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The Meaning, Spiritual Foundation, and Mythology of African Sacred Landscapes

The Case of Sacred Forests among the Bena of Njombe, Tanzania

Edward Simon Mgaya | ORCID: 0000-0002-2680-3464
Mkwawa University, College of Education, Iringa, Tanzania
edwardmgaya@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

In various cultures around the world, past and present, many natural and cultural sites are deemed sacred. What are sacred landscapes? What are the spiritual foundations for their formation? How are they formed? How are they protected? The answers to these questions help frame a discussion of sacred landscapes within the context of their meaning, origin, and management processes as lived experiences of specific societies. In Tanzania the linkages between biodiversity and the worldview of a society have partly been acknowledged but remain unexplored. This paper applies a mixed research approach to studying sacred forests among the Bena community of Njombe in Tanzania. Rather than looking exclusively at the sacred forests in themselves as places, the paper underscores the linkage of human-nature-spirituality as key in explaining the history of sacred forests. It establishes that, among the Bena, the sacredness of a place was founded on the relationship between the visible and the invisible worlds – relations that led to the formation of various mystical-religious homelands' sacred places that are protected through mythologies.

Keywords

sacred landscape – forest – folklore – Bena – Njombe – Tanzania

1 Introduction

Forest management entails interdependence between nature and society at different levels and systems. In Africa one example of this interdependence is sacred forests, groves of trees with special religious importance in a people's

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culture. A study of sacred landscapes is important but complex since its foundations are deeply rooted in societies' cultures. For any meaningful understanding of sacred forests, we need to consider the linkages between those landscape establishments and management, and the spirituality of communities in question.

In Tanzania the linkages between biodiversity and the cosmology or worldview of a society have partly been acknowledged but remain unexplored. To be able to understand these connections we need to study sacred forests alongside the sacred institutions that uphold them. Spangenberg identifies sacred institutions as an important dimension of sustainability (Spangenberg 2002). As a vital aspect in upholding landscapes among traditional communities, sacredness is of great research value. What do sacred landscapes mean? What founds their formation as spiritual landscapes? How do societies establish and protect these landscapes? These questions have to be answered if we need understand sacred landscapes within the context of their meaning, origin, and management processes as lived experiences of specific societies.

This paper studies sacred forests as an ongoing process of interdependence between nature and society among the Bena community of Njombe in Tanzania. Rather than exclusively looking at the sacred forests in themselves as places, the paper underscores human-nature-spirituality as a key in explaining the meaning, origin, and history of sacred forests in the community under study.

2 Methodological and Theoretical Underpinnings

Sacred groves, as examples of cultural and ecological coevolution, require research based on hybrid methods. This research uses a qualitative research design that bridges 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.

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 (Conquergood 1983). There is power in working with stories as a means to draw insights and possibilities to indigenous experience and knowledge (Archibald et al. 2019). 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. Respondents 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. The conversational approach used aligns with an Indigenous worldview that honours orality as a means of transmitting knowledge and upholds the necessary relations to maintain a collective tradition (Kovach 2010). When the opportunity arose, participant observation in rituals augmented interviews. The combined methods constitute what scholars refer to as ethnography, a research approach based on fieldwork consisting of participatory observation and open-ended interviews (Fetterman 1989). During fieldwork I attended social events in villages and was generously invited to three ritual services, *matambiko*, which were conducted in the sacred forests.

This study deploys Berkes's (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 TEK as a knowledge-practice-belief system since 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 (Berkes 1999, 2008). 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 an area that has access restrictions through spirituality, taboos, and myths, and its activities are regulated and maintained by the customs of specific groups. Thus a disregard of the historical and sacred ecology aspects of the forests is likely to cause depletion of the landscapes. A knowledge-practice-belief complex systems framework allows us to understand sacred grove management as various on-going processes rather than as an inert entity. When knowledge about the environment changes the practices and the belief system embedded in them change as well, and vice versa.

3 The Concept of Sacredness

Concepts such as sacredness are always understood within the context of their use. The reasons for making those sites sacred and the levels of significance of the locations vary between sites and cultures. Sacred places are found in mainstream faiths, indigenous faiths and in nonreligious contexts (Bremer 2006). Sacredness has been used to describe a wide variety of types of places. People

have historically honoured a deity, provided sanctuary for spirits, viewed landscapes as a living expression of certain gods, or protected a sanctified historical site. Historical sacred places are valuable community assets because they help provide meaning to a culture and a focus for the community.

