

Sacred Ecology of an African Landscape: Evidence from the Mau Forest Complex, 1600-1895

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ABSTRACT

The study is a historical examination of the spiritual dimensions and sacredness of the Mau forests; the nature of engagements and benefits obtained from sacred forests; governance practices and dynamics aspects of sacred forests; and the implications of dynamics on human-ecology interaction sustainability among the Ogiek. The study equally portrays the effects of human intrusions on the state of sacred forests and their provisions. Before the advent of colonialism, communities in and around the Mau Forest had elaborate traditional systems of forest land utilization. Indigenous religious beliefs and practices served to maintain a harmonious relationship with the natural environment. Thus, this paper offers an in-depth historical study of how religion was used to conserve the Mau Forest, arguing that present-day ecological challenges are best solved when one first understands the underlying historical topography, and when strategies based on modern practices are modified by blending them with indigenous practices. In doing so, I propose a model of political ecology that considers cultural, social and religious change dimensions of African history.

Key words: Ogiek, religion, land use, ancestral spirits, supreme being, Mau Forest.

INTRODUCTION

The Mau Forest land has had a long history of human and terrestrial interactions and transformation since as early as the 13th Century CE. Throughout the centuries, native Ogiek populations coevolved with their environment, at the same time that always exerted some degree of pressure on the system but with careful utility. The Ogiek understood that their livelihood in hunter gathering largely depended on flora-fauna cultural relations. Rules and regulations were as such formulated to ensure the community interests, especially those for survival as guaranteed by forest resources were assured (Ogot, 1979). They invoked religious beliefs, such as forests being an abode of the spirits to deter prospective unpermitted intruders. Knowledge about forests, land, trees, and animals was collectively owned by members of the community and passed on from one generation to the other through oral traditions and apprenticeship.

This study, therefore, examines socio-ecological status of the Mau Forest in relations to the Ogiek who were the entr ee and who resided inside the Mau Forest and sustained it by using indigenous religious beliefs before, during and after British colonialism in Kenya. And because they did not record or write anything about their world view and experiences, this study used folklore, myths, taboos and oral traditions as narrated by them and written documents to reconstruct such a narrative. In this study also, it is argued that, before the advent of colonialism, the Ogiek of the Mau Forest had elaborated religious philosophies and traditional systems of forest land utilization and conservation. During and after colonialism, the study established that one of the contributing factors to the degradation of the Mau Forest land and other resources is Christianity.

METHODOLOGY

An array of interconnected methods was used to collect data. Gleaned information was sourced from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources included consultation of documents from Kenya National Archives Nairobi, Kenya Forest Service, interviews, a questionnaire, and focused group discussions. These research instruments were carefully developed for each category of respondents. Secondary sources included newspapers, journals, books, diaries, government reports and policies, seminar papers, correspondences, and dissertations. Other materials included reports by UNEP, conservationists, the internet, Acts of parliament, Human Rights Organizations, and the civil society. Others included resources available at the Kenya National Library, County Information and Documentation Centres in Nakuru, Kericho, Bomet, Narok and the British Council. The study involved thirty respondents that included Ogiek elders, Ogiek women, former workers of the Forest Department, NGOs, village elders and chiefs, loggers, elders from the Kipsigis, Maasai and Kikuyu communities and the youth. Data analysis was instituted by use of several procedures keeping in mind its historical nature that included corroboration, contextualization, and synthesis. Ex-post-facto research design was instituted.

MIGRATION, SETTLEMENT OF THE OGIEK

The Ogiek belong to a group of hunter gatherer communities that roamed the African continent before the arrival of waves of migrations of many large groups that included the Bantu, Nilotes and the Cushites. For nearly thirty thousand years out of forty thousand of human existence, they lived in small bands and their main economic activity was hunting and gathering. These early humans survived by gathering wild fruits and killing animals for meat. They did this repeatedly for a long time until they accumulated a bank of knowledge about their environment and nature. Some of these expert knowledge included knowing how seasons changed, the behaviour of animals in terms of breeding and migration, which roots and berries were edible and how to find water. Some of these foraging communities in the modern and near modern eras include the native Americans of the Eighteenth Century, the Inuit, the Khoikhoi and San of the Kalahari Desert, and the Yanomamo of the rain forests in Brazil and Venezuela.

