritage sites, but also economically very beneficial. (Cornelia Dümcke and Mikhail Gnedovsky, 'The Social and Economic Value of Cultural Heritage: literature review', *EENC paper* (European Expert Network on Culture, 2013), 18.

localised cultural politics and attaching spiritual values to nature might be especially relevant for the future integrity of sacred natural sites.

5.3. Tourism meets the sacred: emerging tourism interest at Nyumbanitu shrine

Sacred groves have local significance. They may not be known to people outside the region, and the location of sacred sites may be kept secret to avoid harm to the grove. However, a small number of forests may become popular as tourist sites. Although the total number of sacred groves in Njombe has declined (actual figures not yet established), and many trees have been cleared to enable land to be cultivated, there are some noteworthy exceptions: sacred groves that are visited by increasing numbers of tourists. In Njombe, the most famous of these is undoubtedly the Nyumbanitu shrine. In the 1990s, local government authorities, Tanzania's tourist board and the site custodians themselves began presenting Nyumbanitu as a touristic sacred grove. What challenges may result from opening a culturally protected grove to tourism?

Sacred forests represent the functional link between the social life and forest management system of a region. While sacred sites may have touristic appeal as a pilgrimage and secular tourist attractions, such groves are qualitatively different from others that have been developed for tourism. Sites which exist for sacred practices or otherwise sacred by their nature, and which establish touristic attractiveness, have been referred to as 'sacred touristic sites.'³³ Although such sites are not sacred to all visitors, they hold unique appeal to some.

Traditionally, the Bena considered sacred groves as holy sites that should exclude non-spiritual activities. The village inhabitants believed in the sanctity of the grove and deities. No one could, therefore, be allowed to enter the sacred forest for research purposes or tourism. To maintain the sanctity, various taboos, and myths about the danger of entering the forest were put in place and transferred through generations. Issues of sacredness precluded academic studies being undertaken about sacred groves in Njombe. Students and researchers would not think to risk their lives by studying landscapes that are full of mythologies,³⁴ and ancestors would be angry with whoever entered the forest for non-ritual

³³ Russell E. Brayley, 'Managing Sacred Sites for Tourism: A Case Study of Visitor Facilities in Palmyra, New York', *Tourism Review* 58, no. 3 (2010), 289.

³⁴ Although the situation has changed over time, people still fear the groves. During this research, the researcher was in many occasions asked by relatives and friends why do research on groves. 'why can't you choose another topic to study?', they asked, showing their fear that I could be harmed. Being from Christian family the researcher faced great challenge as Christians would associate the shrines with superstitions.

purposes. The NSF assistant priest emphasised the strict nature of grove traditions. As he said in May 2018:

In the past, we could not allow people to enter the forest to study as you are doing now. We could only admit people who came to seek religious services. We used to receive many journalists, students, researchers, and other visitors who wanted to explore the forest. We could only narrate to them about the forest while here [pointing at the post near the entrance to the grove where we also stood] but never allowed them to enter.... Things have changed now; see now you are here interviewing us. And soon we shall be entering the forest for you to have the real experience.³⁵

The folklore about terrible outcomes for people who illegally entered the shrine convinced people to not visit the forest. But, as numerous interviews reveal, including those with the NSF keepers, the situation has changed. From the late 1990s, apart from ritual reasons, people could visit the groves for study and tourism if they respected the instructions given by forest keepers.

The move to less-strict conditions for entering NSF occurred in part due to death of Vangameli Msigwa, the renowned forest custodian and resident priest of the 1990s. Vangameli famously maintained the established traditions of the shrine. After his death in 1998, the custodial role of the forest was taken by his son Julius Vangameli Msigwa, assisted by Alex Vangameli Msigwa (his brother). Being his youngest son, at about 25 years, Julius formally undertook the role of shrine priest in 1998.³⁶ There also was a progression of leadership positions within the three main shrine custodian sub-clans (Mkongwa-Kiswaga-Fute). Thus, during the 1990s, a new generation of Bena took over the custodianship and priesthood of the NSF. The new, younger leadership was more liberal than their predecessors.

The leaders of the shrine, new and progressive, were also confronted by the socio-political and economic conditions of the 1990s characterised by liberalisation in which Tanzania embarked on economic policies to reduce and remove barriers to trade.³⁷ Sacred landscapes and the institutions that upheld them were not immune to the changes that were taking place in a broader socio-economic and political context of the nation. Indeed, the

³⁵ Alex Vangameli Msigwa (assistant shrine priest), interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Mlevela, 26 May 2018.

³⁶ Julius was the youngest of the five sons of Vangameli Msigwa (to the first wife) while Alex was a second of the five sons (to a second wife).

³⁷ Athumani J. Liviga, 'Economic and Political Liberalization in Tanzania and its Unintended Outcomes', *Eastern Africa Social Science Research Review* 27, no. 1 (2011), 1. Liberalization was perceived beneficial for it opened both the political and economic space for all actors in the development process. Liberalization was embraced because of its perceived advantages to all sections of society: allowing citizens to participate in decision-making on matters affecting their lives and allowing and facilitating, among others, the private sector to take the lead role in economic development (engine of growth).

impacts of the new national economic policy trickled down to impact sacred landscapes. By the late 1990s, people began hearing that Nyumbanitu shrine would open for non-spiritual tours. Schools began organising study tours for their pupils to visit the shrine. There are, however, no current statistics regarding the number of schools or pupils visiting the forest, but caretakers estimated in May 2018 that about one hundred visit per year.³⁸

Some Bena elders did not agree with opening sacred groves to tourists. There was a feeling among them that opening NSF for unreligious tourism would disrespect ancestors and collapse long-cherished traditions which maintained the site's sanctity. Different opinions existed even among the Mkongwa-Kiswaga-Fute clansmen. Bena chief Mkongwa, sceptical about the move, stated that

For a long time, I have said that tourists should not be allowed to enter the shrine. But unfortunately, the caretakers invite the tourists to enter. If they let them, they pay. It does not have to be like this. I insist that tourists should be forbidden to enter the forest and cave, especially the innermost sanctum.³⁹

Opposition to new developments at NSF were not successful. These new developments were accompanied by the commodification of the sites. Traditionally, people who visited the shrine for *tambiko* services made payment in forms of goods such as cereals and animals. There was no entrance fee. However, when NSF became a cultural tourist site, visitors needed to pay a certain amount (mainly cash) to be allowed to enter. The experience from this research showed that there was no established fixed amount for a visitor to pay. Shrine keepers allowed visitors to decide their entrance fees.⁴⁰ In most cases, such payments were made after entering and touring the shrine. Although the site managers did not mention economic incentives as a reason for allowing tourism, one could quickly notice income motives among the caretakers. Like in other African countries, tourism may be encouraged to generate income for the community controlling a cultural site.⁴¹

From around 2000, NSF became more publicised as one of the tourist destinations in Tanzania's Southern Highland. At the local level, NSF was promoted through the Bena festivals held annually at an open space near the shrine (between the sacred forest and the

³⁸ Based on interviews conducted in 2018 and 2019.

³⁹ Chief Joseph Mbeyela Mkongwa, explained in E.M. Mkongwe, *Historia ya Kabila la Wabena na jinsi Kabila hilo Lilivyotawanyika katika Makabila Mengi na Walivyoweza Kumuondoa Mjerumani*. (unpublished pamphlet prepared by and in custody of Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwe). Copy of which was given to this researcher as a gift.

⁴⁰ When asked how much was to be paid, the shrine priest told the researcher that, 'you will see by yourself what to give us depending on how satisfied you will be after the tour.'

⁴¹ Celia Nyamweru, 'Natural Cultural Sites of Kenya: Changing Contexts, Changing Meanings', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6 no. 2 (2012), 275.

cave). During these festivals, many people participated, including government officials. Speeches were usually given to encourage internal cultural tourism. For example, part of an address provided by the current Njombe regional sports and culture officer reads

The pride of a person starts with knowing one's culture. Nyumbanitu is home for the Bena cultural traditions that are worth knowing. I call upon everyone to be part of the mission to promote this site, which is not well known to many people, even some of yourselves. I, therefore, call upon you all to visit, learn and experience the beauty of the site out of which you can be good ambassadors to others. Let us treasure what is ours!⁴²

Advertisement for NSF as a tourist destination also featured in the Tanzania tourism page run by Tanzania Tourist Board (TTB). The highlighting of NSF in a National worldwide touristic page signified recognition of the touristic appeal of the site. Part of the webpage reads

Best for tourist investment, Njombe region stands among competitive areas for tourist development by its diversified natural and historical attractions. Identified among the top attractive sites in the Njombe region are the Nyumba Nitu natural forest, currently under conservation and management of local communities.⁴³

As part of the description of what is found at Nyumbanitu, the tourism page states that 'several tales and myths surround Nyumba Nitu [sic.] forest, where wild hens are found living since time immemorial. The *Wabena* [plural for Bena] communities are the owners of the forest where they pay homage calls to conduct rituals and sacrifices to their unseen ancestors.'⁴⁴ Although the local communities manage NSF and, therefore, it is not a forest reserve,⁴⁵ on this tourism page NSF is included in a list of forest reserves destinations.⁴⁶

Recently, the local and central government have made more efforts to collaborate with the local community in promoting tourism activities in the area. Ministers and deputy ministers for natural resources and tourism have, on different occasions, visited the site. Multiple orders and directives emerged from these official visits. For instance, on 30 July 2018, a deputy minister for Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT), Japhet

⁴² Reads part of the speech given by Assistant Njombe regional Cultural officer during Bena festival held on 27 July 2018 [speech was in Swahili. Translation to English is mine].

⁴³ Njombe region tourist destinations, <https://www.tanzaniatourism.go.tz/en/destination/njombe-region> (18 September 2019).

⁴⁴ Nyumbanitu natural forest, <https://www.tanzaniatourism.go.tz/en/destination/nyumba-nitu-natural-forest> (18 September 2019).

⁴⁵ In Tanzania's 1998 National Forest Policy, a reserve forest is defined as a forest area, either for production of timber and other forest produce or protective for the protection of forests and important water catchments, controlled under the Forest Ordinance and declared by the Minister.

⁴⁶ Forest reserves destinations, <https://www.tanzaniatourism.go.tz/en/places-to-go/category/forest-reserves> (19 September 2019).

Hasunga, visited the NSF to learn the tourist potential of the site.⁴⁷ Most recently, another deputy minister, Juliana Shonza, visited the NSF as an effort to intensify tourism in the region. Minister Shonza ordered the Wanging'ombe district commissioner to facilitate the building of a unique information centre at NSF. She insisted that

Sites of this nature are significant and, I am informed that only a few people come to visit here. More work is to be done and, I think to begin with the district and regional level, you must build an information centre for tourist and public to easily access information about the treasures of this important site.⁴⁸

In accepting the directive given by the deputy minister, Wnging'ombe district commissioner Ally Kasinge explained to the minister that

We have some plans, including to establish a district information centre. The centre will make available through writings and videos, all this valuable information provided by the elders. We understand that most of these materials are unknown to many and are prone to be lost if not properly handled.⁴⁹

Figure 5.3 Tourism ministers at Nyumbanitu sacred forest



Notes: Plate 1: Deputy minister (MNRT) Juliana Shonza, addressing a team of Regional and district officers and shrine elders with the Wanging'ombe district commissioner standing behind the minister. The minister visited the site on 3 August 2019. Featuring at the background is part of the NSF. **Plate 2:** Julius Msigwa, a shrine priest, accompanied by elders of the Bena tribe council

⁴⁷ Hakipensheni, 'Naibu Waziri wa mali asili na utalii afanya ziara kwenye msitu wa Nyumbanitu, Msitu wenye masimulizi ya Kutisha', <https://hakupensheni.blogspot.com/2018/07/naibu-waziri-wa-maliasili-na-utalii.html> (25 July 2019).

