

RE-TRADITIONALISATION, COMPETITION OR AIDED WARFARE? INTERROGATING THE DRIVERS OF WESTERN AND LOCAL FASHION AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

Nigerian universities have come to represent a place where Western and traditional fashion frequently interact. Though the manifestations of this “interaction” are multiple (in terms of competition, acculturation, collaborations and even conflict), factors such as globalization, government, university authorities, the media, individuals, and religious groups have increasingly, served as drivers. Acting as drivers, not only do these factors influence and sometimes determine what is fashionable in support of one of the two, but there is a growing trend where some of these factors have forcefully determined what is acceptable or unacceptable in the university. This paper locates the contestations between Western and traditional fashion in terms of re-traditionalisation, competition and/or aided warfare among female students of two public Nigerian Universities: University of Lagos and University of Ibadan, and two private universities, Babcock and Covenant. Also, based on an examination of these emerging trends among female students at the selected universities, the paper engages two interrelated questions: What are the representations of these factors (drivers) in Nigerian universities? And second, to what extent is the contestation between Western and local fashion on university campuses in Nigeria determined or influenced by these drivers? To engage these questions, a number of In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on fashion on four Nigerian University Campuses were undertaken to get responses from relevant stakeholders.

Keywords: Re-traditionalisation, Fashion and non-fashion factors.

INTRODUCTION

Over the years, students of higher institutions, especially universities and polytechnics have been accused of dressing indecently within campuses. Women’s dressing has become the site for policing and debates about social and moral decay in Nigeria with calls for intervention within Nigeria’s higher education institutions, by religious organisations, the media and government. One of the ways some institutions are trying to arrest this situation is through the introduction of dress codes for both male and female students. This dress code policy is

gradually becoming widespread within the University systems as evident in the banning of certain type of clothing and particularly any 'revealing' clothes by young women because they ostensibly do not reflect the seriousness, dignity and character moulding nature of the academic enterprise and thereby making sexual violation and harassment a marked feature of university life in Nigeria.

Against this back drop, this paper attempts to locate the contestations between Western and traditional fashion in terms of re-traditionalisation, competition and/or aided warfare among female students of selected Nigerian Universities: two public universities, the University of Ibadan (where dress codes are part of the hidden curriculum) and University of Lagos and two private universities, Babcock and Covenant Universities that have published dress codes for students. University of Ibadan, founded in the year 1948 is Nigeria's oldest university. University of Lagos established in 1962 is among the first generation of over 60 federal universities in Nigeria today. Both Babcock and Covenant Universities are categorized as private and Christian mission universities in Nigeria.

Against the backdrop of the debate on the appropriateness of the emerging fashion trends among female students in Nigerian Universities and the enactment of dress code policies in some, the paper interrogates the factors that drive the fashion trend in Nigerian universities and the extent of the contestation between Western and local fashion on university campuses in Nigeria as influenced by these drivers. To engage these questions, a number of In-depth Interviews (IDIs) and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) on Fashion on Nigerian Campuses were employed.

DRESS CODE IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Clothing, dress patterns or adornment is an aspect of human physical appearance which has social significance. Clothing or dress forms are culture bound, dynamic and exhibits intergenerational identification that is tied to a specific transformation process. It is one of the cultural denominators of mankind (Art. 25, UDHR). Since clothing is cultural, what is considered acceptable dress or clothing patterns are guided by norms, and cultural values that specify expected behaviour in everyday situation. (Fayeye, n.d). Universal cultural patterns influence the forms and functions of dress which exist within a specific culture. According to Pokornowski *et.al* (1985,6) value orientations, technology, morals, hygiene, ritual, symbolism, and aesthetics are cultural patterns that affect the selection of one dress variable over another".

In a largely traditional society like Nigeria where mainstream values are conveyed through beliefs, rules and structure, fashion, dressing and dress patterns form part of these values. Also, our universities have come to represent places where Western and traditional fashion frequently interact. In the process of interaction, students from diverse backgrounds come together and express their dress sense in varying modes and forms; engendering varying opinions and policies from the articulate public, school administrators, visitors, lecturers, non-teaching staff, parents and students on what students should wear on campus (Anderson, 2001). Fashion trends and clothing patterns by students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria have thus become a source of concern to stakeholders in the educational sector. One of the ways some institutions are trying to arrest this situation is through the introduction of dress codes for both male and female students. This dress code policy is gradually becoming widespread within the University and it is often questioned whether the free will of students at this level needs to be curtailed.