Concepts such as sacredness come into existence to express the thoughts of a group of people that share them at a point in time, with meanings that reflect their origin, use, and time frame. Thus a clear and concise definition of the concept will help us differentiate a 'sacred forest' from other forests. The term 'sacred' comes from the Latin *sacer*, meaning restricted or set off (Witcombe 1998). Various traditions may have a term that correlates with *sacer*. For example, in Bena the term is *matehelo*, in Swahili *Matambiko*, in Arabic *Muqaddas*, and in Maori *wāhi tapu*. Scholars have argued about what defines the holiness or sanctity of a place, but the main point emerging from such arguments is that sacred sites stand out from other places and induce a feeling of awe and wonder (Isaac 1965). 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' (1998, 1). In his original discussion of sacredness (1954), Emile Durkheim asserts that 'the sacred thing is *par excellences* that which the profane should not touch, and cannot touch with impunity' (1954, 40). Mircea Eliade (1961) explains 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. However, as cautioned by Michael Sheridan (2008), the distinction between the sacred and the profane is more of a European logical construct dating from the mid-nineteenth century, and not all societies organise their worlds using such categories. For instance, the sacred versus profane categorisation may be difficult to apply in the African context in which sacred forests are simultaneously ecological, social, political, and religious phenomena.

Despite the existing efforts to define the concept of the sacredness of a landscape, there is still vagueness and complexity in the existing literature. Previous research on sacred landscapes focused on the religious geographies of sacred places, examining their establishment, religious traditions, or pilgrimages, or emphasised the role of sacred natural sites in ecological conservation (Li et al. 2013; Shepherd and Gu 2012). There is less scholarly research on the concept of sacredness and its embedded social meanings and values. As Singh states, a sacred landscape is a 'faith-scape' that embodies not only the physical geographical features and cultural establishments but also the intangible spiritual

elements (2005, 215). Symbolic rituals and practices are also important components in a sacred landscape since they reflect local people's religious worldviews and cultural identity. The meaning of sacred landscape is therefore multilayered and subject to personal understandings and experiences.

To bring a cross-cutting meaning of sacredness, Levi and Kocher developed a cross-cultural perspective of sacred places. The authors are optimistic that a cross-cultural perspective would help to identify some of the challenges that planners face in trying to preserve important community assets. They define sacred places as a behaviour setting, an aspect of place identity, and an experiential phenomenon (2010). These three definitions help to view sacred sites from alternative perspectives and are not mutually exclusive; they are used together to understand why a place is considered sacred.

Sacredness is a behaviour setting because meanings arise from the behaviour that occurs there. Users and religious practices make a place sacred. In that regard, sacred places must provide meaning, support, and context for performing religious activities (Rapoport 1982). The meaningfulness of the place arises from its uses by the people, while the place helps to structure the social relationships and activities. As an 'aspect of place identity', sacredness refers to the meanings and feelings associated with a place by a group of people (Hague 2005, 10). In this regard, sacredness can be viewed as an inherent characteristic of the place due to the presence of spiritual forces. As Bianca argues (2001), many traditional cultures believe that sacredness is directly attached to a place. Sacredness is 'an experience' because it arises from people's interactions with a place (Carmchael, Hubert and Reeves 1994). Like the perception of beauty, sacredness does not exist in the person or the environment but rather in the relationship between the two. As Sharkeley argues (2001), the experience of sacredness exists only for those who can perceive why the place was delineated as sacred by the local culture.

A diagram that shows the complex relationship between the realms of superhuman and human beings can help explain the concept of sacredness of a landscape. We can draw a diagram mapping various aspects of worldviews/spiritual beliefs, sacred sites, and sacred practices. It is the combination of these three aspects that forms the sacredness of a landscape. Such a diagram shows the downward movement from abstraction of worldviews to the actual practices emanating from such beliefs. At the highest, abstract level stand five aspects: superhuman entities, behavioural restrictions, separateness, emotion-oriented aspects, and place-based characteristics. A behaviour restriction might occur, for example, when a traditional society imposes taboos on natural resource use.

Sacred sites occupy a middle position between abstract and concrete. The sites include physical and cultural landscapes as separate parts of the landscape. Natural landscapes, sometimes referred to as wilderness, denote that which existed before it was acted on by human culture (Sauer 1925). However, in the twenty-first century landscapes that are totally untouched by human activity are hard to find. Thus its reference is now made to the degrees of naturalness within a landscape. The World Heritage Committee (WHC) defines cultural landscapes as cultural properties that present the combined works of nature and man (UNESCO 2012). A cultural landscape can thus be an area designed and created intentionally by man, valued because of religious or cultural association with the natural element.

In our conceptual diagram of a sacred landscape, concrete practices include worship rituals, special events, and religious festivals. A 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. For a landscape to have complete sacredness all these aspects, which constitute the realm of human beings, need to be connected to the realm of supernatural entries (see Figure 1).

