

TRANSCRIPT
***Land Body Ecologies* Podcast**
Episode 2 – Honey (English Language Version)

Opens with sounds of bees buzzing, growing increasingly louder. Interspersed with the humming of an Ogiek elder and cowbells.

Duncan Nonosa:

THOSE DAYS

So lonely I am here today,
In a crowd but thinking in my way,
Inside me filled with loneliness,
I miss my old happiness.

Happiness from my own living ways,
Happiness from my own culture ,
Hunting, gathering I mean competing with the wild for survival,
Happiness that I got from taking honey from angry bees.
Those days, the gone days.

How did we get to hear?
The songs of birds and the untamed I no more hear,
The life today is filled with Shame and dismay,
Shame of eating what wasn't meant for me .

Tomorrow is so uncertain,
Coz today is filled with pain,
Crying with pain for our stolen pride,
Pride our land, our destroyed home..

The honey today isn't honey but funny,
Our symbiotic relationship with environment turned to parasitism,
A painful reality,
Reality tearing my heart into uncountable pieces.

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I'm only fighting a
Losing
battle,
coz I got the weakest weapons,
My pen and paper is what I handle,
With it trying to break the unbreakable bones....

A poem recited by Nonosa. Rise of distorted sounds of bees in the background,

Daniel Kobei: When I share about the situation, I feel it is half solved. When you don't have a story, then... you are living a life whereby, you are not having memories of your past.

Buzzing continues and fades.

Mau Forest Complex

Lilian Maina: 6:45 am, July 8th 2022. Cultural Centre grounds, the forested part.

Birds can be heard, dogs barking, rooster crows nearby.

Daniel Kobei: Mau Forest Complex is around 200 kilometres southwest part of Nairobi. So, it is an area of around 400,000 hectares and it is inhabited by Ogiek community in and even around Mau Forest Complex. So it is, what we call our water tower part in Kenya, and one of the big forests we have in this country. I'm Daniel Kobei from Kenya from Ogiek community. I'm also the Executive Director of Ogiek Peoples' Development Program based in Nakuru Kenya.

One you should know that Mau is a very fertile land, very arable for agriculture. Everybody wants to go to Mau and everybody wants to have a piece of Mau. But amid it, is that the government look at it in terms of conservation. What they do not understand is that we are not a threat to Mau but it is our ancestral home, its our territory. It is where we call home. Other communities in Kenya received what we call community reserves, the Maasai reserves, the Kikuyu reserves, the Luo reserves, and many other communities. It is Ogiek community who never got their own reserve. This was set by colonial government. Now the post colonial government inherited the same by evicting the Ogiek again in the ancestral land, because we

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were in the most fertile areas. They call them the white islands, the white islands where you remove because the white fellows came and took big tracts of land and removed the Ogiek, sent them, and most of them died. But fortunately or unfortunately they came back again. We are one and the same. Us and Mau. We are one and we look at ourselves as part and parcel of Mau. For us, we consider Mau our ancestral home. We get our medicine, we get our food, we get structures for youth for building our homes. It is where we will find a scenery, a home where we have connectivity with our ancestors. This is where also we get our honey. So we have a lot of both spiritual livelihood and the future of our Ogiek is within Mau Forest Complex.

Singing in Ogiek can be heard in the background by Nkareta singers. Cow bells can be heard and buzzing.

Lilian Maina: Recording Nekishon Leboo, a herbalist, she is explaining the importance of using honey in the art of herbalism. She mentions other herbs and the diseases they treat.

Nekishon Leboo: This is aloe vera. It is useful for a person with cancer. It is broken this way (she breaks the aloe vera into bits). The inner parts are chewed .

Daniel Kobei begins speaking. The dialogue is underpinned by the sound of Nekishon Leboo's voice fading in and out.

Daniel Kobei: See, land to Ogiek is about having connectivity with the Mother Earth. It has a cultural perspective... because we could see this where we are connected to the earth, where our umbilical cord was buried. So we have that connectivity with the earth, so that's what it means to us. We don't see it as a factor of production. We see it in a spiritual manner. And it has a lot of relation with us because that's where we grow, that's where everything comes. So our spirituality, our cultural perspective, they are all linked with land.

