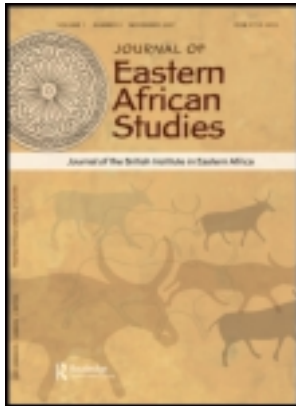


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### Natural cultural sites of Kenya: changing contexts, changing meanings

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## Natural cultural sites of Kenya: changing contexts, changing meanings

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Kenya is the home of over 40 ethnic groups of different cultural backgrounds. In pre-colonial times each of these groups had its own belief system, incorporating natural sites to which they ascribed cultural significance. Many of these “natural sacred sites” have been destroyed or severely degraded over the last century, while others survive and continue to be preserved. Over time, the meanings of such sites have changed, as has their management and control, especially since the political changes in Kenya of the early 1990s and with the increasing strength of the global environmental movement over the same period. This paper traces the history and recent development in four clusters of natural sites of cultural significance: the kaya forests of the Kenya coast; Mount Kenya and related sites of the central Kenya highlands; cultural sites in the Lake Victoria basin, including Ramogi Hill and Kit Mikayi; and highland sites in northern Kenya occupied primarily by pastoral nomads, including Mount Nyiro and Forole Hill.

**Keywords:** cultural sites; World Heritage; sacred sites; Kenya; kaya forests

On 8 July 2008, 11 groups of “Sacred Mijikenda Kaya Forests” were inscribed as cultural sites on the UNESCO World Heritage list.<sup>1</sup> These forests have been important to the Mijikenda people for many centuries, but only during the last two decades have they received wider national and international attention. They joined three other Kenyan sites on the World Heritage list, one of which is Mount Kenya National Park/Natural Forest, inscribed as a natural site in 1997.<sup>2</sup> It is too early to discern the impact of this designation on the kaya forests, and the extent to which it may strengthen their conservation, but the experience of Mount Kenya forest over the last 13 years suggests that World Heritage listing is not a guarantee of enhanced conservation. Nonetheless, UNESCO’s recognition of the kaya forests will surely have an influence on their future status and protection. In this paper these and other natural sites of cultural significance across various Kenyan localities will be examined, to establish what these sites have meant to local communities in the past, and what they mean now. A trajectory is apparent from local control in pre-colonial times, through external control by agents of the colonial and post-colonial states, to a situation in the present century in which local communities have formed alliances with international agencies to re-establish control over their cultural sites.

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Definitions have some importance for this discussion. The UNESCO World Heritage Convention defines “cultural heritage” as monuments, groups of buildings or sites of “outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art or science”. “Sites” are further defined as “works of man or the combined works of nature and man, and areas including archaeological sites which are of outstanding universal value from the historical, aesthetic, ethnological or anthropological point of view”. “Natural heritage” is defined as natural features, geological and physiographical formations and natural sites of outstanding universal value from the point of view of science, conservation or natural beauty.<sup>3</sup> The sites we will consider here are primarily elements of Kenya’s cultural heritage, of historical, ethnological or anthropological value, and in which the work of nature outweighs the work of man. These may be termed “natural cultural sites”. The word “natural” in this context does not imply a pristine or undisturbed status: human influence has been powerful in Kenya for many thousands of years. In following UNESCO’s use of “cultural” we can avoid debate over the meaning of the term “sacred” as applied to environmental features. While “sacred” is widely used in anthropological and conservation literature,<sup>4</sup> the use of “cultural” makes it clearer that these sites have multiple meanings. Such a combination of natural and cultural values was recognized by the World Heritage Convention in 1992, when they adopted additional criteria to define “cultural landscapes of outstanding value”, among them “associative cultural landscapes”, “justifiable by virtue of the powerful religious, artistic or cultural associations of the natural element rather than material cultural evidence which may be insignificant or even absent”.<sup>5</sup>

It is likely that up until the late nineteenth century cultural sites or landscapes of one kind or other were to be found all over the geographic area that was to become Kenya. Since that time social, economic and environmental changes have been dramatic. The impact of colonization saw the alienation of much of Kenya’s most fertile land for commercial farming by white settlers. African communities lost control of large areas of land, including their own cultural sites and landscapes. Even in those areas where Africans retained control, the impact of increasing populations on a restricted land area, and the commercialization of agriculture led to more intense land use. This pressure has been most visible in the drastic reduction of Kenya’s indigenous forests – where many cultural sites were located. For example, despite the significance of Mount Kenya as a cultural landscape, the destruction of forests on its lower slopes has been extreme. And at Kenya’s coast, several kaya forests have been totally destroyed in recent decades.

But since the 1990s, Kenyans have become more articulate in voicing their opposition to the destruction of natural resources or the plundering of community property by politically powerful individuals. Sometimes alone, but increasingly with the aid of local or foreign based non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and conservation activists, local communities have become more aware of the value of their cultural and environmental resources, and more active in conserving them. Groups such as the Malindi District Cultural Association (MADCA), the various committees of kaya elders and GECOG (Giitune Environment Conservation Group) have been formed through the efforts of local communities to preserve their natural cultural sites. At a national level, organizations such as the Coastal Forest Conservation Unit (CFCU) and the Kenya Resource Centre for Indigenous Knowledge (KENRIK) have emerged, while there is growing awareness of the

UNESCO World Heritage list. After many decades of neglect, cultural sites are regaining recognition throughout Kenya.

Four clusters of natural sites of cultural significance have been selected for consideration in this paper: the kaya forests of the Kenya coast; Mount Kenya and related cultural sites in the central highlands; cultural sites in the Lake Victoria basin, including Ramogi Hill and Kit Mikayi; and finally several highland sites in areas of northern Kenya occupied primarily by pastoral nomads, including Mount Nyiro and Forole Hill (Figure 1). This represents a wide range of Kenya's cultural mix, including the populous and politically powerful Kikuyu and Luo, as well as the less numerous Mijikenda of the coast, and the politically marginalized pastoralists of the north. The cases chosen also include sites of different physical nature. Vegetation



Figure 1. Natural cultural sites of Kenya discussed in the text.

sites (“sacred groves” or “sacred trees”) have received much attention in Kenya as elsewhere, but mountains, hills, caves and water bodies of cultural significance are also included here. The choice of sites also reflects their natural and international profile, and the availability of information. Published and documentary sources have been augmented by fieldwork undertaken at the sites, including interviews among local communities. The first part of the paper provides an overarching discussion of the general pattern of beliefs and practices associated with natural cultural sites. This is followed by a detailed review of specific sites in each of the four clusters.

### **Beliefs and practices associated with natural cultural sites**

The cultural importance of landscape and place was highlighted in the pioneering work of scholars such as Frazer and Turner,<sup>6</sup> before the categorization of sacred sites was first proposed by Bernbaum and Wilson.<sup>7</sup> Hay-Edie and Hadley created quadratic charts of natural sacred sites based on two criteria: a continuum from “inert” (rocky features) to “organic” (trees and groves) and from “natural” to “human modified”; and a second chart categorizing sites according to scale (from “small” to “large”) and from low to high biodiversity.<sup>8</sup> There are many ways of categorizing natural cultural sites, but in this analysis the meanings attributed to these cultural phenomena will be emphasized. Cultural sites are contested terrain, both literally and metaphorically. They are also dynamic features. Even in the nineteenth century sites were subject to changes in meaning and function, and their physical condition and integrity have changed even more rapidly more recently. The account to be given here of each site is broadly chronological: in Table 1 the application of different categories of meaning to the four clusters of Kenyan cultural sites is summarized. It is important to note both that a particular site may be perceived with several different concurrent categories of meaning, and that the meanings change through time. Meanings may be strong, moderate or weak/absent, and they may be held on a local, national or international level. Six general categories of site are identified here, and their characteristics described. These categories will then be deployed in describing the four clusters of Kenyan sites in the following discussions.

(i) *Origin and first settlement sites* are those at which a group ancestor and their immediate descendants are said to have taken up residence on first entry into a particular area. At a later date settlement spreads out to other locations. The original site may have been overtly defensive, and it may contain graves of ancestral individuals. In applying Kopytoff’s hypothesis of the “internal African frontier” to sacred groves, Sheridan stresses that an “immigrant group creates its own sacred groves as touchstones for its legitimacy as rulers of people and owners of land” and that in many parts of Africa the groves “represent the moral authority of patrilineal land tenure systems”.<sup>9</sup>

(ii) *Religious sites* are those at which deities are believed to reside, or visit regularly. This category also includes sites at or towards which sacrifices and prayers are directed or located. Religious sites vary in topography and geography, and they may be particular to a certain lineage or family. For example, the national and international significance of the Matopo Hills of Zimbabwe is explained in Ranger’s masterly study. He shows how the hills, originally occupied by pre-Bantu San peoples, became the home for the shrines of the High God Mwali. As the site of Cecil Rhodes’ grave, the Matopos then became the embodiment of white rule over

Table 1. Beliefs and practices associated with Kenyan natural cultural sites.

	Kaya forests	Mount Kenya	Central highland forests	Mukurwe wa Gathanga	Got Ramogi	Kit Mikayi	Forole	Nyiro	Mtelo
Origin/first Settlement	strong	none	none	strong	strong	none	weak	none	weak
Religious	strong	strong to weak	strong to weak	weak	none	moderate	strong	strong	strong
Indigenous governance	strong to moderate	none	strong to none	none	none	none	strong	none	strong
Political	moderate	weak	none	weak	weak	moderate	?	?	weak
Conservation	strong	strong	moderate	weak	moderate	moderate	?	weak	?
Tourism	moderate	moderate	weak	moderate	moderate	moderate	?	?	weak

Rhodesia: but struggles over the meaning of the Matopos continued after Zimbabwe's independence in 1980. Ranger describes the rivalries between claimants to the priesthoods of the Mwali shrines, their interactions with politicians and the profits they make from charging fees. The hills also became objects of concern to the international conservation movement and of interest as an international tourist site,<sup>10</sup> though their eventual inscription to the World Heritage List in 2003 is as a cultural site, citing the religious traditions and the long interaction between communities and the landscape.<sup>11</sup>

(iii) *Indigenous governance sites* are those at which community affairs were discussed or managed. As well as regular meetings of community leaders, these sites would also be the location for community-wide rituals, such as initiations and age-set promotions. Sheridan describes sacred groves as representing social order, and as such, focal points for cooperation and conflict – sites where political power may be contested and reinforced.<sup>12</sup> Governance sites are defined as being of importance to individual (or occasionally neighboring) communities. Contestations here would have been intra-community, in contrast with political sites where the contestation for power becomes much broader.

