



Research Paper

## Indecent Dressing among Muslim Girls in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: The Islamic Solution

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**ABSTRACT:** *There has been public outcry among Muslim leaders, parents and scholars on the mode of dressing of young Muslim girls in Nigeria Muslim societies especially in the tertiary institutions. These are mothers of tomorrow and the ones to whom the legacy of training and nurturing leaders of this country is to be bequeathed. Does it suggest the dearth of Islamic culture and morality that is the symbol of Muslim identity, continuity, security and unity? This paper, discusses the menace of indecent dressing in Nigeria tertiary institutions particularly as it affects young Muslim girls. It goes further to discuss decent and indecent dressing in the Islamic perspective and the Islamic solution to indecent dressing among both Muslim men and women.*

**KEYWORDS:** *adornment, dress, indecent, Islam, Muslim Girl, tertiary institutions*

### I. INTRODUCTION

Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary defines dress as a piece of clothing that is made in one piece and covers the body down to the legs, sometimes reaching below the knees, or the ankles [1]. This definition strongly buttresses the purposes of dressing which Khan gives as for modesty to cover our nakedness and protect ourselves against harsh weather and for fancy and fitness [2]. The definition and purposes of dress are however at variance with what these Muslim girls wear in tertiary institutions. The concern expressed by the fears of this trend is the fact that these young Muslim girls are the mothers of our future homes and hope because they will be sources of the transmission of our values, culture and traditions. These they have not found pleasure in, especially the material aspect of our culture, therefore they do not practice. The bugging and begging question is how did we find ourselves in this unfortunate situation? A situation where the dress pattern of our future mothers are not only afar and aping deviation from our Islamic culture and moral values but also a profane, degrading and immoral posture that do not depict our prospective mothers and the anchor of our society, in good light. The disturbing fact is that this is done with impudence and no remorse, that some young Muslim girls have come to say that it is inadvertently their inalienable right.

Discussions in print and electronic media and even at Islamic gatherings admit that the dressing patterns of many young Muslim girls in Nigeria's polytechnics, colleges of education and universities have remained outrageous, demeaning, profane, obscene and obnoxious. The Muslim girls do this in obeisance to many factors. Some journalist simply describes such Muslim girls as under dressed in décolleté dress, backless, chemise otherwise called "spaghetti" and very tight-fitting attires that manifest all features of a Muslim girl. [3] The dressing of these young Muslim girls leave their bodies scarcely covered, skimpy and designed to be very low and to show their shoulders and the top part of their breasts. These dresses starts from the chest region leaving the upper part of the breast open and is a long way up from the knee, short (mini) or long skirts with hemlines and slits or other openings high up; the thigh sometimes exposing even underpants. It may also be a tight-fitting jeans, trousers or skirts and tops that are so scanty and torn at sensitive portions to expose the Muslim girls' sensitive and attractive parts. [4] This description can go on and on as the attires/costumes are many and varied.

## II. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

Culture is learned, transformational and gives a community a sense of identity, dignity, continuity, security and unity and it takes place by a process of absorption from the social environment or through deliberate instruction.[5]

Throughout recorded time and probably even before, clothing, along with food and shelter, has been recognized as one of the primary needs of all peoples in all parts of the world. [6] Whatever the priorities, clothing remains an essential element necessary for human well being. Hilal further expanded the purpose for wearing clothes to include for adornment and beautification; to cover nakedness; for psychological security and for identification of wearer's status, occupation, religion, tribe, etc. [7] Thus Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, Fulani and other tribes and ethnic groups in Nigeria all have dresses that are only peculiar to them.

Experts in the field of clothing do agree that dress depict the personality of the wearer. [8] Every individual has a variety of social, psychological, emotional, and aesthetic needs that also must be met in some way. Clothing can and does fulfill some of them. Decency and dignity is what is unique in dress sense; not outrageous sheer obscenity and prostituting in 'tight-fitting', unfitting cloths in the name of fashion.

Elements of each culture are transmitted, that is passed down from one generation to the next. In the process of transmission, it is also transmuted, that is changed or altered in the process. The changes may be subtle (as style variations of *agbada* or *baban riga*) or more extreme.

As have been stated earlier, culture is learned and not necessarily inherited biologically. Cultural patterns are learned first from parents, siblings and other family members then from peer groups/play mates and working companions, people learn from copying and adapting from books, newspapers, television and other communication media. This learning may take place informally through observation and subtle direction or formally and purposefully through direct instruction.

