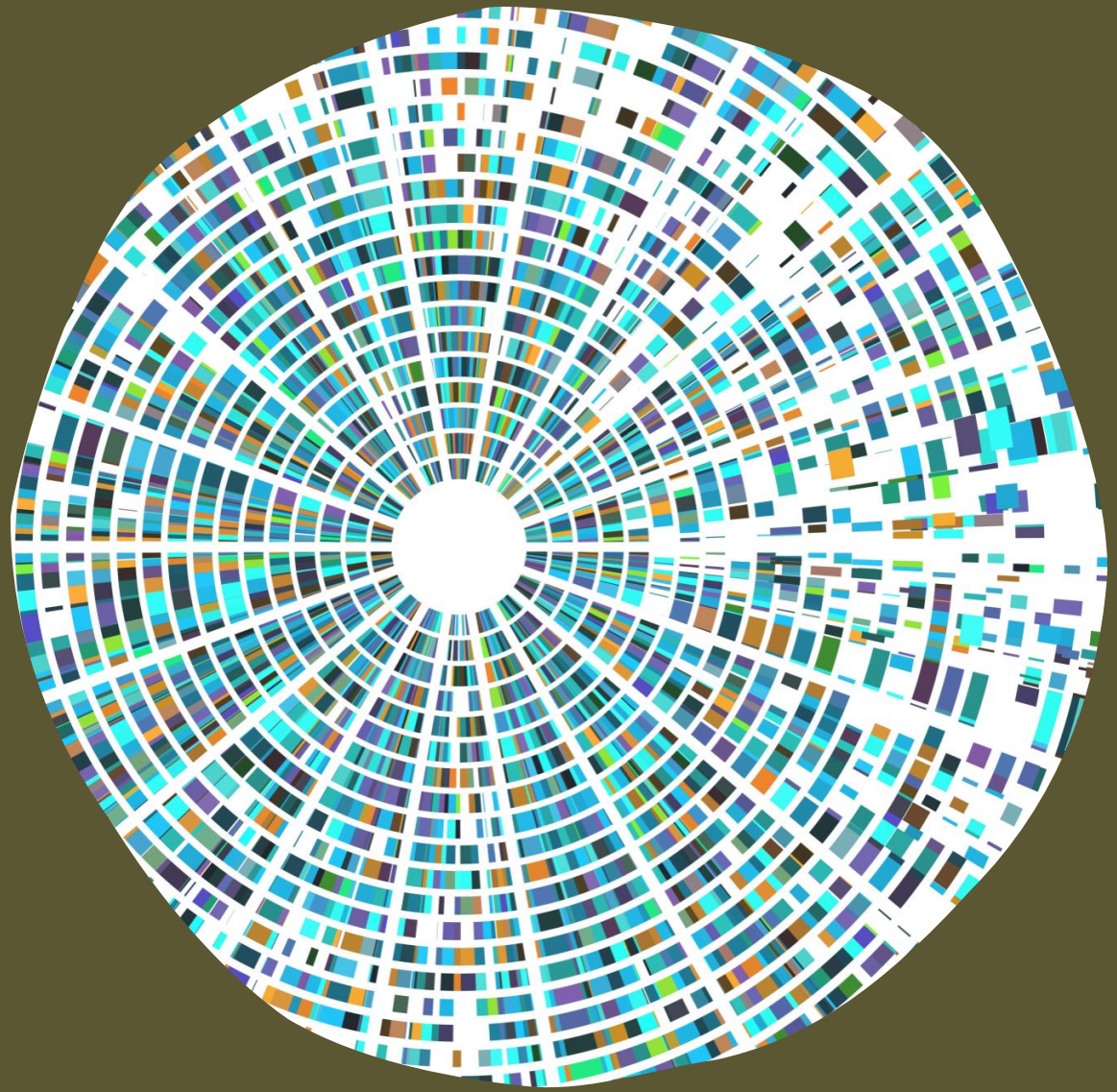
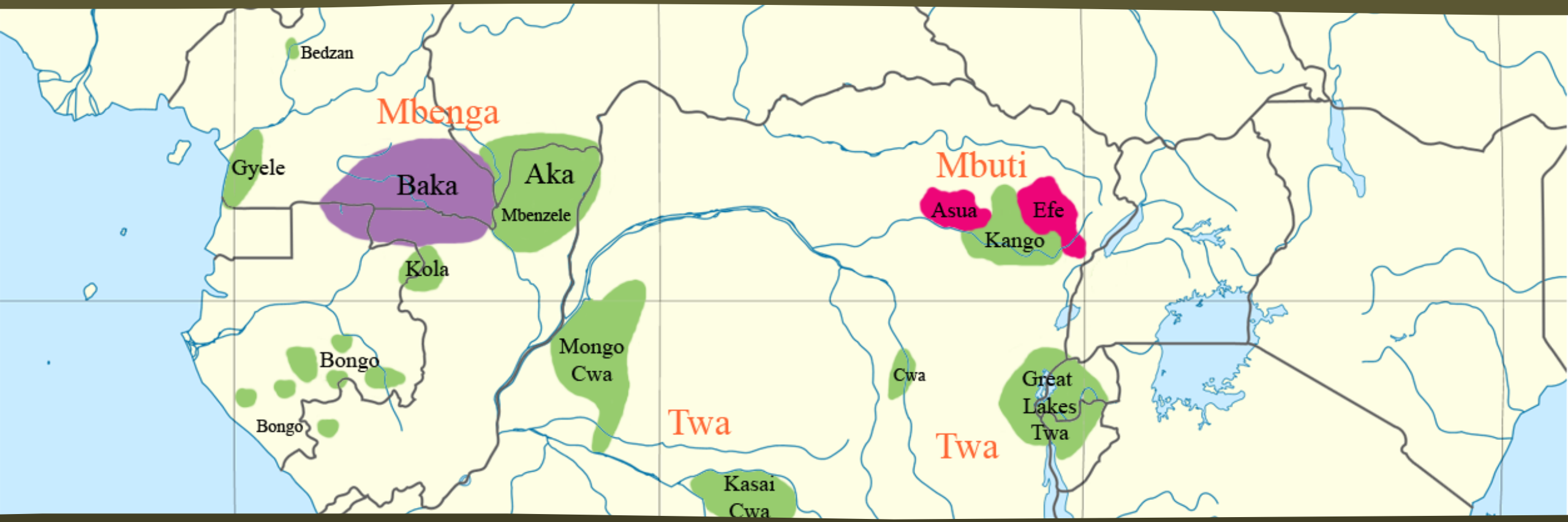