Bees, to Ogiek, are like anybody who is owning some cows or animals. So for us bees is a way whereby they will be able to produce honey for us. So we look at bees as part and parcel of us. The Ogiek beehive is around one metre and a half long. Cut a log and split it into two and then you make it hollow and then you begin to smoothen it inside in both sides and then you bring them together and then start sewing them using some material from the forest. And then you cover it with bark and then you begin to tie it and you hang it or you put it in a tree. And in one tree we can also have one more than three or four hives.

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Sounds of hammering can be heard as a beehive is prepared by Sanare Leboo.

Sanare Leboo: Mzee Sanare Leboo, making this hive. I started today making this hive. I've shaped and smoothed it using an axe. Now, I have come with a chisel to clean it so that I can carry it and hang it. This tree is so quick and it's the best for making the hives. I want to start this work today. The Ogiek love doing this because it is this work that our grandparents used to survive on.

*Sanare starts to sing a song normally sung when making the hive.
Sanare Leboo begins introducing himself.*

Sanare Leboo: My name is Sanare from the family of Leboo. Since, I was a child, forest is where we survived as Ogiek family. In the forest, there were two things. There was Sowyo and Tirap. In the tirap, maraisit blossoms, kureyiet blossoms, kuriot blossoms and silibwet blossoms. When the flowers are blossoming in the forest, we the Ogiek used to move to the forest. We migrated with our children. You will start by lighting fire to warm the children and when you will go to the forest to look for hyraxes and check our beehives and harvest honey to be used in making honey drinks. Children would eat hyrax meat with the honey drink. You could stay three to four months until we saw that flowers were not blossoming anymore. We will know that it was time for the bees to start moving towards Sowyo. When we saw swarms of bees moving towards Sowyo, we used to follow them and take note of special star because it is the star that used to show us where the bees were.

We loved bees, we were taught by our grandparents. We cannot forget our culture. Our lifestyle as Ogiek will not be abandoned.

Loud rain pelters down and a cow bell rings out.

Daniel: For us, Mau, it is a sad situation because there has been a continuous evictions of Ogiek community. They wanted us to leave Mau. They wanted us to be even assimilated to other communities because of the size of our numbers. And they've continuously, even post colonial government, they started evicting us and even destroying our property. In early 90s, the late President Moi decided that I think it is high time we settle Ogiek within or around more forest complex and so that they can have access to the forest and also to have their life in Mau.

Salaton Nadunguenkop, an elder, stands in the place where the Ogiek were evicted in 2005, describes a place they were living in the past in Ogiek.

Salaton: I'm an Ogiek, I'm among the council of elders. I'm the chairman of the Ogiek council of Elders from Nkareta. As I stand here, I feel pain for this land. This

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place was our ancestral home. We were evicted by people who disregarded our rights. Today as we stand here, we won the case in Arusha¹. We want to tell the government to stop delaying the implementation of the Ogiek case. We want this land to be recognised as Ogiek of Mau, instead of the way that they are calling it Maasai Mau. We want it to be called the Ogiek of Mau, we want the name changed from Maasai Mau to Ogiek Mau. The Ogiek community in this land have really suffered. Our houses have been destroyed in this forest. Our beehives were destroyed. Our property in these forests was destroyed.

Daniel: Instead of settling Ogiek, they brought other communities. There was an influx of agricultural communities, those who wants to, to live by farming and so forth. This led to Ogiek getting angered and they felt it is time we go to court. And the court continued being postponed. Ogiek never had enough money to pay for the legal work. And then in 2009 there was a major notice by the government which gave Ogiek 14 days to leave Mau.

Salaton: I'm now 30 years. And when we evicted in 2005/2004, like 13 years ago, all houses were burned and properties. We were harassed, and we left everything unwillingly. We went crying for justice.

Daniel: I talked to them my community and asked them, what we do now? Should we continue with the case in Nairobi, or we go to the African Commission? We ended up voting, there were 50 of us. We ended up voting for the Ogiek case to go to the commission and then now the case progressed.

Recording of court case in 2017 plays back for listeners.