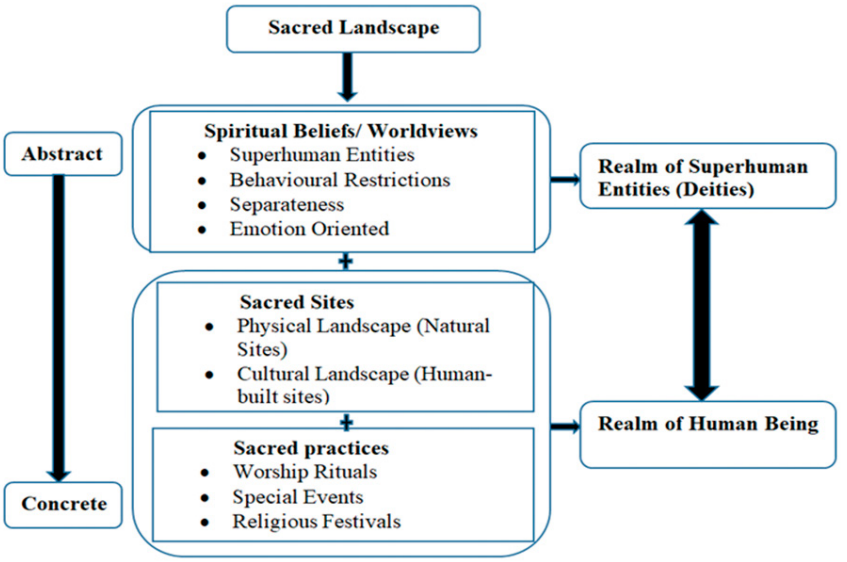


FIGURE 1 A conceptual diagram of a Sacred Landscape
SOURCE: SYNTHESISED FROM LITERATURE REVIEW BY THE AUTHOR

The preceding discussion vividly presents the complexity in defining sacredness. Soutter et al. (2003) attempted 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 customs. Nevertheless, sacredness is a concept that needs to be defined by the context of those who consider something sacred. Despite the many definitions available, it is still reasonable to argue that the best interpretation of sacred landscapes should draw insights from the perspectives of local insiders who personally experience and interact with the landscape daily. Traditionally lived experiences establish a cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and representations that describes the relationships of living beings with one another and with their physical environment, which evolved by adaptive processes and have been handed down through generations by cultural transmission. Thus traditions, culture, and institutions should be understood in connection. These locally devised institutions are linked to resource management. This understanding puts us in a better position to examine how traditional institutions such as taboos, rituals, folklore, and others have worked to resiliently manage natural resources in societies where formal institutions are still fragile. It is within the realm of these institutions that traditional societies define the sacredness of specific natural sites.

4 The Spiritual Foundations of Landscape Sacredness among the Bena

It is essential to understand the spiritual foundations of sacredness for specific communities since the worldviews of such societies are deeply rooted in those foundations. Such fundamentals help us appreciate the spiritual reality that 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 landscapes if 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 instantly become a believer in whatever supernatural forces of divinity are made and manifested (Witcombe 1998). 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 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 (Escobar 1998), the Bena perceive these life forms as equal and interdependent. The only primary separation between 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, underscored the inseparability of the two worlds 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 coexistence 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.[2]

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 eventually ascended 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 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 (Mbiti 1989). The cosmology has translated into common values of respect for the lives of the 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 (Juntunen, Nikkonen, and Janhonen 2002). 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 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 visible when exercising power over creatures in regulating nature (Mligo 2013). For the Bena the name of the Supreme Being has changed 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 Bena society.[3]

Believing in the continuity of life, the Bena 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.[4] 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 more personal to humans. *Vatwa* represent the earthly kin 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.

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 dead family members. The villagers following Bena traditions are expected to visit and worship at the graves of their living dead ancestors and to ask for blessing and forgiveness (Juntunen, Nikkonen, and Janhonen 2012). The Bena believe that the *Vatwa* are the mediators between them and God. 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, recognition that the left is still a member of their families and a token of respect and remembrance of the departed. (1970, 59)

When the need for sacrifice arises, particular elders are set for the purpose. Among the Bena, the elders who direct sacrifices are called *Vatehedzi* – priests or mediators – and the action of sacrificing is called *hutehela* or *hutambiha*. All the sacrifices are made at a designated sacred site in the forest. Before entering the forest the priest in charge has to ask for permission. He picks a leaf from the forest and spits on it. He then says in the Bena language, '*Vamuhimba, Hiswaga na Mkongwa, mkong'omale panyuma pesu panavagenzi va Mtwa, vandzile hulola inyumba iyi, twisuha vingile salama vahume salama*', which 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'. Having stated the intention to enter the forest, the priest welcomes the attending people to do so. Everyone must remove their shoes and hats for hygiene and as a sign of respect to the ancestors. Upon arrival at the axis tree (the altar), the priest leads the ritual. The materials offered for sacrifices differ among clans, but cereals (strictly finger millet) and animals are common across all Bena clans. At Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest (NSF), 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 is linked to the darkness of the cave found in the forest and the colour of cloths used for ritual ceremonies.