⁴⁸ 'Serikali Kujenga Kituo cha Taarifa Msitu wa Nyumbanitu Njombe', [The Government to build an Information Centre at Nyumbanitu forest in Njombe] <https://darmnya.com/serikali-kujenga-kituo-cha-taarifa-msitu-wa-nyumbanitu-njombe/> Retrieved on 18 September 2019. [English translation from Swahili is mine]

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

explaining to the MNRT former deputy minister Japhet Hasunga (left) when he visited the site on 30 July 2016.

Sources: Plate 1, <http://www.muungwana.co.tz/2019/08/serikali-kujenga-kituo-cha-taarifa.html>; Plate 2: <https://hakipensheni.blogspot.com/2018/07/naibu-waziri-wa-maliasili-na-utalii.html>

The touristic attractiveness of Nyumbanitu shrine presents several challenges that need to be addressed. How, for example, can suspicion, scepticisms and denial of authenticity by curious but non-believing tourists be minimised when the treatment of the site, or the presentation of the events by those who consider it sacred, are such that they support the perception of performance? Also, where the sacredness of the site is generally recognised as authentic, how can that sacredness be maintained in the presence of hordes of ‘staring gentiles’ who, by their very existence and curiosity, threaten to detract from its holy, set apart, reverent nature? In response to these questions, the scholarly literature is mute, but the practice speaks volumes.

The transition of Nyumbanitu forest from sacred site to a sacred touristic place presents new challenges to the custodians. Groups who do not believe in the sacred traditions and the rituals enter the woods to enjoy the beauty of the site. The kind of questions that comes from these non-believers became a new trend to the site caretakers and the priests. These custodians were used to narrating stories about the shrine in a way that they were not expecting questions which challenge their beliefs. The priests at Nyumbanitu explained that tourists might ask questions ignorant about cultural traditions. Priest Julius Msigwa complained that

We now get people from various places with different beliefs. Some of them seem to come to challenge our long-cherished sacred traditions that have kept our site safe for so long. We try to answer their questions, but they seem not to understand. Sometimes the more we answer them, the more they ask. This is a trend which we were not familiar with before.⁵⁰

The custodians also seemed aggravated by some kinds of questions and doubts raised by an assistant who accompanied the researcher for this study. The responses provided by the caretakers revealed their difficulties in interacting with critical, non-believer visitors. The upgrading of the sacred grove to a touristic site required the keepers to adapt to the changes in the kinds of visitors they receive. It was easier to interact with the believers who came to seek religious services than with the non-believers who sought touristic experience or those who had research interests.

⁵⁰ Julius Vangameli Msigwa interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu and Mlevela, 8 May 2018.

Some scholars have suggested that the development of eco-tourism might incentivise local communities to protect sacred forests. Decher, in discussing the sacred forests in Boabeng in Ghana, stated that the revenue from eco-tourism at Fiema Monkey Sanctuary could be used to develop further conservation, reforestation and education projects, activities that would, in turn, strengthen the continued existence of sacred forests.⁵¹ Similarly, in their study of sacred forests in Zanzibar, Madeweya et al. argued for nature-based tourism as an alternative means of earning foreign exchange while providing less destructive use of resources compared to activities such as logging and agriculture.⁵² Ormsby provided a similar conclusion in the cases of Ghana and India stating that ‘tourism may represent a method to provide additional protection for sacred sites, including revenue to help with management and conservation.’⁵³ For these and other similar scholars, income from eco-tourism could help to offset economic hardship, and therefore, discourage local communities from destroying sacred landscapes.

Research from this study indicates that the potential for tourism or eco-tourism and the economic benefits from it almost certainly cannot be the main incentive for protecting sacred forests. Economic incentives, although persuasive, must be based on spirituality and ecology which are key in Bena’s nature cosmology. For these small and fragile sites in Njombe, one is well advised to heed the words of Turton (1987) in the context of National park development in Ethiopia:

The tourist is at best a mixed blessing, a necessary evil, to the conservationists: a powerful incentive for foreign exchange hungry governments to develop national parks, but a dangerously unreliable one, given the sensitivity of the tourist industry to the winds of economic change in the developed countries. And then, of course, there is the capacity of tourists to love the National Park to death, which makes them a positive enemy of conservation, particularly in so-called “wilderness” areas.⁵⁴

Perhaps the direct ecological and cultural benefits of sacred forests to the local people by far outweigh the benefits that might be gained from the development of tourism. Some

⁵¹ Jan Decher, ‘Conservation, Small mammals, and the Future of Sacred Groves in West Africa’, *Biodiversity and Conservation* 6 (1997), 1018.

⁵² Kassim Madeweya, Hiroyasu Oka and Mitsuo Matsumoto, ‘Sustainable Management of Sacred Forests and their Potential for Eco-Tourism in Zanzibar’, *Bulletin of FFPRI* 3, no. 390 (2004), 34.

⁵³ Alison Ormsby, ‘Perceptions of Tourism at Sacred Groves in Ghana and India’, *RASAALA: Recreation, and Society in Africa, Asia and Latin America* 3, no. 3 (2012), 1.

⁵⁴ David Turton, ‘The Mursi and National Park Development in the Lower Omo Valley’, in *Conservation in Africa: People, Policies and Practice*, eds. D. Anderson and R. Grove (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 183.

thought should be given to what kind of visitors or groups should have access to sacred forests and the facilities available in these sacred sites to accommodate visitors.

The upgrading of NSF to a sacred touristic site presented challenges regarding the availability of facilities. Sacred site managers and other interested parties were expected to protect the sacred resources by providing essential tourist facilities without violating the sacred space or traditional activities of the site. Examples include visitors' centres, toilets, interpretive displays/signs, and self-guided tour materials. These tourist facilities are developed to balance the tourists' need for authenticity with the host culture's need to limit outside interference with the sacred lifestyle, events, sites, and objects. Since the 1990s, NSF has transformed from a non-touristic to a touristic sacred site; however, as late as 13 August 2019 there were no facilities to accommodate tourists.⁵⁵ Site caretakers would explain prohibitions/taboos on littering, urinating or doing anything that would pollute the sanctity of the forest. But there is still no restroom on the site. The wood itself is far from the village, making it difficult for visitors to access services.

The onset of tourism at sacred groves represents benefits and threats. The sacred groves would benefit through recognition and valuing of the site that would lead to funding and conservation support. But the process threatens sacred sites because of possible over-use and the lack of waste disposal or other ecological impacts. Thus, officials at MNRT, although acknowledged to have little knowledge about sacred forest management, recommended support for traditional rituals, community resource management, and education programs associated with the groves. Culturally sensitive tourism guidelines and tourism profit-sharing plans, developed with the input of sacred grove stakeholders and custodians, would be helpful. One also should consider visitor carrying capacity as well as the implications in designating sacred groves as heritage sites.

Traditionally, then, the Bena considered sacred groves as holy sites closed to non-spiritual activities. Various taboos and myths preserved the sanctity of the sites. However, increasingly NSF became known for its tourism. From the 1990s the site acquired an informal status of 'touristic sacred site', presenting new opportunities and challenges to accommodate touristic interests while maintaining the cultural and spiritual origins. A new generation of custodians, compelled by the forces of the liberalisation policy initiated in

⁵⁵ These descriptions are based on researcher's own experience upon visiting the sites. The researcher visited the NSF five times in the entire period of fieldwork. There was a follow-up visit which was done on 13 August 2019. In all the visits, the researcher had a chance to talk to the shrine priests, keepers, and other elders. The researcher entered the forest and observed and participated in various ritual ceremonies providing a chance to experience and learn.

the 1990s, are now pushing tourism. The welcoming of touristic activities at NSF, although good, might erode sacred traditions. It is thus important to not overemphasise tourism at the expense of cultures that have kept the sites for so long. Religious meanings make a place sacred and correspondingly make the sites a meaningful destination for tourists. But tourists and spiritual practitioners usually have very different attachments to and understandings of these sacred spaces.

5.4. Tradition versus modernity: will the young generation adhere to sacred traditions?

Social changes such as the introduction of Christianity and formal education are believed to have weakened Bena customs and traditions and consequently stressed sacred groves. The intensity and frequency of biotic stresses vary from region to region in Tanzania and even from forest to nearby forest. A loss of faith in the traditional belief systems, which were fundamental to the concept of sacred groves, is a commonly cited factor to help explain the destruction and degradation of sacred groves' traditions. Rituals attached to the belief systems are now considered mere superstitions, especially among the Bena young generation. Have young Bena abandoned their belief systems? If so, what are the implications regarding the sustainability of the sacred forests in Njombe?

Youths constitute a significant section of the society and any adherence to a set of cultural practices would minimise trans-generational change.⁵⁶ Since pre-colonial times, Bena youths were trained to be 'good citizens' of the clan or tribe. Teachers created a picture in the minds of those taught, depicting the virtues, manners, and the future lives they would lead, including observance to the sacred traditions. Such an ongoing process of knowledge transmission constituted the Bena education system in which the content was derived from the physical and spiritual environments.⁵⁷ As part of this broader context, traditional religion in Njombe played a crucial role in the life of children and adults alike: it provided a uniting point for the good relationship between people and the environment.

⁵⁶ Formal demographic composition statistics for specific ethnic groups in Tanzania cannot be reported with much confidence as data rarely exist. But, although not specific to the Bena ethnic group, the *City Population*, deriving from the 2012 census, reported a demographic composition of Njombe region in which the youths constituted the majority. Of the total 702,097, Children aged 0-14 were 294,147 (41.9%); those aged 15-64 were 375,448 (53.5%) and aged 65 and above were 32,502 (4.6%). https://www.citypopulation.de/en/tanzania/admin/22_njombe/ (5 December 2019).

⁵⁷ Such arrangement agrees with Adeyemi and Adeyinka who points that, 'a greater portion of indigenous education in Africa centred on religious training in which events and landscapes were accorded spiritual significance.' (Michael Adeyemi and Augustus Adeyinka, 'Some Key Issues in Traditional African Education', *MCGILL Journal of Education* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2002), 234).

At the time of independence, in 1961, youths learned via initiation, observation and repetition of what parents and other adults did. Knowledge was also imparted through oral stories. It was indeed through practice that the young people learned to appreciate and value the heritage of their grandparents. Once children understood and appreciated their cultural heritage, they too passed it on to their offspring who in turn did the same to their children. Stories and practice helped to maintain the continuity of the Bena pattern of life. The Bena utilised these traditional means to enable the continuity of sacred forest management traditions. While Bena elders endeavoured to safely transmit the traditions to the young generation, the youths were eager to have those traditions handed to them.

