



Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa

From Jean Comaroff

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What role does ritual play in the everyday lives of modern Africans? How are so-called "traditional" cultural forms deployed by people seeking empowerment in a world where "modernity" has failed to deliver on its promises?

Some of the essays in *Modernity and Its Malcontents* address familiar anthropological issues—like witchcraft, myth, and the politics of reproduction—but treat them in fresh ways, situating them amidst the polyphonies of contemporary Africa. Others explore distinctly nontraditional subjects—among them the Nigerian popular press and soul-eating in Niger—in such a way as to confront the conceptual limits of Western social science. Together they demonstrate how ritual may be powerfully mobilized in the making of history, present, and future.

Addressing challenges posed by contemporary African realities, the authors subject such concepts as modernity, ritual, power, and history to renewed critical scrutiny. Writing about a variety of phenomena, they are united by a wish to preserve the diversity and historical specificity of local signs and practices, voices and perspectives. Their work makes a substantial and original contribution toward the historical anthropology of Africa.

The contributors, all from the Africanist circle at the University of Chicago, are Adeline Masquelier, Deborah Kaspin, J. Lorand Matory, Ralph A. Austen, Andrew Apter, Misty L. Bastian, Mark Auslander, and Pamela G. Schmoll.

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Modernity and Its Malcontents: Ritual and Power in Postcolonial Africa From Jean Comaroff **Bibliography**

- Rank: #1030054 in Books
- Brand: Jean Comaroff
- Published on: 1993-11-01
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.00" h x .80" w x 6.00" l, .70 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 272 pages

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About the Author

Jean Comaroff is the Alfred North Whitehead Professor of African and African American Studies and of Anthropology and an Oppenheimer Fellow in African Studies at Harvard University. She is the author or coauthor of many books.

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