There are different types of sacred sites with varying levels of sacredness. Based on their studies of Mormon culture, Jackson and Henrie classify sacred

sites into three categories. First, mystical-religious sites are 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 that represents the roots of individuals and groups that regard these locations as sacred. The third and least sacred are historical sites that are assigned a modest level of sanctity. These sites are chosen because historical events important to the group or people occurred there (Jackson and Henrie 1983).

Sacred sites among the Bena 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 that 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 of these forests varies. Among the Bena the Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest is the most sacred and respected by all Bena clans because 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 certain characteristics distinguish them from the profane and potentially link the visible and invisible worlds. Spirits are most likely to be found in big trees or forests, bushes, caves, rivers, and mountains (Juntunen et al. 2012). 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. The animal is 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 to the sites based on the activities performed in each. For example, the Sanga clan in Lupila has three sacred groves – Igajilo, Uswimwa, and Upakilwa.[5] Different rituals are performed, as the clan leaders direct, in each of the three forests.

The spiritual foundation of landscape sacredness among the Bena thus emanates from the links between living creatures and the underworld. Respect for the ancestors marks sanctification of the places of their dwelling and all that surrounds it. Through this foundation ecospirituality becomes the direct consciousness and experience of the sacred. For the Bena spirituality becomes a religious concept that is an integral part of the sacred and holistic worldview. The emphasis on such a worldview is demonstrated in anthropomorphism, ancestral worship, mystical powers, ritualism, and totems.

5 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 developments. This 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 the long-term sociopolitical dynamics of the societies in question.

The term 'sacred forest' refers to woods of varying sizes that 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 (Ormsby and Bhagwat 2010) and are historically protected by local people (versus government) for their spiritual and ecological values. Sacred groves differ from a village forest that is owned and managed by the local government. Given a sacred forest's spiritual value, the discovery and revelation of a sacred forest possesses existential worth for the spirituality of the traditional societies. As Eliade argues, 'nothing can begin or be done without previous orientation and any orientation, implies a fixed point' (1961, 22). The Bena are not an exception in fixing their spiritual home in the world in which they live.

Traditionally, the Bena always sought to fix their spiritual abode at 'the centre of the worlds'[6] which needed to be found if the world was to be lived in. 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 the homogeneity of spaces. The break was symbolised by an opening through which passage from one cosmic region to another was possible.[7] One expresses the communication between the two regions via specific images, what Eliade calls the '*axis mundi* pillar' (1961, 37). 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 have always assumed the preeminent 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' (1923, 121). In 1964 Davies reported to have identified settlement sites

in Ghana using patches of forests: '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' (1964, 29). Although the identified sites might be surviving patches of pristine tropical forests, they could also serve as evidence of human beings as historical makers who are capable of creating and modelling such forests.

A sacred forest can be either pre-existing or created. However, Chouin (2002) argues that the two typologies mask the complexity underlying the different processes that created sacred forests. He instead suggests four categories of sacred groves based on the ways they were founded. The first category is groves 'discovered' during the clearing of a new settlement or agricultural lands. The second is groves used for ritual purposes by a group within the community. The third is groves associated with a specific trauma that revealed the sacred character of the forest to the community. The fourth is groves used as burial grounds.

Although providing useful insight on the complex phenomena at work, Chouin's categorisation of sacred groves, 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 the habitats of departed spirits, the latter is considered habitats of spiritual powers inherent in nature.[8] Some forests associated with burial grounds are also incidentally associated with old settlements.[9] While forests with burial and settlement origins can provide archaeological traces, the sacred forests associated with nature spirits 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 the result of various waves of migration from about 1100 AD to the seventeenth century (Nyagava 1999). Remembered Bena genealogies normally go thirteen to fourteen generations back and cover the period in which different groups gathered and were established and consolidated under clan leadership (Nyagava 1999). Their agricultural life accelerated social formation in kinships and clans. The people began to be collectively known as Wabena, meaning those who live in Ubena and speak Kibena. The Bena social formation necessitated the establishment of sacred forests. It was a tradition for the firstcomers 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 rapidly in the favourable weather conditions of Ubena.

Other sacred forests emerged from burial activities and a 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 witnessing 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. (TOWEGALE 1999, 31)

The seeds dropping from the first planted tree could lead to other trees germinating around the axis tree. A ritual ceremony could also be carried out 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 plant and animal species was said to belong to the ancestors.[10] Among the Bena clans, some sites are associated with both burial and ritual processes. Some clans established more than one such place 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 show how some forests are associated with multiple processes. Table 1 maps fifteen sacred forests against the clans responsible for managing them, the reasons why the clans established them, their dates, sizes, and locations. The largest sacred forest, Nyumbanitu, about three to four 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 in present day. The remaining fourteen forests descended from Nyumbanitu and thus had a sociocultural and political connection to it.

