

## Fashioning Postfeminism: Spectacular Femininity and Transnational Culture, by Simidele Dosekun. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2020.

Rosemary Oyinlola Popoola

*Fashioning Postfeminism: Spectacular Femininity and Transnational Culture* seeks to recentre and challenge dominant narratives about postfeminism from the standpoint of often silenced and marginalized women of the Global South, specifically socio-economically privileged Nigerian women. Over many years, postfeminism has been framed as the exclusive preserve of White women and girls—with only a few exceptional Black women like singer Beyoncé Knowles and model Tyra Banks seen as qualified to embody postfeminism in Western narratives. Dosekun challenges the hegemonic Western narrative about feminism by insisting that postfeminism is “a culture that circulates both performatively and transnationally” (Dosekun, 2020: 5). Drawing from the lived experiences of 18 middle-class women in Lagos, the author argues that postfeminist subjects are not just Westernized women, but also women of other parts of the world. In many ways, the book is an indictment of postfeminist ideals. It highlights the lives of a specific group of women in Lagos who have embraced a spectacular style of femininity as a new form of female empowerment and agency. The text interrogates the promises and illusions of happiness that postfeminism offers women, “the forms of unhappiness that they conceal”, the contradictions of the women who exemplify it, and how these new styles of hyperfemininity have continued to subjugate women to patriarchy and structures of oppression in ways that they are either conscious or unconscious of (3). Ultimately, as the author powerfully asserts, the book is about how the idea of postfeminism “is lived and inhabited in the flesh” (3).

Drawing from diverse conceptual, epistemological, and methodological viewpoints, Dosekun insists that globalization, media, local history, location, and economic status play significant roles in how postfeminism is lived or experienced in Lagos. The book claims a space for Black women in postfeminist discourse. It is a paradigm shift, a total departure from how we conceive the who, where, and how of postfeminism. The five-chapter book covers issues ranging from historical

background to spectacularized dress style in Lagos; how class division and economic inequality allow a certain class of women to afford the consumerist and individualistic lifestyle that postfeminism offers; sources from which they finance their fashion; polemics about the authenticity and appropriateness of their fashion, and the risk that beauty technologies pose to women and the society where spectacularized femininity is associated with being intellectually deficient.

Chapter One gives African women agency in self-fashioning and fashionability by positioning them as active participants and creators of transnational fashion trends. Dosekun argues that fashion is not imported into Africa but is a product of African women's creativity and ingenuity, spanning centuries of independent internal evolution and external contact. Drawing from a multiplicity of historical and ethnographic sources, the author positions fashion and fashionability as indigenous to Lagos. She asks readers to think beyond colonial narratives that suggest that Lagos is the hub of fashion and fashionability because of its precolonial/colonial contact with the Western world or because it was the former capital of Nigeria. Chapter Two underscores the place of power and culture in shaping the subjectivity of women in postfeminism. It engages with the numerous ways in which attitude, mannerism, bodily stylistics, demeanour, dress practice, beauty repertoires, and use of beauty technologies by middle-class women in Lagos simultaneously contradict and conform to postfeminist ideas. It highlights the constraint, discomfort, and even physical pains embedded in beauty practices and technologies. Relying on interviews with women across various professions—from banking to media—the author highlights the tedious and laborious processes associated with embodying postfeminism, as well as the financial cost.

Chapter Three shifts attention to the economics of hyperfemininity, visibility, and stylization; the numerous physical and social-psychic risks that women encounter in pursuit of feminine ideals; the aesthetic labour that spectacular femininity demands, and the feminine rationality that can turn a woman into an “aesthetic entrepreneur” (123). Equally significant are the rationality, strategy, and experiences, and the skilled and quasi-scientific approach that women use to solve beauty problems, as well as the “solutions” they employ, along with the risk of attachment to beauty technologies (94).

In Chapter Four, Dosekun tackles the politics, psychology, nationalism, racism, and antiracism around Black hair and hair practices, and Black beauty and

repertoires. The author moves from focusing on the generalities of postfeminist beauty standards to engaging with the politics of Black hair and beauty, as well as with the intersection of race, history, politics, scientific racism, and location in shaping understandings and politics of hair. Dosekun challenges the dominant thinking about Black hair, beauty, and practices that suggest Black women's use of weaves and processed hair, among others, are expressions of "a racial inferiority complex" and an orientation towards "white aesthetics" (88). She emphasizes the fluidity of the concept of Blackness and the multiple ways and forms of Black beauty, pointing to how Black hair practices are constantly evolving, and changing. Dosekun argues "that black beauty is a complex construct" that is not always "centered on whiteness" (89). The author asserts that the women she focuses on bought hair originating outside White bodies, particularly from places like Brazil and India, affirming that Black women did not desire nor aspire to Whiteness (67-8; 92). Dosekun argues that we must accept those who use weaves and other beauty repertoires of Whiteness as agentic without forgetting the painful history and conditions that render them desirable for many Black women.

The final chapter takes on the question of dominant gendered ontologies and epistemologies of the body over mind and examines how middle-class women in Lagos navigate this tension by aligning themselves with "masculinized norms of character and substance" to negate the "stereotype of exaggerated femininity as a fruitless and intellectually vacant subject position" (120). The chapter focuses on how Dosekun's participants navigate between "what others might make of them and how they saw and felt about themselves" and how they seek to find a middle point (116). Through the lived experiences of her participants, Dosekun reveals that whatever her "intelligence, professionalism, and sense of empowerment," the spectacular professional woman is not beyond sexist interpretation by members of society (127).

Dosekun's work highlights how postfeminism, through the promissory note of a new feminine beauty and desirability, pushes women towards detrimental technologies and practices and acts. More so, it unearths the cruelties of neoliberalism and how consumerism pushes women to pursue ideals and standards that are "impossible to inhabit" (143). Finally, she asks her audience to be alert to a new, stylish, and fun feminism that is touted by celebrities and media because "feminism cannot be happy, cannot be popular, [and] cannot be fashionable" (145).

The book will appeal to scholars across diverse fields. It transcends disciplinary boundaries and is a valuable text for social activists, scholars, and students of history, gender, women's studies, women's history, feminism, media, cultural studies, globalization, and development. In addition, the textuality of this book gives agency to the voices, echoes, and imagery that readers may have heard or seen about women around them or those whom they personally know.