The foraging communities travelled in bands of about fifty individuals by following wild animals and seasons. Even though these bands shared a culture, language and even territory, they were independent and had simple division of labour based on age and sex. Leadership was informal based on situations. Everyone participated in search of food. As a result of their exclusive dependence on nature, these communities in Africa relied on muscle power and their impact on environmental degradation was very small and localized (Anderson, 1957). They were able to live in harmony with nature because they were aware of their dependence on it which was controlled by a supreme being through the spirits of the ancestors and each other. Their embeddedness with nature informed their world view. The Ogiek are known to have settled in the coast of East Africa as early as 1000 CE. The early dispersal from these areas was caused by immigrating communities and slave traders. The communities dispersed in two directions. The first one moved west to modern day Tanzania where they interacted with the Maasai and Hadzabe communities in the north of the country. The second group moved north to settle around Mount Kenya Forest. The constant dispersal by members of this community reduced their numbers significantly making them vulnerable to attacks by larger communities, forcing them to accept assimilation and loss of land. Those invading communities took away the Ogiek land for the purposes of cultivation and grazing (KNA/VF/7/9, 1932).

The Ogiek moved away from the Mount Kenya Forest with the arrival of the Agikuyu because their ways of utilizing forest land conflicted with their own. The Agikuyu conserved forests for defensive purposes. The defensive value was demonstrated where at one time an extensive belt of dense forest was maintained as a buffer against Maasai raids and invasion. The Agikuyu proceeded into it with their shifting cultivation and within a short time (within a generation) large tracts of wooded lands had been annihilated into bare eroded

lands. The Kikuyu system of land ownership had a great influence on the Ogiek movement out of the Mount Kenya Forest. Land rights were put under the communal ownership regime. This became specific when clans or *Mbari* were allocated their own portions. The extended family and the nuclear family which were referred to as *nyumba* and *mucii* were traditionally given the usufruct rights to the land they were utilizing. Rights to the utilization and preservation of trees and forests were therefore a social obligation based on blood relations. The Kikuyu therefore conserved trees as a traditional way of asserting entitlement to the land and the other way round.

There is no evidence to suggest that the Ogiek migrated to several forest in Kenya because of population pressure. But waves of migration were triggered by invading communities that occupied the surrounding lands. A good example is Ogiek migrations from Mount Kenya Forest to other forests that included the Mau Forest, Tinet, Cherangany Hills and Mount Elgon because of population pressure caused by the Gikuyu. The Gikuyu practiced shift cultivation, which totally conflicted with the Ogiek ways of utilizing forest land. They could not mount a resistance against the Gikuyu because of numbers. Their numbers could not match the Gikuyu superiority in terms of population and their determination to occupy fertile Mount Kenya forests and its virgin surrounding land. This is a contrary to Murombezi's (2003) assertion that:

In very early times, evidence exists to suggest that when resources came under pressure from say, increased human population, or economic activity, a typical response was for whole population to move to new uncolonized and resource abundant areas. These political responses to ecological phenomenon resulted in several waves of migrations from central unto southern Africa and back, including the Luba-Luanda dispersions and the Mfecane of the late 18th century.

