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"Eco(il)logical Knowledge: On Different Ways of Relating with the Known"

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In this article, I narrate an ethnographic storyline that involves forest inhabitants, local politicians, development professionals, and scientific researchers in both representational and nonrepresentational worlds of knowing. I discuss how and why, in Angola, making forest knowledge through relations of distance to the forests is crucial for attaining institutional legitimacy over the forests. This way of acquiring authority and influence is championed by a broad epistemological tendency to address only the absent, which is then made present by accredited representers. Yet this technique disempowers local forest dwellers in their everyday territories and disallows the capacity that the ecological knowns have to reveal themselves. Knowing Angolan forests through absence and distance is not just a potent contemporary form of knowledge that qualifies as a way of ruling the forests, but is also integral to widespread (neo)colonial processes of distinction and separation: the knower and the known, the representer and the represented, the "cosmopolitan intellectual" and the "rustic bestial" Other. Finally, I discuss different forms of ecological knowledge in light of ethical stances toward knowing, relationality, and, ultimately, being. (Text from author's abstract)

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