

Falen

African Science: Witchcraft, Vodun, and Healing in Southern Benin

In this sensitive and personal investigation into Benin's occult world, Douglas J. Falen wrestles with the challenges of encountering a reality in which magic, science, and the Vodun religion converge into a single universal force. He takes seriously his Beninese interlocutors' insistence that the indigenous phenomenon known as àṣe ("witchcraft") is an African science, credited with fantastic and productive deeds, such as teleportation and supernatural healing. Although the Beninese understanding of àṣe reflects positive scientific properties in its use of specialized knowledge to harness nature's energy and realize economic success, its boundless power is inherently ambivalent because it can corrupt its users, who dispense death and destruction. Witches and healers are equivalent to supervillains and superheroes, locked in epic battles over malevolent and benevolent human desires. Beninese people's discourse about such mystical confrontations expresses a philosophy of moral duality and cosmic balance. Falen demonstrates how a deep engagement with another lived reality opens our minds and contributes to understanding across cultural difference.



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