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# Colonial Rule and Crisis in Equatorial Africa: Southern Gabon, c. 1850-1940 (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora)

*Christopher J. Gray*

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In the second half of the nineteenth century, two very different practices of territoriality confronted each other in Southern Gabon. Clan and lineage relationships were most important in the local practice, while the French practice was informed by a territorial definition of society that had emerged with the rise of the modern nation-state and industrial capitalism. This modern territoriality used an array of bureaucratic instruments -- such as maps and censuses -- previously unknown in equatorial Africa. Such instruments denied the existence of locally created territories and were fundamental to the exercise of colonial power. Thus modern territoriality imposed categories and institutions foreign to the peoples to whom they were applied. As colonial power became more effective from the 1920s on, those institutions started to be appropriated by Gabonese cultural elites who negotiated their meanings in reference to their own traditions. The result was a strongly ambiguous condition that left its imprint on the new colonial territories and subsequently the postcolonial Gabonese state. Christopher Gray was Assistant Professor of History, Florida International University.

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