(iv) *Political sites*: this term refers to cultural sites of political significance. Some may have been sites of resistance to colonial rule, or to post-colonial nation states. According to Hughes and Chandran, sacred groves “may serve as examples of local ownership and autonomy, and may serve as rallying points for local people when these are threatened”.<sup>13</sup> Geschiere and van der Klei describe the significance of the *bukin* sacred groves of the Diola people of the Casamance region in their protests against the central government of Senegal in the 1980s,<sup>14</sup> while de Jong describes how a senior Senegalese politician who had not been initiated earlier in life chose to undergo initiation in a sacred grove at the rather advanced age of 55. De Jong's example shows that while the indigenous meaning of this ritual and cultural site may be strong, the political meaning of the site may undergo change.<sup>15</sup> Robben Island is probably the best known such African site, but within Kenya the Mau Mau struggle also gave rise to such sites of political meaning, albeit less well known internationally.

(v) *Conservation sites*: these are sites the importance of which stems from the conservation efforts directed at them, either as elements of the “natural” environment (vegetation, water, rocks) or on “cultural” features (homesteads, fortifications, places of worship). Many cultural sites are partly defined by indigenous controls on access and extraction of natural resources, and many scholars have argued that sacred groves are indigenous conservation systems. Some African conservation groups consider that “sacred groves epitomize contemporary conservation policy's goals of grassroots participation, sociocultural legitimacy, and demonstrated ecological efficiency”.<sup>16</sup> Over recent years countries have competed to have their natural and cultural sites recognized at the highest level by inscription on the UNESCO World Heritage lists.

(vi) *Tourism sites* are those that have become the focus of national or international tourism. Tourism is among the world's fastest-growing industries and increasing numbers of tourists seek experiences of cultural value. Cultural sites may attract international tourists or draw nationals of the host country who wish to learn more of their own history and culture, as in the case of some West African sites described by Juhé-Beaulaton. Tourism may be encouraged as a means of income generation for the community controlling a cultural site, a notable Kenyan example being Kaya Kinondo.<sup>17</sup>

### Cluster 1: The Kaya forests

The word *kaya* (plural *makaya*) means a settlement in the Mijikenda languages.<sup>18</sup> This is a clue to the primary meaning the Mijikenda themselves attribute to these forest patches, as the locations of the first defensive settlements established by their ancestors as they migrated into this area several centuries ago.<sup>19</sup> More recent scholarship has cast doubt on this version of Mijikenda history, presenting a longer and more complex sequence of events bringing the Mijikenda to the lands they occupy today.<sup>20</sup> However, the majority of the Mijikenda see the *kaya* forests as the homes of their ancestors. Each group identifies its own primary *kaya* settlement, from which dispersal occurred as populations increased and the threats from neighboring groups subsided. The earliest written records from the mid-nineteenth century confirm that this process of dispersal was taking place, while also confirming the originally defensive nature of *kaya* settlements. In August 1844, Krapf visited the primary settlements of the Rabai, Ribe, Kambe and Jibana, approaching them on forested paths that led to triple gates. Twenty years later, New visited Kayas Kambe, Jibana, Chonyi and Kauma, which he describes as “stockaded villages always, for greater security, built in the midst of the forest, and generally on elevated ground”.<sup>21</sup>

Supernatural elements of the *kaya* are manifest in New’s account of the *moro*, as “a hut built in the *Kaya*, which is looked upon with great awe by the people. None but the initiated are allowed to enter it.” He also describes how, after his party camped in *Kaya Chonyi* overnight, in the morning they found a party of old men at the gate of the *kaya* “engaged in the performance of some superstitious rite. A goat was slaughtered before the gate, its blood and entrails were scattered about the entrance; certain incantations were repeated, and the ceremony was at an end.”<sup>22</sup> (It is possible that this ceremony was carried out in order to cleanse the *kaya* from the pollution caused by New’s visit.) Spear describes the central uncleared circle in the *kaya*, in which the *finjo* (a powerful protective magical charm) was buried, and the surrounding forest, which “served as a safe place to store those medicines too powerful to be kept safely within the confines of the *kaya* itself”.<sup>23</sup> As settlement sites, the *kayas* also had supernatural elements.

Significant changes seem to have occurred during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Writing primarily of *Kaya Giriama*,<sup>24</sup> Brantley and Parkin each relate the growing recognition of the *kaya* as a sacred center during these decades to its decline as a population center. According to Brantley, “the *kaya* changed from the core of *Giriama* population and government into the *Giriama* ritual center and a symbol of *Giriama* unity. As the store-house of all medicines and the burial ground of the ancestors, the *kaya* became sacred.”<sup>25</sup> Parkin makes a similar point:

it seems likely that the idea of the *Kaya* as sacred centre has been intensified, and even exaggerated if not invented, only since the *Giriama* ceased to live in and around it in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>26</sup>

He goes on to assert that “the evacuation of the *Kaya* from the mid nineteenth century onwards perhaps parallels its growing mythicisation as a source of sacredness”. As the *kaya* settlements were abandoned, the cultural significance of the *kaya* as a source of Mijikenda identity grew. Parkin provides a list of the attributes of the *kaya*, including its power to bring about good (rain, fertility, health, success in war) and also to control the evil of witchcraft. Even today, prayers and



sacrifices for rain are held in kaya forests. Reports from Kaya Kinondo indicate that prayers have been offered for the academic success of local school children.<sup>27</sup>

Parkin also refers to the governance function of the kaya, describing Kaya Giriama as “an intrinsic source of ritual power . . . providing its elders with legitimacy in their handling of crises”.<sup>28</sup> The indigenous governance system of the Mijikenda was based on the *kambi* or council of elders. As long as the bulk of the Mijikenda population was primarily resident within the kaya settlements, it was relatively easy for the elders to maintain control, both through their ownership of the productive resources (land and livestock) and through the powerful oaths that they controlled. But once people moved out from the kaya settlements, this control weakened. New mentions this as early as 1865, and Brantley provides a detailed account of changes through the early twentieth century.<sup>29</sup> A century on, the indigenous system has been replaced by other institutions, involving government-appointed chiefs and headmen, elected local councilors, and elected national parliamentary representatives. However, “kaya elders” still exert influence at both the local and national levels.

The role of the kaya forests in Kenyan national politics can be traced back to the early twentieth century, when Kaya Giriama was seen by colonial officials as a “hotbed of sedition”.<sup>30</sup> The decision was made to destroy this symbol of Giriama resistance to colonial rule, and in early August 1914 “the elders watched silently as the main trees and gates were blown up, all the dwellings and trees inside the kaya burned, and the entrance dynamited and barricaded”.<sup>31</sup> Though Kaya Giriama was later restored, the kayas did not become centers of local resistance to colonial rule. Willis stresses that “political leadership in modern Mijikenda society has not always sprung from a direct relationship with the kaya”, pointing out that the Mijikenda Union, the first formal organization claiming to represent “the Mijikenda” as a group, was created by “modernizing” men who explicitly asserted that school education and salaried employment fitted them for office.<sup>32</sup>

In the decades since independence, however, it has become clear that political aspirants with “school education and salaried employment” have, like the Senegalese politician described by de Jong, recognized the benefits of being seen to be closely linked to kaya elders and institutions. Ronald Ngala (1922–71) was typical. The first Mijikenda to reach prominence in national politics, Ngala was a Giriama born close to Kaya Giriama. While working as a teacher, Ngala led Giriama school children “into Kaya Fungo for a familiarization and educational excursion”.<sup>33</sup> He wrote a book on Giriama culture, and was “very interested in the maintenance of the abandoned kayas and . . . against the destruction of trees in them”.<sup>34</sup> According to Aseka,

Because of his closeness to the kaya elders whose wisdom he often sought, Ngala became particularly popular among the Mijikenda . . . On his death the kaya elders were to perform the last burial rites in 1971 as he was lowered into the grave. They were even to insist that he be buried in the precincts of the kaya.<sup>35</sup>

Burial within the kaya implies that Ngala had been initiated as a kaya elder.<sup>36</sup>

In the decades after Ngala’s death, other Kenyan politicians have sought to draw on the influence of the kaya elders to strengthen their position. A Kenya media story describes how Transport minister, Chirau Ali Mwakwere, was invited for blessings at Kaya Kinondo, where “a group of Kaya elders from various districts flocked the

Kaya, slaughtered a black bull and prayed for him to be elevated to the post of deputy prime minister”.<sup>37</sup> Another prominent Mijikenda politician was the late Karisa Maitha, whose elevation in 2003 to kaya eldership and the position of “King of the Mijikenda” is described by Willis.<sup>38</sup> This search for legitimization has extended beyond Mijikenda, Bbeja recounting how Najib Balala, elected representative from a Mombasa constituency

was dressed as a kaya elder by the outspoken Rabai Kaya elder, Pekeshe Ndeje a.k.a. Simba Wanje, outside a kaya forest. But this sparked a controversy as other kaya elders insisted that only individuals from the Mijikenda community can be made kaya elders.<sup>39</sup>

But it seems that no objection was made in April 2003, when Mwai Kibaki, then recently elected President of Kenya, made his first official visit to the coast and was “initiated” as an elder of the Mijikenda at a public ceremony which “involved wrapping him in an array of cloths and a headdress, and was performed by a man who was described as representing the ‘Council of Kaya Elders’”.<sup>40</sup>

Kaya institutions and elders have also played a role in ethnic violence on several occasions since 1992. Issues of ethnicity have been very prominent in every Kenyan election since 1992. At the Kenya coast, violence was particularly bad between August and November 1997. Centered on the Likoni area south of Mombasa, looting, arson and attacks against persons of non-coastal origin left several hundred people dead and many more injured. The Kenya Human Rights Commission (KHRC) published two short reports on the violence, entitled *Kayas of Deprivation*, *Kayas of Blood* and *Kayas Revisited*.<sup>41</sup> In the prologue to the 1997 report the authors explained why they chose this title, noting that the word kaya has a dual meaning in the Mijikenda languages, being both a homestead and a symbol of Mijikenda culture, history and identity. These investigations concluded that “ultimately, the marginalization and deprivation of the kaya (as homestead) can turn its forest into a violence-prone area of politico-economic contestation”.<sup>42</sup> Many of the youths who carried out the looting and destruction had been trained and indoctrinated in forested areas, including kaya forests; Kaya Bombo, Kaya Waa and the Similani caves were among the locations named by informants. Though not all raiders were Mijikenda, elements of Mijikenda culture were drawn on in the indoctrination process, including a ritual described as the *kinu* oath.<sup>43</sup> Some raiders are described as being bare-chested or wearing black or dark blue cotton, colors often worn by kaya elders at their rituals, and “usually associated with spirits and exorcism among the Mijikenda”.<sup>44</sup>

Prominent kaya elders vehemently deny such associations. An elder of Kaya Kambe in Kilifi District gave an impassioned account of the deaths of two “raiders” killed in the kaya by the security forces two weeks earlier, saying

the cadavers are still there – the kaya is too hot . . . The corpses poured blood – this desecrated the kaya. The kaya is never for the enmity/war since times immemorial. It’s been ever for peace and prayers – for the good. And now there lie the corpses . . . it’s desecrated. Now it is a must to have a cleansing rite.