OGIEK RELIGION AND THE SACRED FOREST: POLITICS OF LAND AND RESOURCE UTILISATION

The name Ogiek (plural), Ogiot (sing) means a caretaker. They believed that the Mau Forest was given to them by the supreme being to take care of it. Under the supreme being, there are intermediaries that he uses to communicate with them. The intermediaries include the ancestors and below them the elders. The elders were highly respected because they had the privilege of direct communication with the ancestors/spirits who had powers to influence all aspects of Ogiek world that included social, economic, and calamities (Olupora,2014, Kopytoff,2012, Newell,2018). They also believed that the spirit's abode was in designated areas in the forest that included places like riverbanks, heavy canopy areas, water sources and some satellite forests. The Ogiek are believed to be the earliest inhabitants of the Mau Forest land. While in the forest, they were able to develop an elaborate system of education concerning forest land and conservation. Blackburn (Blackburn,1978) asserts that the Ogiek traditional value system emphasized spirituality in forest land use and its conservation. The lineage was the unit used to hold land for residence. Apart from education the lineage was bestowed with the responsibility for negotiating and giving girls to marriage and also negotiating for compensation in cases and conflict resolution. Spirituality was the focal point for social education and the custodian of social norms, sanctions and enforcement of law and order within the community.

Huntig ford (1955) observed that apart from identifying themselves as Ogiek, they also did acknowledge their local group affiliations. It is said that this community migrated into the Mau Forest from Mount Kenya region. This was as a result of the arrival of the Kikuyu in the seventeenth century (Ronoh,2015). The Kikuyu being cultivators began to clear forest prompting the Ogiek to move away because they considered this as an affront to their livelihood and provocation of ancestral spirits and the supreme being to unleash terror on them because of prohibited transgressions of interfering with the forest. They did not just move to the Mau Forest but dispersed to forests in Baringo, Laikipia, Taveta and Naivasha (Hobley,1955). Each of the forest land zones in the Mau Forest was owned by a lineage. The territories were named *Konoito* (sing)

and *Konoituek* (plural). Members of these lineages were bestowed by the customary law to own allocated parts of the forest land in order to practice economic activities such as collection of honey. These territorial strips were owned by the Male (patrilineal members of the community). The clans subdivided the land in accordance with the family tree. It is therefore evident that land was owned collectively but individuals enjoyed subsidiary rights in terms of usage and occupations. It should be noted here that the Ogiek believed that portions of land in the forest was allocated to them by the spirits who expected them to use it prudently for habitation and production of honey. Honey was used to appease the spirits not to actualize punishments as a result of transgressions which Christians call sin (Newell,1979). Honey was at the centre of Ogiek religion and philosophies or worldview. They also believed that the spirits and the supreme beings liked honey which was used to offer offerings. In every Ogiek ceremony be it birth, marriage, initiation of the youth through circumcision (for both boys and girls), funerals, marriage and festivals honey was at the center. Furthermore, they perceived forests as honey barrels given to them by the supreme being to extract honey for him, spirits, and themselves (O.I,2022).

For the purposes of managing resources provided by the environment, the Ogiek allocated themselves the forest land based on natural features that included streams, rivers, valleys, and hills as demarcations as recognized in their traditional land tenure system. They ensured the protection of streams and rivers by discouraging human activities near them as they were considered as spirits dwelling places. Conservation of their natural resources and features was therefore an important element of their sense of being a member of the Ogiek community who is in a cordial relation with the spirits (Ronoh, 2015). Several studies of the Ogiek and other communities that interacted with the Mau Forest, such as the Kalenjin and the Maasai reveal that there were ideas, practices, institutions, and belief systems that were shaped by the natural environment. The young people learnt from elders on myriad of issues concerning the environment and its conservation. They learnt about customary laws concerning the land that included the kinds of trees to be exploited and those that should not be touched, the uses of different kinds of plants, insects and the dangers and benefits associated with them.

People were not allowed to enter the forest and do whatever they wanted. The Ogiek people used forest for resources with a lot of caution keeping in mind what the community rules and belief systems say about what you are about to do. For example, when hunting, one had to keep in mind the kind of animals to be killed and which ones were not. For example, if you find your trap has a pregnant hare or antelope, you just release it (O.I, 2022).