It is commonly said that practically everyday, there are complaints about the provocative and indecent dressing of students, most especially the female students. The complaints are usually about female students wearing skimpy, tight fitting and transparent outfits that expose vital parts of their body to lectures and other social gatherings in and outside campus. By wearing dirty jeans with pockets of holes deliberately created around the knees and lower parts of the trousers and the waist of their trousers lowered at the middle of their two bottom lobes, revealing their pants (underwear); piercing of any part of the body and tattooing on part of their body, some of the male students are also adjudged guilty of indecent dressing in different ways than that of the girls. (Gbadegbe Richard Selase and Quashie Mawuli, 2013, 166)

Consequently, dress codes have been introduced in a number of Nigerian Universities; Federal Universities, State Universities and privately owned Universities. Specific dress codes applying to lecture halls have been instituted by some universities and faculties; other universities have gone further to specify a regulated dress code - specific uniform dress for students in some professional courses such as Medicine, Law, and Accounting among others. In yet some universities, lecturers in the Clinical Sciences for instance have been instrumental in initiating reforms to student attire. In the College of Medicine, University of Lagos for instance, "Ladies should not wear too tight dresses; no jeans with frills; no tattered jeans; no trousers which tend to show all the contours; the blouses should not expose the bellies or part of the breast; no

spaghetti tops; no mini dresses up to the upper thigh level; skirts should not be slit to the upper thigh level. In short, students must not attend classes half-naked." Trousers, should be well tailored and of neutral colours. Artificial nails, "flamboyant" jewellery, slippers, high platform shoes and long hair are banned in clinics and laboratories for the students' own safety. Male students, too, are asked to leave their slippers at home, to have their shirts tucked in and properly buttoned and to make sure their jeans are not dirty or torn. Braided hair, earrings and flowing gowns have been banished from laboratories (<http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/164321.article>). Medical students were provided with a number of reasons for adhering to a dress code. These included an appeal to tradition, professional appearance ('neat and smart') and the idea that wearing the uniform inspired mutual confidence between patients and medical students (future doctors). Law faculties in Nigerian universities have also instituted a student dress code: white shirt and black trousers for male students, and white shirt and black skirt for females. The Council of Legal Education, mandated Law faculties to enforce this dress code. Some other faculties are fairly flexible on the issue (Fatunde, 2010).

Evidently, the dress code sets the tone for the atmosphere on our campus. While there are different types of dress codes, from uniforms to acceptable attire, the primary rationale is instilling proper grooming standards in students in manners that project an appropriate image for the student, university, and community and ensures that students dress properly and decently.

Indecent dressing can be understood from the premise of prevailing norms and acceptable ways of dressing relative to the society in which it is being perpetrated. That is to say, local value orientation exert a subtle force over the usages of forms of dress. In some cases, custom and law encourage forms of dress to remain the same, or encourage change in dressing from traditional forms and materials, to Western-based models. In some other circumstances, the reverse is the case. The governments of Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Malawi in the past condemned the near nudity of traditional forms of dress and also proscribed Western dress which they saw as symbols of Westernization and its negative values (Audry Wipper, 1972). Also in Zaire, President Mobutu officially rejected western dress for both men and women (FSB Kazadi, 1978). Evidently, the meaning of indecent dressing is associated with societal expectations. The perception of indecent dressing can only be appropriately defined in the understanding of societal norms, cultural or religious restrictions. What is indecent in Nigeria

for instance, may be decent elsewhere. This buttresses the assertion of some school of thought that indecent dressing is a consequence of “foreign culture.”