The following year it was reported that “Kaya elders from the 46 *kayas* (holy places) in the Coast said the violence was meant to disrupt peace and scuttle development activities in the region” and distanced themselves from groups threatening violence

to up-country people.<sup>45</sup> Despite these sentiments, it appears that other leaders were involved in illegal military training of youths and oath taking in Kwale in subsequent years; news stories from April 2005, for example, reported that a senior Mijikenda politician was set to lead a “team of religious leaders, Kaya (traditional shrine) elders and fellow Coast MPS to talk to Kwale elders on the need to rein in youths believed to have been recruited into a group bent on disrupting peace in the area”.<sup>46</sup>

Violence at the coast in the aftermath of the disputed election of December 2007 was less than in the Rift Valley and Lake Victoria basin, though there was considerable property damage and around 30 people were killed. The violence seems to have occurred mainly as a response to the election result, and there is little evidence of pre-election training in forested areas. However leaflets targeting up-country communities were “signed” in the name of the “Kaya Revolutionary Council [*sic*].” The Kenyan National Commission on Human Rights (KNCHR) suggested that “violence in the region did not spiral out of control as there were peace initiatives such as Kaya elders, church leaders, and the council of Imams”.<sup>47</sup>

Interest in the kaya forests from a conservation perspective appears to have begun in the 1980s,<sup>48</sup> though Spear has drawn attention to the historical importance of the forest surrounding kaya settlements: “It was thought that should be kaya forest be cleared the kaya would perish. The common idiom for an abandoned or worthless kaya is that it has been ‘cleared’.”<sup>49</sup> The status of the kaya forests as threatened ecosystems containing a variety of rare plants and animals was first described in 1981 in the report of the Oxford University Ethnobotanical Expedition to Kenya. Researchers focused on the botanical composition of the forests, reporting evidence for forest destruction and regeneration, and spoke with a number of kaya elders about the status of the forests. They were particularly impressed with the elders of Kaya Rabai, whom they described as being “strong-minded in their resistance to the detrimental effects of westernization”.<sup>50</sup>

Recognition of the need to conserve the kaya forests, and of the kaya elders as important allies in this goal, continued to grow during the 1980s, exemplified by the reports of the botanists Robertson and Luke. Robertson describes how her interest in kaya forest conservation started at Kaya Waa, in Kwale District, where she “felt every sympathy with Mzee Selimu when he bemoaned the fact that there was no one coming after him to care for the kaya forest as all the youngsters wanted to do was go to bars and dancing”.<sup>51</sup> The goal of the 1986–87 project was to create plant lists, evaluate the conservation status of each kaya forest, and gauge the attitude of the different elders groups and to suggest the most suitable ways of protecting each forest. In a broader project between 1988 and 1991, Robertson and Luke carried out floristic surveys of other Kenya coastal forests as well as kaya forests, with further discussions with kaya elders. They observed that

some Elders have been slow to realize the threat to their sacred clearings by the gradual erosion of forest from without. Only when the clearing is no longer hidden in the depths of the forest do they understand that their heritage is almost lost.<sup>52</sup>

They went on to note that “there was local concern about the disappearance of the indigenous plants used in traditional medicine, as well as awareness of environmental degradation resulting from forest clearance”.

Government responsibility for kaya forest conservation has been through the National Museums of Kenya (NMK), and specifically the Coastal Forest Conserva-

tion Unit (CFCU). Funded largely by WWF-International, CFCU began operations in February 1992. Its goals are outlined in project documents and in publications by Githitho and others.<sup>53</sup> Much of the work has focused on supporting kaya elders in efforts to reduce the rate of extraction of forest resources. This support has included giving the elders

access to a wide forum, including regional meetings and, for a few, trips to biodiversity conferences and workshops in Nairobi. The committees of elders also have access to patronage; they appoint the kaya guards and may receive monthly salaries from the CFCU.

Overall, since 1992 many of the kaya elders groups have gained material and moral support from the global conservation movement. However, this access to influence<sup>54</sup> has probably exacerbated tensions over status and power within kaya elders groups. Willis refers to “the developing relationship between elderhood and leadership [which] has been rendered the more complex by the apparently abundant supply of kaya elders”.<sup>55</sup> Several groups have experienced highly contested internal politics, marked by expulsions and re-instatements of key elders.

Some elders have seen the Kenyan media as useful allies in these struggles, and local journalists have been quick to pick up stories about the kaya forests.<sup>56</sup> Many stories focus on indigenous culture and on the kaya elders themselves, sometimes naming and photographing them. Headlines stress the agency of the elders,<sup>57</sup> while often criticizing agents of the Kenyan state. A cartoon from the *East African Standard* of 28 September 1995 is typical: following the report of the privatization and sub-division for sale of plots in Kaya Waa, a Digo kaya forest in Kwale District, the cartoon depicted a civil servant allocating plots to elected officials. The officials are shown as obese thugs trampling on the local people, who bewail their fate as harmless chickens (see Figure 2). Reports on the kaya forests as the focus of alliances between indigenous governance and international conservation to preserve threatened ecosystems have even reached the international media.<sup>58</sup>

Local attitudes and practices are not totally supportive of forest conservation. Interviews in 1997 with over 400 Mijikenda men, women and children from six different communities close to kaya forests elicited a wide range of opinions about the value of the forests. Women were three times as likely as men to say that the kaya forests had no value, and over six times as likely to say that they did not know their value. This was particularly true of young women of estimated ages 18 to 25 years. In general, younger people (especially members of revivalist Christian churches) tended to be ignorant of and openly hostile to the belief systems represented by the kayas. While older Mijikenda believe in the importance of the forests as sites for prayers to avert drought and other disasters, the reality is that kaya degradation is an ongoing process.<sup>59</sup>

Locally based ecotourism projects have been suggested to combine kaya conservation with income generation. One such project operates at Kaya Kinondo. Visitors are taken on short walks through the forest, a local guide explaining the cultural significance of the kaya and pointing out its botanical highlights.<sup>60</sup> However, tourism is by its very nature an uncertain and highly competitive industry; the near-collapse of the Kenya tourist industry following the violence in early 2008 led to the temporary closing of Kaya Kinondo.<sup>61</sup> Also, not all kaya elders favor developing their forests in this way: a NMK official commented that

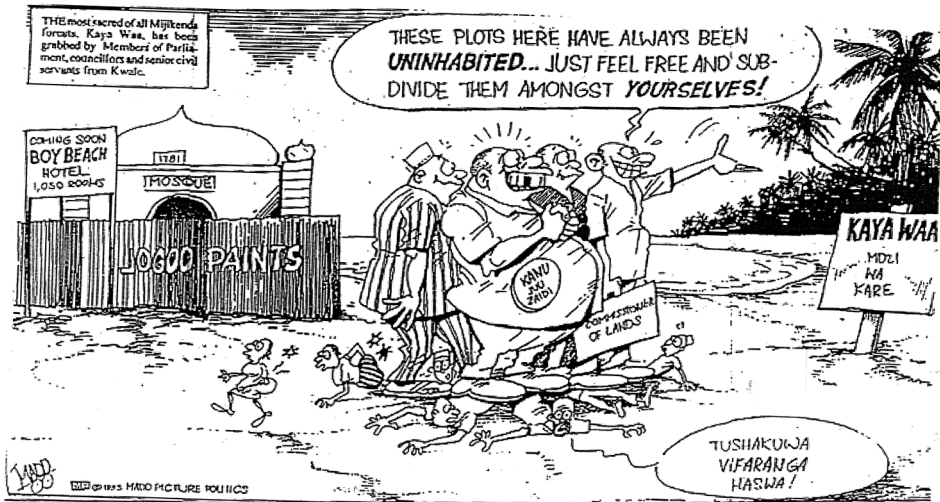


Figure 2. Cartoon from the *East African Standard*, 28 September 1995. © Standard Group Limited. Reproduced with permission.

“elders at Kaya Rabai and Kaya Kauma have resisted the idea of allowing tourists in the sacred forests”.<sup>62</sup> Given the persistence of such attitudes,<sup>63</sup> the optimism of another NMK official that “tourists visiting Kenyan Kayas could triple” seems unrealistic.<sup>64</sup> But the UNESCO World Heritage listing will increase visibility of the kaya forests as tourist destinations, and also strengthen fund raising to support their conservation.

### Cluster 2: Cultural sites of the central highlands

The central Kenya highlands are the ancestral home of a number of related Bantu-speaking groups, principally the Kikuyu, Embu, Mbeere, Meru and Kamba. Their oral traditions and indigenous belief systems recognize a variety of cultural sites, including Mount Kenya, sacred forests, groves and trees species, sacred lakes, caves, centers of dispersal and community meeting places. Over the last century, Christianity has taken deep root in central Kenya, and indigenous belief systems are now much weaker than among the Mijikenda. The context within which cultural sites are managed and conserved is therefore very different in central Kenya.

The most prominent cultural site in this cluster is the 5199 meter snow-capped peak of Mount Kenya, one of the first Kenyan sites to gain UNESCO World Heritage listing. The glaciated rocky peak rises over 3000 meters above the surrounding plateau and is visible to people over a wide area.<sup>65</sup> Each ethnic group had its own name for the mountain; according to Kenyatta, the Kikuyu who live on its southern and southwestern slopes named it Kirinyaga or Kere-nyaga. He translates this as “that which possesses brightness, or mountain of brightness”.<sup>66</sup> Kenyatta further explains that God (Ngai or Mwene-nyaga, possessor of brightness) lived on the mountain and that all prayers and sacrifices were offered facing the mountain. Ngai also had “minor homes” on three other mountains visible to the east, south and west of the Kikuyu homeland, which according to Kenyatta “are regarded with reverence as great places and mysteries symbolic of God”.<sup>67</sup> The

Embu and Mbeere, living on the southeastern slopes of Mount Kenya, identify the mountain as the favorite resting place of their deity, *Mwene Njeru* (owner of the sun) where he would “sit and rest there after his numerous journeys and watch all the country”.<sup>68</sup> Certain Embu and Mbeere ceremonies (especially healing rituals and the blessing of infants) involve participants facing Mount Kenya.<sup>69</sup>

Mount Kenya’s religious function was almost entirely fulfilled from a distance; among all the groups surrounding the mountain, actual prayers and sacrifices were carried out under sacred trees or at other local cultural sites. Before 1900, when the upper zones of rock, ice, moorland and bamboo were surrounded by a thick ring of montane forest, there would be good reasons why few if any of the peoples surrounding the mountain visited the high peaks to pray or place offerings. Stigand reports that the local people were extremely fearful of the upper slopes, though “the Meru are said to be more enterprising in exploring the mountain than the Kikuyu”, a few might visit the moorland above the bamboo belt in search of medicinal plants.<sup>70</sup> A locally published source commented that “even though the Agikuyu believed that Murungu [God] lived on top of Kirinyaga [Mount Kenya], still the sacrifices made to Him were done under the sacred trees like the fig (*mukuyu* or *mugumo*)”.<sup>71</sup> One of Mwaniki’s Embu informants referred back to the founding generation or the Kubai *nthuke* of the Embu people, when “it was believed that going beyond the forest edge was wrong because the urine of God reached as far down as that”.<sup>72</sup> This taboo was only broken during a subsequent famine, when people went into the forest to hunt animals.