Judge: For the delivery of judgement in the matter of African Commission on Human and People's Rights vs the Republic of Kenya. On the precedent, both parties are duly represented at this seminar.

I'm going to read the unanimous judgement of the court...

Daniel: Then now, on 26 May 2017, the case was, was judged or ruled in favour of the Ogiek community in Arusha, Tanzania, where the Ogiek were declared indigenous peoples of Kenya. And then one of the greatest issues which was conflicting between the Ogiek and the government, was the fact of the issue of conservation. That the Ogiek may not have the ability to protect or conserve Mau, and the Ogiek were being evicted amidst COVID-19 in July 2020. And at that time, we were waiting for a reparation judgement or hearing and now 23rd of June 2022, a reparation judgement was made, and the ruling was made again in February of the Ogiek community.

¹ Ruling by the African court in Human and People's Rights on 26 May 2017.

Sound of Nkareta women singing begins, rising and fading to a lower volume as Daniel speaks.

Daniel: We are still fighting. My generation is fighting. Those who started, some are dead now, I'm not young anymore. I'm now facing another challenge because up to today as we are talking, the Ogiek have not been settled and when we won this twenty third reparation on that June this year, the government have not even said anything.

Changes in land inheritance

Emily Katais Nadunguenkop sings a song usually sung in the forest. A song of herbs and berries. It is a forest song. Quietens gently as Daniel speaks.

Daniel: For us, it was the only thing you can, we could inherit from our great grandfathers or our fathers. Not one day did our great grandfathers thought people were going to subdivide land or break it into titles. We never knew one day Mau will get open, the way it got open.

Samson: She (Emily) loves this song because it actively praises the biodiversity in the forest, where they used to get food for honey. And when the summer was ripe, the honey is sold much in quantity.

Emily Kamakei: My name is Emily Kamakei. A daughter of Ogiek. We are in our forests. We want to tell outsiders to stop destroying our forests.

As Ogiek, we are related to the forest, our life is the forest. The forest is where we source food and medicine for our children. We don't want anyone to destroy our forests. Like fish, when removed from water, it dies. Same as to the Ogiek, the forest because when we were evicted, our life will diminish.

Daniel: Really, it is an area which is very sad to discuss because, I've personally witnessed a very high magnitude of destruction in Mau, where people have pulled down and brought down trees in terms of logging, charcoal burning, destroying it for agricultural purposes. And, and, all these in within the eyes of the government. Some of them were given permits, were given by the government. Some of them also are areas whereby the government, they, they don't see the value of trees, they see the value of maize and potatoes. And, in this case, when we tell them no, you please, stop this kind of mess, they say we don't want to, they say we still want to live a

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backward barbaric life of being in the forest. They don't see it as a means of conservation.

For us, we promote conservation. We wanted the forest to be intact, so that we can have a savanna because the destruction has brought down the level and the amount of honey we are harvesting. It has gone so low in some areas in Mau whereby you can hardly get honey even for consumption purposes. And I can tell you, it is because there is what we call "plantation forest" which have been planted and, and it is used and it is not producing pollen for, for bees. And not only that, there are no cultural trees, where you can have herbal medicine, because most of them are pine, Cypress, eucalyptus, these are trees which are very minimal, very minimal, umm... medicinal value, and also cultural value for the Ogiek community. Some of them when we want to, to prepare our Mabwaita or where we are having to appease onto some cultural issues, we always find ourselves... having to move deep, deep inside the forest to be able to get because most of the surrounding areas have been planted with Cypress, pine and all sorts of trees which grow very fast for the sake of harvesting and logging purposes.

Daniel: Specifically for the communities, which were evicted in 2019 in a place called Ngaroni, where even my own sister was evicted. It is a very sad situation. It is the same group who I mentioned of 17 families. And one of the family is the one of the late Mzee Joseph Mapelo. Being one of the leaders amongst the community then, was evicted and then one day he had gone to visit one of the daughters married outside the Ogiek community. They were with a son. They were coming on the way. Then somebody made a call to the saddle and said, "Oh, the fencing has been done. And now it is about to reach where your land was. Hearing on that, he got a heart attack. He couldn't contain it. He died instantaneously just because, when the son tried to ask him, he said, "*You mean I'll never go home again,*" ...