What then is indecent dressing? Indecent dressing can be described as the improper way of dressing or the generally unaccepted way of dressing which exposes vital parts of the human body. That is, inappropriate and provocative ways of dressing relative to specific societies or cultures. According to Oyeleye et al (2012), indecent dressing means the deliberate exposure of one’s body to the public. This practice violates the acceptable norms and values of the society. Adeboye (2012) defined indecent dressing as the wearing of clothes that are not appropriate for a particular occasion or situation. Egwim (2010), referred to indecent dressing as the attitude of someone, male or female that dresses to showoff parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks or even the underwear particularly those of the ladies that need to be covered. This habit is embraced by all ages in the society but it is prevalent among youths. As vividly portrayed by Omede :

What the girls call skirts that they wear is just “one inch” longer than their pants. When they put on such dresses, they struggle to sit down, find difficulty in climbing machines [motorcycles] , cross gutters as well as pick anything from the ground. Apart from the skimpy and tight fitting nature of these dresses, they are again transparent; revealing certain parts of the bodies that under normal dressing patterns ought to be hidden away from the glare of people. In the case of boys, their pattern of dress ... makes them to look so dirty and very unattractive with unkempt hairs and dirty jeans having pockets of holes deliberately created around the knees and the lower part of the trousers allowed to flow on the ground because they go through their heels into their legs as socks. The waist of their trousers are lowered and fastened tightly at the middle of the two bottom lobes to reveal their boxers (pants). And when they are walking, they drag their legs and one of their hands particularly, the left one, cupping their invisible scrotum as if they will fall to the ground if not supported (Omede, 2011)

These types of dressing are considered indecent in the Nigerian context and are judged to be morally offensive by some. In order to curb unacceptable forms of dressing and in the belief that education is incomplete without teaching the right principles in regard to dress, some Nigerian Universities enacted dress code policies.

RATIONALE FOR INSTITUTING DRESS CODE POLICIES

Some universities in Nigeria have variously introduced dress codes for their students for varying reasons. The rationale for the adoption of the dress code in universities according to Fayokun, Adedeji, and Oyebade (2009, 61) is founded on reasoning such as:

- (1) Enforcement of morality and decency;

- (2) Upholding of academic standards;
- (3) Promotion of decorum and discipline in academic atmosphere;
- (4) Security awareness.

First, and of great importance appears to be the need to preserve moral standards. The types of dressing prevalent among some students on Nigerian campuses have been described as outrageous. There are campuses that establish a relationship between indecent dressing and morality which they ascribe some religious meanings to. The opinion variously expressed that dress affects behaviour and performance is not new. "Clothes make man", "The apparel often proclaim the man", "Good clothes open all doors", "dress right, act right" are all current thoughts on clothing. For instance, the "dress code is one of the unique aspects of Covenant University's culture that students must imbibe to make their academic pursuits pleasurable" (Covenant University 2013-2017 Student Hand Book). The University "attaches great importance to modest and decent dressing" and asserts that "dressing adds value to a person's personality, self-confidence and self-worth. In Babcock University, "the way you dress is the way you are addressed." Babcock University "acknowledges that our dress and grooming often reflect both our philosophy of life and our emotional maturity" The University further maintains that "In dress, as in all things else, it is our privilege to honor our Creator. "He desires our clothing to be not only neat and healthful, but appropriate and becoming...A person's character is judged by his or her style of dress. A refined taste, a cultivated mind, will be revealed in the choice of simple and appropriate attire" (Babcock University. Students Hand Book, 2013-2015)

Another reason is the need to instill discipline and a sense of responsibility among university students. In Babcock University, "one purpose of the University, ...is to encourage each student to develop a personal lasting philosophy of dress and grooming". The assumption is that discipline should be a basic and essential part of university education, and a defined dress code is one of the ways to impart such and inculcate a sense of responsibility when students of higher institutions dress in a proper manner. The point in this position is that many professions and companies compel certain dress code which a defined dress code system on campus prepares students for.