During the Mau Mau uprising of the 1950s, several thousand freedom fighters lived in the forests of the Aberdares and Mount Kenya. Karari Njama’s account of his life in the forests makes frequent mention of morning prayers and prayers before meetings uttered while facing Mount Kenya; he also faced Mount Kenya on two of the occasions he took Mau Mau oaths.<sup>73</sup> In August 1953, Njama describes how

we could see the snow cap of Mt. Kenya while saying our morning prayer and eagerly staring at the sacred Home of God asking Him to guard and guide us. Though I did not believe that God *lived* there, I believed it to be a holy place. Firstly, this traditional belief, which had begun with the creation of our tribe, must have originated from something to do with God and not from nothing.<sup>74</sup>

Gucu Gikoyo also spent several years in the forests of Mount Kenya and the Aberdares. His account of a visit to the high moorland is full of awe; a comrade told him

that particular mountain had many strange things not found on other mountains . . . he recalled an incident where they sent some fighters up the mountain to pull down some prayer houses that had been set up by Europeans. They had carried out the mission but forgot to pray before doing so. *Ngai* struck them with blindness for seven days . . . the mountain is never pointed at with a finger for that would be sacrilege as God lived there.<sup>75</sup>

After Mau Mau, the symbolic importance of Mount Kenya to the newly independent nation was marked by a climb to the highest peak organized to coincide with the ceremony marking the end of British rule on 12 December 1963. A team of Kenyan climbers scaled the peak and unfurled the national flag; Kisoï Munyao was then

flown by helicopter to the ceremony in Nairobi. Munyao's achievement was remembered at his death in March 2007.<sup>76</sup>

Mount Kenya has little specifically religious significance to the Kikuyu and other inhabitants of central Kenya today. Kenyatta gave an account of an independent Kikuyu church that came into existence in about 1929.<sup>77</sup> This group "Watu wa Mngu" ("the people of God" in Swahili)<sup>78</sup> combined Christianity and the indigenous Kikuyu religion, and "in their prayer to Mwene-Nyaga they hold up their arms to the sky facing Mount Kenya". Similarly, Wamue's account of Mungiki stresses its advocacy of "a 'complete' return to indigenous beliefs and practices", mentioning prayers under mugumo trees and at the Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga site (see below).<sup>79</sup>

The indigenous belief systems of the peoples of central Kenya recognized many cultural sites related to trees and sacred groves, their meanings being both religious and linked with indigenous governance. Leakey describes how Kikuyu clearing forestland for cultivation will always leave a number of large trees standing – to provide homes for the spirits of all the former trees in the neighborhood. Special rituals had to be performed if it became necessary to cut down such trees. Leakey tells us that sacred trees were selected according to specific procedures and criteria, sometimes dedicated in elaborate ceremonies. Favored species included the *mugumo* (*Ficus natalensis* or *F. thonningii*) and *mukuyu* (*F. capensis* or *F. sycamorus*), but "by no means was every *mũgumo* or *mũkũyũ* a sacred tree, nor did a tree, once dedicated, remain a sacred tree for all time".<sup>80</sup> However, while a tree was recognized as sacred

no person could cut down or break any branch of the tree, nor could anyone cut down or clear the bush round it. Anyone who desecrated it or its environment in any way was heavily fined, and a sacrifice of purification had to be made.<sup>81</sup>

Each household had its own sacrificial sites at particular trees, as did sub-clans, and there were also sacred trees for wider territorial units, established by generational sets (see below).

According to Kenyatta, one of the criteria for selecting sacred trees was their size, as huge trees were considered to symbolize the mountains. Prayers and sacrifices might be made to avert disasters such as disease or drought; Kenyatta describes witnessing a sacrifice for rain under a large *mugumo* tree in his home district of Kiambu in which, "even before the sacred fires had ceased to burn, torrential rain came upon us".<sup>82</sup> The trees were also involved in ceremonies marking group rites of passage; Kenyatta describes the ceremony of "breaking of the sacred tree" which

consists of the boys running a race of about two miles to a sacred tree called *mogumo* or *motamayo*, which they have to climb and break top branches, while the girls gather round singing, and at the same time gathering the leaves and the twigs dropped by the boys.<sup>83</sup>

Another significant rite of passage among the Kikuyu was the *ituika* ceremony, held about every 30 years to mark the transfer of power from one ruling generation to the next.<sup>84</sup> According to Castro, these ceremonies were held in sacred groves, and in each locality the incoming generation would establish its own sacred tree. The same was true of the Embu and Mbeere, where the comparable ceremony (the *nduiko*) "took place all over the country in the age-sets' sacred groves".<sup>85</sup>

As land was lost to European settlers and population pressure increased, many sacred trees and groves were cut down. The weakening of the indigenous belief systems under the spread of Christianity also played a role. Kenyatta tells how, when he was a child in the early twentieth century, only one sacred tree in his neighborhood of Kiambu survived; “The other sacred trees had been cut down by European planters who were clearing the newly acquired land for cultivation.” He also describes how the elders had prevented Kikuyu Christians from cutting down a sacred tree “to destroy the abodes of the old gods so as to make room for the new”.<sup>86</sup> Castro describes an incident in Nyeri, from 1911, when an Italian priest desecrated sacred groves, but states that “such assaults on the sacred groves were not common in the first two decades of colonial rule”. Despite the spread of Christianity, Castro argues that “the threat of supernatural sanction or peer pressure undoubtedly influenced the neophytes to leave the groves alone”.<sup>87</sup> In contrast, Fadiman’s history of the arrival of missionaries among the Meru includes a dramatic account of the “donation” of the spirit forest Ka-aga<sup>88</sup> to the Methodists in 1912. This forest was the home of ancestral spirits, visited only at night by members of various supernatural groups, but the pioneer Methodist missionary accepted it eagerly. In later decades a Church of Scotland missionary led the attack on the groves in another region of Meru, entering them, blocking off the ponds or springs that they contained, and encouraging the collection of firewood:

In each case the destruction was essentially symbolic rather than physical . . . as belief in the new faith took root, the converts themselves began to enter the sacred groves, deliberately felling the ancient trees and, with them, a tradition that had endured for generations.<sup>89</sup>

Based on his fieldwork in the early 1980s, Castro reported that, while the sacred groves were no longer used for ceremonies, “respect for tradition has caused many landowners, including devout Christians, to preserve local groves. Another informant suggested that people still fear the sacred groves, suspecting misfortune if they harm them.”<sup>90</sup>

In the last few decades, recognition of the conservation value of trees and groves has begun to play its part. People also recognize other utilitarian reasons for preserving these trees, such as the shade they provide (for example at market places) and their role as windbreaks and as sources of seeds and cuttings. In recent years a combination of outside funding and local initiatives has worked towards the conservation of at least some of the cultural forests of central Kenya. In an illustrated booklet, published in 2005, Muhando and Thuku describe a number of “sacred sites” around Mount Kenya, including the mountain itself. They list a total of 32 sites within five districts surrounding the mountain, including forests, wetlands, caves and single trees.<sup>91</sup> The sites are undergoing degradation from population pressure, logging and charcoal burning and the invasion of exotic plant species. Publication of the booklet was associated with rehabilitation projects supported by several national and international agencies, among which they list the African Initiative for Alternative Peace and Development (AFRIPAD) and KENRIK. The bulk of the funding was from the Global Environmental Facility (GEF) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) under its Small Grants Programme (SGP).



This range of participating agencies is further extended at other conservation sites being protected through this initiative. Giiitune sacred forest in Meru Central District lies less than five miles from Meru town and is a shrine for two Meru clans, whose oral histories tell of a blood brotherhood pact made there. Its main function is as a prayer forest, though controlled collection of wood and medicinal plants was allowed. Despite having lost about one-third of its area to cultivation, it was gazetted as a National Monument in 2003 and it is now being preserved through the activities of a coalition of agencies.<sup>92</sup> In addition to AFRIPAD, COMPACT and NMK, there is the Porini Trust (an environmental NGO). Care of the forest is also the concern of the Kenya government through the provincial administration, the forest department and the National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA). At the local level there are at least two indigenous organizations involved; one is the “supreme council” of the Meru people, known as Njuri Ncheke. And local people have formed their own group, Giiitune Environment Conservation Group (GECOG) which Thuku and Gichere describe as “the lead group in the struggle to rehabilitate and preserve Giiitune forest”.<sup>93</sup> Their report is optimistic about the future of this forest under the control of GECOG, attributing its success to “the power of Ameru traditions of forest protection and earth keeping”.<sup>94</sup> Their objectives include promoting Giiitune as an educational and eco-tourism centre and establishing other income generating activities such as tree nurseries.

Another central Kenyan site that had both religious and indigenous governance functions is Karima Hill in Nyeri district, an area of 265 acres supporting two small sacred forests, Gakina and Kamwangi. Kamwangi is said to be a shrine consecrated by the Mwangi ruling generation in 1900, while Gakina is a clan shrine. There are large sacred fig trees growing at each site, and there are said to be valuable indigenous plants in the surrounding area. In the past prayers and sacrifices for rain would be made under these fig trees. Karima Hill suffered intensive logging during the 1990s, and news stories from 1998 report attempts to initiate tree planting. In 2006 some local residents formed a group to protect the forest and plant indigenous trees.<sup>95</sup> The following year they accused the local Town Council and a tea factory of contributing to the deforestation, leading to a plan by local elders to curse these organizations. The last straw seems to have been the council’s plan to allow the erection of a mobile phone mast on the hill. The Porini Trust was said to be “the NGO organizing the cursing ceremony”, demonstrating in this a strong coalition between environmentalists and representatives of “indigenous African culture”.<sup>96</sup>

Mukurwe wa Gathanga (or Nyagathanga) in Murang’a district is a four hectare site identified in traditions as the original home of Gikuyu and his wife Mumbi, the ancestors of the Kikuyu people.<sup>97</sup> According to Muriuki, this legend, in which God takes Gikuyu to the top of Mount Kenya, shows him the lands he and his descendants are to occupy and tells him to settle at this site, “acted as a focus, or symbol, of unity, thereby welding together the various disparate elements [migrants who came together to form the Kikuyu people] into one people”, while also legitimizing Kikuyu claims to the ownership of land.<sup>98</sup> While it is clear that this has always been considered as an origin site, and not a religious site, it has recently become the focus for contestation among a number of interest groups, including the Mungiki. Wamue describes an event on 12 December 1998,<sup>99</sup> when a Mungiki leader “organized his own congress at Mukurwe-wa-Gathanga shrine . . . with the aim of inaugurating what he refers to as the Kirinyaga Kingdom”.<sup>100</sup> This event included the chanting of Mau Mau war songs, the recital of traditional prayers, and the

hoisting of the Mungiki flag “with the stern warning that they would not tolerate further disruption of their religious activities by the government”. Mungiki had also painted “Mungiki structures” with their colours. This ceremony took place only a few weeks after the site was gazetted as a National Monument and thus formally under the control of the NMK, implying that Mungiki’s actions were a direct challenge to government authority.<sup>101</sup>

Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga today displays a number of disparate natural and man-made features that symbolize the interest groups that vie for control of the site. Its status as an origin site is represented by reconstructions of “traditional culture” – Mumbi’s house, Gikuyu’s house, a few large indigenous trees (*mugumo*, *mukurwe* and *muringa*), and nine modern cottages.<sup>102</sup> Attempts to develop it for tourism are shown by several modern structures in varying states of repair; a detailed sketch map made in March 1998 shows a shop, management office, shower room, an arena, a swimming pool, bars, and a “Main hotel building”. The NMK team described the conservation status of the site as “Seriously devastated, a tourism hotel was once in the process of being constructed, now stopped.”<sup>103</sup> Reports from the site in 2005 and again in 2008 confirm that the structures mapped in 1998 are still in various states of incompleteness and dilapidation. The site is owned by Murang’a County Council, which apparently received a grant to fund the construction of the hotel as a way to attract tourists. Current visitors are received at the site by informal local “custodians”, who show them around for a modest fee. The site now has metal gates, funded by a human rights activist and retired university professor whose family home is close by. He now resides in the United States but visits regularly and has continued to push for appropriate conservation of the site and has opposed moves to sub-divide and privatize this communal land, as well as a plan to build a police post at the site. In early 2006, the vice-chairman of Murang’a County Council “asked the government to repair the road leading to the historic site, in a bid to attract tourists”, but no improvements in the road or in Mukurwe wa Gathanga itself have taken place since then.<sup>104</sup>

### Cluster 3: Cultural sites of the Lake Victoria basin

Most of the Lake Victoria basin is densely populated, and centuries of farming and livestock keeping have had significant impact. The area is underlain by very old crystalline rocks, which in places form spectacular rocky outcrops, several of which are cultural sites. The lake basin also contains ample water supplies, including Lake Victoria itself, a number of smaller lakes, and several rivers; some of these also have cultural significance for the local people.

Ramogi Hill<sup>105</sup> lies in the far western corner of Kenya, close to the Uganda border. It consists of two hills, Minyegira (200 hectares) and Nyaidi (83 hectares).<sup>106</sup> When Hobley collected Luo origin stories in the early 1900s, he was told that Apodtho or Podho, the “Adam” of the Luo people, lived to the north in Uganda on a Ramogi or Lamogi hill, and that his son Ramogi “migrated southward, and came and settled on a hill in Kadimu country (near the mouth of the river Nzoia); this hill is called after him to this day. His offspring founded the Ja-Luo race.”<sup>107</sup> Ogot suggests that Ramogi Hill in Kenya may carry a “reminiscent name like New York or Cambridge (Massachusetts)” and describes its suitability for the predominantly pastoralist Luo.<sup>108</sup> The hill itself provided a defensible site with a view over a wide area of lowland and is surrounded on several sides by natural barriers of lake, river

and swamp. Water and grazing for livestock were nearby. Other versions of Luo oral tradition suggest that the ancestor Ramogi himself may never have reached Kenya, but his sons and grandsons did, arriving in western Kenya between 1490 and 1600 CE. The individual said to have initiated settlement at Ramogi Hill was Idi, great-grandson of Ramogi, who “one day went out on a long hunting expedition, which brought him to the foothills of Got Ramogi. After surveying this beautiful land he went back to Ligala and told the story.”<sup>109</sup> But Kenya’s popular discourse identifies Ramogi Hill as the site of the first fortified settlement of Ker Ramogi Ajwang’ himself, rather than drawing on the more nuanced and complex versions of Ogot and Ochieng’.<sup>110</sup> Whatever the evidence from archaeology, linguistics or oral histories may be, in popular culture Ramogi Hill takes its place next to Shungwaya and Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga as the origin site of one of Kenya’s ethnic groups in order to serve the purposes of the present.

Unlike Mount Kenya, Ramogi Hill has never been identified as the home of a deity: the Luo high god Nyasaye is a remote god, “believed to dwell high up in the sky, often close to the sun or the moon”.<sup>111</sup> Hauge’s account of Luo religion contains many references to sacrifices to Nyasaye carried out under big trees atop hills, but there is no specific mention of Ramogi Hill as the preferred site for such sacrifices. The hill attracted ecological attention in 1993 and 1994 when Bagine surveyed its biodiversity, finding pronounced evidence of selective tree cutting, grazing and hunting and concluding that the hill forest was low in species richness.<sup>112</sup> In terms of ethnobiology, Bagine found that “the community surrounding Ramogi Hill forests use the forest resources not only as their source for day to day needs, but also for cultural and religious practices”. Bagine mentions that traditional healers collect medicinal plants from Ramogi Hill, another report by Onditi even claiming that “the richness of Got Ramogi as a source for medicinal plants attracts herbalists from as far as Angola, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Malawi”.<sup>113</sup>

In 1998, a National Museums team reported some degradation at the site, with charcoal burning and land clearing, and people obtaining pot clay, medicinal plants and wood from the hill. They also commented that “Ramogi Cultural Centre for Research and Information Dissemination [is] thinking of conserving the hill.”<sup>114</sup> Six years later it was reported that “the dream of Luo elders that a multi-million shilling shrine be built on an ancestral hill in Bondo District will soon be realized . . . each Luo clan would have a mini shrine there, and that elders would meet there”.<sup>115</sup> An undated source from the early 2000s describes how the forest on Got Ramogi had been sustainably managed by the local council of elders for many years, referring to a project on this site to be carried out by the Jaramogi Oginga Odinga Foundation.<sup>116</sup> This project included ambitious plans to develop the hill as a tourist destination by rehabilitating and reconstructing “sacred sites”, constructing a community museum, and promoting “folklores, dances, poetry, traditional religion”.

On a site visit in July 2010, it was observed that buildings for a Village Polytechnic had been constructed at the base of the hill, though they were not then operating. Just above the Polytechnic is the entrance to Got Ramogi, with impressive metal gates and several permanent structures, including a pit latrine and a building which is to be a craft and curio shop. A few hundred yards up the rocky track is a tourist resort, apparently built on the homestead of the original Ramogi. There are four stone walled cottages in various stages of completion. It appears that considerable amounts of money have been spent on the site – the grounds are landscaped, there are parking areas, and one cottage is fully furnished including a

luxurious bathroom – but there was no water supply, and the guide explained that funding from the European Union through the Tourism Trust Fund (TTF) had run out. A news story from June 2010 included Got Ramogi among several western Kenya sites to receive substantial funding from the TTF, quoting the chief executive of TTF saying that “three major projects are already up and running and residents have begun reaping the fruits. Tourists too have been trooping in”.<sup>117</sup> In June 2010 at Got Ramogi this optimism seemed misplaced. Community members had probably benefited from employment generated by the construction project, but there was no other sign of material gain.

Walking up the stony path to the hilltop there are sites where several syncretic sects (“Roho,” Legio Maria,” and “Last God Appeal Church”) come to pray, and the area is scattered with fragments of plastic and other waste material. Local worshippers are charged 50 Kenya shillings, while “outsiders” pay double: they may remain praying on Got Ramogi for three or four nights. This practice goes back at least to the mid-1990s, as reported by Bagine. There may be a steady if small income from these worshippers, and there is hope of more income from the cottages. The Got Ramogi resort will charge 2000 Kenya shillings per night to local residents for use of the cottages, but this cannot begin until the resort has a water supply.

The current management structure for Got Ramogi is complex, but does incorporate a wide range of local stakeholders. A Community Forest Association was in the process of registration in June 2010, which will manage plant resources that are harvested from the hill – firewood and building poles, grass for brooms, and medicinal plants. Currently these are harvested freely. There is also the Got Ramogi Community Forest Trust, which is already registered and which has the responsibility of managing the resort. Within the Trust there are smaller groups, described as “Project Management Committees” or “Investment Groups”. These include a Beekeeping Group (receiving financial support from Dominion Farms, an Oklahoma-based company that is developing a large rice farm not far from Got Ramogi), a tree nursery group, a herbal medicines group, and an ecotourism group. There is a “General Assembly” of local people that meets once a year and elects a Board of Governors, composed of men and women from the different villages surrounding Got Ramogi. There is also considerable outside involvement in managing Got Ramogi. At least part of the hill is gazetted as a national forest, so the Kenya Forest Service and KEFRI (the Kenya Forestry Research Institute) have important roles to play. Other institutions involved are Maseno University and the NMK, who have a “Project Officer” for the resort project. This Project Officer explained that despite these elaborate local management groups, most of the development of the resort had been planned and implemented by representatives of the TTF in a top-down manner.

The current status of Got Ramogi is complex, and rapidly evolving. As the “origin site” of the Luo people’s migration into Kenya, it has cultural importance. But it is not clear how important the various shrines around the hilltop may have been before the current adoption by syncretic sects. There is another interesting small site just below the resort – a rock about one metre high, protruding from the ground in a patch of woodland, through which Ramogi is said to speak and ask for sacrifices of alcohol, goats or hens. People would also pray there when preparing to fight or in times of disease or drought. In 1964, the rock was broken by members of Legio Maria, and it is alleged that the pastor who led this desecration died 24 hours later, struck by lightning. Sacrifices are still done there by a direct lineal descendant of Ramogi, most recently during a drought in 2004, when rain followed the sacrifice.

Slightly further east along the Lake Victoria shoreline is Kit Mikayi, a rocky outcrop that has powerful cultural and spiritual connotations for Luo. The name means “the stone of the first (or senior) wife”. Luo women interviewed by Nancy Schwartz explained the rocks as having formed after a first wife was rejected by her husband in favor of their child’s nursemaid, whom he took as his second wife. The rejected wife went to reflect at the site and a storm and earthquake occurred during which the first wife, her husband, the second wife, and her child were turned into rocks.<sup>118</sup> A 32-year old man interviewed in 2007 gave a different story, of a Luo man with five wives who lived nearby and “liked to spend most of his time on the rock smoking pipes. Ngeso’s love of the site led to the name Kit Mikayi.”<sup>119</sup> Ogot’s text makes no reference at all to Kit Mikayi, but his book contains a photograph of it with the caption “Mikae Rocks, Seme: originally used as a fortress, it later became a shrine.”<sup>120</sup>