Our mode or manner of dress is a part of our social inheritance; the clothes we wear are new developments that appear in our own life times. The primary influence on the type of clothing worn by individuals within a society is cultural. The pertinent question therefore is: whose culture does the dress pattern of our young Muslim girls in tertiary institutions depict?

Muslims have been a people under bondage from slavery through colonialism to neo-colonialism who have entered the twenty-first century with a very large debt over-hang and the dearth of industries (traditional and modern). Muslims have therefore, culturally transited from our traditionally Islamic and African ways and values to a 'modern' European or Western styles. These continuous cultural change and processes, has gradually eroded Muslim and Islamic identity, values, morality and culture which the colonial masters described as primitive in order to suit their style. This has seen us subsume many aspects of Islamic culture under those of colonial masters particularly in tertiary institutions. [9]

## III. DRESSING PROBLEMS IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

Opinions abound on what students should wear in school premises and to class. But it is not only the fashion experts who express strong feelings about clothing but the entire populace including the students themselves. The problem of indecent dressing in Nigeria is not manifesting any where more than in our institutions of higher learning. Yarima posits that many higher institutions of learning in the country have become the places where larger percentages of these Muslim girls are seen in their nudity! [10] Yarima goes further to trace the increasing cases of rape in the society to 'ladies going half-dressed' [11]. Opinions among the Muslims in an interview with some lecturers on some campuses now seem to favor the fact that it is some Muslim girls who now sexually harass their teachers through their indecent dressing; instead of the public outcry against the reverse a few years ago. [12] In addition, Bello in an interview noted that the problem of indecent dressing in our tertiary institutions resulted in the rising cases of violence, gang activity and theft of clothing and accessories. Fashion emphasizes economic differences among students and leads some students into vices that are detrimental not only to their academic work but even to their personal health and safety. [13].

In another oral interview with Ladan, he observed that; Innocent Muslim ladies, because of peer pressure, follow the seductive influence of other ladies' lifestyle and dress pattern thereby acquiring the traits of being gorgeously dressed in a bid to lure men into immoral relationships. In the desperate bid to keep pace with the fashion world, many of these Muslim girls often sell themselves to get the much wanted money for fashion and make-up. The above are sure and easy ways to catching Human Immune Virus (HIV) and the shortest attraction to vices such as drug addiction and prostitution. [14]

In tying the knots therefore, this paper has raised issues at the social, economic, moral and cultural levels. In our relationship with the world, we are part of the globalization processes that imply that we socialize with other nations of the world without restrictions and limitlessly. In this socialization we have borrowed through learning and interaction other peoples' architecture, food and feeding habits and even mode of dressing.

Being the copy-cats and stereotypes we are, who have always seen ourselves as inferior and prefer to be subsumed under western culture, no doubt, we see any one as primitive, uncivilized, subservient and lowly. The indecent dressing mode of our youth is therefore a manifestation of our inferiority complex.

When a people see morality through the eyes of other cultures they waste their age old values which they have developed over time based on the peculiarities of their environment, cultural and religious experiences. This is revealed in the abandonment of the people's own religious and cultural values and clutching to foreign values which they cannot fully grasp because of the differences in exposure, environment and culture. This therefore, makes plain the moral decadence that has engulfed our society, so much so that, we have a cliché 'the Nigerian factor' which means that 'nothing works in Nigeria'. [15]

Our misfortune according to Mahmud in an oral interview is that even as the youths claim they are copying from the Western world, they are doing so from an uninformed position. First, that the outrageous clothes they copy are worn on occasions in their homes of origin. Second, that it is women of easy virtues whose intention is to lure men into immoral relationships that abound in the seductive dress habits. Third, that their schools and colleges observe dress code and therefore not any kind of dress is worn in the school environment. [16]

More so, Usman in an interview observed that the implementation of dress code in school settings improves student's behaviors, reduces differences among socio-economic levels, and enhances students' self-confidence'. He goes further to say that although research data have not shown an absolutely clear link between dress and students' performance or behaviour, anecdotal evidence and certainly many people's perceptions generally support some type of dress code in our tertiary schools in Nigeria. [17]

#### **IV. DECENT DRESS IN ISLAMIC PERSPECTIVE**

The essence of Islam is "Submission to the Will of Allah", that is to make one's opinions, inclinations and actions subservient to the commands of Allah.

And it is not for a believer man or believer woman to have any choice in their affairs when Allah and His Messenger decided a matter; and whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, indeed he has strayed a manifest straying (Q 33:36).