Nyumbanitu sacred forest best represents young Bena receptivity to sacred forest traditions in the post-independence era. From the 1950s to 1998, the priesthood of the NSF passed through the hands of Mwapesa Msigwa, Ng'ombeulaya and Vangameli Msigwa (detailed earlier in this chapter). The intensive search for a young man to take over from Vangameli contrasts with the situation experienced in recent times. Vangameli had ten male children from his two wives (five boys each). Per tradition, a person who assumed the priesthood and management of NSF would be one of the ten children. Priests needed to be male. All the children took significant interests in learning from their father, each hoping to be installed into the priesthood to take over their father's role. It took time before the successor was announced and installed. The children were to be examined before a decision was made. An assistant NSF priest explained the rigorous search process:

We all wanted to become shrine priests. We considered it prestigious to be caretaker of the Bena shrine, but we could not nominate ourselves to the role. Our father used to randomly pick one of us whenever he wanted to venerate the shrine with other Bena elders. Taken to the forest, we had to learn all the *tambiko* procedures. When we got home, he asked us to rehearse the process. He did that to everyone at multiple times.⁵⁸

Competence regarding procedures for *tambiko* would accompany one's ethical conduct, demonstrated through respect and love for people and nature, leadership skills and thoughtfulness. It was equally important for candidates to demonstrate a high capacity to narrate the history of the Bena and their sacred forest traditions.⁵⁹ The outcome of the rigorous assessment of the young men was communicated to the council of Bena elders,

⁵⁸ Alex Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by Edward Mgaya, 8 May 2018.

⁵⁹ A Bena chief, Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa pointed that a proper understanding of Bena traditions and customs was also considered important for one to become a chief or member of tribal elders' councils.

particularly the Mkongwa-Kiswaga-Fute. It was these elders who would then announce the successor.

In 1998, after the death of Vangameli, the elders pronounced Julius Vangameli Msigwa, the youngest son of Vangameli, as the new custodian priest and caretaker for NSF. The choice of a younger son was not taken by surprise as it was believed that, apart from the assessment by elders, ancestors would select the right person for the task. The decision of elders, therefore, was believed to have been communicated from the ancestors; thus, no one could question such an outcome. ‘We knew from the beginning, that ancestors could not be challenged, and the one chosen could not refuse as he would get problems,’ said Alex Vangameli Msigwa, Julius’ elder brother.⁶⁰

Although the system enabling young people to take over sacred traditions could not be questioned, elders relied on fear and punishment to teach youths. Such training could only produce learners who, out of fear, became obedient and submissive. They committed to memory ideas that they sometimes did not understand and the values they had no right to question. This traditional means of knowledge communication thus tended to kill the spirit of initiative, innovation, and enterprise. During the past two decades, however, teaching by fear has eroded. Young Bena increasingly challenges long-cherished sacred beliefs. This trend, an outcome of modernisation, challenges the steadiness of sacred forest traditions.

The attitudinal change regarding sacred grove traditions among the Bena led to the abandonment of *matambiko* (plural for rituals) in some sacred forests. During fieldwork, it was observed that in the larger sacred groves, traditional rituals were still being performed according to customary beliefs. In most small and degraded sacred forests, though, the traditional ceremonies were not performed. For example, there were no recent records regarding rituals being conducted at Malaganga and Luhuyo sacred groves. ‘We do not have people to lead the *matambiko*, and our young men are not interested.... Maybe in the future, someone will be able to take up the role,’ commented Stephen Ilomo, one of the kin connected to the neglected Malaganga sacred grove.⁶¹ Rituals are known only to a few people, most who belong to the older generation. Most young Bena considers rituals as superstition. While some families continue worshipping their ancestors’ spirits, most do not transmit their sacred forests’ knowledge and practices to the next generation. As a

⁶⁰ This was noted by Alex Vangameli Msigwa as he explained their acceptance of Julius’ appointment despite being the youngest.

⁶¹ Stephen Ilomo interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Lupila, 19 May 2018.

result, there is a significant generational divide, whereby the Bena youth only know that they are not allowed to enter some groves, with no further explanation. As Jonas Nyika explains:

One thing that I see, and which brings and will continue to carry damage, is that our children do not want to be investigative like you [the researcher] have been asking here. I may tell you about the sacred forest-related knowledge but, my children would not ask me, because they stick to their books, I mean to the things of the contemporary world.⁶²

During an interview at the Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism, a respondent emphasised that the youth nowadays want tangible things: ‘they do not believe in the stories of their *babus* [grandfathers].’⁶³ For instance, there were many arguments when youths challenged their elders about the use of sacred land for production. Indeed, much of the encroachment in sacred landscapes pitted Bena youths against elders. As one informant put it, ‘young men said that lineage forests were traditional things to be done away with, so they cut them and started to use the fertile soil.’⁶⁴

In post-colonial Tanzania, with the introduction of the modern national state, rituals aimed at protecting the Bena against rivals became useless. The security mechanisms enacted and reproduced through specific ritual performances inside sacred forests were no longer seen as necessary for the survival of the community. As such, young people do not know the advantage of investigating rituals that do not have a direct impact on their lives. For instance, today people cannot comprehend the beliefs of *mgoda mtitu* (dark medicine),⁶⁵ which were crucial during the Bena intertribal wars in the pre-colonial and early colonial periods. The new generation lacks information on the customs and traditional practices in sacred forests. As time goes by, those who keep the *mila na desturi* (traditions and customs) have not only been influenced by Christianity and formal education, but traditional knowledge also dies with the passing of elders. Thus, there are concerns that children might not receive any information about sacred forests and all the related knowledge, practices, management, and ownership standards.

The disconnect between *vijana* and *wazee* (youths and elders) comes from disinterest, which in turn, is exacerbated by migration and urbanisation. The circumstances

⁶² Jonas Nyika interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 19 May 2018.

⁶³ Deusdedit Bwoyo interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Dodoma, 22 June 2018.

⁶⁴ Elly Daniel Kiswaga interviewed in Swahili by Edward Mgaya, Ulembwe, 23 August 2018.

⁶⁵ *Mgoda mtitu* [literally translated to dark medicine or black forest] was a medicine which was obtained from Nyumbanitu shrine. It was believed that with such medicine, enemies would not be able to see the Bena soldiers, thus giving the Bena an advantage to win the war.

needed to acquire formal education lead the younger generation to move to other parts of Tanzania, especially to big cities. Consequently, 'learning by doing', vital for the propagation of traditional ritual practices, is interrupted at an earlier age. Many Bena youths—males more than females—leave their villages to find 'better life' after finishing primary or secondary education, and most do not return to live permanently in their original Njombe communities. Even Bena youths who remain home are less interested in learning traditional beliefs related to sacred groves.

The sacred custodianship among the Bena was predominantly male, thus requiring young boys' preparedness. During interviews, most Bena elders, including the shrine priests themselves, were worried about youth disinterest when they accompanied elders when performing *tambiko*. Julius and Alex, the NSF priests, had five and two boys, respectively. But they doubted that any of their boys could take on their roles. As Julius said:

challenges exist regarding getting someone from our kin to take over the custodial and priesthood positions as we did from our fathers. Chances are becoming slim for our youths to accompany us as we execute our priesthood roles in the groves. Most of them stick to modern religion and schools. They do not have time for traditions.⁶⁶

The priests explained that if no young ministers could take over their roles, another clan would take over the priesthood. But they still hoped to find someone from within the family. The priests revealed confidence in the mystical powers of the Bena ancestors: ancestors would choose a proper person to undertake the important role and supernaturally compel him into the role. According to Joseph Mwatiga,

our ancestors are mighty, and no one can go against their will. It is tough for someone to refuse if chosen to carry on this sacred role. We have experienced people denying responsibilities the ancestors wanted them to perform for the community. They ended up getting misfortunes that disappeared only after they accepted the role. Some are chosen to be healers while others are to lead the *tambiko* tradition.⁶⁷

Cultural and religious beliefs were stronger among rural than urban communities. The more youths were exposed to modernity and interacted with different cultures, the more they developed blended perceptions and behaviours and consequently disturbed the sacred groves' traditions.

⁶⁶ Julius Vangameli Msigwa interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Nyumbanitu, 8 May 2018.

⁶⁷ Joseph Mwatiga interviewed by Edward Mgaya, Lupila, 25 July 2018.

To some Bena, the rise of Christianity and modern education do not fully explain the younger generation's scepticism about traditional forest rituals. For instance, most sacred forest priests I interviewed pointed out that traditional religion did not contradict Christian teachings, particularly regarding respect to nature. These priests were also Christians, though, and they considered themselves doing God's work in conserving nature. The priests blended some Bible scriptures with their ritual practices. In describing ancestors, the priests begin by mentioning *Nguluvi* (God) whom they believe made a covenant with Bena ancestors at NSF.⁶⁸

Along with loss in beliefs, Bena language, a carrier of culture is fast dying among Bena youths. There are increasingly fewer Bena youths who can fluently speak Bena language. According to United Nations Educational and Scientific Organisation's Ad Hoc expert group on Endangered Languages "language is in danger when its speakers cease to use it, or use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. That is, there are no new speakers, either adults or children".⁶⁹ The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Inter-Commission Task Force on Indigenous peoples estimated in 1997, that half of the world's languages—the storehouses of peoples' intellectual heritages and the framework for their unique understandings of life—would disappear within a century'.⁷⁰

Bena elders are concerned about Bena youths' increasingly abandoning their Bena language in favour of Kiswahili and English languages. 'The Bena language is still alive among us [elders] but this present generation could let it die away' said Elias Mkongwa, a Bena chief showing his concern about the danger of language extinction. For most Bena older people, Kiswahili was only learned at school as second language after prolonged use of Bena as the only language. While for the elders Kiswahili was a new language, for most Bena youths Kiswahili has become a first language replacing the Bena. Some Bena think speaking in Kiswahili makes them look modern thus do not speak Bena language. Discontented by people who cannot speak their Bena language, Alatangwa Nyagava said:

Our Bena language is dying because some parents think to be modern is to speak Kiswahili [or English for the learned] language and, therefore, do not speak the local language with their kids at home. Kiswahili is gradually

⁶⁸ Eliasi Mwaluko Mkongwa, 'Historia ya Kabila la Wabena na Jinsi Kabila hilo Lilivyotawanyika katika Makabila Mengi na Walivyoweza Mumuondoa Mjerumani', 1.

⁶⁹ M. Brezinger, et al. *Language Vitality and Endangerment* (Paris: UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage Unit, 2003), 2.

⁷⁰ IUCN, 'Indigenous Peoples and Sustainability: Cases and Actions,' IUCN Inter-Commission Task Force on Indigenous peoples (Utrecht, NL: International Books, 1997), 364.

becoming the first language in the homes of most working families in Tanzania. I find it shameful when one cannot speak their local language.⁷¹

Some Bena youths, feel bad when someone speak to them in Bena, especially in public in the cities. Anania Kabelege, shared his experience as he lived in Dar-es-Salaam city.

If I were to speak to my brother in our mother-tongue in a public place, this would be considered rude and bad manners, by Tanzanian standards, at least. I think this is a shame, because by letting languages die, we are letting a culture to die! Nevertheless, it is good to have Kiswahili as a unifying language, but this should not jeopardise our being native Bena.⁷²

A particular language points to the culture of a particular social group. Knowing a language, therefore, provides a window for a learner to know the society and its cultural customs hence ensuring intergeneration cultural transmission. Traditional ecological knowledge is often lost when a language carrying that knowledge is lost.⁷³ Knowledge-practice-belief systems are transferred to the next generations through songs, myths, and stories that tell of various sacred ecological traditions. Proper knowledge regarding how the society relate to their environment has to be in a relevant language that forms the base of that culture. A Bena chief notes a difficulty in communicating some of the knowledge in a language other than Bena.

Most of our sacred knowledge regarding groves tradition can only be properly communicated in our Bena language. Any use of Kiswahili changes meaning and takes us away from the language of our ancestors and so making the *tambiko* less meaningful.⁷⁴

The prospect of the extinction of Bena language and, with it, the erosion of traditional beliefs and indigenous knowledge systems that such language hold and sustain, aggravates danger of discontinued practice of sacred forests management by the Bena youths.