Some of them have died.... some elders have died. Of course they were ill, they could not contain the fact that, now they have to go and stay in relatives' homes because their homes are no more. They saw their properties being banned by the police and game rangers and now they are not even accepted. They are not even allowed to go access the burial places of their ancestors.... So this has traumatised the people. And, and, and, some of the elders they say, "*We didn't know one day there will be such a big suffering just because forest seems to be more important than human – humanity*". Rather, to them they see, the government seems to put more prominence on forest conservation and they don't care... about the lives of the people who have been staying with the same forest for generations....

Rising sounds of bees. The sounds of Sanare Leboo harvesting honey can be heard.

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Sanare Leboo: I started making my hive today. I say, I'm going to hang it now. I'm going to hang it today. Now before I hang it, let me pick the leaves of perekeyiwek and put them in the hive to close this small opening as we used to do it in ancient time. Then I'm off to hang my hive.

Sanare Leboo closes the hive. Finishing construction, he proceeds to hang the hive, singing a song sung during the construction of hives.

Sanare Leboo: They say to be one of the land of honey, land with beehives, bee hives inherited from grandfathers, our father's, livestock, I says, it's our bees. This hive will not stay for three days without bees occupying it. I swear on my firstborn. This beehive. This side is where the bees will come through. This head, I swear on my dad's cow, as sure as a man stays in the house, bees will stay in this hive.

Sanare Leboo hammers the hive closed.

Daniel: Ogiek have to buy honey now, from their fellow Ogiek because most of them have changed. They are no longer having beehives. So, beekeeping has gone down substantially, unlike before. But now with the kind of projects which we have come up with as OPDP, we have realised now people are getting interested in getting bee hives and even restoring and hanging beehives. This is what we call restoration to bring Ogiek, back to their livelihood standards, we are pushing them, trying to inform them the importance of beekeeping trying to sensitise the young generation of the importance of land. They don't look at it as just a factor of production, but they should look at it in a spiritual value. We are not fighting for ourselves, but we are fighting for the generations to come. If we were fighting for ourselves, some people would have given up. But because we say it may not happen in my generation, but it will happen in the generation of my children. Our Fathers fought and others have died. Others are still alive. We are happy that they saw that there was... there is hope and there is light in the end of the tunnel as far as justice for the Ogiek is concerned.

Samson: Sanare has finished hanging the hive and is heard dropping the rope.

The sound of bees vibrations builds to resound in of the listener. This is followed on by Nkareta women singing "Song in the Valley" and ululating. Ends with laughter and clapping.

Translation: Song In the Valley

The Dombeya trees from Mau forest are beautiful and good

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The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
I can see a traditional bee hive in the beautiful Dombeya trees
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We say thank you for this beautiful forest that we have.

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
The Dombeya trees in our forest are beautiful and good
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
I am able to see the beautiful Dombeya trees in our very beautiful forest.
Our own forest.

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
I am seeing a traditional beehive, in our beautiful indigenous forest
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
There is a relationship between the beautiful forest and the traditional honey bug the community has
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
The Dombeya trees in our forest are beautiful and good

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
It is in our forest that we are able to practise the traditional ways of life as the Ogiek community
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
Please protect this forest, protect for us this indigenous forest

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are telling the scouts, the community scouts, that our forest is very beautiful
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are asking the scouts to protect for us the trees in our indigenous forest, the indus trees in our forest

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are telling the scouts to protect for us the Silibwet tree used for traditional ceremonies
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are seeing that the Dombeya tree in our indigenous forest is beautiful and good

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
The traditional honey wine from the indigenous forest is very good and also is nice
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are telling our children that the Dombeya tree in our forest is very good and beautiful

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are telling everybody including our parents that the Dombeya tree in our indigenous forest is very good

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We get traditional honey, we get many things from our forest

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
We are telling our visitors, including from abroad that our forest is very beautiful and good

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
As you communicate to the world about the problems the Ogiek are facing, still say that our indigenous forest is good and beautiful.

The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.
Despite the beautiful forest the Ogiek community have continued to suffer in their ancestral land.
The silibwet in the indigenous forest is beautiful.

END