In the case of sites associated with settlement and burial practices, as in number 1 above, the process began with 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*[11] villagisation program engineered by then president Julius Nyerere. The old settlements which in some

TABLE 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, Mkongwa, 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	0.5 acre	Igangitololi
5	Ukwama	Sanga (Sanga mhemi)	Burial and ritual	*c.*1700s	0.5 acre	Ukwama
6	Kuwaluka	Kiwuka (Sangu)	Ritual	*c.*1800s	2.5 acres	Kuwaluka
7	Igajilo	Sanga clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1900s	2 acres	Lupila
8	Luhuyo	Chaula clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1800s	0.5 acre	Luhuyo
9	Nsalagatu	Lwila clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1850s	2 acres	Lupila
10	Luhulu	Ilomo clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1800s	2 acres	Luhulu
11	Malaganga	Ilomo clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1850s	0.5 acre	Malaganga
12	Upakilwa	Sanga clan	Burial and ritual	*c.*1800s	0.5 acre	Upakilwa
13	Matamba	Bena of Sovi,	Rituals	*c.*1600s	0.5 acre	Matamba
14	Malangali	Bena of Kilawugi	Rituals	*c.*1650s	0.5 acre	Malangali
15	Lupembe	Maswamu Bena	Rituals	*c.*1650s	1 acre	Lupembe

Note: The table is ordered according to ways, by which the forests were established, from a combination of factors to a single factor.

SOURCE: DATA COMPILED BY THE RESEARCHER FROM INTERVIEWS AND VISIT TO THE SITES

cases were also burial places no longer used for burial, were not cultivated. For some time the forest recolonized the old cemetery, which was then made sacred since it was associated with the departed. As rituals continued, the institutionalisation of the sacredness of the forest intensified through taboos, folklore, and other institutions serving 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. In most cases the grave of the great ancestor was located further away from the rest to indicate his authority and respect.[12] Regarding how a location of sacred forests was chosen, some interviewees reported that the

head of the family/clan chose a spot in which he would be buried, and it thereafter became a sacred place. Leaders of families/clans gave instructions regarding the location and procedures for their burial. Clan members who did not bury their deceased family heads in the chosen land experienced misfortunes in their families.[13] However, others interviewed could not remember how particular locations were picked.

The process of forming a sacred forest among the Bena was far more than a complex ecological process that created a forested landscape. Its sanctification as a spiritual device was a historical event that induced the transforming of a sacred forest as a social reality. Community members identified specific areas of the 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. Once a landscape was consecrated by the community it had to be taken care of and protected. To do so, traditional institutions such as mythology took the central role in sheltering the sacred landscapes.

6 Folklore: Sacred Forests' Restrictions and Repercussions against Defaulters

A study of groves calls for scrutiny of the important traditions of reverence for nature used to conserve patches of forests dedicated to gods/goddess or ancestral spirits. This discussion is especially imperative when we consider that, through traditions, local communities have always delimited and protected sacred forests. Keeping those landscapes in a relatively undisturbed state expresses the 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 down orally through generations.

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' (Putman n.d.). It also comprises the generally held beliefs of members of the group and their activities resulting from such views. Initiatives to study folklore 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 (Longchar 2011). Folklore as culturally encoded elements connects to the shared meanings and social practices of a community.

Most of the indigenous Bena people 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 granted rewards and blessings for good behaviour and punished nonbelievers. The 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 or harm the fauna in it. It was equally important to maintain the sacred forests in pristine condition.

Sacred forests and folklore are historically interwoven. As Guerin argues, forests have traditionally contributed to a considerable repository of folkloric knowledge of the community (Guerin 2006). Among the Bena, several stories were told to depict various facets of life and the culture of people, and how groves are self-protected through the ancestral spirits. For example, the Nyumbanitu Sacred Forest was spared while 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 because their efforts were met by mysterious forces more powerful than their bulldozers. 'When the trees were felled', one man contended,

> they spilt blood. That is why the African employee of the [Commonwealth Development Co-operation] 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.[14]

Others claimed that a European employee of the CDC disappeared in the grove, never to be seen again.[15] However, the Europeans did not believe any of the mythologies they were told. According to Allan Mfugale, when Europeans did not believe what they were told by African employees, 'they decided to go clear the land themselves'. 'But they were unsuccessful in clearing the wood', another man added, 'When they sent in their bulldozers, they all [got] 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 those Europeans ran away, leaving their tent'.[16] Lutengano Fute, a leader of the Nyumbanitu ancestral worship in the 1990s, explained that when the Europeans cleared the land they were surprised to find all the trees standing once again the next morning.[17] The narrative of the cut trees standing again was also told by the current shrine priests Julius and Alex Msigwa, and by many others interviewed.[18] '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 destruction they had caused:

> The elder's counsel told the Europeans to pay one black cow, a black sheep, and a chicken, and money [amount not mentioned]. The Europeans agreed to pay, and once the payment was made the elders conducted the great *tambiko* [ancestral veneration] to appease the ancestral spirits. Just the next day the rain started.[19]

These stories about European failure to clear the grove due to various setbacks have been retold throughout Bena generations. The stories established in peoples' minds that traditions were more powerful than the modernity that came to destroy the culture embraced by the community. Such stories make it clear that 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 helped instil into people's mind the idea of awe in the forest. The mythical black chickens that dwell in the forest are central to one of the retold narratives throughout Njombe. The priests narrated that these chickens mostly appear during the harvesting season and disappear afterward. Most of the interviewees do not know where the chickens came from, 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' (Stanislaus 2015). Whether the narrative is true or not, the fact remains that chickens are part of the NSF ecosystem, making it home to fauna as well as flora.

The black chickens' life in the NSF reflects how the forest is complete and self-sustaining through the power of the ancestral spirits that dwell in it. Although chicken is a source of protein for most Bena, the chickens found in the forest are considered part of the ancestral forest spirits and thus cannot be eaten.[20] Culturally, the black chickens signify mystical power and consecration. The chickens are not fed by anyone; they survive through what is naturally provided in the forests. The Bena believe that the unseen and masters who control the forest and everything in the community are seen in black chickens (Elias 2018). For the Bena community the NSF thus equalled life and security. The hierarchy and patriarchy of the chickens reflects the social organisation of the Bena society, which is also the case for the ancestors who are arranged

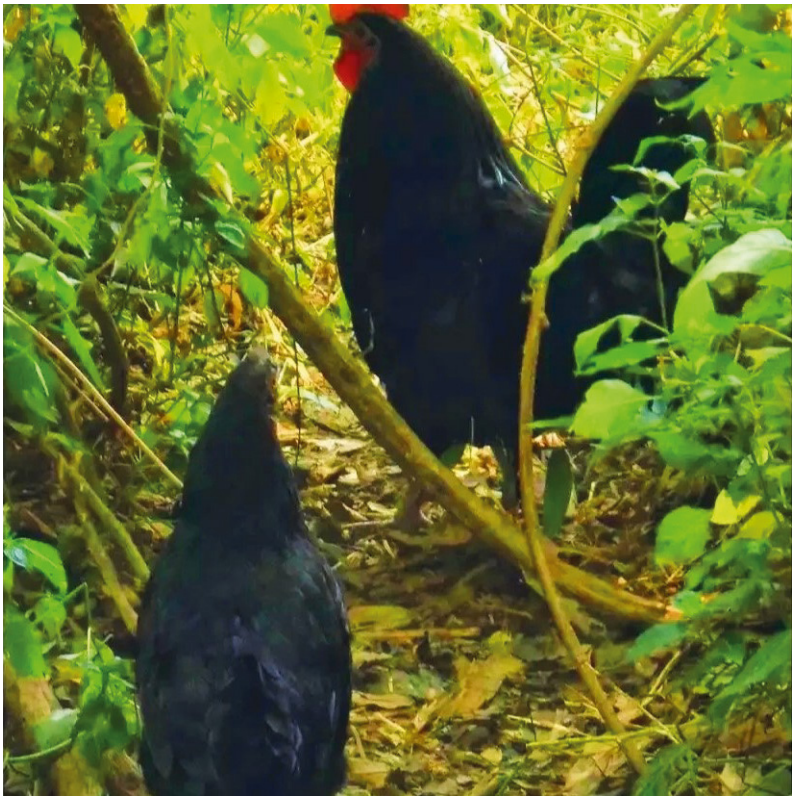


FIGURE 2 Black chickens inside Nyumbanitu sacred forest
SOURCE: PHOTO TAKEN BY THE RESEARCHER DURING HIS VISIT AT NSF, 9 MAY 2018

in a hierarchy. The list of significant Bena ancestors reflects a patriarchy society since all were males. The chickens dwelling in the forest signified mythical powers and consecration. People were expected to respect the chickens and their dwelling place. For instance, people at Mlevela Village commented that 'even when it happens the chickens enter our village, no one dares to catch them because we fear them'.[21] As with black cows and sheep, black chickens have entered the canon of forest folklore as myths, legends, tales, and rituals.