There is also the possibility of some male lecturers or even female lecturers falling prey to such inappropriate dressing which may result in sexual favours between the lecturers on one hand and students on the other hand. The enactment of a dress code will reduce the level of sexual

abuse and harassment on campuses. This belief is predicated on the saying ‘you are addressed the way you are dressed “. A lot of students, predominantly female have allegedly been molested by their lecturers simply because their indecent dressings have appealed to the latter. Finally, on security, because of how the female students are dressed, many of them “had at one time or the other become victims of rape, lured into prostitution, used for ritual purpose, unable to complete their education or training and also engaged in other ancillary social and moral problems like cultism and lying to mention these few” Omede, 2009).

NATURE OF DRESSING AMONG FEMALE STUDENTS IN SELECTED NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES

Observation of the hallways and walkways of Universities of Lagos and Ibadan and Babcock and Covenant Universities lend credence to the argument that students have pushed their forms of dressing to the limit thus compelling the authorities of some universities to prescribing dress codes for their students.

Our survey indicates that students essentially perceive themselves to be young adults who need to adopt fashionable clothing patterns in order to be attractive to the opposite sex through suggestive dressing; secure the attention of peers, teachers and the members of the school community; exhibit parental socio-economic status or class in some cases; assume the role of a pace-setter in being the gatekeepers of fashions trends; cover up a sense of failure in academic efforts through displacement efforts in clothing; imitate certain role models especially media celebrities; and exhibit novel and attractive foreign dress patterns. The result of this mind set is that students exhibit their freedom of adornment in forms of dressing that some perceive to infringe on the right of others to sustain concentration and focus in the school setting.

Some universities like Babcock and Covenant have published in their manuals, specifically, the types of dresses that their male and female students are not allowed to wear. Except for a few regulations the stipulated dress codes in both Universities are largely similar as illustrated in the tables below.

Table 1: Dress Code for Female Students in Babcock and Covenant Universities

Babcock University	Covenant University
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<p>Skirts and skirt suits must be long enough to cover the knees (at least 3 inches below) and must not be slit up to the knee. This is to ensure that skirts and gowns cover the knees whether the wearer is standing, walking, sitting, bending or kneeling.</p>	<p>Skirts could be straight, flared or pleated. Pencil skirts and skirts with uneven edges are not allowed. Lacy skirts are better worn to church. None should be tight or body-hugging.</p>
<p>Bare midriff-blouses/shirts or any tight blouse, worn in a way that exposes undergarments or intimate body parts (back, chest, thigh, abdomen, armpits, shoulders etc.) are not permitted. This is also to ensure that whether the lady is standing, sitting, bending, kneeling or walking, the undergarment and intimate body parts are not exposed.</p>	<p>Any shirt worn with a waist coat or armless sweater should be properly tucked into the skirt or loose trousers. It should never be left flying under the waist coat/armless sweater. The waist coat/armless sweater must rest on the hip. "Bust coats", terminating just below the bust line are not allowed Wearing of tops, shorts or T-shirts with indecent inscriptions and other forms of indecent words is not allowed anywhere in Covenant University and Canaanland Jersey material tops are not allowed for normal lectures and other University assemblies</p>
<p>Shawls, sheers, scarf are not permitted as part of dressing for covering sleeveless, low neck-line blouses and top.</p>	<p>The wearing of dropping shawls or scarves over dresses or dresses with very tiny singlet-like straps (spaghetti strap) is strictly prohibited</p>
<p>Facial make-up, lip lining, medically unauthorized contact iris lens, painted eye lashes, coloured lip gloss, coloured nail-polish, artificial nails, eye shadow, fake Eyelashes, long nails and bleaching must be avoided.</p>	<p>Painting of nails, attaching artificial long nails are not allowed in and outside the University. Wearing of ankle chains and rings on toes is prohibited in the University. Earrings and necklaces may be used by female students, provided they are not the bogus and dropping types. The wearing of more than one earring in each ear is strictly prohibited anywhere in the University</p>
<p>Students are allowed moderate use of artificial hair, but unnatural hair colour or dyed and unnatural facial make-up is strictly unacceptable. Artificial hair (braided or attached) should not exceed shoulder-length and should match with the natural hair colour. The hair should be well groomed (neat and tidy) all the time.</p>	<p>Female students are advised to wear corporate hairstyles that are decent. Coloured attachments that are different from the student's hair are strictly prohibited in the University</p>
<p>Short, tight slacks, bathroom slippers and similar attire are not to be worn to the reception and outside the residence hall. However, proper fitting slacks may be worn</p>	<p>Female students may wear trouser suits; however, the jacket must fall below the hip line. The possession and wearing of jeans or any</p>

for outdoor recreational occasions such as Adventist Youth Ministry (AYM), hiking; physical exercises, community service etc. provided they conform to dress provisions under Sports.	jeans-like materials of any kind are strictly prohibited in the University. The use of face-caps is strictly prohibited
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Source: Compiled from Babcock and Covenant Universities Student Hand Books