The systems and rituals that have for so long kept sacred forests in Njombe, then, face abandonment by younger Bena. Most associate such practices with superstition. The traditional learning process which involved youths accompanying elders, as they executed their traditions, has been replaced mainly by formal schooling which provides less traditional learning by initiation, observation, and repetition of elders' beliefs. Postcolonial Njombe has thus witnessed the neglect by youths of traditions of *tambiko* which were vital for managing sacred forests. Although a section of young Bena, especially in rural areas,

⁷¹ Alatanga Nyagava, interviewed by Edward Mgya, Njombe, 26 May 2018.

⁷² Anania Kabelege, Interviewed by Edward Mgya, Makambako, 4 June 2018.

⁷³ B. Wilder et al. 'The Importance of Indigenous Knowledge in Curbing the Loss of Language and Biodiversity', *BioScience* 66, no. 6 (2016), 499.

⁷⁴

still adhere to such traditions, their number does not guarantee the continuity of such groves. Youths might be motivated if one stressed the ecological importance of woods rather than focusing only on spiritual aspects. Some custodians have started adopting such an ecological approach.

5.5. Rationality for contemporary conservation and management of sacred forests

Over time, Bena sacred groves have experienced degradation mainly due to economic pressures and people distancing themselves from beliefs that were key to establishing and managing the sacred forests. However, traditional institutions and the custodians of the forests have not been static and silent to such changes. They became part of such changes. Given the current rates of tropical deforestation and the growth of environmentalism in the world, sacred forests have a newfound salience. Apart from the traditional spiritual rationality for keeping sacred forests, custodians have resorted to blending religious and scientific explanations to defend the existence of groves. Although environmental consciousness was part of the traditional ways of life among the Bena, ecological importance is more apparent now than ever. For instance, the linkage of sacred groves with social and economic policy to form ‘sustainable development’, and the search for community participation in conservation efforts, has led to the recognition of traditional institutions as a resource management system. International organisations like UNESCO and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) call for collaboration between sacred grove custodians, governments, and researchers in social and natural science to safeguard the sacred landscapes. The notion that ecological diversity should be protected requires ecological consciousness. But scholars disagree whether ecology should be placed at the centre of sacred forest management. What is the rationality behind the contemporary conservation of sacred forests in Njombe? If the adherence to traditional spirituality is fading, can traditional societies validate keeping sacred groves on ecological grounds alongside spirituality? Our discussion helps answer the question whether there is ecological rationale embodied within cultural beliefs of sanctified groves. An examination of traditional African religious attitudes toward nature helps us decide whether such traditions were environmentally conscious in the practice of upkeeping sacred forests. In examining the Bena attitude to the environment, we can gauge whether their traditions will re-emerge as a robust conservational force in the context of today’s global environmental challenges.

The term 'environment' refers to both biotic and non-biotic external conditions that impact on an organism or a group of organisms.⁷⁵ In *environmental and legal terms*, the environment is defined as the totality surrounding a substance or a person's existence and the way they relate to the world. It covers the social, political, economic, spiritual and natural environment which comprises the living and non-living things such as water, land, plants, animals, man and their existing inter-relationships.⁷⁶ The science of the mutual relationship between organisms and to their environment is what is referred to as ecology.⁷⁷ Human societies are generally expected to conserve their environment to ensure that the earth remains a better place to live. Thus, the management of sacred forests is expected to partly be a process of conserving the environment.

Some scholars view African traditional religion as, by definition, environmentally friendly. For instance, a generation ago Ranger stated that

African religious ideas were very much ideas about the relationship, whether with other living people, or with spirits of the dead, or with animals, or with cleared land, or with the bush.⁷⁸

The idea of environmentally traditional African religion is shared more recently by Gumo et al. (2012) who argue that African worldviews implied attitudes, values, perceptions, beliefs, and practices based on natural environmental resources of the cosmos. They added that 'African spirituality created respect for animals, reverence for forests, rocks, mountains and rivers.'⁷⁹ Information on African worldviews on nature can be retrieved from sources such as myths, legends, rites, and taboos, all of which relate to sacred grove traditions. Mgumia and Oba argue that sacred groves indicate significant potential for in situ conservation of biodiversity.⁸⁰ To these scholars, therefore, humility and respect for nature is a characteristic of African worldviews.

Other scholars disagree with the idea of environmentally traditional African culture. They see views that affirm environmental consciousness in traditional African religion as romantic.⁸¹ Instead, practices that led to nature conservation in most traditional societies followed from a land's spiritual significance rather than biodiversity conservation per se.

⁷⁵ P.H. Raven and L.R. Berg, *Environment* 5th ed. (New York: Willey Publication, 2006), 3.

⁷⁶ C.C. Lee, *Dictionary of Environmental and Legal Terms* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1997), 3.

⁷⁷ Raven and Berg, 'Environment', 4.

⁷⁸ Terrence O. Ranger, 'African Traditional Religion', in *The World's Religion*, eds. Stewart Sutherland et al. (London: Routledge 1988), 687.

⁷⁹ Gumo et al. 'Communicating African Spirituality through Ecology,' 524.

⁸⁰ Mgumia and Oba, 'Potential Role of Sacred Groves in Biodiversity Conservation in Tanzania', 263.

⁸¹ Nisbert Taringa, 'How Environmental is African Traditional Religion?' *Exchange* 35, no. 2 (2006), 191.

For example, Taringa argues that any affirmative answers to the question of whether there is environmental conservation in African culture are more theoretical than practical.⁸² From research on the Shona people of Zimbabwe, he identified three African attitudes to nature: to maintain, obey, and act on it. The first two relate to sacred aspects of nature and are primarily based on a fear of ancestral spirits—environmental consciousness.⁸³ He concluded that the Shona maintain a worldview about human-nature relationships that primarily are relationships with spirits—they are not necessarily ecological relationships with nature.⁸⁴ Writing about India, Tomalin made two critical remarks about traditional societies' attitude to nature. First, the environmental friendliness of those societies should not be assumed to be a result of those people holding ecological values. Secondly, while those societies prescribe behaviour that might conserve nature, the motive behind such actions may not necessarily be to benefit the environment.⁸⁵ Similarly, Mgumia and Oba argue, in the case of the Nyamwezi of Tanzania, that although their practices directly contributed to in situ conservation, their goals were spiritual.⁸⁶

The Bena worldview follows the general traditional African worldview concerning the human relationship with nature. The Bena believe that land, with its natural resources, is entirely owned by the ancestors.⁸⁷ It follows, therefore, that attitudes to nature are strong when attached to ancestral ownership and beliefs in the sacredness of the land, which serves as a common history that unites all Bena generations. It is believed among the Bena that whoever does not relate to sacred aspects of nature as per prescribed taboos and restrictions, for instance, will suffer misfortunes as the ancestors would be angry. In this worldview, the fundamental attitude of the Bena to nature is religious, based on fear of mystical sanction by the ancestors. From such a worldview, one can easily concur with other scholars to conclude that Bena traditional spiritual practices do not display environmental consciousness. Although little is written about the Bena society, there are at least two studies that discuss the Bena and sacred forests. Elias wrote that the Bena traditional folklore materials have helped to preserve sacred forests from exploitation.⁸⁸ In their review of the effectiveness of conventional institutions in sustainable resource use, Njana et al.

⁸² Taringa, 'How Environmental is African Traditional Religion?' 210.

⁸³ Ibid, 211.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 196.

⁸⁵ Emma Tomalin, 'The Limitation of Religious Environmentalism for India,' *Worldviews* 6 (2002), 15.

⁸⁶ Mgumia and Oba, 'Potential Role of Sacred Groves in Biodiversity Conservation in Tanzania', 264.

⁸⁷ As argued by Mbiti, Africans have a prevailing anthropocentric worldview regarding the human being (dead or alive) as central to the universe (John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (London: Heinemann, 1969), 15-16).

⁸⁸ Elias, 'Inside Nyumbanitu Traditional Forest', 3.

concluded that Bena traditional institutions demonstrated effective management to assure future sustainability.⁸⁹ The two studies, however, do not present evidence of ecological consciousness behind Bena sacred forest practices.

A phenomenological proposal that traditional beliefs and practices do not comprise ecological aims to support contemporary management of such sites needs a further examination before they are taken as general truth for the traditional societies' attitudes toward nature. In this study, we argue that it is challenging to distinguish traditional institutions from conservation origins. The social and religious values in the context of the Bena tradition are inseparable from ecological factors. One needs to investigate how the existing informal institutions relate to resource and ecosystem dynamics over time and space and how they adaptively respond to the environmental feedback holistically. To the Bena, conservation of the environment is attained through sustainable living rather than through separate efforts geared specifically towards maximising biodiversity.

Many Bena traditional institutions differ from formal measures in their nonspecific nature conservation objectives. We do not need to examine the conservation objectives of conventional institutions in the prism of how they agree within a worldview assumed in modern environmental discourses. Traditional institutions operate in their realms, which can not necessarily fit modern terminologies to human-nature relations. For instance, while formal institutions use laws to protect the environment for the sake of ecology, informal institutions use spirituality to conserve nature for both spirituality and the environment.

When gathering oral testimonies, it is not easy to obtain precise answers that directly link cultural practices with environmental objectives. As noted by Posey, ethnographers are often puzzled by the fact that indigenous informants frequently fail to provide ecological explanations for cultural practices that seemingly have environmental effects.⁹⁰ The fact that a researcher might not find direct ecological recollections does not, however, justify arguing that communities or elders ignored environmental concerns. The flaw might partly result from how researchers frame the questions they ask. For example, during this research, two questions related to the aims of preserving sacred forests were asked: 'are there environmental aims in establishing and maintaining sacred forests?'; 'what is the importance of the sacred forest?' The two questions received different

⁸⁹ Njana et al. 'Are Traditional Institutions Effective in Regulating Forest Use and Sustaining Forest Resources?' 99.

⁹⁰ D.A. Posey, 'Interpreting and Applying the 'Reality' of Indigenous Concepts: What is Necessary to Learn from the Natives?' in *Conservation of Neotropical Forests: Working from Traditional Resource Use*, eds. K.H. Redford and C. Padoch (New York: Columbia University Press 1992), 25.

responses. While the response to the first question was mainly ‘I don’t know/ not sure’, the response to the second question produced four answers. During the focused group discussion, the informants revealed that sacred forests are important because they: (i) serve ritual activities such as prayers, blessings and thanksgivings; (ii) maintain the culture, (iii) provide a source of medicine and healing; and (iv) help deliver rainfall for plants and animals.⁹¹

The first question, ‘are there environmental aims in maintaining sacred forests?’, demanded specific ecological/environmental aims, making it difficult for informants in rural communities to answer. The difficulties firstly emanated from the use of terminologies that the country people, most of whom are illiterate, could not comprehend. Secondly, the fact that the question demanded specific environmental aims conflicted with their nonspecific nature conservation objectives. The informants’ response to the question provided a lesson: when researching rural communities, we should think about our terminologies. To obtain proper answers, we should immerse ourselves into the culture of those we are studying. Switching to the second question, ‘what is the importance of the sacred forest?’, allowed informants to give a broad spectrum of answers that revealed socio-cultural, economic, and ecological aims behind their establishment and management of sacred forests.

We do not need to hear the terms environment or ecology in the explanations provided to be able to discern the ecological rationality of the cultures we study. The Bena people expressed environmental objectives of sacred forests by linking it to things that matter most to them—other creatures and ancestors. For instance, the Bena understand that the forest provides a source of rain, medicinal plants, and habitats for birds and animals alongside ancestors. That understanding credits their environmental rationality and explains the continued management of groves today. Although they could not explain the forest-rain connection in bio-geo-chemical terms, when asked about the importance of forests, informants indicated that without congested forests, rain would not fall.