The Ogiek land use practices looked at land especially forests as honey barrels. They also believed that all forest land belonged to them (Sang,2022). Any person who wanted to access forest land was supposed to adopt the Ogiek ways of life. To them land was there to be used economically for hunting and gathering, wild fruits harvesting and acquisition of honey. This kind of land utilization was sustainable because it was not intensive as it is today. Their culture and life revolved around honey and spirituality. For example, no ceremony would be conducted without honey. These ceremonies included weddings and rites of passage. At the center was the honey wine (*rotikap gomek*) which was used as a symbol of culture, tradition, friendship and relation(Haila,1994) between themselves, ancestral spirits, and the supreme being. It is imperative to note that the Ogiek community in the Mau Forest had developed some land management techniques that were specifically grounded on their ecological knowledge derived from economic and social relations that conditioned the land use.

They subdivided the Mau Forest land into lineage ownership (*Konoito*)based on the ecological zones. They also classified forest land into four ecological zones that ensured the continuity and sustainability in access to honey and other forest products throughout the year. The year was sub-divided into three honey seasons. In most cases they liked hunting animals from places where honey was ripe. Their settlement was small and scattered throughout the Mau Forest. These settlements were based on extended families that were patrilineal and were occasionally joined by matrilineal relations. A local group comprised of several families

that ranged from six to ten. This grouping constituted a unit of cultural identity. Honey collection, making of beehives and animal hunting were exclusive responsibilities of men. Unlike other foraging communities in Africa that largely depended on plants for food, the Ogiek relied heavily on game meat and honey and occasionally traded on grain. Women had their unique responsibilities cut out for them that included processing and cooking food, fetching of firewood, childcare, making of bags, straps, and construction of huts (Rambaldi,2007).

The Ogiek just like the inhabitants of Kissidougou Forest in Guinea had developed sophisticated knowledge of land, soil and vegetation management skills, spirituality, and wisdom which can be termed as “indigenous science”. This knowledge was not recognized or appreciated by the colonialists when they occupied their African territories. This observation is clearly stated by Fairhead and Leach(1996) when they say,

When considering the ecological concepts and explanations employed by Kissidougou’s farmers however, it has not always been straightforward to understand these in terms familiar to the Western scientific literature on forest savannah ecology. This problem stems at a fundamental level from the framing of scientists and inhabitants’ explanations within very different root assumptions concerning the relationship between social and ecological processes.

According to them a misunderstanding stem from how the Africans conceptualized their land use and how the European enlightenment conceptions perceived it. Enlightenment knowledge treated social and natural phenomena to be disjointed or separate. In that the social phenomena can be studied separately from the natural one (Richards, 1983). This is not to say the Ogiek of the Mau Forest did not or are not bound to change their traditional ways of managing and use of land in the forest. As time passed their must have been some adjustments on how they managed land and the environment. According to Berry (1989) rules and regulations for land use and environmental management by any community emanate from the competing interests over resource management and use. In this process the struggles and competing claims were resolved by articulation through cultural idioms and religious beliefs. The structuring of power as a result of that lead to the establishment of labour, tenure, and crop control. These factors were influenced by shifts over time together with social and institutional arrangements. These shifts were in turn determined by demographic conditions. This explains why the Ogiek had to manage their land use and access to other resources through clan system based on deities as explained earlier.

In order to avert conflicts with their Maasai neighbours, they allowed them entry into the forest land. The Maasai being roaming cattle keepers, would take their cattle to the Mau Forest because they had some special relationship with it whenever there was drought in the plains. The main reason being the forest enjoying rainfall almost throughout the year. The Maasai respected Ogiek belief systems and this was evidenced with them not taking their cattle to their designated sacred sites within the forest. This partly explains why the Ogiek were not infuriated by Maasai and their cattle presence in the forest. The Maasai belief systems did not allow them to kill wild animals or eating them and destruction of trees. These belief systems were perfectly acceptable to the Ogiek. Pastoralism according to the Maasai lived in harmony with the forest. This was because they did not graze their animals regularly in it. It only happened when the plains were experiencing shortage of pasture as a result of drought. Cattle immensely contributed to the fertility of the forest land because cow dung eventually provided manure to the trees. The animals also helped in compacting and hardening the soil though this was seen as a problem later by the colonial administration (See, Kameri,2012).