In clothing and adornment, Islam takes into serious consideration the principles of decency, modesty, chastity and morality. Anything in clothing or adornment incompatible with the attainment, maintenance and development of these qualities is inhibited by Islam. [18] The clothing material and the dressing manners which may stimulate arrogance or false pride and vanity are strictly prohibited. [19] So are the adornments which may weaken the morality of Muslims or undermine their values system. Muslims should remain loyal to their nature, which God has chosen for them, and keep away from all the things that are likely to weaken or endanger their character.

When Islam allows Muslim woman to use the things which are suitable for the feminine nature alone, Islam does not let Muslim woman go loose or wander unrestricted. It allows her the things which suit her nature and, at the same time, cautions her against anything that might abuse or upset that nature. [20] The manner in which Muslim women should dress up, beautify, walk and even look is a very delicate question, and Islam pays special attention to the matter. The vision of Islam in this respect is focused on the general welfare of Muslim women. Islam has served advice woman to help them in particular to retain and develop their dignity and chastity, safe from being the subject of idle gossip or vicious rumors and suspicious thoughts. [21]

Islam is a complete religion in which all rules and regulations are well-synchronized, and if one wants to tamper with a certain part, the whole system would disintegrate. You have to accept the whole machinery as it is; you cannot choose from it.

In addition, Islam believes in keeping men and women apart. It has entrusted males and females with completely separate responsibilities, according to their natural ability. Man is obliged to earn livelihood for himself and his family. Woman has been entrusted with responsibility of managing domestic affairs, and upbringing the children with Islamic moral values in Islamic cultural background.

The proponents of the "liberty" of women sneer at this division of labor, implying that proper upbringing of children is an inferior duty which degrades women. They do not realize that their new social order, which deprives the children of parental care and control, is a major factor in increasing juvenile delinquency, which in its turn is tearing the society apart [22]

Decent dressing as we know it was not in Arabia before Islam. It was introduced in Madinah by specific injunctions of the Qur'an, long before Arabs and non-Arabs came into the fold of Islam.

'Ayesha (the mother of the faithful) was reported to praise the women of al-Ansar in these words:

I did not see any women better than those of Al-Ansar, in their confirmation of Allah's Book and the faith in the revelation. As soon as the chapter of an-Nur was revealed, containing the words, and they draw their

head covers over their neck slits, {and they were informed of it by their men} everyone of them without exception took her robe (shawl) and wound it around her head, in conformity with, and faith in, what Allah had revealed in His Book. They came next morning behind the Messenger (s.a.w) with those wound robes on heads as if a crow was sitting on their heads” [23]

The Qur’an is categorical on the issue of decent dressing for both Muslim men and women as it says: Say unto the believing men that they cast down their gaze and guard their private part; that is purer for them. Verily, Allah is well aware of all that you do. And say unto the believing women that they cast down their gaze and guard their private parts, and they display not their adornment except what becomes apparent of it; and they draw their head covers over their neck-slits; and they display not their adornment except to their husbands, or their fathers, or the father of their husbands, or their brothers, or their sons, or the sons of their husbands, or their brothers, or their brother's sons, or their sister's sons, or their women or those whom their right hands possess, or the male servants void of sexual desires, or the children who have not yet attained the knowledge of women's secrets (or nakedness), and they should not strike their feet so that what they hide of their adornment becomes known; and turn you all unto Allah, O you believers, so that you may be successful (Q 24:30-31).

In addition, the Qur’an says:

Such elderly women as are past the prospect of marriage, there is no blame on them if they lay aside their outer garments, provided they make not a display of their adornment; but it is good for them if they restrain themselves; and Allah is All-hearing, All-knowing (Q 24:60).

The Qur’an further says:

O Prophet! Say unto your wives, and your daughters and the women of the believers that they let down upon them their robe (which covers head, face and shoulders); so that they may be distinguished, so that they will not be troubled; Allah is Oft-Forgiving the most Merciful” (32:33).

#### **4.1 Islam and Decent Dressing of the Eyes**

The believing men must cast down their gaze and believing women must also cast down their gaze. None is allowed to look at the opposite sex, unless he or she is within the prohibited degree. As the man is required to struggle for earning the livelihood, he is not told to hide his body (except to a certain extent). Still he is obliged to cast down his gaze; and not to look at women with lust and promiscuity.