Legends that are 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 the 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', Julius Msigwa narrated. 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'.[22] The man had to visit the shrine priests to apologise. Related to that tale was the story of a driver who hit a 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 a short drive his car got problems. The villagers advised him to go back and apologise, which he did and continued with the journey afterward'.[23] To show that there was no exception to punishment for disrespecting the ancestral spirits, some interviewees recounted the story of the son of Vangameli Msigwa, a known shrine priest in the 1990s. 'Vangameli's son', recalled *Mzee* [elder] Allan Mfugalle, 'became lunatic after he stole a chicken from the forest'.[24] 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. However, they soon realised that they were carrying big snakes together with the firewood. The 'wood was 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 what had happened'.[25] In our interviews I asked interviewees if they would dare collect firewood from the grove. The common answer was 'NO!' because they believed the 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 Christians from Ihanzutwa entered the grove as they were travelling to Ukalawa, now Amani Lutheran Centre. According to priests interviewed, when they saw a road sign locating the NSF they said, 'Here is where the evil spirit stays, let us go and destroy them'. They then 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 complained that their priest was not fully saved by God because he feared accepting the 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 went mad as they repeatedly mentioned 'Nyumbanitu'. Their relatives went to Nyumbanitu shrine to apologise and pay for the destruction. A special *tambiko* [traditional ritual] was made for them, and they recovered. Related to that was a story of three Charismatic Catholics who entered the forest to pray for the destruction of 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.[26]

Although Christians interviewed associated *tambiko* 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. For instance, they believe that if one enters the forest without permission, he/she will get lost or suffer other related problems. There are also beliefs and taboos (*Imani ni miiho*) related to how to behave when entering the forest. It is believed that acting against the established taboos would 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 (Elias 2018). As such, people are cautious to not 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 just as taking off shoes and hats signifies respect.

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 medicinal and are used by traditional healers to heal various human and animal diseases (Njana et al. 2012). As Mgumia and Oba state (2003), tropical forests such as NSF form a kind of botanical garden where traditional healers can find rare medicinal plants, often essential for their pharmacopoeia. Although 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 medicinal plants from the grove without permission, the medicine will not heal the intended ailment and the fame of this healer will completely disappear in the community. Traditional healers are also warned to not collect an excessively large amount of medicinal plants from the forest. Most of the taboos provide conditions for sustainable use of the forest resources.

Among the Bena, some clans believe in the relationship between totems and human hosts. The killing of totems is a taboo among the Bena. According to one definition, totemism is 'a complexity of ideas, practices, legends, fears and kinship patterns which refer to the connection between human beings and animals and plants' (Gumo, Gisere, Raballah, and Oum 2012, 533). 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 (Inyang 2015). 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 relatives or ancestors of their respective social units. The killing of such creatures believed to be totems is a taboo (Inyang 2015).

There are common animal, bird, and plant totems. There is a belief that the destruction of a habitat contributes to the termination of animal species, including totems.[27] As such, efforts to protect some patches of forest areas or bodies of water aim to safeguard the lives of totems that belong to such communities. There is also a taboo, honoured by most Bena clans, against eating certain animals or birds or using certain plant species for firewood. For example, the Mgaya clan have a taboo against eating the *hivatesa* bird, and the Dembe clan has a taboo against an elephant. Every clan has an inherited taboo concerning at least one animal, plant, or bird. Adherence to taboos and totems helped increase the need for management of traditional protected areas. It also helped to sustain the population growth of certain plants and animal species.

There are characteristics inherent in folklore materials that make them appropriate for application in the resource management of less-advanced societies. Colding and Folke (2001) spotlight resource-related taboos, for instance ones that provide for low monitoring, enforcement, and sanctioning costs. 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 (1990, 27). The conservation value and practices of traditional societies do not come from law enforcement but from spiritual and social responsibility based on stipulated ways of how humans should utilise nature (Gumo et al. 2012). 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 provide a framework for defining acceptable resource use among the Bena. Their base is linked to the spiritual world that streamlined these practices. Taken together, these traditional practices create an ecological balance that 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 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.

Beliefs are the life-lived practices of African traditional religion. They include belief in divinities, ancestors, and spirits, and the practice of medicine

and magic. Whatever might be said regarding the authenticity of these beliefs, people have held on to them for generations. What is essential in considering traditional beliefs is not what one thinks about religion but instead peoples' experiences. Symbols are connected to symbolic actions known as rituals (Mligo, 2013). The Bena, as do other Africans, celebrate their experiences and expectations through symbolic actions. Rituals as part of traditional institutions are crucial in dramatizing lived reality. They are key to understanding the essential constitutions of human societies. Among the Bena, rituals stand as a bridge between verbal symbols and people's daily activities. Rituals help people understand orders and accept claims of rules in society.

Traditionally, the Bena considered sacred groves as holy sites that exclude nonspiritual activities. The village inhabitants believed in the sanctity of the grove and deities. No one could 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. However, despite the existing sacred forests' restrictions among the Bena, some forests have become popular as tourist sites, threatening the core functions and existence of these sites. The most famous of these in Njombe 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. Nyumbanitu exists for sacred practices or is otherwise sacred by its nature, and has established touristic appeal. Sites such as this are referred to as 'sacred touristic sites' (Brayley 2010, 289). Although such sites are not sacred to all visitors, they hold a unique appeal for some.