At this time also population in and around the Mau Forest was scarce. Forest land was therefore in abundance for the Ogiek. Conflicts over land were rarely experienced and there were no economic incentives that would drive the foraging Ogiek people into property rights to land. This in part explains why the Maasai could freely move in and out of the Mau Forest with their cattle without coming into conflict with the Ogiek. Because also of the economic activities and belief systems of the two communities that

surrounded the forest land (Ogiek and Maasai) of foraging and pastoralism, there was no interest to encroach into the forest land to occupy it as happened during the colonial period because of European introduction of capitalist system of economy (Feris, 2004).

The Ogiek were able to sustain the Mau Forest land because of several factors, firstly, the population was low enough not to exert a lot of pressure on the forest land and other resources. Secondly, their exploitation was only to satisfy or fulfill the immediate need of consumption. Thirdly, the forest resources were not commoditized and their conservation ideals were designed to operate during times of crisis situations caused by natural disasters. Their indigenous systems of conserving the Mau Forest land and trees were transmitted in form of oral traditions. The ecological knowledge was collectively owned by the community. Transmission was done through folklores, proverbs, riddles, songs, rituals, traditional laws, religious obligations, cultural values, apprenticeship and language. They emphasized on what was for utility to them as a community. Their traditional value system of conservation was laced with a lot of religious incentives (Burns and Dietz, 1992). “ For example they believed that people who are sympathetic or keen in following the traditional norms of conserving the natural environment were blessed and their descendants lived good lives without misfortunes or curses”(O.I, 2022).

Conservation of the forest land and trees was a necessity for the Ogiek people because of their reliance on both plants and animals. Animals compelled them to develop complex forest and wildlife management techniques that would guarantee sustainable food supply. They were also intended to regulate the exploitation of this resource (Harper and Fletcher, 2011). The techniques were anchored and entrusted on territorial units called *Konoito* that also housed several clans as pointed out earlier. Those clans were guided by traditional rules and religious regulations. These clans were also allocated hunting territories based on traditional negotiations carried out by elders. No clan could infringe on another clan’s hunting ground and individuals who violated this rule were punished by their own clan members.

The Ogiek would argue against existence of power that controlled conservation but agree that there were elders from some specific clans that were highly respected and feared in equal measure because they had powers to curse by influencing ancestral spirits against those who abuse the environment.

Elders from some specific clans could punish someone who did wrong things like felling of trees that are not allowed or hunted animals that were prohibited like pregnant antelopes, such animals if trapped were supposed to be released. Anyone who caused forest fires because of careless harvesting of honey was severally punished by the elders. The punishment could be suspension from owning beehives, curse, or total ban (O.I, 2022).

The Ogiek demarcated sacred places where no human activity was allowed. Examples of these included Tinet, Marishoni and part of Nessuit. These forest areas were classified traditionally and no hunting, grazing or any other human activity was allowed including bee keeping.

A person found violating this was summoned by elders to appear before a tribunal. Judgement made by elders in such cases were severe and merciless. In fact they were intended to inflict maximum pain on offenders that also affected members of their immediate family and clan as a whole. Hunting and trapping of animals was allowed only by elders and were strictly for home consumption (O.I, 2022).

