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How to Become a Big Man in Africa

Subalternity, Elites, and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria

Wale Adebani

DESCRIPTION

Can subalterns transform themselves into members of the elite, and what does it take to do so? And how do those efforts reveal the nature of ethnic politics in postcolonial Africa?

How to Become a Big Man in Africa: Subalternity, Elites, and Ethnic Politics in Contemporary Nigeria examines these questions by revealing how, through ethno-regional conflict, violence and cultural activities, an artisan, Gani Adams, transformed himself into the holder of the most prestigious chieftaincy title among the Yoruba. Addressing persistent gaps in anthropological studies of the subaltern and of "big men" in politics through in-depth biography and rich social history, Wale Adebani follows Adams and other major figures in Nigeria's Oodua People's Congress (OPC) over two decades of ethnographic study and visual representations. Challenging existing models of African political mobility by leveraging his initial lack of formal education into a position of power, Adams moved from a "radical lumpen" and "area boy" to a "big man" who continues to struggle—and reflect—over the significance of his role as a cultural subject. Blurring the lines between tradition and modernity, Adams and his group have used Yoruba rituals to simultaneously claim authenticity and champion new movements for democracy and self-determination.

How to Become a Big Man in Africa encourages us to understand the full complexity of Adams's political trajectory and how it reflects the structural and personal realities of becoming a "Big Man" in the contemporary postcolony.

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Wale Adebani is the Presidential Penn Compact Professor of Africana Studies with secondary appointment in the Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania. He is a Research Associate at the African Studies Center, Oxford University and author of *Yorùbá Elites and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria: báfemi Awólówò and Corporate Agency*, and editor of *Everyday State and Democracy in Africa: Ethnographic Encounters*.

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