Bena generations differ in their emphasis regarding the aims and functions of sacred forests. While all generations affirm groves’ social, cultural, political, and ecological values, the sequence to which they put these aims reflects a shift from emphasizing socio-cultural aspects, by elders, to recognizing environmental issues of the groves, by Bena

⁹¹ These are not the only answers provided by informants but, they represent answers most repeated by most of them indicating that they are commonly shared by majority of the community members.

youths (See table 5.1). Three-quarters of older Bena mentioned ecological aims alongside other aims, but it ranked last. One-quarter of the old Bena interviewed did not mention environmental intentions at all. On the other hand, most Bena youths who were interviewed about the importance of sacred forests provided answers that denoted more ecological awareness despite spiritual explanations coming first. While the old Bena mentioned fertility alongside rainfall, the youths mentioned fresh air alongside rainfall when explaining the benefit of sacred forests.

Table 5.1 Rationality for sacred forests: priority changes with ages

Rank	Generation 50 years and older	Generation younger than 50 years
1	Ritual activities	Ritual activities
2	Maintain culture	Rainfall and fresh air
3	Medicine and healing	Maintain culture
4	Rainfall and fertility	Medicine and healing

Note: The priorities are arranged in ascending order, from the one mentioned first to the last. The highlighted reason denotes ecological rationality.

Source: Compiled by the researcher based on the information from fifty fieldwork interviews, 2018.

The emphasis that older Bena generations gave to socio-cultural aspects reflects low population pressure in pre-colonial and early colonial periods in which they did not worry much about resource depletion. With the increasing number of people settling in Ukena, the colonial and later post-1961 policies, and today's significant global environmental crises, much more importance and emphasis were given to ecological explanations. The Bena youths shifted attention to sacred forests as sources of rain, emphasising, therefore, their ecological values.

Ecological aims of sacred forests are also expressed in terms of what is needed for the ancestors to thrive. The Bena believe that like human beings, ancestors need to be sustained by fresh air and shelter. Thus, after a traditional burial, particularly of elders, mourners could plant a symbolic tree. As a sign of prosperity, other trees would eventually grow alongside the initial tree, creating a sacred forest—a shelter for supernatural and

living beings. Just like the modern environmental scientist would discuss the importance of vegetation to human survival, the Bena referred to such meanings about ancestral spirits. As they speak about ancestors, they talk about themselves too. What is good for ancestors benefits the living. Therefore, to clear a sacred forest threatens lives, and hence is forbidden.

In addition to preserving sacred forests for religious purposes, the Bena have increasingly been aware of other interactions with the forest and other sacred places they established. The diversity of aims for management of forests agrees with Berkes et al. who argued that, rather than being devised explicitly for nature conservation, conservation measures of traditional societies are embedded in a broad social context that fundamentally differs from modern societies.⁹² As such, the Bena practice of traditional knowledge systems offers an integrated system of knowledge, practices, and beliefs handed down through generations by cultural transmission. Such settings, however, do not suggest that the Bena were ‘noble savages.’ Instead, they based their resource management on other spiritual rationales as well as on some western nature management and conservation systems.

The rationality behind contemporary management of sacred forests among the Bena, then, reflects a broad-spectrum of explanations. Their rationales are holistic, taking into consideration socio-cultural, economic as well as ecological objectives that together make a meaningful life. Customs and traditions (*Mila na desturi*) are indeed the first reason why the Bena people keep preserving sacred forests. However, the eco-philosophical analysis of the motivations behind the conservation of such groves does not allow a clear dichotomisation of traditional versus modern. The boundary between the two is indeed artificial; the so-called traditional elements of Bena cosmology are instead infused with current western scientific conservation objectives—they exist next to each other and are intertwined. The meanings attributed to sacred forests, derived from traditional Bena cosmology and which drive current conservation policies, have changed and adapted to new circumstances. On the one hand, the shift represents the flexibility and evolution of local institutions, which is also the power of fluid, dynamic local communities worldwide. On the other hand, the change emphasises the divergent approaches of modern conservation programs, which view sacred forests as static and contained.

⁹² F. Berkes, C. Folke, and M. Gadgil, ‘Traditional Ecological Knowledge, Biodiversity, Resilience and Sustainability’, in *Biodiversity Conservation*, eds. C.A. Perrings, G.K. Maler, C. Folke, C.S. Holding, and B.O. Janson (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1995), 275.

* * *

Sacred forests in Njombe are not merely the physical remnants of a pre-modern past, nor are they a result of unchanging institutions. On the contrary, these groves are living sites, ecologically as well as ritually, politically, and socially. However, their significance in postcolonial Njombe is subject to ongoing negotiation and transformation, and differs from place to place and from different times. These sites are subject to competing socio-political and economic interests alongside contenting historical narratives, ritual transformations, and biodiversity conservation. Although these aspects may appear disparate and unrelated, experience from sacred groves in Njombe shows that they are closely related, because they all centre on questions of ownership, access, and use.

A successful co-existence of sacred natural sites and modern economic imperatives requires a better understanding of their interrelationships and the broad values and benefits of sacred natural sites for human wellbeing and development. In the past, protection and conservation of the sacred groves in Njombe were closely linked with the religious beliefs and traditional culture of the indigenous Bena communities. Although this cultural heritage survived through generations, the religious beliefs and taboos that were central to sacred grove preservation are eroding due socio-economic changes. The early post-colonial government politics that emphasised increased agricultural production to combat poverty signified the need for more fields, giving a reason for individuals to clear sacred groves. Thus, farmers' encroachment upon and the dividing of the commons resulted partly from changing postcolonial politics in Njombe. The material, social and cultural legacies of these processes included environmental change, declining management capacity and persistent doubt about the value of 'conservation.' Liberalisation policies of the 1980s did not secure the commitment of some sacred grove custodians who unstiffened their obligations to keep sacred sites intact. Their support of an alone-standing tree for *tambiko* for instance, signalled a move from the traditional 'sacred forest' to a redefined ritual space, 'a sacred tree.'

New developments are underway in the sacred landscape in Njombe. Eco-tourism, an activity that was traditionally unwelcome in sacred landscapes, has found justification in post-colonial Nyumbanitu sacred forests. This development brings new challenges to the sustainability of sacred forests, especially when the need of tourism and tourists are put in focus at the neglect of the needs of the local people and the sanctity of the sites. The adherence of Bena youths to the sacred traditions is in decline. Differences in interests

regarding sacred forests characterise the contestations among custodians and between custodians and other locals and with local government authorities. The detaching from sacred forest practices by many Christian converts has given room for few custodians to use sacred sites unchecked.

Despite all the changes, patches of sacred groves exist in different parts of the Njombe region today. But it is complicated, if not impossible, to protect sacred groves indefinitely based solely on religious beliefs. Thus, Bena communities have revitalised their holistic approach to nature by supplementing to their spiritual cause an ecological knowledge about the crucial role these forest patches play in conserving biodiversity. Further, sacred groves provide valuable goods and vital ecological services to the people living around them. Although slowly, the blend between spirituality and ecology has increasingly characterised sacred groves' custodians in post-colonial Njombe. Holistic and flexible traditional African cultural practices help to explain the current efforts to promote the practices as conservation options. The promotion of traditional forms of resource management is centred on the management capabilities of local communities and the possible danger of disregarding them.

Conclusion

Studies of sacred landscapes as an expression of human activities, in space and time, are gaining increasing attention in a variety of disciplines. The focus on sacred forests has relevance both for our understanding of society, culture, and traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and for research on landcover change and biodiversity. Sacred groves once symbolised local cultural cohesion among Tanzanian local communities. Their prolonged decline has occurred during relentless socio-economic and political changes experienced by these societies. The present study has analysed the linkages among the processes of sociocultural, economic, and political change in Njombe from the 1880s to the present to discern changes and continuities in the sacred forest tradition among the Bena.

The study of forest patches and the institutions that protect them assumes urgency when we consider that a conservation strategy focusing only on large, state-protected areas insufficiently meets the conservation needs of some species and systems and that conservation efforts in the tropics must include forest areas that lie outside large reserves. In Tanzania, only 43 percent of the forested land is classed as a forest reserve. Traditional and customary management practices have generally supported the conservation and maintenance of some of the forest cover of villages for sacred, religious, or social purposes in numerous localities across the country. Sacred forests constitute part of the forest cover maintained by villages and clan lineages. By studying these landscapes, we can understand the inextricable link between the present society and the past in terms of biodiversity, culture, and religious and ethnic heritage. Religiously protected sacred groves act as an ideal centre for biodiversity conservation.

The study contributes to knowledge about sacred forests by bringing into natural resource management debate a historically situated and locally nuanced forest management and the need for institutional arrangements that link culture and biodiversity within the changing socio-economic, political, and ecological context of local communities. A historical model that focuses on shifting institutions and practices explains traditional institutions' management of sacred forests in Njombe better than the simple model espoused by those who view sacred groves and African religion as static. The thesis has proved that contemporary sacred forests among the Bena are not relics of pre-colonial ideas and practices as they have changed alongside changes in institutions that revere them. Learning from these changing resource management traditions enables us to gauge whether

such practices can re-emerge as a strong conserving force to help meet today's global environmental challenges.

To understand the sacred forest tradition of the Bena, this thesis applied a qualitative, mixed-method ethnographic research approach, combining interviews, participant observation, and focus groups. The study relied on oral histories gleaned via interviews in Bena and Kiswahili with fifty key stakeholders. The informants included the sacred forests' caretakers, traditional priests, chiefs, and elders. Also providing interviews were officials at the Tanzania Forest Services (TFS) agency, village heads, church leaders and young Bena. The use of oral recollections emanates from the fact that an understanding of the management of sacred forests by once colonised societies must include both colonial and pre-colonial influences. Orality did not disappear with the advent of writing in colonial Africa. Rather, oral, and written traditions have interacted with one another in a context that privileges the written. Thus, a need to closely examine the processes through which different contested versions of the past are recounted, recorded, and institutionalised. Because of illiteracy, sacred forest traditions have mainly been passed down by word of mouth through the generations. Oral history entails a new reading of the 'tradition' in Africa, one that considers the prior history of pre-colonial societies in the construction of ethnic identity.

Relying on oral histories had its limitations which included the fact there was no guarantee for interviewees always to say what a researcher would want them to say, and thus any disclosed information is necessarily restricted by the type and amount of information told by the informants. Oral interviews and responses also faced the problem of chronology. While the duration and progression of events need to be established as accurately as possible, oral testimonies rarely included clear notions of time in modern terms. Most interviewees, especially older people, related their description of events to other events when asked about time. The limited written records supplemented the oral information collected and, where no document or oral account existed to determine a time frame, approximate dates were used.

The thesis analysis of traditional institutions' management of sacred forests reveals sacred groves as complex and dynamic systems responding to both endogenous and exogenous influences. The management of these landscapes by the Bena people constitute traditional ecological knowledge (TEK). By regarding sacred forests as form of TEK the thesis has applied concepts of *Knowledge-Practice-Belief complex systems* as an analytical framework. Knowledge-practice-belief complex systems framework is useful for

understanding sacred grove management as various ongoing processes rather than an inert entity. When the knowledge about the environment changes, the practices and the belief system embedded in them changes too and vice versa. In this framework, sacred forests subsume four interrelated levels: Traditional knowledge, traditional resource management practices, social institutions, and a world view. The feedback and interactions between the four levels leads to changes in the way sacred forests are managed. The changes may lead to more sustainable practices or degrade sacred forests. The knowledge-practice-belief complex systems concept helps us perceive that environmental conditions are continuously altering in response to internal and external forces. As environmental conditions change, local communities change with them. Through TEK and hence knowledge-practice-belief systems, sacred groves in Njombe are potentially historical and tied to spirituality of particular communities. Because of their nature as ‘sacred ecologies’, any management efforts that disregard the spiritual (sacredness) aspects of the forests are likely to fail.