This is a little bit different from how the Tolon community in Ghana conserved their forests. They believed that gods took the form of leopards, pythons and even crocodiles. These animals were not killed or eaten. In times of epidemics, certain areas of forests were used in order to appease the gods. As a result the epidemics stopped. The forest land was therefore seen as sacred and its conservation was mandatory. From the above practices by the Ogiek and Tolon, it can be argued that religion was deployed by pre-colonial African communities in order to conserve and manage forest land and forests. In central Africa, most sacred

groves were managed at the village level. Schoffeleers (1979) observed that conservation was embedded into religion because of subsistence economy. There was need to do so in order to articulate traditional earth philosophies, institutionalization of the groups and for historical continuity. The Ogiek also embraced totemic concepts in their forest land conservation strategies. Clans allocated themselves certain animals for example monkeys, antelopes and bird species. They were not allowed to kill or eat any animal or a bird associated with their clans. From a philosophical point of view, these animals were physical representation of their ancestral spirits and depended on the forest land thus nobody would interfere with their habitats. This safeguarded the forest land and trees from human interference. As a result the community through its traditions was able to advocate for land protection, land rights, sustainable management and guaranteed future use.

The Ogiek viewed forest land and other forest resources as inseparable part of their well being and lives. The environment benefited individuals as well as the community and observance of rules and taboos was viewed as a moral value and obligation that inculcated communitarianism between the forest land the individual. Their worldview in relation to the forest land can be regarded as non anthropocentric (Ronoh,2015). Taboos were used as an ethical tool that guided the relationship between people and their natural environment. The rules and taboos were strong enough to effectively warrant effective utilization of natural resources (Ibid).As pointed out earlier, elders were given immense powers by the traditions in the management and utilization of land and trees among the Ogiek. They were the only ones bestowed with the responsibility of allowing or determining the usage of land and trees. Authorization of cutting of trees were given by them only for the purposes of cultural or religious functions.

This forest (the Mau Forest) you are able to see today because our ancestors had methods of preserving and respecting it. They used the authority of the elders; taboos, proverbs, riddles, and severe punishments to achieve their goals. Community members because of their socialization respected what the elders ruled as it was believed that they have discretion given to them by the community ancestral spirits to follow rules and exercise due diligence (O.I,2022).

Among the Ogiek, herbs played a vital role in the conservation of low lands and the trees adopted to the kind of climate found there. Land in these areas was understood as given to them by God for the purpose of keeping trees that provide them with medicine for the treatment of myriad of ailments. Herbalists were the only people mandated by the council of elders to harvest tree products. They included harvesting just a small portion of medicine from an identified tree. Medicinal trees were found in highland and lowland shrubs. Herbal knowledge was transmitted from one generation to the other through apprenticeship. This knowledge was acquired consciously and unconsciously from elders through exposure in a process that was largely informal. Harvesting of herbs was done secretly and components of a given prescription were not divulged to anyone. This helped a great deal in the conservation of trees in the Mau Forest itself and the lowlands were conserved for this special purpose (Rambaldi et al, 2007).

The council of elders and elders in general played an important role in the preservation of the forest land and trees among the Ogiek at the Mau Forest. They were highly regarded and respected members of the community. They acted as intermediaries between the community and the ancestral spirits who had direct communication with the supernatural. Elders also acted as a prohibitive measure against abuse of the natural environment. This resonated well with the Banyoro of Uganda who ensured that people were always at peace with the environment. They believed that nature is ruthless when you interfere with its designated functioning. Nature was feared, respected and venerated. The land was looked at as a source of fertility, food and medicine. They also looked at the land as a source of power and wealth which had to be managed well (Kameri,2012). This was because the Banyoro were determined entrepreneurs in the area of accumulation.

They had a strong belief that natural places were mystical. They had stories of people who had pressing

needs that forced them to cut down trees but they bled uncontrollably, walked naked and even talked unknowingly. Elders were the ones who kept on narrating these stories with the aim of ensuring conservation. Large trees were particularly conserved with punitive sanctions in place (Packard,1981). This was because the Banyoro used them to construct canoes that played a critical role in their commerce and warfare. They also used spiritual conservationism. For example the Babito believed certain trees and animals possessed sacred power. Some trees were revered to an extent that people could not touch them. Some very huge trees like the *Rukoma* were worshipped and thought to possess divine powers. Respect of forest land was as a result of belief and appreciation that man shared a communion with it and the glaring beauty and harmony that comes with it (Doyle,2006).

