

African Histories and Modernities

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This book series serves as a scholarly forum on African contributions to and negotiations of diverse modernities over time and space, with a particular emphasis on historical developments. Specifically, it aims to refute the hegemonic conception of a singular modernity, Western in origin, spreading out to encompass the globe over the last several decades. Indeed, rather than reinforcing conceptual boundaries or parameters, the series instead looks to receive and respond to changing perspectives on an important but inherently nebulous idea, deliberately creating a space in which multiple modernities can interact, overlap, and conflict. While privileging works that emphasize historical change over time, the series will also feature scholarship that blurs the lines between the historical and the contemporary, recognizing the ways in which our changing understandings of modernity in the present have the capacity to affect the way we think about African and global histories.

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African Battle Traditions of Insult

Verbal Arts, Song-Poetry, and Performance

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*In memory of
Okitiakpe, Memerume, Oloya, and other traditional African poets and
performers who blazed the battle tradition of insult.*

ABOUT THE BOOK

This book explores the “battles” of words, songs, poetry, and performance in Africa and the African Diaspora. These are usually highly competitive artistic contests in which rival parties duel for supremacy in poetry composition and/or its performance. This volume covers the history of this battle tradition, from its origins in Africa, especially the udje and halo of the Urhobo and Ewe, respectively, and other African variants, its transportation to the Americas and the Caribbean region during the Atlantic slave trade period, and its modern and contemporary manifestations as battle rap or other forms of popular music in Africa. Almost everywhere there are contemporary manifestations of the more traditional older genres. The book is thus made up of studies of contests in which rivals duel for supremacy in verbal arts, song-poetry, and performance as they display their wit, sense of humor, and poetic expertise.

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