



Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency

Margaret Thompson Drewal

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Yoruba peoples of southwestern Nigeria conceive of rituals as journeys sometimes actual, sometimes virtual. Performed as a parade or a procession, a pilgrimage, a masking display, or possession trance, the journey evokes the reflexive, progressive, transformative experience of ritual participation. "Yoruba Ritual" is an original and provocative study of these practices. Using a performance paradigm, Margaret Thompson Drewal forges a new theoretical and methodological approach to the study of ritual that is thoroughly grounded in close analysis of the thoughts and actions of the participants. Challenging traditional notions of ritual as rigid, stereotypic, and invariant, Drewal reveals ritual to be progressive, transformative, generative, and reflexive and replete with simultaneity, multifocality, contingency, indeterminacy, and intertextuality. Throughout the book prominence is given to the intentionality of actors as knowledgeable agents who transform ritual itself through play and improvisation. Integral to the narrative are interpolations about performances and their meanings by Kolawole Ositola, a scholar of Yoruba oral tradition, ritual practitioner, diviner, and master performer. Rich descriptions of rituals relating to birth, death, reincarnation, divination, and constructions of gender are rendered all the more vivid by a generous selection of field photos of actual performances.

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