

Forests of Belonging: Identities, Ethnicities, and Stereotypes in the Congo River Basin (Culture, Place, and Nature)

Stephanie Karin Rupp

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Forests of Belonging examines the history and ongoing transformation of ethnic and social relationships among four distinct communities--Bangando, Baka, Bakwéle, and Mbomam--in the Lobéké forest region of southeastern Cameroon. By slotting forest communities into ecological categories such as "hunters" and "gatherers," previous analyses of social relationships in tropical forests have resulted in binary frameworks that render real-life relationships invisible and that have perpetuated correspondingly misleading labels, such as "pygmy." Through rich descriptive detail resulting from field work among the Bangando, Stephanie Rupp illustrates the complexity of social ties among groups and individuals, and their connections with the natural world. She demonstrates that social and ethno-ecological relations in equatorial African forests are nuanced, contested, and shifting, and that the intricacy of these links must be considered in the design and implementation of aid policies and strategies for conservation and development.



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