Large rocks feature frequently in Luo folklore. As well as Kit Mikayi, Hoehler-Fatton also names two other rocky sites – Luanda Magere in Kano and Kit Jajuok (Stone of the Diviner) in the Kajulu Hills. These rocks are said to have spirits (*juogi*) of great power. Luanda Magere is named after a heroic Samson-like figure, said to have turned into a rock on his death. It is said that spears sharpened on this rock kill humans and animals very quickly. However, Kit Mikayi seems the most important of these rocks. In 2007, Warigi described it as “arguably the most famous traditional shrine in Luo Nyanza, better known even than Ramogi Hill”.<sup>121</sup> In the past it was a place of sacrifice in times of drought, and it is said to have healing powers, even for individual problems like infertility. Like Got Ramogi, the site has become important to syncretic sects such as Legio Maria. This sect originated as a breakaway from the Catholic church and shares much of its iconography; members believe that the Virgin Mary, whom they see as “protector of women, provider of healing, and proponent of the use of holy water . . . came to Kit Mikayi and increased the healing properties of its waters, making them holy”. The rock itself is a complex structure of massive granite boulders – one climbs into it rather than onto it. In between the boulders are wide cracks that lead into small caves. For a number of years, members of Legio and other sects have held overnight prayer vigils in the caves, with the aid of small paraffin lamps and candles, paying a fee of 50 Kenya shillings, as they do at Got Ramogi. People also come to the rock to pray for promotion and other successful outcomes, especially in politics. According to Warigi, the rock has become

a favoured destination for politicians seeking good luck. According to residents, a beeline of parliamentary and civic aspirants from Kisumu Rural and beyond have been trooping to the spot. Actually, this happens whenever an election is around the corner. Even Jaramogi Odinga used to come to the shrine.<sup>122</sup>

Kit Mikayi has been the focus of interest from the conservation perspective, though in 1998 a NMK team described its biodiversity as “Nothing unique, but plant density higher than the surrounding areas.”<sup>123</sup> However, it is visually spectacular, with the massive granite boulders rising up from a grassy area, and a number of trees growing around and on the rocks. The site is currently fenced, well maintained and clean, with a small open walled structure that serves as an “office” for the receptionist employed by the KitMikayi [*sic*] Tourism Cooperative Society Limited, which is responsible for the site. The team who carried out the 1998 survey identified Kit Mikayi as threatened by human encroachment, including the possible

building of a tourist hotel on the site. In 2010, these plans were still under discussion. The KitMikayi Tourism Cooperative Society Limited has an official receipt book for visitors who are charged fees. Kenyan citizens pay 100 shillings for entry and 200 shillings (USD \$2.50) to take photographs; local school groups pay less. Meetings of the Luo Council of Elders in February and March 2009 stressed the potential economic and social benefits that could arise from developing the site for tourism, but also pointed to possible sources of contention. One of these is the inevitable tension between “local” and more distant stakeholders about how to share income from visitors; another is the issue of land ownership. Kit Mikayi is presumably public land, but it is a small area closely surrounded by private landowners. The recommendation in the Luo Council of Elders report of 4 March 2009 “that the acquisition of land be carried out amicably to avoid friction with land owners” might not be easy to achieve.<sup>124</sup>

Lake Victoria itself (Nam Lolwe in Dholuo) is also a powerful cultural symbol to Luo, who identify themselves as Jo-nam (people of the lake). The lake is believed to be the home of several powerful male and female python possession spirits, and some Luo say that the pool of water on Kit Mikayi goes all the way to Lake Victoria, so that the Kit Mikayi python can go there to visit other snakes. Fishermen on the lake recognize the need to sacrifice a fowl when a new fishing boat is launched, so that the lake should not take its own sacrifice.<sup>125</sup> Simbi Nyaima in south Nyanza is a small crater lake that the Luo identify as the former site of a village, cursed by an old woman after she was excluded from a celebration there. Immediately after she left in anger a heavy downpour flooded the village, creating the lake.<sup>126</sup> It is a salt lake whose waters are said to have medicinal powers, and some soda ash is harvested from its shores. Kilili et al. reported that flamingos migrated to the lake in late 1997 or 1998, causing the Kenya Wildlife Service to take an interest in the lake as a wildlife habitat. Describing the surroundings of the lake as “relatively conserved” but lacking in unusual biodiversity, they characterize it as “A doomed place to the majority, hence, negative attitude and neglect” – a reminder that not all cultural sites necessarily have positive connotations for local communities.<sup>127</sup>

#### **Cluster 4: Cultural sites of northern and eastern Kenya**

The pastoral and agro-pastoral peoples of the plateau areas of northern and eastern Kenya recognize a number of cultural sites, often located on mountains or hills. These groups include Gabbra, Cushitic-speaking pastoral nomads who occupy extremely arid rangelands south of the Ethiopian border in Marsabit District. Though some Gabbra have converted to Islam or Christianity in recent decades, many elements of their indigenous culture and belief system are still widely practiced. They are a patrilineal people, divided into five sections (clusters of clans) known as phratries.<sup>128</sup> Each phratry makes regular ceremonial migrations to sacred sites, most of which are now inhabited by the neighboring and related Borana. Several sites lie across the international frontier in Ethiopia. Gabbra oral history identifies these as sites of origin. According to Schlee, “the lineage ancestor (a boy or a man) with his household and camels, was found by members of some other lineage at some place, the very place where his descendants hold their sacrifices”.<sup>129</sup> These do not seem to have been residential sites in the past, and Gabbra settlements are not clustered around them today: ritual migrations can cover tens of kilometers. Schlee joined a ritual migration in 1986, and gives a detailed account of their complexity, in terms of

the people, the precise choice of dates on which to reach ritual places, and the procedures to be followed scrupulously during the migration. He describes these events as being closely connected with the age-set promotions that take place on these journeys. Another source<sup>130</sup> identifies Mount Forole as being the site for the installation of the Qallu (ritual leader) of the Galbo phratry, qualifying these as indigenous governance sites according to my typology.

These sites can also be identified as conservation sites, where vegetation and wildlife are protected by Gabbra norms. According to Schlee, at the Mount Forole ritual site (defined by the rocky slopes of the mountain itself and an area of red soil rising gently to its foot) “it is forbidden to hunt, and no plant or plant parts may be removed; even fibrous twigs used as toothbrushes have to be left behind and no herding sticks or tent poles are cut. Swearing or talking indecently are forbidden.”<sup>131</sup> Even in a non-ceremonial year, appropriate behavior on and relating to the mountain is required; Schlee’s Gabbra escorts rebuked him for describing part of the mountain as a “bad place”. Other sources also stress that “despite changing times, these places remain sacred today”.<sup>132</sup> It is reported that even during conflicts, “the Boranas fully respect the sacredness of the Gabbra ritual sites, such as the Forole Mountain, and the inherent restrictions, directly ensuring conservation of these unique sites”.<sup>133</sup>

Some sacred mountains have featured in attempts by other ethnic groups to reclaim their identity and indigenous rights. The Waata hunter-gatherers inhabit semi-arid and savannah regions of Kenya and Ethiopia, interacting with Kamba, Mijikenda, Gabbra and Borana. The Waata are despised<sup>134</sup> by Gabbra and Borana, yet they play a central role in certain key rituals. The Waata have their own sacred mountains in northern Kenya (Borrolle<sup>135</sup> and Abbo), where they previously performed generation-set ceremonies in parallel to those of Gabbra and Borana. In recent years Waata, like other African hunter-gatherers, have begun to take assertive action to address their marginalization.<sup>136</sup> Though they are not officially recognized among Kenya’s 40 ethnic groups, they are among six small ethnic minorities listed in a report on Kenya’s minorities sponsored by an international NGO.<sup>137</sup> In April 2002, the UNESCO Working Group on Indigenous Populations approved a grant of US \$10,000 to the Indigenous Waata People’s Organization (IWAPO) for “Waata education and training in human rights”.<sup>138</sup> Among the goals of Waata self-determination is that they be “allowed to register the sacred shrines of Borrolle and Abbo in the names of their traditional custodians and the environmental destruction of the surrounding areas be prevented”.<sup>139</sup>

The Samburu, another pastoral group, have diverse perceptions of their deity, Nkai. The deity’s home is believed to be somewhere in the sky, but mountains (as the sites of clouds and rain) are the deity’s preferred places on earth. One of Straight’s informants explained that “there is no mountain that Nkai is not in . . . there is no mountain without Nkai”.<sup>140</sup> Mount Nyiro, on the edge of the Rift Valley, may now be the Samburu’s most sacred place, though earlier sources did not emphasize its importance: Spencer refers only to it as the area occupied by the Masula, a Samburu phratry with strong Dorobo links.<sup>141</sup> However, recent fieldwork has resulted in a different image of Mount Nyiro as a cultural site of religious, social and environmental significance. It is described as having served as a defensive site for generations, a place of refuge for Samburu escaping from the threats of Turkana and other enemies. Nkai is said to live on Nyiro, on the Kosikosi peak, at a rock called Ndadapoi.<sup>142</sup> The mountain is the site for prayers and the sacrifice of livestock, made

at an open site known as Lorian le kosikosi. The Samburu pray facing Mount Nyiro, and ceremonial houses must be built with the door facing either Mount Nyiro or Mount Kenya. Several Samburu diviners, prophets and healers are said to live around the slopes of the mountain.

There are several reasons for the environmental significance of Mount Nyiro. Seven permanent springs rise from its lower slopes, and it is also an important dry season grazing area. This draws people and livestock to the area and raises the threat of degradation. High levels of insecurity between Samburu and their Turkana and Pokot neighbors have also led to the Samburu spending more time on the mountain than is ecologically sustainable. Recent construction of a tourist lodge on the mountain slope has further impacted the vegetation and aroused resentment among some locals, who consider it a desecration of the mountain.<sup>143</sup>

The Pokot, an agropastoral community living to the west of Samburu territory, recognize at least one sacred hill, Mutelo (or Mtelo), rising at the northern end of the Sekerr range.<sup>144</sup> Pokot have seen it as a site of origin, a religious site, and a site relevant to indigenous governance. According to Barton, the name Mutelo means a landmark, or that which is known of all; another interpretation is “visible and perfect”.<sup>145</sup> Barton adds that “Old men say Mutelo is the navel of the Suk”, implying a sense of origin or core ethnic identity.<sup>146</sup> Though the Pokot high god Tororut was said to manifest himself widely in natural phenomena, another divine figure, Ilat, was said to express himself in rain and lightning and live among the clouds on Mutelo, described by Peristiany as “the Pokot Olympus”. In the past most, Pokot were said to bury distinguished individuals with their stomachs facing Mount Mtelo. In describing the prolonged Pokot initiation ceremony, Huntingford tells us that the boys were stabbed in the hand and leg by what they were told is “the *kipsikutua*, a fierce animal which is supposed to live on Mount Mutelo”.<sup>147</sup>

A recent Kenyan news story headed “Sacred hill where raiders, politicians meet the gods” brings to the fore Mutelo’s current role as a political site.<sup>148</sup> Pokot still believe it is important to consult the “gods” on the hill before undertaking a major enterprise like livestock raiding, as well as to thank them with a sacrifice after a successful raid. The ancestors and gods who reside on the hill also play a role in confirming community leaders, all leaders having “to visit the hill before assuming their positions”. The hill is also the site for cleansing the bewitched, curing the terminally ill, and bringing fertility to barren women.

