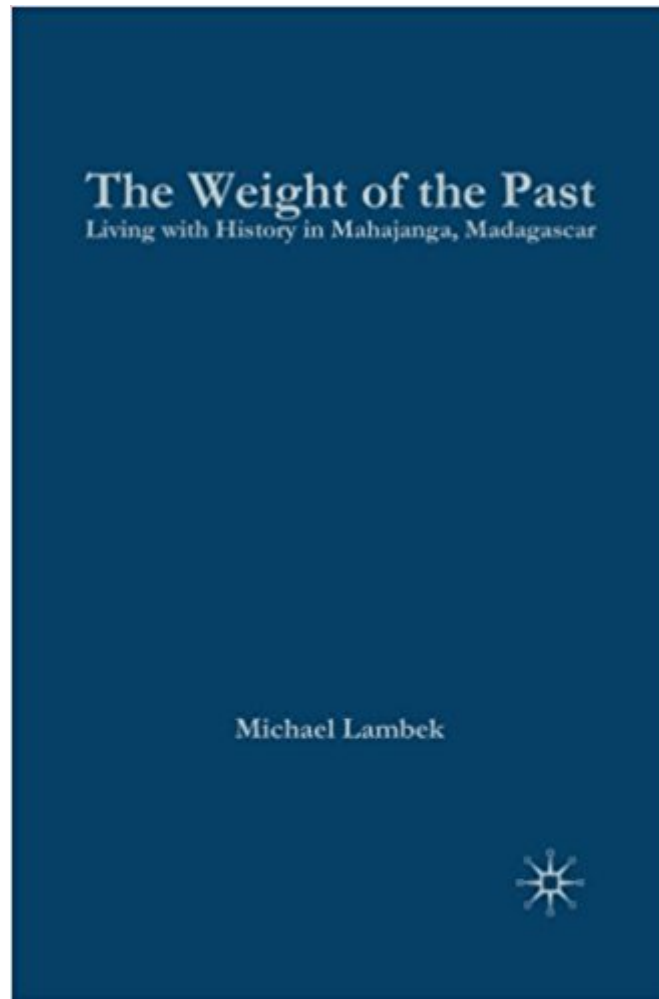


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The Weight Of The Past: Living With History In Mahajanga, Madagascar



Synopsis

In *The Weight of the Past*, Michael Lambek explores the complex ways that history shapes, constrains, and enables daily life. Focusing on ritual performances of spirit mediumship in a multifaceted religious landscape, Lambek's analysis reveals the multiple ways that Sakalava 'bear' history. In Mahajanga, Madagascar, to bear history is at once a weighty obligation, a creative re-birthing, a scrupulous cultivation, and an exuberant performance of the past. To bear history is to serve and to suffer it, but also to be informed, enlightened, and sanctified. Royal ancestors emerge in spirit mediums to comment on the present from multiple voices and generate a refracted, ironic historical consciousness. This book describes the division of labour, creative production (poiesis), and ethical practice (phronesis) entailed in imagining, embodying, and serving the past. It is at once a vivid ethnography of Sakalava life and a significant intervention in anthropological debates on culture and history, structure and practice, advocating a theoretical approach informed by Aristotelian categories of understanding. Ethnographically rich and engagingly written, this book will be essential reading for courses in the anthropology of religion, ritual, or historical consciousness.

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