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978-0-521-51922-9 - Acts of Activism: Human Rights as Radical Performance

D. Soyini Madison

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ACTS OF ACTIVISM

Madison presents the neglected yet compelling and necessary story of local activists in South Saharan Africa who employ modes of performance as tactics of resistance and intervention in their day-to-day struggles for human rights and social justice. The dynamic relationships between performance and activism are illustrated in three case studies or acts of activism: Act I presents a battle between tradition and modernity as the bodies of African women are caught in the cross-fire. Act II focuses on “water democracy” as activists fight for safe, accessible public water as a human right. Act III examines the efficacy of street performance and Theatre for Development in the oral histories of Ghanaian gender activists committed to the well-being of women and children. Local activism is illuminated and extended as Madison translates these experiences to the public stage. Unique to this book is the continuing juxtaposition between the everyday performances “on the ground” of local activism and their staged enactments before theatre audiences in Ghana and the USA. Madison beautifully demonstrates how these disparate sites of performance cohere in the service of rights, justice, and activism.

D. SOYINI MADISON is Professor of Performance Studies and Anthropology, and served as Interim Director of the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University. She is the author of *Critical Ethnography: Method, Performance, and Ethics* (2005) and the editor of *The Woman That I Am: Literature and Culture of Contemporary Women of Color* (1994). Madison lived in West Africa as a Senior Fulbright Scholar and has conducted field research over the past ten years on the performance tactics of local human rights activists in Ghana.

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To my sister

Versions of scenes from this book have appeared in the following publications: *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies*, eds. N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, and L. Tuhiwa Smith (2008); *Performance Research: A Journal of the Arts*, 12:3 (2007); *Remembering: Oral History Performance*, ed. Della Pollock (2005), and *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, eds. Norman Denzin and Yvonne Lincoln (2005).

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