There are frequent references throughout the literature to the requirement to face towards Mutelo in rituals. Structures made for age-set rituals have their openings facing Mutelo, and initiates face Mutelo when carrying out the ritual of spearing a bull as part of the ceremony.<sup>149</sup> The hill itself, rising to 3325 meters, is not easily accessible and is protected by powerful sanctions: “profaning the sanctity of the hill is believed to lead to calamities like drought, invasion and even death in the society” and “a special cleansing is performed on anyone intending to climb the hill”. Despite this, there is a move towards marketing Mount Mutelo as a tourist destination. The Marich Pass Field Studies Centre has promoted this idea, though it is not clear what relationship this organization has with local communities. Their website advertises expeditions to Mount Mutelo, which they describe as “the resting place of the supreme being of Pokot mythology”.<sup>150</sup>



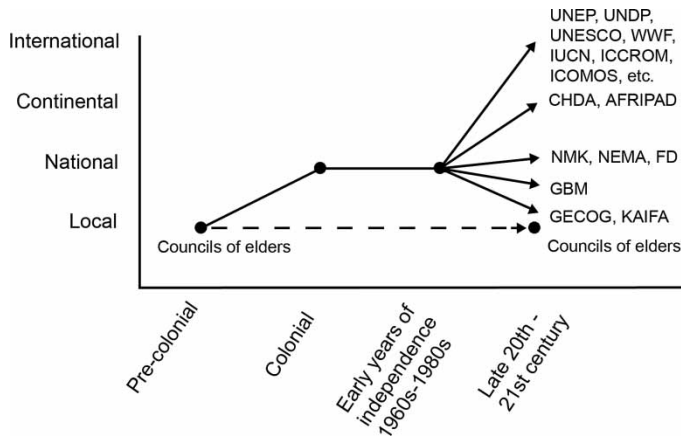


Figure 3. Scale of management of Kenyan cultural sites – a time line (initials are explained in the text).

### Conclusion: meanings and management

Since the nineteenth century there have been major changes in the meanings attributed to Kenya's cultural sites, and in the ways in which they are managed. Figure 3 represents this trajectory diagrammatically, beginning in pre-colonial times when representatives of Kenyan ethnic groups exercised local control over sites whose predominant functions were religious and/or associated with such elements of local governance as initiation rituals and transitions between generation sets. Access to these sites was generally controlled by male elders, and might be very limited (as in the case Meru's Ka-aga groves) or open to controlled use by local community members (as with kaya forests). Some sites were shared between lineages or occasionally with neighboring ethnic groups; others were specific to particular lineages or families. Some sites had meaning that transcended human life spans; many mountain resting places for the deity fall into this category. Others had finite life spans – we have seen that Kikuyu sacred groves or trees might lose sacredness and new cultural sites be created. Cultural sites and landscapes have never been static.

During the colonial era control of all natural resources was centralized, largely at the national level. The agents of colonial rule saw landscape largely in practical terms and were concerned to initiate and enforce policies of resource use that laid down which groups (racially or ethnically defined) could use which soil, vegetation, water and animal resources, and how. Many African cultural sites and landscapes were destroyed, and communities lost control of other sites. Some sites became incorporated into protected areas – the national forests and parks – created by the colonial government. We thus see two contradictory forces at work during the colonial years: outright destruction of some cultural sites and landscapes, and “fortress conservation” applied to others. The agency of local communities to manage sites was largely ignored. Christian influences brought about further destruction of cultural sites, and undermined the belief systems that attributed meaning to the sites.

Only since the early 1990s has there has been a major shift in attitudes and policies toward cultural sites. Connections between the local and the global have

helped bring this about. At the international level UNESCO and its World Heritage Centre have been important, as well as ICCROM (the International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property), ICOMOS (the International Council of Monuments and Sites) and CHDA (the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa). Focusing more on the physical environment are UNEP (the United Nations Environment Programme), IUCN (the International Union for Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources), WWF (the Worldwide Fund for Nature), and a host of others. At the national level, the NMK has played the leading role in the management of Kenya's cultural heritage, while the Forest Department and the National Environment Management Authority have also been active. Other national or continent-wide initiatives include AFRI PAD and the GBM (Green Belt Movement). Many Kenyan scholars, including botanists, ecologists and anthropologists, as well as environmental and social activists, now play a prominent part in the conservation of natural cultural sites, while the local press regularly reports on matters of cultural conservation.

Amid these developments, cultural sites have acquired new meanings. Religious meanings continue to be important at many sites, as does indigenous governance. But the real shift has been in the emergence of ecological issues, with cultural sites being viewed as islands of biodiversity in an increasingly homogenous landscape. Tourism has played its part in strengthening such arguments too. Local communities now make alliances with national and international groups to support conservation and tourist development of cultural sites. While this is a welcome counterbalance to the cynical exploitation of Kenyan natural resources that took place at the highest levels of government for several decades following independence, problems remain. One of these is sustainability; how sustainable are some of these locally based conservation initiatives? Many of them are still at an early stage of institutional development and community support. Marketing sites as eco-tourism and cultural tourism destinations is not easily achieved, and, if successful, may have damaging impacts on the ecosystem and on local practices. The marketing of sites as cultural tourism destinations leads also to the question of cultural essentialism; will such sites contribute to the forging of a national Kenyan identity, or exacerbate existing ethnic tensions? The experience of the kaya forests and of Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga suggests that cultural sites can be misused by individuals and groups with selfish motives to enhance their power in Kenya's contested politics.

Cultural sites remain contested locations. A kaya elder interviewed in 1998 gave a vivid account of a local Christian sect that had built a church at the entrance to Kaya Kambe "on the spiritual way used by the elders", explaining how elders directed that it be demolished immediately. A similar conflict was reported from Laikipia in 2002, when an African Christian preacher led his followers in cutting down and burning a sacred fig tree, the site of prayers and sacrifices by community elders, who then "condemned and cursed him through traditional chants".<sup>151</sup> Christianity is deeply rooted in many Kenyan communities, and not all Kenyans welcome the cultural renaissance associated with the conservation of cultural sites. Even among those who do support such initiatives, agendas and alliances can be contentious. External funding agencies have their own agendas, as do the national institutions such as NMK. Things may be no more united at the local level, as issues of cultural preservation draw on clan and family loyalties. We have seen how kaya elders groups are frequently fragmented over claims to power and "authenticity", and how different stakeholders compete to decide the fate of Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga.

Whatever the future holds for these sites, it is likely to be dynamic and highly contested as Kenyans, like others across Africa, construct their own modernities to make sense of themselves and the world in which they live.<sup>152</sup>

### Acknowledgements

To the late Nancy Schwartz for her generous sharing of her unpublished material on Luo culture – erokamano ahinya! In addition, Jacob Muhando (at the time employed by the NMK) contributed significantly to the early drafts of this paper.

### Notes

1. UNESCO, "Twenty-seven New Sites Inscribed."
2. Lamu Old Town was inscribed as a cultural site in 2001; Lake Turkana National Parks were first inscribed as natural sites in 1997, with an addition in 2001.
3. UNESCO, *UNESCO World Heritage Convention*.
4. Sheridan and Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves*.
5. UNESCO. *Report on the Expert Group on Cultural Landscapes*.
6. Frazer, *The Golden Bough*; Turner, *The Forest of Symbols*; Ramakrishnan, Saxena, and Chandrashekar, *Conserving the Sacred*; Sheridan and Nyamweru, *African Sacred Groves*; Nyamweru and Sheridan, "African Sacred Ecologies."
7. Bernbaum, *Sacred Mountains of the World*; Wilson, *The Atlas of Holy Places and Sacred Sites*.
8. Hay-Edie and Hadley, "Natural Sites", 55, 58.
9. Sheridan, "Dynamics of African Sacred Groves," 23.
10. Ranger, *Voices from the Rocks*, 283, 270.
11. Three criteria are given; the high concentration of rock art, the interaction between communities and the landscape, and the Mwari (*sic*) religion "the most powerful oracular tradition in southern Africa." UNESCO, World Heritage List.
12. Sheridan, "Dynamics of African Sacred Groves," 23.
13. Hughes and Chandran, "Sacred Groves around the Earth," 70.
14. Geschiere and van der Klei, "Popular Protest," 209–30.
15. de Jong, "Politicians of the Sacred Grove," 203–20.
16. See review of this literature in Sheridan, "Dynamics of African Sacred Groves," 10, n.1.
17. Juhé-Beaulaton, "Sacred Forests and the Global Challenge," 351–72; Nyamweru and Kimaru, "Contribution of Ecotourism," 327–50.
18. The Digo and Duruma peoples live mainly in Kwale District; the Giriama, Rabai, Ribe, Jibana, Chonyi, Kauma and Kambe in Kilifi and Malindi Districts.
19. Spear, *The Kaya Complex*; Mwangudza, *Kenya's People: Mijikenda*.
20. For examples, see Walsh, "Mijikenda Origins," 1–18; Willis, "The Northern Kayas of the Mijikenda," 75–98; Helm, "Re-evaluating Traditional Histories," 59–89.
21. Krapf, *Travels, Researches and Missionary Labors*, 111–14; New, *Life, Wanderings and Labours*, 76.
22. New, *Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 112, 79.
23. Spear, *The Kaya Complex*, 47–8.
24. Also known as Kayafungo or Kaya Fungo.
25. Brantley, *The Giriama*, 40.
26. Parkin, *Sacred Void*, 40–3.
27. Nyamweru and Kimaru, "Contribution of Ecotourism."
28. Parkin, *Sacred Void*, 37.
29. New mentions this from 1865 (*Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 113), and Brantley provides a detailed account of changes through the early 20th century (*The Giriama*, 39–43).
30. Brantley, *The Giriama*, 93.
31. In 1919 the kaya was reopened and Mekatalili and Wanje, two Giriama resistance leaders, returned from exile to live there. Brantley, *The Giriama*, 111, 139.
32. Willis, "King of the Mijikenda."

