

WHAT IS 'KIASILI' (NATURAL)? STUDYING CHANGING FOODSCAPES IN WEST TANZANIA FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF ENVIRONMENTAL ANTHROPOLOGY

New foodways, new diseases and a new 'natural'

In West Tanzania, *kiasili* ('natural' or 'original' in Kiswahili) foods and healing practices have emerged in reaction to new foodways and the diseases they are felt to cause. New foods, too rich in sugar, imported refined palm oil and agrochemicals are causing a surge in 'new diseases' such as diabetes and sexual impotency. Foods that are considered 'natural', such as honey and 'indigenous' chicken are now commanding higher prices, and Herbal Health clinics and the food conscious 7th Day Adventists churches have gained popularity.



Herbal Healing clinic Mpanda

against what background is the changing foodscape understood as 'unnatural'?

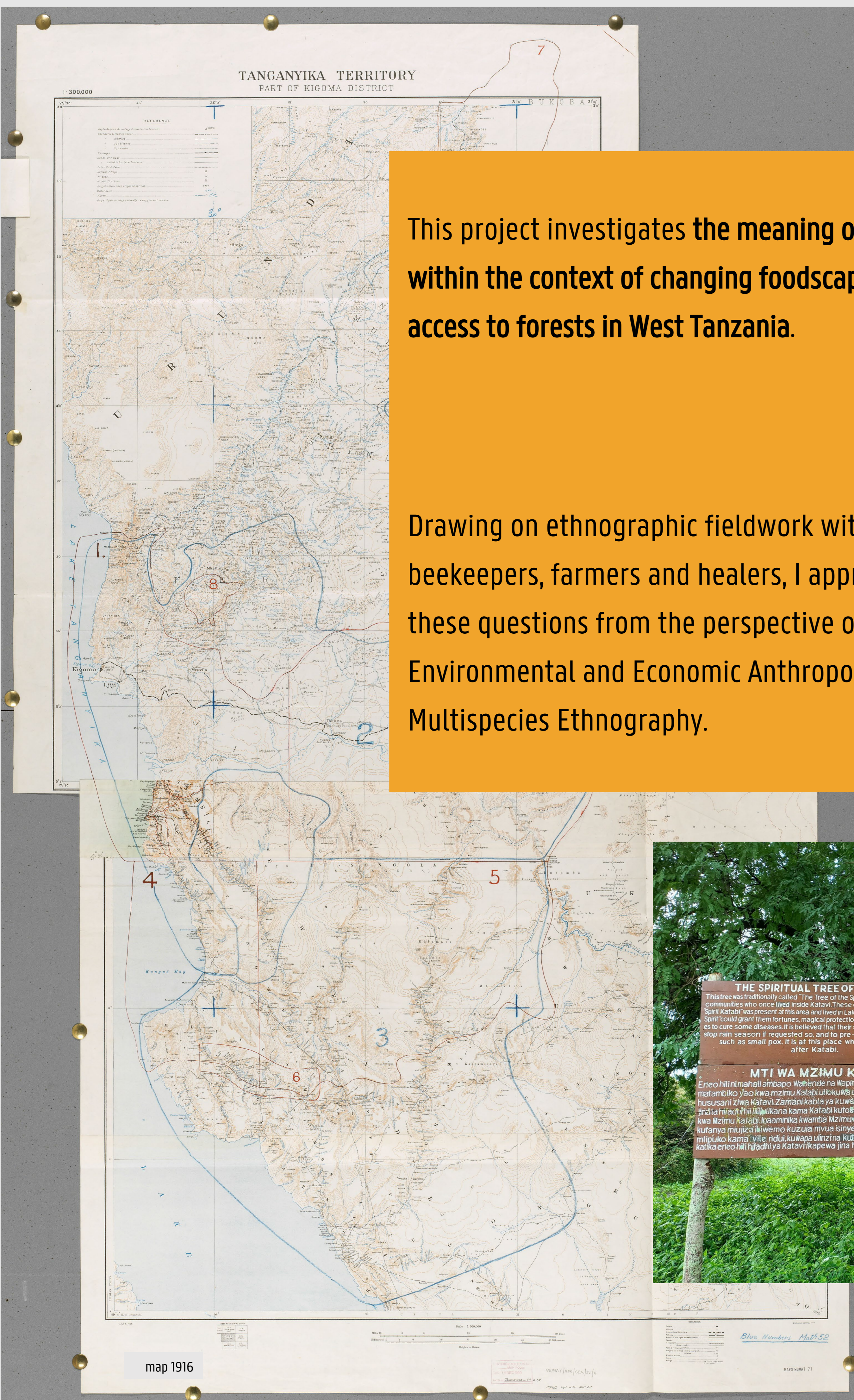
- plants, animals, soils and people have a proper growth rhythm that is disturbed by (agro)chemicals, causing them to grow too fast and grow old too fast
- *kiasili* animals use their 'own natural foods and medicines' in contrast to kept 'western'/'modern' animals such as broiler chicken
- conservation efforts are making access to forests and forest foods increasingly difficult

what moves the preoccupation with unhealthy foods and new diseases?

- the sociological indexicality of food and valuation; *kiasili* and new foods as distinction
- fears around the opaque food system of imported and processed foods, the use of (agro)chemicals

how does the *kiasili* discourse differ from older perspective on the natural and its role in healing and sustaining well-being?

- the space of the forest, healing and fertility
- *Mdimi* and *Mighabho* forest spirits
- Christians and state actors feel the need to distance herbal healing from 'witchcraft'



This project investigates the meaning of *kiasili* within the context of changing foodscapes and access to forests in West Tanzania.

It asks

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with beekeepers, farmers and healers, I approach these questions from the perspective of Environmental and Economic Anthropology, and Multispecies Ethnography.



Katabhi Mighabho Tree in Katabi National Park

Contact
emelien.devos@ugent.be
research.flw.ugent.be/en/emelien.devos