Woman can easily keep herself covered and hidden because her sphere of activity is her home; therefore, she was told to cover her entire body, as well as cast down her gaze and not to look at men lustfully. The Prophet (s.a.w) told 'Ali ibn Abu Talib, “Ali, do not let a second look follow the first. The first look is allowed to you but not the second”. [24] The Prophet (s.a.w) considered hungry and lustful looks at a person of the opposite sex as "the *zina* (adultery) of the eye," according to his saying, "The eyes also commit *zina*, and their *zina* is the lustful look". [25] In another saying of the Prophet (s.a.w), narrated by Ibn Abbas, he said: “I did not see anything so resembling minor sins as what Abu Huraira said from the Prophet, who said, "Allah has written for the son of Adam his inevitable share of adultery whether he is aware of it or not: The adultery of the eye is the looking (at something which is sinful to look at), and the adultery of the tongue is to utter (what it is unlawful to utter), and the inner self wishes and longs for (adultery) and the private parts turn that into reality or refrain from submitting to the temptation".[26]

Numerous hadith declared that the glance after the first glance is an arrow of *Shaitan*; and is forbidden. Our boys and girls should ponder on these verses and traditions, in order to realize that wearing decent dressing or scarf is not a license to look freely at the opposite sex.

#### **4.2 Islam and Decent Clothing**

Islam is very sensitive to the manners of clothing and ornaments. It makes it crystal clear that both man and woman should be confined to their respective natures to safeguard their natural instincts and endow them with modesty and high morality. Prophet Muhammad is reported as having said that God condemns those men who behave or act in a womanlike fashion, and those women who behave or act in manlike fashion [27]. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that Islam lays no restrictions on the harmless or proper items of clothing and ornaments. In fact, the Qur’an calls such things the beautiful gifts of God and reproaches those who look upon them as forbidden.

The Qur’an says:

Say: Who hath forbidden the beautiful (gifts) of Allah, which He hath produced for His servants, and the things, clean and pure, (which He hath provided) for sustenance? Say: They

are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) purely for them on the Day of Judgment. Thus do We explain the signs in detail for those who understand (Q7:32)

#### **4.2.1 Extent of covering for a Muslim Girl**

The dress for a Muslim girl must cover her whole body, except what has been specifically exempted. According to a hadith of the Prophet (SAW): The Prophet said: “the whole body of woman is *'awrah*. The woman is *'awrah*”. And what is the meaning of *'awrah*? The genitals are called *'awrah*, because it is a shame to look at them; and everything which is hidden (because of pride or shame) is called *'awrah*; and the women are *'awrah*”. [28]

In another hadith, Abu Huraira reported Allah's Messenger (s.a.w) as saying: “Two are the types amongst the denizens of Hell, the one possessing whips like the tail of an ox and they flog people with their help. (The second one) the women who would be naked in spite of their being dressed, who are seduced (to wrong paths) and seduce others with their hair high like humps. These women would not get into Paradise and they would not perceive the odour of Paradise, although its fragrance can be perceived from such and such distance (from great distance). [29]

#### **Covering is of two types in Islam:**

- i. The covering which is compulsory in itself means:
  - a. Hiding of *'awrat* (private parts, front and behind) from all people, male and female, except husband and wife and small children who are unaware of the shame of sex.
  - b. As it is forbidden to uncover those parts before any person, so it is forbidden to look at them.
  - c. It is compulsory for a woman to cover her whole body (except face and hands up to wrists, from all persons except her husband
- ii. Covering concern the Prayer.
  - a. A Muslim must cover his *'awrat* even if there is no one there to look at him or her.
  - b. Woman specifically must cover her whole body including hair and ears except face (from forehead up to the chin in length, and between the thumb and middle finger in width), hand (from wrist downwards) and feet up to ankles.
  - c. If there is someone who is looking or may look with lust at her face, hands or feet during prayers, then it is compulsory for her to cover these parts. [30]

#### **4.2.2 Thickness of the material**

The dress must be thick enough so as not to show the color of skin or the shape of the body. It is necessary to remind Muslim women that the purpose of decent dressing is not putting on any cloth but to hide the body and cover nakedness. Transparent or thin clothes which reveal the color of skin or shape of body are absolutely forbidden. The Holy Prophet (s.a.w) said in a hadith: “Their women will be dressed, yet naked; on their heads will be like the humps of lean camels; do curse them, for they are truly cursed”. [31] In another hadith Narrated by Safiyyah, daughter of Shaybah, who said that Aisha mentioned the women of *Ansar*, praised them and said good words about them. She then said: When *Surat an-Nur* came down, they took the curtains, tore them and made head covers (veils) of them. [32]