The onset of tourism at sacred groves entails both benefits and threats. The sacred groves benefit through the recognition and valuing of the site that lead to funding and conservation support. However, the process threatens sacred sites because of possible overuse and the lack of waste disposal or other ecological impacts. Although acknowledging they have little knowledge about sacred forest management, officials at Tanzania's Ministry of Natural Resources and Tourism (MNRT) 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 should also consider visitor capacity as well as the implications of designating sacred groves as heritage sites. The upgrading of the sacred grove to a touristic site requires the keepers to adapt to changes in the kinds of visitors they receive. It is easier to interact with believers who came to seek religious services than with nonbelievers who sought a touristic experience or those who had research interests.

7 Conclusion

Sacredness is a complex concept that needs to be defined by the context of those who consider something sacred. Despite variations, 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. Traditionally lived experiences establish a cumulative body of knowledge, practices, and representations that describe the relationships of living beings with one another and with their physical environment. This evolved by adaptive processes and has been handed down through generations by cultural transmission. Thus traditions, culture, and institutions should be understood in connection.

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 these relations that led to the formation of various mystical-religious homelands' sacred places. As the most common sacred place, forests are fixed as centres of communication between the two worlds – the world of the living and the world of the departed. Such forests originated from migration, settlement, burial activities, and ritual practices. The Nyumbanitu sacred forest, the central sacred forest among the Bena, illustrates that the sacred forest is an area for rituals (*matambiko*) and a place where sociocultural 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 subforests 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.

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Notes

1 Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed in Swahili by the author, 10 May 2018, Nyumbanitu Village.

2 Chief Eliasi Mkongwe, interviewed in Swahili by the author, 23 May 2018, Ilembula Village. (English translation by the author).

3 Alex Vangameli Msigwa, interviewed by the author, 10 May 2018, Nyumbanitu Village.

4 If a child cried endlessly, especially at night, the mother, grandmother, or any other adult would call out the names of family ancestors. If the child became 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 from that point on.

5 Imelda Adomeni and Claud Sanga, interviewed by the author, 20 June 2018, Lupila.

6 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. In order for the dwellers of these two worlds to be able to communicate there must be a fixed point, here referred to as the 'centre of the world', where communication between the earth and underworld can be expressed.

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

8 Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by the author, 19 May 2018, Nyumbanitu; Hallan Mfugale, interviewed by the author, 23 May 2018, Ilembula.

9 As is discussed later, the Nyumbanitu sacred forest provides an illustration of forests that are associated with both a burial ground as well as old settlements.

10 Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interviewed by the author, 19 May 2018, Nyumbanitu; Hallan Mfugale, interviewed by the author, 23 May 2018, Ilembula.

11 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 larger village communities in planned areas.

12 Halan Mfugale (71), interviewed by the author, 19 June 2018, Nyumbanitu Village.

13 Simon Mgaya, Scondina Mgeni, Victory Mgaya, and Chezelina Mgao, group interview by the author, 10 July 2018, Igosi Village.

14 Lumuliko Pandisa Lugalla, interview by the author, 20 August 1997, Dar-es-Salaam.

15 Anna Nayamule and Felister Mgaya, interviewed in Swahili by the author, 6 June 2018, Nyumbanitu.

16 Allan Mfugale, Michael Asangile Mkongwa, and Jonas Nyika, interviewed by the author, 21 May 2018, Mlevela.

17 Lutengano Fute, and Vangamere Msigwa, interview by the author, 24 July 1994, Nyumbanitu.

18 Julius and Alex Msigwa, interview by the author, 20 May 2018, Nyumbanitu.

19 Chief Elias Mwaluko Mkongwa, interview by the author, 23 May 2018, Ilembula.

20 Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interview by the author, 20 May 2018. The interview with the two forest priests (Julius and Alex) was conducted at a forest post outside the forest before entering the forest. As we talked about chickens, the priests said 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 path we had to take to enter the forest. The chick crossed the road 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 seemed to be lucky since the ancestors had sent the spirit in the form of a chicken to welcome us.

21 Mlevela villagers, interview by the author, 18 June 2018, Mlevela.

22 Alex and Julius Msigwa, interview by the author, 6 May 2018, Nyumbanitu.

23 Alex and Julius Msigwa, interview by the author, 6 May 2018, Nyumbanitu.

24 Allan Mfugale, interview by the author, 19 May 2018, Mlevela.

25 Felister Mgaya and Anna Nyamule, interview by the author, 6 June 2018, Nyumbanitu.

26 Jonas Nyika, Alex and Julius Vangameli Msigwa, interview by the author, 6 and 7 May 2018, Nyumbanitu.

27 Elias Mkongwe, interview by the author, 23 May 2018, Ilembula; Penzeli Mwajombe, interview by the author, 12 July 2018, Makoga; Ernest Msigwa, interview by the author, 13 July 2018, Njombe.