

348 hours of recorded interviews, few Rwandan life histories are presented, though many short comments made by the research participants (and other anonymous sources) are inserted into Thompson's critique of the Rwandan government's state building enterprise. Thus, it is difficult to grasp fully the specific ways in which the state-led policies of national unity and reconciliation directly affect the daily lives of each of the 37 research participants. Some of the more nuanced observations on the contradictions and complexities of Rwandan society from the perspective of the interviewees are found in the profiles of the research participants listed in the appendix of the book.

It is also unclear what the terms unity and reconciliation mean for the 37 Rwandans participating in the study. These terms are described by Thompson through her analysis of academic literature on Rwanda. The assumption seems to be that the research participants view Rwanda's government policies in the same way as Thompson. Whether research participants misinterpret policies or are confused by them is not considered, though such a focus could have presented some interesting research findings. In the book, Rwandan citizens are divided between those that have power (political elite) and those that do not (peasants). The political elite constitute state agents, including local officials who deliver national policies locally. Here again, the book omits much of the complexity of Rwandan society. For example, local officials are classed by Thompson as elites and members of the RPF ruling party, but many of them are also peasants. The study could have examined how local officials engage in small acts of resistance in opposition to state-centric directives or be required to negotiate between central and local demands. Perhaps this would have added another dimension to Rwanda's post-genocide political order as outlined by Thompson and provided a broader understanding of Rwandan society.

Thompson does not attempt to mask her contempt for the RPF which, she writes in the preface, is informed by her experiences of working in Rwanda, as well as in Madagascar in the early 1990s where she witnessed brutal violence. Yet her overarching critique of postgenocide Rwanda could have reflected on the challenges the RPF government faces, in spite of their public success stories, even if Thompson does not agree with the approach they take. Ironically, many of these challenges are articulated by her research participants. Indeed, a book properly addressing these issues has yet to be written.

GEORGINA HOLMES
University of Portsmouth

Things Fall Apart? The Political Ecology of Forest Governance in Southern Nigeria by PAULINE VON HELLERMANN

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'Past grandeur and present decline' is a robust template of common sense, not least when it comes to 'the environment'. A growing body of literature mixes perspectives from political economy, environmental history, science studies and ethnography to understand and situate the role of past and current

environmental science and policy in shaping the environmental and peoples' relations to it, and Pauline von Hellermann's work adds to it. The title of her book evokes Chinua Achebe's classic novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and the question mark signals a challenge to what she perceives as common understandings of decline since the colonial period when Nigerian forests were protected and managed properly.

The book features a brief introduction and five thematic chapters that fall on a temporal scale from the pre-colonial era to the present with a geographical focus on present day Edo State, Southern Nigeria. Chapter 1 builds on the environmental history tradition associated with James Fairhead and Melissa Leach applied to the pre-colonial Benin Kingdom. Existing historical and archaeological research and travellers' descriptions dating back to the 17th century form the basis for an account of the likely fluctuations in forest cover and condition over time, which challenges current understandings of the area as previously covered in dense forest. Chapters 2 and 3 examine the history of forest reservations, de-reservations and forest management efforts from the early colonial period until today. They address the belief that forests were managed and protected properly during the colonial period, while more recent de-reservations and encroachments signify a failure of the post-colonial state. Drawing on archival material and her own ethnographic work, Von Hellermann illustrates how the reservation, de-reservation and forest management processes are situated in a broader context of land claims, national colonial policy and international markets and events, and how the scientific forestry models of the colonial era were, in and of themselves, poorly adapted to the context and rarely fully implemented. Chapter 4, on Taunguya farming, provides another interesting debunking of its purported failure by showing how local practice finds a way in spite of 'impossible' rules and that the social and environmental outcomes of such local practice compare favourably with those of practices condoned officially by the state. Finally, Chapter 5 on the more contemporary process of creating the Okomu National Park shows how community and conservation interests have come to terms with each other.

In seeking to challenge narratives about the past grandeur and present decline of forestry in Southern Nigeria, Von Hellermann's book exemplifies good political ecology research. Its major contribution lies in the rich empirical insights on Nigerian forestry that are drawn from an impressive variety of data sources and approaches to empirical enquiry, whereas it offers less by way of extending existing theoretical and conceptual arguments. One could have hoped for more attention to other, related research on forest governance in West Africa by scholars such as, for instance, Phil René Oyono (Cameroon) and Christian Pilegaard Hansen (Ghana) as this may have contributed to further contextualisation. Yet, this does not detract much from the overall impression that this book, in relatively few pages, manages to illustrate a range of empirical insights relevant to anyone with an interest in understanding past and present forest governance and environmental politics in West Africa and beyond.

JENS FRIIS LUND
University of Copenhagen