



The Social Life of Trees: Anthropological Perspectives on Tree Symbolism (Materializing Culture)

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The passionate response of the British public to the Newbury Bypass is a revealing measure of how strongly people feel about trees and the environment. Similarly, in the United States, the giant sequoia of California is an enduring national symbol that inspires intense feelings. As rainforests are sacrificed to the interests of multi-national corporations and traditional ways of life disappear, the status of forests, the cultural significance of trees, and the impact of conservation policies are subjects that have inspired intense engagement. Why do people feel so strongly about trees? With this explosion of interest in environmental issues, a serious study of what trees mean to people has long been overdue.

This interdisciplinary book responds to this need by providing the first cross-cultural analysis of tree symbolism. Drawing on rich case studies, contributors explore the processes through which trees are used as metaphors of identity and continuity. Political struggles over forest resources feature prominently, and the perceptions of trees in various cultures provide telling insights into the ways in which human societies conceptualize nature.

As well as being a major contribution to the field of symbolic anthropology, this comprehensive study will be essential reading for students in a wide range of courses and for anyone with a keen interest in the politics of ecology, the occult and neo-paganism, and the history and sociology of environmentalism in its widest sense.

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Editorial Review

Review

“This is a challenging read for anyone who wants to view current Western preoccupations as the direct, unmediated voice of the trees. But it is also a good book for anyone who has seen the anger and passion of today's bypass campaigns - and who wants to see them in a social context as well as an ecological one.” ?*3rd Stone: Archaeology, Folklore and Myth*

“This is a valuable collection . . . It deepens understanding of the processes by which humans imagine and respond to their worlds.” ?*The Australian Journal of Anthropology*

“The text is . . . persuasive and the ethnographic accounts are fascinating.” ?*Oceania*

“This is a challenging book with some rich pickings, not least Rival's overview chapter, which adds considerable value.” ?*ECOS*

“Offers fresh insights and perspectives on a topic that has evaded either global analysis or synthesis.” ?*Ecumene*

“The scope and spirit is agreeably ecumenical; the methods and contents rampantly diverse.” ?*Ecumene*

About the Author

Laura Rival, Queen Elizabeth House International Development Centre, University of Oxford

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