Table 2: Dress Code for Male Students in Babcock and Covenant Universities

Babcock University	Covenant University
Decent shirts (short or long sleeves) tucked in with a pair of trousers, with or without a tie, are acceptable. Complete suits and ties are acceptable. Complete English, French and complete African suits are acceptable	Male students must be corporately dressed; this connotes wearing a shirt and necktie, a pair of trousers, with or without a jacket, and a pair of covered shoes. The tie knot must be pulled up to the top button of the dress shirt. Any shirt with indecent inscriptions or any sign with hidden meaning is strictly outlawed Wearing of long-sleeved shirts, without buttoning the sleeves is not allowed
Bushy hair and heavy beards are unacceptable.	Students are advised to avoid cutting worldly hair styles like “richo”, “all back”, etc. All male students are also expected to be clean-shaven, as keeping of beards is prohibited. In addition use of clipper should be restricted to the barbing salon.
Men are not to appear bare-footed, bare-bodied or without shirts outside the hall of residence including the reception	Wearing of slippers, short nickers, tight trousers are strictly prohibited. Wearing of a tie with canvas is not allowed in the University environment. Jerry curls and treated hair are strictly prohibited. Wearing of slippers and sports shoes, tennis shoes, sneakers, or canvas shoes is not allowed in lecture and examination halls.
	Bandless trousers must never be worn without suspenders. Singlet and shorts above the knee are not allowed.
	Slashing of eyes, wearing of earrings, putting chain on legs are strictly prohibited in and outside campus

Source: Compiled from Babcock and Covenant Universities Student Hand Book

The photographs below are samples of proper and approved dresses in

Covenant University:



Figure. 1: Approved Dressing for Females Students in Covenant University
Source: Covenant University Hand book



Figure 2: Approved Dressing for Male Students in Covenant University

Source: Covenant University Hand book

Similarly, the Universities of Lagos in its *Campus News* (Vol 15 ,No 45) reported that Senate approved the following dress code for University of Lagos students which stipulated that students are not allowed to wear:

- (1) All tight—fitting clothes including skirts, trousers and blouses.
- (2) All clothes which reveal sensitive parts of the body such as the breasts, chest, belly, upper arms and the buttocks.
- (3) Outfits such as shorts, knickers and mini-skirts and dresses which are not, at least, knee length.
- (4) Outfits like party wear, beach wear and bathroom slippers should not be worn to lectures.
- (5) Outfits such as t-shirts, skirts and jeans which carry obscene and messages.

The University of Ibadan on the other hand, does not have a published dress code but “ encourages a 'dress sense' culture among males and females” (see Figure 3). In the University of Ibadan *Sexual Harassment Policy* , forms of sexual harassment in the University include : “Seductive postures and indecent dressing and exposure by males or females that offend public morality. Any form of dressing that exposes vital parts of human body constitutes indecent dressing”. (University of Ibadan Sexual Harassment Policy, 2012; 13). Besides, the Vice chancellor while addressing the matriculants for the 2012/2013 session, “encouraged the matriculants to strive to be ...on the Vice-Chancellor’s Rolls of Honour at the end of the session rather than engage in social vices like hooliganism, violence, cultism, prostitution and indecent dressing among others” (University Advancement Center, 2013).



Figure 3: Poster on Indecent Dressing at A Female Hall of Residence, University of Ibadan Source: Author's Picture

The features of the array of dress forms in these four universities and others in Nigeria include outfits that as noted by Fayeye (n.d.) are:

- Ripped, torn, or noticeable holes (particularly jeans).
- Soiled, stained, odorous or wet (often evident amongst male students)
- Excessively wrinkled or loose fitting.
- Excessively short, tight or revealing.
- Transparent enough to make the underwear visible.