Since pre-colonial times, Tanzania’s local communities have managed traditional forests. However, the top-down approach to forest management during the colonial and early post-colonial periods ignored them. After neglect, formal recognition, and development of the various forms of community forest management regimes emerged in the 1990s. The failure of many state-led conservation efforts led researchers and policymakers to look for ways to empower or create community-based institutions for natural resource management. Recognising community forest management responded to the need by conservation agencies and the government to decentralise natural resource management and to build upon existing local institutions. Thus, conservationists and development practitioners investigated ways to incorporate sacred groves into conservation policy, as they believed that sacred forests epitomised contemporary conservation policy’s goals of grassroots participation, socio-cultural legitimacy, and ecological efficacy.

Despite its formality, the devolution of forest management signified a shift to revive the pre-colonial norms and principles of traditional systems of indigenous forest management. The 1998 forest policy (policy statement 39), declared that ‘local communities will be encouraged to participate in forestry activities.’¹ In practice, the sustainability of forests needed to consider the socio-economic, ecological, and cultural aspects. The principles of multi-functionality and equitable benefits and responsibility-

¹ URT. *Tanzania National Forest Policy*, Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT), Tanzania (Dar-es-Salaam: Government Printer, 1998), 1.

sharing would now drive forest management.² Given legal force by Forest Act No. 14 of 2002 (Cap. 323), the policy vested the responsibility for managing forest resources into various stakeholders. The document recognised traditional forests as constituting a type of forest. While the policy accorded protection to indigenously managed traditional forests and encouraged the founding of more, the necessary legal framework to promote sacred forests has failed to emerge.³ In addition to establishing a supportive legal framework, promoting traditional sacred forests requires expanding the knowledge base about them—their location, extent, and management, a base much better developed with regard to non-traditional forests.

In Tanzania, scholarly inquiry about indigenous systems' management of natural resources began increasing in the 1990s. Three factors motivated studies of sacred forests and the institutions upholding them: the need to learn more about their management systems; a general understanding of their potential survival value and the flexibility they presented; and their sustainable ecological management strategies. However, the general support for the potential survival value of sacred forests must take note that sacred landscapes are local affairs: they originate from cultural practices and the histories of specific communities. Focusing on the traditional institutions of specific communities ground historical locally devised institutions in resource management. Institutions need to be explained within the given context they emerge and operate.⁴ Accordingly, institutions connect to culture. For instance, traditional taboos, rituals, and folklore function as informal institutions that have worked to resiliently manage natural resources in societies where formal institutions were still fragile. It is within the realm of these cultural institutions that traditional societies define and redefine the sacredness of specific natural sites.

Among the Bena, the sacredness of a place emanated from the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds. The forest, the most common sacred place, acted as a centre of communication between the two worlds. Such forests originated from migration (which led to an expansion of Bena centres for venerating ancestors), an abandoned settlement, burial activities, and ritual practices. Nyumbanitu sacred forest, being the central sacred forest for the Bena, illustrates that the sacred forest is an area for *matambiko*

² K. F. S. Hamza and E. O. Kimwer, 'Tanzania's Forest Policy and Its Practical Achievements with Respect to Community Based Forest Management in MITMIOMBO', *Working Papers of the Finnish Forest Research Institute* 50 (2007), 25.

³ URT. *Tanzania National Forest Policy*, (1998), 1.

⁴ P.J. DiMaggio and W.W. Powel (eds), *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 5.

(ancestral veneration) which emerged from an abandoned settlement. The Bena perceive sacred sites as religious and socio-cultural arenas upon which their life was based. The sacred forests were for them homes to ancestral spirits who provided for and protected the living kin if the living kin reciprocated the kindness. Sacred sites are culturally significant in that they are historical artefacts of the ethnic groups that lived in areas where sacred sites currently exist. The sites are a reminder of the collective past and symbols of power. Their existence, ownership, and levels of sacredness reflect the power relationship between the Bena groups. Folklore, myths, rules, and protocols that discouraged intrusion into sacred forests resulted in an ideal landscape and vegetation type—the sacred sites became natural montane patches with thick canopies that provided shade for the ancestors and concealed sacred rituals. The holiness of sacred forests centred on ancestors, and ancestral spirits, taboos, and folklore protected these groves. Sacred forests signified connectedness of the entire Bena society. Their network spread in various places through the founding of sacred sub-forests as a sign of new community life. While formal institutions use laws to enforce nature conservation, folklore played a crucial role in administering nature conservation among the Bena.

Before the final quarter of the twentieth century, African religion, a key to sacred forest tradition, was understood by many scholars as aboriginal.⁵ Those who were hostile to African religion called it ‘primitive’, while those favourable to it called it ‘primal’. Both words imply an unchanging continuity with the earlier times. Understanding African culture in either way makes it challenging to treat sacred forest management historically. A static view of African religion led to the concept of the sacred forests as relics of *primaeval* forests, a property of kin and ethnic groups whose traditional spiritual values made them conserved areas. In Tanzania, despite some proofs to the contrary, the idea of primal forests still typifies some literature. Sacred forests’ relatively rich biodiversity, especially compared to that of most state-reserve forests, fosters their characterisation as steady.⁶ Studying sacred groves apart from the dynamic institutions that uphold them also contributes to the idea of sacred forests as unchanging. Although persuasive, the static view of African sacred groves is flawed, particularly in its understanding of sacred groves as remnants of an ecological and cultural climax from a pre-colonial past.

⁵ M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle, ‘Changing Ways of Thinking about the Relations between Society and Environment’, in *Beyond the Sacred Forest: Complicating Conservation in Southeast Asia*, eds. M.R. Dove, P. E. Sajise and A.A. Doolittle (London: Duke University Press, 2011), 3.

⁶ In Tanzania, most reserved forests experience huge encroachment and illegal timber harvesting and hunting thus affecting its biodiversity.

Describing sacred landscapes as steady communal sites overlook the constitutive dynamics inherent in traditional institutions. Understanding sacred forests as a state of historical, cultural, and ecological equilibria imply that unchanging human processes exist that can create, maintain, transform, or destroy a sacred landscape. The ‘equilibria’ approach thus attributes to human processes the immutableness of natural law. The fact that traditional institutions have played a significant role in managing forests should not obscure the fact that over time such institutions might have changed. Sacred sites do not stand apart from local communities. Rather, they form focus points where divergent interests collide. This study underscores traditional institutions’ dynamics as key to explaining the history of sacred forests in Njombe. The study unpacks cultural institutional politics to reveal the contestations around the symbolic, cultural, economic, and ecological value of sacred sites among the Bena community.

African religious practices, as illustrated by this case of the Bena, exhibit dynamism. They have, since pre-colonial times, reacted to changing socio-economic circumstances, political domination, and, above all, to new ideas. At some points, the resulting changes have been drastic and rapid, while superficial at other periods. In pre-colonial Njombe, chiefs and elders monitored the use of natural resources, but the relationships of the inhabitants to the forests changed with shifting demographics, socio-economic and environmental conditions. Between the 1880s and 1961, German and then British colonial administrations, often aided by missionaries, placed considerable pressure on Bena traditions and ways of life. The colonial governments and missionaries had a strongly negative attitude towards sacred forests. Differences in the understanding of sacred landscapes led to competing interests between foreigners and the indigenous population. The colonial state alienated the fertile lands—some of which contained sacred forests. Some of those forests were made forest reserves, prohibiting access for cultural traditions, even when the native councillors resorted to Western environmental discourses to explain the importance of cultural practices for forest sustainability. The colonial administration also re-ordered the traditional leadership systems to suit the administrative objectives of the government: some tribal leaders lost power, jeopardising their role in forest rituals and ownership of sacred sites. The colonial government regarded customary political organisations as too diffuse to be used for administration purposes. They established a formal political hierarchy which diminished the cultural significance of sacred groves. In many contexts, the colonial state produced an elite group of Bena with power exceeding the traditional authority of *Vatwa* (Chiefs), some of whom deviated from

observing traditional practices. The economic system compelled male household members, some of whom acted as guardians of sacred sites, to migrate to distant workplaces. Religious conversion, mainly to Christianity, eroded the ideological and popular support for sacred groves. Missionary teachings changed the way some Bena perceived their ancestors and their environment, as well as their sacred practices.

Despite colonial pressures, many Bena traditions survived. While undermining the Bena concept of their sacred landscapes, colonial administrative and economic pressures, migration, and Christianity did not completely alter sacred sites practices. Our examination of Bena belief in ancestral spirits and in the magical powers of sacred sites shows that sacred practices and sacred forests survived colonial interventions. The continued presence of sacred sites in various parts of Ubena suggests that none of the exogenous factors resulted in the Bena's complete abandonment of their sacred practices. Thus, while changes took place during the colonial era, the changes were mostly on the surface: the traditional *matambiko* persisted as essential background, exerting a profound influence on the Bena's relation with their landscapes. The absence of written formularies aided traditional religion in adapting to societal changes. Oral transmission facilitated the phrasing of sacred forest traditions in such a general term that they could apply in numerous situations. These survivals, however, differed by time and place. Areas that suffered colonial land acquisition witnessed less survival of sacred groves, as forests were confiscated and declared reserves or cleared for farming. Similarly, areas, where Christianity gained numerous converts, experienced more neglected cultural practices than areas where Christianity was still in its infant stages. The German colonial period (1881-1918) pressured Bena cultural practices less than the subsequent British rule in Tanganyika (1919-1961).

Colonial intrusion alone did not cause all the change in sacred forest practices. Considering only external factors blocks inquiry into the internal mechanisms of cultural politics that either threatened or sustained sacred groves. Sacred groves are living sites, politically, ecologically, socially, and ritually. Consequently, ongoing negotiation affects their significance in postcolonial Njombe, a significance that varies according to place and time. In addition to competing socio-political and economic interests, contending historical narratives, ritual transformations, and approaches to biodiversity conservation clash at these sites. Although these contests may appear disparate and unrelated, they all centre on questions of ownership, access, and use. The dynamics inherent in sacred forests traditions in Njombe have continued to characterise them in postcolonial times.

Although the cultural heritage relating to sacred forests survived through generations, the religious beliefs and taboos that were central to their preservation are eroding due to socio-economic changes. The early post-colonial government policies emphasised increased agricultural production to combat poverty, requiring the cultivation of more fields, and incentivising individuals to clear sacred groves. Thus, farmers' encroachment upon and the dividing of the commons resulted partly from changing postcolonial politics in Njombe. The material, social, and cultural legacies of these policies included environmental change, declining management capacity, and persistent doubt about the value of 'conservation'. The liberalisation policies of the 1980s did not secure the commitment of some sacred grove custodians, who neglected their obligation to keep sacred sites intact. Their support of a stand-alone tree for *tambiko*, for instance, signalled a move from the traditional 'sacred forest' to a redefined ritual space, 'a sacred tree'.

