

# Aso Ebi

## Dress, Fashion, Visual Culture, and Urban Cosmopolitanism in West Africa

Series: African Perspectives

The Nigerian and West African practice of aso ebi fashion invokes notions of wealth and group dynamics in social gatherings. Okechukwu Nwafor's volume *Aso Ebi* investigates the practice in the cosmopolitan urban setting of Lagos, and argues that the visual and consumerist hype typical of the late capitalist system feeds this unique fashion practice. The book suggests that dress, fashion, aso ebi, and photography engender a new visual culture that largely reflects the economics of mundane living. Nwafor examines the practice's societal dilemma, whereby the solidarity of aso ebi is dismissed by many as an ephemeral transaction. A circuitous transaction among photographers, fashion magazine producers, textile merchants, tailors, and individual fashionistas reinvents aso ebi as a product of cosmopolitan urban modernity. The results are a fetishization of various forms of commodity culture, personality cults through mass followership, the negotiation of symbolic power through mass-produced images, exchange value in human relationships through gifts, and a form of exclusion achieved through digital photo editing. Aso ebi has become an essential part of Lagos cosmopolitanism: as a rising form of a unique visual culture it is central to the unprecedented spread of a unique West African fashion style that revels in excessive textile overflow. This extreme dress style is what an individual requires to transcend the lack imposed by the chaos of the postcolonial city.

**Okechukwu Nwafor** is Professor of Art History at the Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria and Research Fellow in the Department of the History of Art, University of Michigan.

"There is not another book like it. The author presents a new look at aso ebi, a dress practice taken for granted and relatively ignored."

—Elisha Renne, University of Michigan

"Nwafor's book fills a gap in the literature regarding the social dynamics of fashion and dress in Lagos, which is currently widely known for its high-end fashion designers, but not for how the fashion system works "on the ground" in Lagos for major social events such as aso ebi."

—Joanne Eicher, University of Minnesota



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