

The Power of African Cultures (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora)

Toyin Falola



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The Power of African Cultures (Rochester Studies in African History and the Diaspora) Toyin Falola This book focuses on the modern cultures of Africa, from the consequences of the imposition of Western rule to the current struggles to define national identities in the context of neo-liberal economic policies and globalization. The book argues that it is against the backdrop of foreign influences that Africa has defined for itself notions of identity and development. African cultures have been evolving in response to change, and in other ways solidly rooted in a shared past. The book successfully deconstructs the last one hundred and fifty years of cultures that have been disrupted, replaced and resurrected. The Power of African Cultures challenges many preconceived notions, such as male dominance and female submission, the supposed unity of ethnic groups, and contemporary Western stereotypes of Africans. The book shows the dynamism of African cultures to adapt to foreign imposition. Even as colonial rule forced the adoption of foreign institutions and cultures, African cultures appropriated these elements. Traditions were reworked, symbols redefined, and the past situated in contemporary problems in order to accommodate the modern era. The book illustrates the intersection between culture and politics in history and in the present. An ongoing dialogue exists between the upholding of traditional African culture and the imposition of a modern culture, and the identity of a people and their relationships to each other and the outside world are at stake. All societies deal with the ambiguity and tensions of maintaining an old world in the face of new developments, but Africans have had to come to terms with an ambiguous identity, as new nation states, institutions, religions, languages and gender roles established themselves on old traditions and understandings of the world. Toyin Falola is the Jacob and Frances Sanger Mossiker Chair in the Humanities and University Distinguished Teaching Professor at the University of Texas at Austin, and author of Nationalism and African Intellectuals and Violence in Nigeria, both from the University of Rochester Press.

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