To implement the dress code directive and ensure compliance with the dress code law, some institutions have prescribed sanctions like the exclusion of students from lectures and official businesses when they are not properly dressed. Some school authorities like Babcock and Covenant Universities have empowered the school security personnel to turn back any student not properly dressed from the school premises. At both universities, students are checked on arrival at the main gate before being allowed to go in or sent back if considered indecently dressed or having banned outfits in their possession. Another form of sanction is counseling and endorsement of records by which these violators (depending on the specific circumstances) would be counseled, failing which they face the students' disciplinary committee and have their records endorsed accordingly.

Regarding these regulations our survey indicates that some students approve of the dress code and maintain that students should not be allowed to dress inappropriately on campus. Other students essentially perceive themselves to be young adults who need to adopt fashionable clothing patterns in order to be attractive to the opposite sex through suggestive dressing; secure the attention of peers, teachers and the members of the school community; exhibit parental socio-economic status or class in some cases; assume the role of a pace-setter in being the gatekeepers of fashions trends; cover up a sense of failure in academic efforts through displacement efforts in clothing; imitate certain role models especially media celebrities; and exhibit novel and attractive foreign dress patterns. The result of this mind set is that students exhibit their freedom of adornment in forms of dressing that some perceive to infringe on the right of others to sustain concentration and focus in the school setting.

UNDERSTANDING DRIVERS OF WESTERN AND LOCAL FASHION IN UNIVERSITIES

In the debate on indecent dressing, questions are asked about the increasing westernization of nearly all facets of traditional lives and the gradual erosion of our social values and norms. Bad upbringing and plain mischief are also implicated as a lot of families are said to have lost their focus and shirked their roles in raising their children and wards properly. It is said that dresses that are meant as stage costumes for

musicians and actresses are misconstrued by our youth as every day wears. Moreover, unconfirmed accounts assert that the various cases of assaults and sexual harassment recorded in our society can be linked to indecent dressing by the victims -that a large number of rape victims were victims of their own mode of dressing.

The introduction of dress codes in Nigerian universities has generated various contestations which is evident in ensuing competition, acculturation, collaborations and even conflict among the students. Factors such as globalization, government, university authorities, the media, individuals, and religious groups have increasingly, served as drivers of fashion. Acting as drivers, not only do these factors influence and sometimes determine what is fashionable, but also what is acceptable or unacceptable in the university.

There have been some cases of conflict between students and academic staff on student dress (Ojo, 1995). In the absence of clear rules in some public universities, complaints about students' dressing continues with some university lecturers still complaining about indiscriminate and "chaotic" dress among students on campus even in lecture halls. Investigations in Nigerian universities indicate that besides campuses with general dress codes which students are forced to abide with, students in faculties like medicine and law have more or less accepted the specific dress code for their faculties. In other faculties the debate is ongoing, with Christian and Islamic fundamentalists joining in.

Our study further indicates that the debate over student dress codes engenders controversies over students academic achievement, discipline, professionalism and conformity to social mores and clothes-as-political-statement. While some university authorities argue that the mode of dress is an important factor in determining students academic achievement and it ought to be subject to guidelines, some others are skeptical. While this assertion might be coincidental, it has spurred continued discussions among academic staff on the need to prescribe dress codes in order to improve students results. Though unsubstantiated, fashionable and provocative dressing are also said to displace academic goals and offend the sense of responsibility known with teaching and learning environment.

Also, the conditions and patterns of these form of fashionable dresses by students are believed to rob them of safety and academic focus. Baggy pants and bandanas are often interpreted as cult related dresses. Such dresses intimidate other students and spread fear instead of focusing on academics. Dresses with large pockets may be used to carry drugs or weapons. Worse, dressing seductively is a great distraction to the opposite sex and tend to incur criticism from more orthodox members of the university community.