#### **4.2.3 Looseness of the material**

The dress must not be tight to describe the curves and shape of a Muslim woman's body. The Prophet (s.a.w.) described such women as being clothed, yet naked, since their clothing, being transparent and fine, does not do the job of concealing the body but is rather intended to reveal it; [33] such is the dress of the women of our time especially in tertiary institutions. The Prophet (s.a.w) likened their hair-style to the hump of a special breed of camel (*bakht*) which has very large humps, because they put up their hair in a beehive shape from the middle of their heads. In addition, many women, not satisfied with what Allah gave them in the way of natural hair, buy wigs made of artificial hair to add to their own in order to increase its body, beauty and luster, imagining that this renders them better looking and more sexually attractive. [34]

#### **4.2.4 Overall Appearance of a Muslim woman**

The purpose of the dress is to conceal adornment. It naturally follows that this cover itself should not be of a kind to attract onlookers to the woman inside. Adornment cannot be hidden by a dress which makes people turn their eyes towards the wearer. Woman should not wear a dress which is generally known to be a male costume and vice versa. The Holy Prophet has cursed the men who act like women and the women who act like men. The hadith narrated by Narrated Abu Hurayrah said: “The Apostle of Allah (s.a.w) cursed the man who dressed like a woman and the woman who dressed like a man”. [35]

The evil of such conduct which affects both the life of the individual and of society is that, it constitutes a rebellion against the natural order of things. According to this natural order, there are men and there are women, and each of the two sexes has its own distinctive characteristics. However, if men become effeminate and women masculinized, this natural order will be reversed and therefore will disintegrate.

More so, a Muslim woman dress should not be a dress of fame, pride and vanity. Wearing excessively dirty or rugged cloth to demonstrate denial of 'Self' or one's rejection of the norms of society is not allowed. The showiness and pride are improper in the eyes of Islam and are rejected by Islamic ethics, code and culture. The Prophet said: "Whoever wears a dress of fame in this world, Allah will cloth him with a dress of humiliation on the Day of Resurrection, then set him on fire". [36]

## V. A MODEL OF DRESS CODE FOR OUR STUDENTS

It is interesting that many Nigeria Higher Institutions of learning have continued to propagate to some extent, dress code for their students. The presumption that dress affects behaviors and performance is not a new one if we look at some expressions in our schools billboards, notice boards and other social interaction: expressions such as: "Dress Decently" "Clothes make a man", "Be an ambassador of the school by dressing decently", "Dress right! Act right!!", "He dressed like a gentleman" etc. Simply stated, dress code states what must not be worn. Its essence should include to put off students from craze of fashion and to emphasize decency and the moral and religious culture and prestige in the mind of the students. Dress code should be used as a tool to dress and groom students as individuals with a sense of responsibility and self-respect. It is not a matter of what you must or must not be wear; it is more of a matter of what society does not feel is appropriate, especially, if it becomes disruptive, offensive or provocative to others and also when it is vulgar and profane.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Islam makes it forbidden for women to wear clothes which fail to cover the body and which are transparent, revealing what is underneath. It is likewise forbidden to wear tightly fitting clothes which delineate the parts of the body, especially those parts which are sexually attractive.

Islam denounces such excesses in beautifying oneself as require altering one's physical features as Allah created them. The Qur'an considers such alterations as inspired by *Shaitan* (devil), "...who will command them (his devotees) to change what Allah has created..." (4:119). Among such excesses are tattooing and shortening the teeth. The Prophet (s.a.w) cursed the tattooer and the one who is tattooed, the one who shortens teeth and the one whose teeth are shortened [37]. As for cutting or shortening the teeth, the Prophet (s.a.w) cursed both the men and the women who do it and the women who request it [38]. If a man does it, he merits an even greater curse. Similarly, the Prophet (s.a.w) prohibited widening the spaces between the teeth, and he cursed women who widen the gaps between their own or others' teeth for the sake of beauty, and changing what Allah has created [39].

In summary, there should be a standard policy on dress code in public places, especially in tertiary institutions of learning. This policy must start at the primary school level with school uniform reflecting our religious culture and moral values, and decent enough not to attract undue attention. At the tertiary level of education, students should be involved in drawing up dress code policy and review same from time to time. The successful implementation of any policy depends on developing positive perception, education and mobilization amongst stake-holders and especially recognizing our cultural influences. The fight against corruption in our fledgling democracy must be all encompassing. It is therefore only right that we inculcate the right values in our children early enough so that they come up to respect what is their own and what gives them dignity, identity continuity and unity. The mother is the pivot of the home and her action and utterances should radiate love, patience, tolerance, understanding and protection for her family.

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