33. Aseka, *Ronald Ngala*, 1.
34. Ngala, *Nchi na Desturi za Wagiriana*; Mwangudza, *Kenya's People: Mijikenda*, 30.
35. Aseka, *Ronald Ngala*, 7.
36. Several sources, including New (*Life, Wanderings, and Labours*, 121–2) suggest that this can only be done if the elder has actually died within the kaya.
37. Bbeja, "Mijikenda's Closely Guarded 'Kayas'."
38. Willis, "King of the Mijikenda."
39. Bbeja, "Mijikenda's Closely Guarded Kayas."
40. Willis, "King of the Mijikenda," 233.
41. KHRC, *Kayas of Deprivation*; KHRC, *Kayas Revisited*.
42. KHRC, *Kayas of Deprivation*, ii.
43. *Ibid.*, 21–3. *Kimu* is the Swahili word for a mortar; in this ritual the participants were washed in water containing a mixture of herbs that had been pounded in a mortar.
44. KHRC, *Kayas of Deprivation*, 28.
45. Mitukaa, "Mijikenda Condemn Anarchists."
46. Mango and Mbaji, "Minister's Brother Sought over Kwale Training Camp."
47. KNCHR, *On the Brink of the Precipice*, 106–7.
48. A manuscript report by J.B. Gillett of the East African Herbarium, Nairobi entitled "The Kayas or Sacred Forests of the Kenya Coast, Why and How they should be Preserved" (cited in Robertson and Luke, *Kenya Coastal Forests*), is undated, but is probably from the late 1970s.
49. Spear, *The Kaya Complex*, 46–8.
50. Hawthorne, Hunt, and Russell, *Kaya: An Ethnobotanical Perspective*, 32.
51. Robertson, *Preliminary Floristic Survey of Kaya Forests*.
52. Robertson and Luke, *Kenya Coastal Forests*, 6.1–6.2.
53. CFCU, *Funding Proposal to ODA-JFS*. See also: Githitho, "Destruction of Sacred Forests"; Githitho, "The Sacred Mijikenda Forests"; Nyamweru, "Women and Sacred Groves," 52–4.
54. From Kenyan politicians as well as from conservation organizations.
55. Willis, "King of the Mijikenda."
56. The earliest source is cited by Hawthorne et al. and was published in the *Daily Nation* in 1980. In it the Rabai elders appeal to the Kenya government to protect the forest, explaining that it is "set aside as a holy place where people went to say prayers". Hawthorne, Hunt, and Russell, *Kaya: An Ethnobotanical Perspective*, 32.
57. Kithi, "Kaya Elders Uphold Traditional Faith."
58. Wilson, "Sacred Forests and the Elders"; Nyamweru, "Sacred Groves Threatened," 19–21; Tunbridge, "Tourism Cuts Swathe through Kenya's Spiritual Enclaves."
59. Nyamweru, *Report on Socio-cultural Research*; Nyamweru, "Women and Sacred Groves," 47; Nyamweru et al., "The Kaya Forests of Coastal Kenya."
60. Nyamweru and Kimaru, "Contribution of Ecotourism."
61. E. Kimaru, personal communication.
62. Bbeja, "Mijikenda's Closely Guarded 'Kayas'." But since this report, Kaya Rabai has been developed for ecotourism with the assistance of international donors.
63. Unlike most of the forests in Kilifi District, Kaya Kinondo is close to tourist hotels and holiday cottages.
64. Bbeja, "Sacred Kayas Awarded World Heritage Status."
65. On clear mornings it can be seen from as far west as the Tugen Hills, from a large part of Samburu and Isiolo Districts to the north, as well as from much of the eastern plateau (Mwingi and Kitui Districts).
66. Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 234. Another interpretation suggests the name derived from *nyaga* (ostrich), from the similarity between the black and white plumage of the male ostrich and the black and white patches on the top of the mountain due to the small glaciers close to the summit peaks.
67. Kea-Njahe (now known as Kilimambogo) to the east; Kea-Mbiroiro (Ngong Hills) to the south; Kea-Nyandarwa (the Aberdares) to the west. See also, Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, 1077–8; Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 236.

68. Mwaniki, *Living History*, 62. However Mwaniki also stresses that “Other places, just as important, were all sacred groves called *Ngindwa* and all age-set sacred places or the *Matiiri*, some caves and some enormous trees” (ibid.)
69. Ibid., 67, 90.
70. Stigand, *The Land of Zinj*, 260–1.
71. Mbiri Schools Harambee Committee, *Mbiri 1984*, 15.
72. Mwaniki, *Embu Historical Texts*, 118.
73. Barnett and Njama, *Mau Mau from Within*, 117, 131.
74. Ibid., 244.
75. Gikoyo, *We Fought for Freedom*, 184–5.
76. Kinyungu and Nzia, “Kisoi Munyao Given Hero’s Send-off.” In the years before his death Munyao had been largely ignored; he lived a life of poverty in a lower-income area of Nairobi: Mathangani, “Unsung Hero Munyao Dies.”
77. Largely as a response to the Church of Scotland prohibition of female circumcision.
78. Githieya provides an account of the “Watu wa Mungu,” known by the Kikuyu as the *Arathi* or *Akorino* (“The Church of the Holy Spirit,” 242), but he does not mention praying towards Mount Kenya.
79. Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 274; Wamue, “Revisiting our Indigenous Shrines,” 461.
80. Leakey, *Southern Kikuyu*, 117, 1080.
81. Ibid., 1080.
82. Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 236, 245–9.
83. Ibid., 140.
84. The indigenous Kikuyu political system involved the sharing of power between alternating generations, Mwangi and Irungu (also known as Maina).
85. Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, 118.
86. Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 249–50.
87. Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, 118.
88. Literally, “the small place of curse removers”: Fadiman, *When We Began*, 208.
89. Fadiman, *When We Began*, 208–9, 240–1.
90. Castro, *Facing Kirinyaga*, 122.
91. Muhando and Thuku, *Mt. Kenya Sacred Sites*, 17–18.
92. It is said to have reduced from 30 to 20 acres; tree species also disappeared from the forest ecosystem. Thuku and Gichere, *Gitune Sacred Forest*, 10. COMPACT is “Community Management of Protected Areas for Conservation” – a UNDP – GEF SGP Project (United Nations Development Programme – Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme). See <http://sgp.undp.org>.
93. Ibid., 11.
94. Ibid., 15.
95. Karima ka Inya Forest Association (KAIFA). Muchire, “Villagers to Sue over Degraded Hill.”
96. Wadhams, “Kenyan Tribe Punishes Developers with Curse”; Muchire, “Elders set for Talks on Curse.”
97. Kenyatta, *Facing Mt. Kenya*, 3–4.
98. Muriuki, *History of the Kikuyu*, 62–3.
99. The 35th anniversary of Kenya’s independence from British rule.
100. Wamue, “Revisiting our Indigenous Shrines,” 465.
101. President Moi’s Kenya African National Union (KANU) government, then not broadly supported among Kikuyu, had retained power in bitterly disputed elections in 1997.
102. One for each of the nine clans of the Kikuyu, descended from the nine daughters of Gikuyu and Mumbi.
103. Kilili, Morimoto, and Maundu, *Preliminary Survey*, 5.
104. Gikandi, “Leaders are Opposed to Police Post at Shrine.” In November 2011 veteran Kikuyu politician and businessman Njenga Karume “was crowned the chairman of the Kikuyu Council of Elders at a grand ceremony at Mukurwe wa Nyagathanga” (Wainaina “Leaders Wish Karume Quick Recovery”).
105. Got Ramogi in Dholuo.
106. Bagine, “Biodiversity in Ramogi Hill,” 252.
107. Hobley, “British East Africa,” 326.

108. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo*, 148.
109. Ochieng', *Outline History of Nyanza*, 23.
110. "Shrine to be Built soon on Ancestral Hill," *Daily Nation*, November 23, 2004; JOOF, "Current Projects." "Ker" is the title of the head of the traditional Luo elders' council.
111. Hauge, *Luo Religion and Folklore*, 99–100.
112. Bagine, "Biodiversity in Ramogi Hill," 261. He recorded 12 mammal species, four reptile species, three amphibian species, 64 bird species, over 22 orders of invertebrates and over 100 species of plants.
113. Onditi, "Got Ramogi."
114. *Ibid.*, 6.
115. "Shrine to be Built soon on Ancestral Hill," *Daily Nation*, November 23, 2004.
116. JOOF, "Current Projects." Oginga Odinga, the late father of Raila, was the most important political leader of the Luo for many decades before and after independence.
117. "Western Tourism to Receive Boost from Trust Fund," *Daily Nation*, June 7, 2010.
118. Nancy Schwartz, personal communication.
119. Warigi, "Mystical Rock."
120. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo*, facing page 129.
121. Hoehler-Fatton, *Women of Fire and Spirit*, 135; Hauge, *Luo Religion and Folklore*, 38; Warigi, "Mystical Rock."
122. Schwartz, personal communication; Warigi, "Mystical Rock."
123. Kilili, Morimoto, and Maundu, *Preliminary Survey*.
124. Luo Council of Elders, *Report on Proposed Kit Mikayi Tourist Site*.
125. Schwartz, personal communication; Shipton, *The Nature of Entrustment*, 58.
126. Taveta people have a similar story about the origin of Lake Chala, said to have been formed when a homestead was cursed by an old woman who came there asking for food, but was only given the placenta of a cow. Hopley has a slightly different version of the Simbi Nyaima story ("British East Africa," 349).
127. Kilili, Morimoto, and Maundu, *Preliminary Survey*, 5.
128. Kassam, "The People of the Five 'Drums'," 173.
129. G. Schlee, "Ritual Topography," 121.
130. Were et al., 35.
131. Schlee, "Ritual Topography," 118. Farole (or Forole) is the most important of the Gabbra sites in Kenya.
132. Ganya, Haro, and Borrini-Feyerabend, "Conservation of Dryland Biodiversity," 66; Ganya, "Forole Sacred Mountain."
133. Ganya, "Forole Sacred Mountain," 570.
134. As hunters they eat porcupines, rhinoceros and hippopotamus, making them unclean to Gabbra and Borana. Kassam and Bashuna, "Marginalisation of the Waata Oromo," 197–200.
135. Kassam is of the opinion that this is not a variation of the name Forole and that the Waata had their own sacred mountains distinct from those of the Gabbra (pers. comm.)
136. Bashuna, "The Waata," 36–8; Kassam and Bashuna, "Marginalisation of the Waata Oromo," 207.
137. Makoloo, *Kenya: Minorities, Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Diversity*, 9.
138. UNESCO, *International Decade of the World's Indigenous People*.
139. Kassam and Bashuna, "Marginalisation of the Waata Oromo," 208.
140. Straight, *Miracles and Extraordinary Experience*, 52–66.
141. Spencer, *The Samburu*, 74, 129; Were et al., *Marsabit District Socio-Cultural Profile*.
142. Bernbaum, *Sacred Mountains of the World*. It is not clear whether this is the trembling rock mentioned by Straight's informant, said to tremble frequently for no apparent reason (*Miracles and Extraordinary Experience*, 54).
143. Bernbaum, *Sacred Mountains*; Omwega, Mpoke, and Wanyama, "Mount Nyiro and the Samburu (East Africa)," 1114–17.
144. Part of the western wall of the Rift Valley, rising to 3354 meters: Robson, *Mountains of Kenya*, 26.
145. Barton, "Notes on the Suk Tribe of Kenia Colony," 98; Lucheli and Nyaboke, "Sacred Hill."

146. A Mijikenda informant made the same comment to me of the kaya forest; “*kaya ni kitovu ya dunia*” (“kitovu” is Swahili for navel).
147. Schneider, “Pakot Resistance to Change,” 157; Peristiany, “The Age-set System of the Pastoral Pokot: The ‘Sapana’ Initiation Ceremony,” 192; Huntingford, *The Southern Nilo-Hamites*, 84–90.
148. Lucheli and Nyaboke, “Sacred Hill.”
149. Peristiany, “The Age-set System of the Pastoral Pokot: The ‘Sapana’ Initiation Ceremony,” 192, “The Age-set System of the Pastoral Pokot: Mechanism, Function and Post-‘Sapana’ Ceremonies,” 289; Lucheli and Nyaboke, “Sacred Hill.”
150. Marich Pass Field Studies Centre, “One and Two Day Excursions from the Centre.”
151. Nyamweru fieldnotes; “Priest Seeks Police Help over Sacred Tree Threat,” *Daily Nation*, January 7, 2002.
152. I draw on Greene, *Sacred Sites*, 137, for this interpretation.

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