Living in the Ituri Rainforest

The Mbuti and Spheres

Location: Congo, Central Africa and Cameroon, West Africa









The Mbuti

- Described as ‘the forest people’.
- The Mbuti live within a dark and dense rainforest in bands that move regularly within a given territory.
- Rich diverse diet provided by the forest. Methods, foraging, fishing and using nets to hunt for meat – including elephants.
- Build small ‘disposable’ huts from forest materials
- Rely on the medicines that the forest provides when ill.

The Mbuti, and other similar groups in the forest, have lived in the area f or approx. 3000 years.

The remaining forest is now surrounded by farming Bantu neighbours who immigrated into the area more recently, and who are cutting down the forest to sell for timber.

According to Turnbull, the Mbuti say they ridicule, trick and tease the Bantu relentlessly.

Other accounts suggest that the Bantu use the Mbuti and the Baka for cheap labour.

A picture of a group of adults



THE PIGMIES AS COMPARED WITH ENGLISH OFFICERS, SOUDANESE, AND ZANZIBARIS.
(*From a Photograph by the Author.*)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Pygmies#/media/File:Comparrison_and_differances_of_size_and_hight_between_the_Wellcome_L0034845.jpg



Key Authors: Anthropologists Turnbull, Mosko and Devin



Seeing the world through the eyes of the Mbuti (and Baka)

"The forest whispers things in your ear, it casts its spell over you with its melodies. It comes looking for you at night, when you close your eyes. It tells you who you are..."

Luis Devin, *The Forest Has You*
(La foresta ti ha – Castelvecchi/LIT Edizioni)

Turnbull's work



- First revealed how the Mbuti understood the forest to Europe and America in 1961.
- He showed that the forest was economically important, *but* was primarily held as a parent, sibling and creator. This is not a metaphor, but a material reality linked to how the environment is understood.
- The forest is alive, has feelings and produces outcomes that impact on Mbuti lives, if they don't behave appropriately.

Using Turnbull's ideas, Mosko (1987) analyses Mbuti language to understand how the Mbuti conceive of their world.

- He notes that the forest is the world – even non-forested areas are described in association with the forest.
- He outlines how the forest is directly connected to all aspects of Mbuti culture and demonstrates that, rather than use the forest products, the Mbuti *live with* the forest.
- He uses the etymology of words such as forest (ndura) , womb (ndu), hut (endu) to illustrate the pervasion of the environment (aka, the forest) in Mbuti lives.
- The forest is gender fluid described interchangeably as mother, father, friend, sibling and lover.