Oral literature was adversely used by the Ogiek to impart environmental awareness. This technique was used by many African societies for many centuries before the advent of colonialism. It was an embodiment of peoples way of life that can also be described as the soul of peoples culture. It also affirmed the Ogiek political, religious, and moral philosophies. This embodiment was developed over a period of time and handed over from one generation to the other. This knowledge was built through observations that also included classification system of the local surroundings that culminated in a system of resource management in the Mau Forest (KLA,2011).The taboos were very powerful to an extent that no one would even contemplate of breaking them. Children as young as four were taught the importance of forest land and environmental conservation. Forest land and trees for instance were considered sacred and of utmost importance to the community. When children reached the age of twelve, they were taught on how to recognize bird behaviour patterns in the forest. One major reason that made the community have a lot of care for the forest land, was that it was source of herbs for the treatment of several ailments. Destruction would mean a grave danger to the community (Towet,2002). The community developed an elaborate forest land governance structure that emanated from their strong values attached to the sacred forest (Harper and Lebeau,2005). The governance system embraced values and practices that regulated the use and management of forest land and other resources. The council of elders comprised of fifteen members also known as *Litiku* that was bestowed with the responsibility of helping the community decide on how the forest land will be used sustainably. The decisions made by the council included; allocation of rotational grazing sites, consulting ancestral spirits, dispute resolution and formulation of rules and regulations(Ibid) .

From the oral traditions of the Ogiek, it is clear that precolonial conservation of the Mau Forest is romanticized. Is it true that conservation of the Mau Forest was near perfect? If the answer is yes, then why did the colonial administration think the Ogiek were there to deplete it? or why did they say that they were responsible for lighting fires?. Murombedzi (2003) warns historians not to romanticize precolonial African conservation practices. He observes that:

Precolonial conservation practices have tended to be romanticized by most contemporary commentators. There is a dearth of information about tribe practices although availability of evidence indicate that as precolonial society became first regimented then stratified, access to and use of natural resources also came to be stratified and conservation practices to reflect the attempts to balance competency interests. Such recorded precolonial conservation practices as the demarcation of sacred areas, the allocation of totems, the expropriation of labour for conservation did not necessarily reflect egalitarian and consensual conservation but rather the exercise of power over people and resources by dominant clans or classes as the case would have been.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing discussions and observations it is clear that Ogiek precolonial land use and conservation was based on co-existence and interplay between traditional divinity, humanity and nature. They were not separated from each other but complimented to guarantee access and sustainability. This was unlike the

colonial strategies where humans, belief systems, and nature were separated. The colonial model that created nature conservation areas where humans were restricted from accessing them. Nature was thus described as absence of humans. At this time it is prudent to tap on the Ogiek's vast indigenous knowledge on forest land management and conservation. They should be encouraged to participate in the Mau forest conservation rather than being excluded. They bestowed the lineage the responsibility of inculcating values through education on the sanctity of the forest land and other resources. The lineage owned land and oversaw the observance of customary rules pertaining to land use in terms of management and utilization. They looked at forest land as honey barrels. Honey and religion was at the centre of everything in their world view. Their conceptions of forest lands and forests was that they belonged to them. It did not matter where the forest was. Forest land was there for them to do hunting and gathering and acquisition of honey. Their ecological knowledge was collectively owned by the community while conservation was highly encouraged with the use of traditional incentives. Religion and beliefs played a key role in the conservation and management of the Mau Forest land and other resources by the Ogiek. Forest land was seen as sacred and therefore warranted a compulsory conservation. There was need to do so in order to articulate traditional earth philosophies, institutionalization of the groups and for historical continuity

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