The general belief embedded in the dress code policies that it is possible to regulate and discipline individual liberty in order to prevent immoral behaviour. However the reality of Nigeria's socio-ethnic complexity, and the

rural-urban environment is a mixture of numerous conceptions of dress and nudity, morality and immorality. For instance, whilst some Nigerian religious groups attempt to restrict the wearing of trousers for women because of the fear of imprecise gender limitations, among Muslims, the wearing of trousers by women fits into their doctrinal code to cover the flesh. Such diverse positions on a single item of clothing contests the Universities' positions on dressing on campuses. It also underlines the fact that in a pluralized society like Nigeria, the quest for a unified legal moralism is unworkable (Bakare-Yusuf, 2012).

The dress code policies of some of our tertiary institutions assume that the social fabric and judicial system of a society must be grounded in a universally shared morality that can be adhered to across time and space. (Bakare-Yusuf, 2012) . This is not the case, historically and presently, minimal clothing or exposure of the torso is a common feature amongst a diverse group of Nigerians, especially in the rural areas. Traditional forms of dressing worn by Nigerians (illustrated below) could be classified as indecent.

That is to say communities will be forced to re-adjust their socio-cultural perspective of nudity or semi-nudity if the debate on female dressing is extended beyond the university campuses.



Figure 4: Edo Cultural traditional attire

Source: <http://kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com/2013/06/edo-people-africas-most-popular-and.html>



Figure 5: Edo Ladies dressed in traditional attire revealing their upper arms and chest

Source: <http://kwekudee-tripdownmemorylane.blogspot.com/2013/06/edo-people-africas-most-popular-and.html>



Figure 6: Fulani lady displaying her mid-rib

Source: Google photos

Issues surrounding women's dress are nothing new. Feminists have been debating what constitutes appropriate female clothing since the beginning of the feminist movement in the United States (Scot, 2005). Feminists, academicians, and popular culture critics have tried to understand women's dress in contemporary times since the early 1990s, when Naomi Wolf's book *The Beauty Myth* (2002) was published. The current happenings with women's dress cannot be explained by one theory—instead, the discussion around it leads to questions within feminist theory: Are women exercising freedom to dress as they please or are they simply buying into their own objectification? Questions also arise in the social science research: How can one account for studies suggesting that people believe women's dress is a factor in offenses (such as sexual assault), while other studies suggest that dress is not a factor in determining who is victimized? (Beiner, 2009)

The dress code policies enacted in Nigerian universities against certain forms of women's dressing in order to preserve a pristine cultural and moral world reveals ignorance about the complexity and diversity of norms, the body and dress. The injunction to cover up by the Universities assumed that being fully clothed would eliminate sexual misdemeanour. Contrary, in the work of feminist and gender activists, it is recognised that whether women are clothed or unclothed does not prevent sexual intimidation or violation neither does provocative dress necessarily signify submissiveness. Rather, it may be an indication of confidence and assertiveness. (Beiner, 151-152). Similarly, women's dressing could be a form of agency outside of a male predatory and regulatory framework and an evidence of how young women relate to their body and sexuality in non-abusive or non-violating ways.

CONCLUSION

Balancing the benefits of integrating societies into a globalized world against protecting the uniqueness of local culture requires a careful approach. Establishing a nexus between fashion and culture should not confine and fix fashion in a conservative way. While the adoption of a dress code in elementary and high school or equivalent educational institution may be easily understandable, it may be difficult to find justification for the same phenomenon in tertiary institutions. As observed by Fayokun et al, (2009; 62), the university is both a place of learning for various categories of mature persons with their enshrined fundamental rights and an international institution subject to international standards. Also, the university comprises people of different beliefs and backgrounds and in such a community, the social practices will obviously differ, and this calls for much tolerance.

Needless to say, the widespread denunciation of women's fashion deserves serious attention as the quest to control women's dressing in the name of preserving our culture and customs as exemplified in the dress code polices introduced in some Nigerian Universities persist. In reality, the persistent concern about female dress in Nigeria is about controlling their freedom of choice when it comes to clothing. University authorities need to move away from conformity to adaptability. Instead of suppressing students, schools should promote the development of individuality and voice to better prepare them for life after school.

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