



# Cutting the Vines of the Past: Environmental Histories of the Central African Rain Forest

*Tamara Giles-Vernick*

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Cutting the Vines of the Past offers a novel argument: African ways of seeing and interpreting their environments and past are not only critical to how historians write environmental history; they also have important lessons for policymakers and conservationists. Tamara Giles-Vernick demonstrates how various outsiders intervening in African land-use practices have repeatedly met failure because of their inability or unwillingness to understand how Africans see their land and their pasts.

Giles-Vernick takes as her focus the environmental and historical perceptions and knowledge of the Mpiemu people in the Central African Republic. She argues that Mpiemu opposition to a modern environmental conservation project—the Dzanga-Ndoki National Park and the Dzanga-Sangha Special Reserve—derives from the people's interpretations of their past experiences with environmental interventions imposed by concessionary companies, colonial officials, other Africans, Christian missionaries, and the postcolonial state. At the same time, Mpiemu people associate these contemporary conservationists with the bosses and Christian missionaries of the colonial past, viewing them as sources of jobs, consumer goods, and other support.

Giles-Vernick's argument will interest conservationists and policymakers as well as environmental historians. By examining Africans' environmental and historical ways of seeing and knowing, and by revealing how these have changed, Giles-Vernick offers a fresh perspective on the writing of environmental history.

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