As the forest is gender mobile, so are people.

- People are not gendered until puberty; even then different sexes are considered equal.
  - Grandparent = *tata*
  - Sibling = *apua'i*
  - Child = *miki*

- Only exceptions
- Mother = *ema*
- Father = *eba*
- Mother and father are equal, father takes over childcare when solids are eaten



Rules that apply to who is kin present as fluid/interchangable

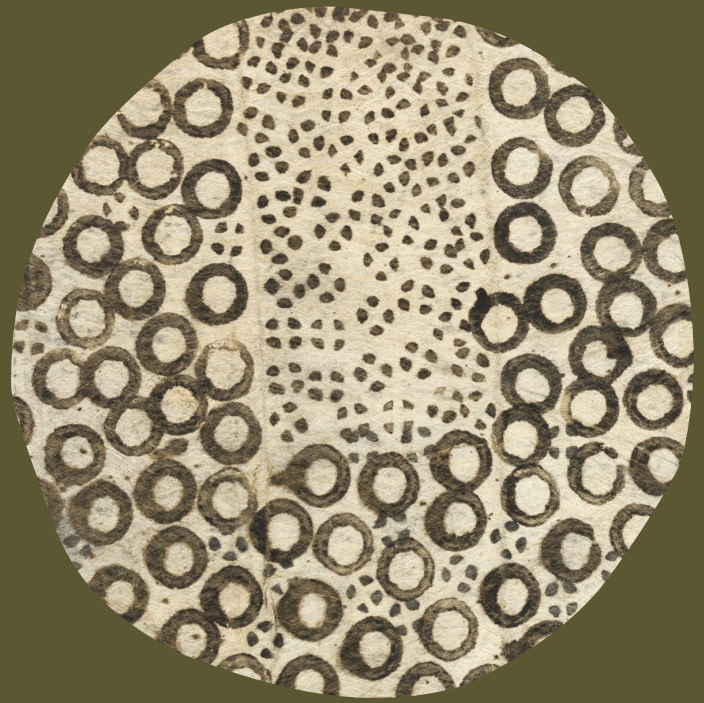
‘ The moment someone left the camp, even if they were siblings from the same womb, the kinship terms of address and reference were no longer used, but were replaced by personal names. Conversely when a stranger, totally unrelated by kinship, was accepted into the camp and became a member of that economic unit, he or she was accorded kinship status according to age and marital condition’ (Turnbull, 1983: 35)



Image: By Max Chiswick - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=44327234


Discord, music
and noise in a
spherical world

The importance of the ‘sphere’ and how this connects to the forest



‘Their world is like a "sphere.” Within this sphere we as individuals… are normally always in the center [*sic*]. When we move in time or space the sphere moves with us, so we remain in the center. … However, the Mbuti say, if one’s movement in time or space is too violent, too sudden, one can reach the edge of the sphere before it has time to catchup, and that is when a person becomes wazi-wazi, or disoriented and unpredictable. Or if the violence of the movement, the disregard for the security that comes from remaining in the center of one’s sphere, is too blatant, one may pierce through into the other world. [Turnbull1978b:166;see also Turnbull1 978a:97-98;1983a:122- 123;1983b:32-33]’ (Mosko, 1987: 899)

Children, smaller people - The *Bopi*

- At 3 the child goes to children's land where children rule
- Adults are banned
- Children are pure
- Responsibility for group purity lies with the children politicians
- The children chastise the adults



Image: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Category:Aka_people#/media/File:BaAka_girl_playing_in_the_forest.jpg



Hunting practice and the role of children





The meat myth in Turnbull (1983).

- Hunting created death
- It is a crime that pollutes people
- Immortality can be restored if it stopped



Being with the Forest



“‘I am *not* dancing alone,” he said, “I am dancing with the forest, dancing with the moon.” Then, with the utmost unconcern, he ignored me and continued his dance of love and life”’ (Turnbull, describing a conversation with Kenge, 1961:272).