The sacred landscape in Njombe faces new development. Eco-tourism, traditionally unwelcome in sacred landscapes, has gained acceptance in post-colonial Nyumbanitu. This development brings new challenges for the sustainability of sacred forests, especially when the desire for tourism and tourists overrides the needs of the local people and the sanctity of the sites. Perhaps the direct ecological and cultural benefits of sacred forests to the local people by far outweigh the benefits that might be gained from the development of tourism. Some thought should be given to what kind of visitors or groups should have access to sacred forests and to the facilities available in these sacred sites to accommodate visitors.

Different interests in sacred forests pit custodians against each, and custodians against other locals, custodians against local government authorities, and elders against youths. The systems and rituals that have for so long safeguarded sacred forests in Njombe increasingly face abandonment by younger Bena. Most associate forest practices with superstition. Many Christian converts turn away from sacred forest practices, an indifference that has allowed some custodians to exploit sacred sites unchecked. The continued existence of most sacred forests in Njombe has depended mainly on the ability of interested groups to settle their conflicts. Understanding localised cultural politics and the attached spiritual values of nature may be especially relevant for maintaining the future integrity of sacred natural sites.

Because African sacred groves embody dynamic processes, a simplistic approach to them will prove ineffective. We need to recognise Africa's sacred forests as complex, dynamic systems, a recognition that can help create informed conservation policies that accommodate traditional practices of natural resource management. The Bena sacred forest

practices derive from oral tradition. Expressed in general terms, such traditions can apply to variable situations. Despite all the changes, patches of sacred groves persist in different parts of the Njombe region. Where sacred forests still exist, the communities have revitalised their holistic approach to nature by supplementing their spirituality with ecological knowledge about the crucial role these forest patches play in conserving biodiversity. Although gradual, the blend between spirituality and ecology has increasingly characterised the actions of sacred groves' custodians in post-colonial Njombe. The holistic and flexible nature of traditional African cultural practices help explain their appeal as conservation options.

While sacred forests have great conservation potential, viewing them as static prevents attention to historical, social, political, ecological, and symbolic dynamics with serious implications for conservation policy. Although descriptions of longstanding forests have succeeded in bringing recognition to sacred groves as a traditional, alternative, and decentralised forms of conservation in Tanzania, such forest patches still suffer from pressure. Sacred forests and the institutions that uphold them have undergone changes and, in some cases, disappeared in post-colonial Njombe. The erosion of sacred groves illustrates how the pressure of human population growth, the increased integration of rural households into the world economy, the breakdown of traditional patterns of forest use and conservation, and government policies that favour converting sacred forest patches into croplands have contributed to the dynamics of sacred groves in Njombe. Coupled with resource shortages, household livelihood demands, poverty, changing social beliefs, modern culture, and the weakening of traditional beliefs by new faiths, sacred forest traditions in Njombe have been largely redefined to accommodate new demands. Areas that have long received special attention by local people have increasingly become sites of competing interests. The disappearance and/or degradation of sacred groves not only leads to the loss of the rich flora and fauna but also the rich tapestry of culture associated with the grove.

Whether sacred forests will survive in southwest Tanzania is difficult to ascertain. Sacred forests are now embedded in a cultural matrix which is very different from the social and ecological landscapes from which they evolved. The conservation of sacred sites was traditionally an integral part of cultural systems designed to sustain livelihoods and the spiritual well-being of the community. The relationship between land and culture has shifted dramatically during the colonial and post-colonial era. As a result, economic perspectives and cultural and religious beliefs have changed, altering the relationship

between the land and the people. Attitudes towards cultural taboos which restrict the exploitation of sacred sites are changing as the enforcing institutions shift. The present study shows the difficulty of protecting sacred groves based only on religious beliefs. There is a need to revitalise the age-old ethos of conservation in traditional culture. Recognition that forest patches play a vital role in conserving biodiversity and that they provide crucial goods and ecological services to local people must supplement the ethos of conservation. African traditional philosophy emphasises holistic understanding, and such all-inclusive rationalities explain the continued existence of sacred forests in parts of Njombe. Based on the current socio-economic and political context, however, ignoring the spirituality of the sacred forests to emphasise only their ecological value would not create sustainability.

Inventories of sacred groves, especially those harbouring endangered species, would help conservationists appreciate their global significance for preserving biodiversity in situ. As a step in this direction, the Tanzanian government should support research efforts to inventory all the groves of the country. Additionally, by declaring sacred groves as preservation sites with legal status, it could promote in situ conservation of biodiversity. In some cases, such as India, where some sacred sites have been declared protected areas by the government, the conservation of the sacred site appears to be more efficient. However, conservation of sacred groves should recruit community efforts, where local people serve as guardians within the framework of national forestry conservation.

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Appendices

A: Research Clearance

A1: Research Ethics Approval from Victoria University of Wellington



MEMORANDUM

Phone

Email

TO	Edward Mgaya
COPY TO	Dr Steve Behrendt
FROM	Dr Stephen Marshall, Acting Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	25 October 2017
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 25386 Traditional Institutions and their Resilience in Maintaining Sacred Forests in Tanzania's Southern Highlands, 1880s-2000.

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 25 October 2020. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Acting Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

A2: Research clearance from national authorities in Tanzania

APB 4

UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR
P. O. BOX 35091 ♦ DAR ES SALAAM ♦ TANZANIA

General: [REDACTED]
 Direct: [REDACTED]
 Telefax: [REDACTED]

Telegraph: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: [REDACTED]
 Website: [REDACTED]

Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 12th April 2018

SALAAM
 REGIONAL COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE
RECEIVED
 27/04/18
 NJOMBE

Regional Administrative Secretary
Njombe Region

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Mr. Edward Mgaya** who is a bonafide staff member of the University of Dar es Salaam and a PhD Student at the Victoria University of Wellington New Zealand. Mr. Mgaya is required to conduct research as part of his PhD studies.

In accordance with government circular letter Ref. No. MPEC/R/10/1 dated 4th July 1980, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam is empowered to issue research clearances to staff members and students of the University of Dar es Salaam on behalf of the government and the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology (COSTECH). I am pleased to inform you that I have granted a research clearance to **Mr. Mgaya**.

I therefore, kindly request you to grant him any help that may enable him achieve his research objectives. Specifically we request your permission for him to meet and talk to the leaders and other relevant stakeholders in your region in connection with his research.

The title of the research is '**Traditional Institutions and their Resilience in Maintaining Sacred Forests in Tanzania's Southern Highlands, 1880s-2000**'.

The period of the research is from **April to September 2018** and the research will cover **Njombe Region**.

Should there be any restriction, you are kindly requested to advise us accordingly. In case you may require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us through the Directorate of Research and Publication, Tel. +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084 or 2410727 and E-mail: research@udsm.ac.tz.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
 VICE CHANCELLOR
 UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
 P.O. Box 35091
 DAR-ES-SALAAM

VICE CHANCELLOR

QUOTATION OF REF. NO. IS ESSENTIAL

UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM

OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR

P. O. BOX 35091 ♦ DAR ES SALAAM ♦ TANZANIA

General
Direct: [REDACTED]
Telefax: [REDACTED]Telegraph
E-mail: [REDACTED]
Website: [REDACTED]

Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 12th April 2018Director General
Tanzania National Archive (TNA)
Dar es Salaam**RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE**

The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Mr. Edward Mgaya** who is a bonafide staff member of the University of Dar es Salaam and a PhD Student at the Victoria University of Wellington New Zealand. Mr. Mgaya is required to conduct research as part of his PhD studies.

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Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]

VICE CHANCELLOR
UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
P.O. BOX 35091
DAR-ES-SALAAM

VICE CHANCELLOR

QUOTATION OF REF. NO. IS ESSENTIAL

UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
OFFICE OF THE VICE CHANCELLOR
P. O. BOX 35091 ♦ DAR ES SALAAM ♦ TANZANIA

General: [REDACTED]
 Direct: [REDACTED]
 Telefax: [REDACTED]



Telegraphic: [REDACTED]
 E-mail: ycc@udsm.ac.tz
 Website: www.udsm.ac.tz

Ref. No: AB3/12(B)

Date: 12th April 2018

Director General
 Tanzania Forestry Service (TFS)
Dar es Salaam

RE: REQUEST FOR RESEARCH CLEARANCE

The purpose of this letter is to introduce to you **Mr. Edward Mgaya** who is a bonafide staff member of the University of Dar es Salaam and a PhD Student at the Victoria University of Wellington New Zealand. Mr. Mgaya is required to conduct research as part of his PhD studies.

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The period of the research is from **April to September 2018** and the research will cover **Tanzania Forestry Service**.

Should there be any restriction, you are kindly requested to advise us accordingly. In case you may require further information, please do not hesitate to contact us through the Directorate of Research and Publication, Tel. +255 22 2410500-8 Ext. 2084 or 2410727 and E-mail: research@udsm.ac.tz.

Yours sincerely,


[REDACTED]
 VICE CHANCELLOR
 UNIVERSITY OF DAR-ES-SALAAM
 P.O. BOX 35091
 DAR ES SALAAM

QUOTATION OF REF. NO. IS ESSENTIAL

A3: Research clearance from regional authorities

JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA
OFISI YA RAIS
TAWALA ZA MIKOA NA SERIKALI ZA MITAA

MKOA WA NJOMBE
 Simu Na:
 Nukushi:



Ofisi ya Mkuu wa Mkoa
 S.L.P. 668
NJOMBE.
 30 April 2018

Kumb. Ab 301/326/0k/132

Mkurugenzi Halmashauri ya
 Wilaya ya Waging'ombe

YAH: YAH UTAMBULISHO WA NDG EDWARD MGAYA MWANAFUNZI
MTAFITI CHUO KIKUU CHA WELLINGTON NEW ZEALAND

Tafadhali rejea kichwa hapo juu chahusika.

Mtajwa hapo juu ni Mtafiti Mwanafunzi anayesoma chuo Kikuu cha Wellington New Zealand kwa sasa na pia ni Mwalimu wa Chuo Kikuu kishiriki cha Elimu Mkwawa.

Hivi sasa yupo kwenye utafiti hivyo atahitaji kuhojiana na watu mbalimbali katika Halmashauri yako ikiwa ni pamoja na kutembelea Msitu wa Nyumba Nitu.
 Tafadhali mpeni ushirikiano unaostahili.

KNY: KATIBU TAWALA MKOA
 NJOMBE

NAKALA

Katibu Tawala Mkoa wa
 NJOMBE (Aione kwenye jalada)

Katibu Tawala (W)
 Waging'ombe (kwa taarifa)

Edward Mgaya (Mtafiti)


1

A4: Research clearance from district authorities

JAMHURI YA MUUNGANO WA TANZANIA
OFISI YA RAIS
TAWALA ZA MIKOA NA SERIKALI ZA MITAA

HALMASHAURI YA WILAYA YA WANGING'OMBE
(Barua zote zitumwe kwa Mkurugenzi Mtendaji)

E-mail -



S.L.P 64,
NJOMBE.

Kumb.Na.WDC/D.30/24/90 02.05.2018

Kwa yeyote anayehusika
H/W Wanging'ombe

YAH: UTAMBULISHO WA NDG. EDWARD MGAYA MWANAFUNZI MTAFTITI
CHUO KIKUU CHA WELLINGTON NEW ZEALAND

Husika na kichwa cha habari hapo juu.

Ninaomba kumtambulisha kwenu Ndugu Edward Mgaya kuwa ni Mwanafunzi mtafiti kutoka Chuo Kikuu cha Wellington New Zealand ambaye ameomba kufanya utafiti na kuhojiana na watu mbalimbali katika Halmashauri ya Wilaya ya Wanging'ombe kwa barua Kumb.Na.Ab 301/326/ok/132 ya tarehe 30 Aprili 2018.