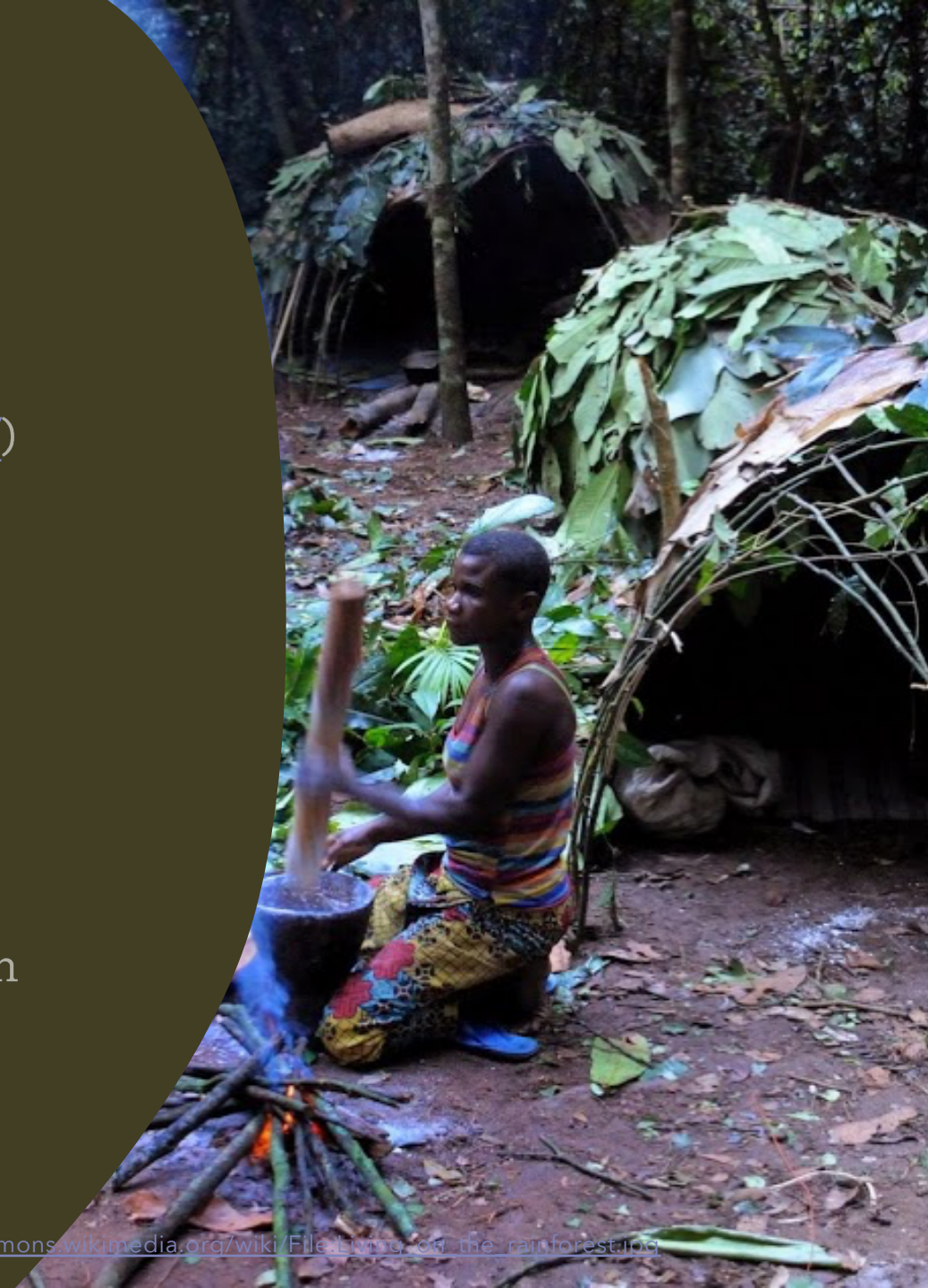
Understanding how the forest acts on you, according to Devin.

"It holds you close, it protects you. Slithering over your feet, flying into you, scratching your skin. Swimming around you when you step into water. Wherever you are, you hear its voice. Its smell. Its breath. Even if you wanted to, you cannot hide, because it has eyes everywhere. Little by little it transforms you. It swallows you up and begins to absorb you - it digests you.
The forest.
In the end you are part of its body, like the antelopes and the streams. The plants and the palm grubs. You have become an extension of it. You belong to the forest."
(Devin, 2020 http://www.luisdevin.com/books/the-forest-has-you/)



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- Turnbull, C. M. 1983 *The Human Cycle* New York: Simon and Schuster



- https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Living_on_the_rainforest.jpg

Turnbull back in the day and key texts

1961 The Forest People

1965 The Wayward Servants

1972 The Mountain People

1983 The Human Cycle

1983 The Mbuti Pygmies: Change and Adaptation