Kwa barua hii ninaomba umpokee na kumpa ushirikiano.

KNY: MKURUGENZI MTENDAJI
HALMASHAURI YA WILAYA
WANGING'OMBE

Nakala: Ndugu. Edward Mgaya (Mtafiti) KNY MKURUGENZI MTENDAJI
 HALMASHAURI YA WILAYA WANGING'OMBE

B: Research instruments

B1: Information sheet for participants – English version



Traditional Institutions and their Resilience in Maintaining Sacred Forests in Tanzania's Southern Highlands, 1880s–2000.

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

You are invited to take part in this research. Please read this information before deciding whether to take part. If you decide to participate, thank you. If you decide not to participate, thank you for considering this request.

Who am I?

My name is **Edward Mgaya** and I am a Doctoral student in the History program at Victoria University of Wellington. This research project is work towards my thesis.

What is the aim of the project?

This project aims to study the **history of sacred forests in Tanzania's southern highlands**. Specifically, the study examines the changes and continuities of traditional institutions as custodians of the traditional belief systems and the implications of such changes in the history of sacred forests.

Four questions guide the research: What are the institutions and local organisational systems that have maintained the status of sacred forests? How are those traditional institutions linked to the characteristics of the natural sites? What factors have shaped the dynamics of the traditional institutions and their practices of keeping sacred forests over time? And how far has the evolution of traditional institutions posed a threat to the stronghold of sacred forests in Tanzania? All the follow-up questions will be asked within the framework of the guiding questions.

This research has been approved by the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee on application reference number **0000025386**.

How can you help?

You have been invited to participate because you are thought to have knowledge on sacred forests in your area. If you agree to take part, I will interview you at your home place. I will ask you questions about sacred forests and the custodial institutions. The interview will take twenty minutes. I will audio record the interview with your permission and write it up later. You can choose to not answer any question or stop the interview at any time, without giving a reason. You can withdraw from the study by contacting me at

any time before 30th December 2019. If you withdraw, the information you provided will be destroyed or returned to you.

What will happen to the information you give?

- With your consent, the research will not be confidential, and you will be named in the final report. If you accept, thank you. If you don't want your name mentioned, I will do so.
- The information gathered and disseminated in the research may be sensitive and precious to you. Nevertheless, the knowledge will be out of your control if it is published.

What will the project produce?

The information from my research will be used in PhD Thesis report and academic publications and conferences.

If you accept this invitation, what are your rights as a research participant?

You do not have to accept this invitation if you don't want to. If you do decide to participate, you have the right to:

- choose not to answer any question;
- ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- withdraw from the study before 30th December 2019;
- ask any questions about the study at any time;
- be able to read any reports of this research by emailing the researcher to request a copy.

If you have any questions or problems, who can you contact?

If you have any questions, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Edward Mgya

Steve Behrendt

PhD Candidate

Supervisor

Victoria University of Wellington

School: HPPI

Human Ethics Committee information

If you have any concerns about the ethical conduct of the research, you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convenor

B2: Information sheet for participants – Swahili version



Taasisi za Jadi na Uhimili wake katika Kuhifadhi Misitū ya Asili Nyanda za Juu Kusini mwa Tanzania, Kuanzia Miaka ya 1880 hadi Mwaka 2000.

MAELEZO YA UTAFITI

Unaalikwa kushiriki katika utafiti huu. Tafadhali soma maelezo haya kabla ya kuamua kushiriki katika utafiti huu au la. Ukiridhia kushiriki, nitashukuru sana. Ikiwa haupo tayari kushiriki, pia nashukuru kwa kuzingatia ombi langu.

Utambulisho Wangu.

Naitwa **Edward Simon Mgaya**, ni mwanafunzi wa shahada ya uzamivu wa historia katika Chuo kikuu cha Victoria - Wellington nchini New Zealand. Utafiti wangu unalenga kukamilisha tasnifu yangu ya uzamivu (PhD).

Lengo la Utafiti.

Utafiti huu unalenga kujifunza historia ya misitu ya jadi katika ukanda wa nyanda za juu kusini hususani mkoa wa Njombe. Kipekee, utafiti utatathmini mabadiliko na uendeleo wa taasisi za jadi kama muhimili wa mila na desturi na matokeo yake katika mustakabali wa misitu ya jadi.

Maswali makuu manne (4) yanategemewa kujibiwa kutokana na utafiti huu: Ni taasisi au mfumo gani wa kijadi ambao umehifadhi hadhi ya misitu ya jadi? Ni kwa namna gani taasisi au mfumo huo wa jadi unaendana na tabia na hali ya misitu ya jadi? Ni mambo gani yamechangia mabadiliko ya taasisi za jadi na mfumo wake katika kuhifadhi misitu ya jadi? Na, Ni kwa kiasi gani mabadiliko ya taasisi na mfumo wa jadi umeleta changamoto hatarishi katika uimara wa uhifadhi wa misitu ya jadi? Mahojiano yetu yatelenga kutafuta majibu ya maswali haya makuu.

Utafiti huu umeidhinishwa na kamati ya maadili ya utafiti unaohusisha binadamu ya Chuo kikuu cha Victoria - Wellington kwa idhini namba **25386** na Kupewa kibali na serikali ya Tanzania kupitia Chuo kikuu cha Dar-es-Salaam.

Namna ya kushiriki.

Umealikwa kushiriki kwenye utafiti huu kwakuwa unadhaniwa kuwa na uelewa kuhusu misitu ya jadi na taasisi zake katika eneo lako. Ikiwa unakubali kushiriki nitahojiana nawe nyumbani kwako au mahali pengine utakapochagua. Nitakuuliza kuhusu misitu ya jadi na

taasisi zake za uhifadhi. Mahojiano yetu yatachukua takribani nusu saa (dakika 30). Kwa ruhusa yako, mahojiano yetu nitayarekodi kwa kinasa sauti na baadaye nitayahamishia katika maandishi. Unaweza kuchagua kutojibu swali lolote au ukasimamisha mahojiano yetu muda wowote bila kulazimika kutoa sababu ya kufanya hivyo. Pia unaweza kuamua kujitoa katika utafiti huu kwa kunijulisha muda wowote kabla ya 30/12/2019. Ukiamua kujitoa, taarifa zote za mahojiano yetu zitafutwa au kurejeshwa kwako.

Kuhusu taarifa unayotoa.

- Kwa idhini yako, utafiti huu hautakuwa wa siri na jina lako litatajwa katika ripoti ya mwisho ya tasnifu. Ikiwa unakubaliana, nashukuru sana. Ikiwa hukubaliani basi sitataja jina lako.
- Taarifa na maelezo utakayotoa havitaweza kubadilishwa baada ya kuchapishwa.

Matokeo ya utafiti.

Taarifa na maelezo yatokanayo na utafiti huu yatatumika katika uandishi wa tasnifu yangu ya uzamivu na machapisho mengine ya kitaaluma pamoja na mihadhara mbalimbali halali.

Haki yako kama mshiriki wa utafiti.

Ikiwa unakubali kushiriki katika utafiti huu, una haki ya:

- Kuchagua kutojibu swali nitakalouliza;
- Kuamuru kuzimwa kwa kinasa sauti wakati wowote wa mahojiano;
- Kujiondoa kwenye utafiti huu kabla ya 30/12 2019;
- Kuuliza swali lolote, muda wowote;
- Kusoma ripoti au taarifa yoyote ya utafiti huu.

Maswali, maoni au malalamiko.

Ikiwa una maswali yoyote, sasa au hata wakati mwingine, tafadhali uwe huru kuwasiliana na mojawapo kati ya wafuatao:

Edward Mgya

Mtafiti wa uzamivu (PhD)

Chuo kikuu cha Victoria - Wellington

[REDACTED]

Steve Behrendt

Msimamizi wa Mtafiti

Chuo Kikuu cha Victoria - Wellington

[REDACTED]

Kamati ya Maadili ya Utafiti

Ikiwa una dukuduku yoyote kuhusu ukiukwaji wa maadili katika utafiti huu unaweza kuwasiliana na mkuu wa kamati ya maadili ya utafiti wa chuo kikuu cha Victoria – Wellington kwa anwani ifuatayo:

The Victoria University HEC Convenor:

[REDACTED]

B3: Participant interviewee consent form – English version



Traditional Institutions' and their Resilience in Maintaining Sacred Forests in Tanzania's Southern Highlands, 1880s–2000.

CONSENT TO INTERVIEW

This consent form will be held for 3 years.

Researcher: **Edward Mgaya**, School of History, Philosophy, Political Sciences and International Relations, Victoria University of Wellington.

- I have read the Information Sheet and the project has been explained to me. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions at any time.
- I agree to take part in an audio recorded interview.

I understand that:

- I may withdraw from this study at any point before 30th December 2019.
- I understand that the results will be used for a PhD Thesis, academic publications and conference presentations.
- I consent to information or opinions which I have given being attributed to me in any reports on this research: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like a summary of my interview: Yes ☐ No ☐
- I would like to receive a copy of the final report and have added my email address below. Yes ☐ No ☐

Signature of participant: _____

Name of participant: _____

Date: _____

Contact details: _____

B4: Participant interviewee consent form – Swahili version



Taasisi za Jadi na Uhimili wake katika Kuhifadhi Misitū ya Asili Nyanda za Juu Kusini mwa Tanzania, Kuanzia miaka ya 1880 hadi mwaka 2000.

Mtafiti: **Edward Mgaya**, Idara ya Historia, Falsafa, Sayansi ya Siasa na Uhusiano wa
Kimataifa, Chuo kikuu cha Victoria- Wellington.

RIDHAA YA MAHOJIANO

Ridhaa hii itadumu kwa kipindi cha miaka mitatu (3).

- Nimesoma maelezo ya utafiti na nimeelezwa lengo la utafiti huu. Nimeridhika na majibu ya maswali yangu. Ninatambua kuwa naweza kuuliza maswali mengine muda wowote.
- Nakubali kushiriki kwenye mahojiano haya yatakayorekodiwa.

Naelewa kwamba:

- Ninaweza kujitoa katika utafiti huu muda wowote kabla ya tarehe 30/12/2019.
- Matokeo ya utafiti huu nikwaajili ya tasnifu ya uzamivu, machapisho ya kitaaluma na mihadhara mbalimbali halali.
- Naridhia kuhusishwa na taarifa au maoni niliyotoa kwenye ripoti ya utafiti huu. Ndiyo ☐ Hapana ☐
- Ningependa kupewa taarifa fupi ya mahojiano haya: Ndiyo ☐ Hapana ☐
- Ningependa kupewa ripoti ya utafiti huu kwa anwani ya barua pepe nilyoiweka hapo chini. Ndiyo ☐ Hapana ☐

Saini ya mshiriki: _____

Jina la mshiriki: _____

Tarehe: _____

Anuani: _____

B5: Interview guide questions

TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND THEIR RESILIENCE IN MAINTAINING SACRED FORESTS IN TANZANIA'S SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS, 1880s–2000.

Interview Guiding Questions

1. How are sacred forests formed? (History?).
2. How long has the forest been in place?
3. What makes a forest sacred?
4. Apart from the forest, what are other things/features that are linked to sacredness of the forest?
5. What value does sacred forest have?
6. How are the sacred forests maintained/managed?
7. How are sacred forests different from other types of forests?
8. What are the changes that have happened over time regarding the up keeping of the forests?
9. What are the internal and external factors that have shaped the dynamic of sacred forests?
10. What are threats for the sustainability of the sacred forests?
11. Which means do you use to protect the forests against the various threats?