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Chapter Seven

Conclusion

7.0. Introduction

From the previous chapters, it is clear that claims such as the one made by Samuel Johnson that prior to Euro-Arab contacts with Yorubaland, Yorùbá people walked about scantily dressed and that their young ones walked about semi-nude until they attained the marriageable age, is not only untrue, but self-serving. This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the major findings in the previous chapters.

7.1. Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980

Although Yorùbá, as a collective name for a people, a land, a language, and a culture may be a colonial and missionary creation, the sense of kinship, group solidarity, language, and common culture to which the term refers is a very old one. Rather than this collective name, it is this set of shared values that gave the various peoples now known as the Yorùbá people their identities as individuals and as a group. Yorùbá history, especially from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, is no doubt a richly documented history. During these long periods, academic and lay-historians, writing in English, Yorùbá and Arabic, rendered themselves as worthy chroniclers of events. Samuel Johnson, John Olawunmi George, E.M. Lijadu, Otunba Payne, and Mojola Agbebi left behind works of no mean quality upon which different reconstructions have been made. All these have contributed immensely to a Yorùbá historiography; a historiography that remained unparalleled in Nigerian history.

Notwithstanding their contributions to Yorùbá historiography, their works on Yorùbá sartorial tradition is, to say the least, rudimentary. While some basic knowledge about Yorùbá dress are lost forever, certain historical periods and geographical places, events and developments, local cultures and preferences, etc. have helped to shape, determine, define, and modify Yorùbá identity construction, maintenance, and establishment through

dress. As this study showed, Yorùbá people, individuals and group, assigned some central and basic significance to dress, especially in the construction of their individual and group identities.

Besides narrow conceptualization, enormous gaps abound in extant literature, especially in relation to provenance of dress in Yorubaland and how the various changes have helped to shape, determine, define, and modify Yorùbá identity as well as affected Yorùbá sartorial tradition. Other than examining, albeit contextually, specific aspects of dress, no work exists that discussed the evolution and growth of Yorùbá sartorial tradition in holistic term. The need to explore these and many other issues, especially how these different issues tied to Yorùbá identity, gave birth to this study.

Given the transient nature of dress, most notably clothes and fashion trends, and the sheer fact that direct witnesses to the infancy periods of Yorùbá sartorial developments are all dead constituted a draw-down to this study, as a paucity of written documents as well as oral interviews are lacking or grossly inadequate where they exist. However, the use of primary and secondary sources, most especially the use of proverbs, witty sayings, photo-albums, etc. served to ameliorate inadequacies posed by lack of or inadequate written records and oral data. Colonial and missionary records were synthesized with travelers' reports as well as a selected number of oral interviews and insights from such indirect witnesses such as memoirs, photo albums, etc. All these were used to weave a narrative on the evolution of dress and its place in constructing and sustaining individual and group identity of the Yorùbá people.

As seen in the different chapters, colonial and missionary reports as well as other sources yielded up essential information on the issues of dress and identity in Yorubaland, especially in relation to Christianity, colonial rule and colonial administration of Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria.

As this study finds, as an ontological phenomenon, Yorùbá dress performs more than to cover human nakedness and protect the body from unsolicited gaze and the vagaries of nature, but encompasses all direct body changes ranging from facial marks to tattooing; and all additions to human body, from clothes to jewelry. Yorùbá dress establishes and maintains Yorùbá identity and, as a

symbolic interactive tool, it also alters Yorùbá identity. Therefore, Yorùbá dress, as a form of non-verbal communication, is a communicator of Yorùbá identity and values. In a sense, Yorùbá dress functions both in protecting the body as well as in communicating socially defined values. In both cases, the study asserted that dressing differently than what Yorùbá cultural norms prescribed would provoke politically charged reactions, as the example of southeastern Nigerian women's adoption of the Hausa-style tunic on top of wrappers or trousers and many other examples in the study illustrated. As Chapter Four showed, Yorùbá dress constitutes one of the many ways through which Yorùbá people establishes, sustains, and reinforces their identities as individuals and as a group. Hence, dress does not only cover the body, but also reveals it. It indicates gender, character, occupation, wealth, religion, positions, power and status as well as reinforces it. It, in addition, determines and negotiates social relationship. These conceptualizations are encapsulated in the Yorùbá aphorism, *Iri ni si ni isonilojo* (one's appearance determines the degree of respect one gets from others).

Although the study recognized the biological function of Yorùbá dress, emphasis was however placed on the social function of dress, i.e. dress as communicator of values. The study argued that individuals occupy a number of social positions and thus exuded a number of identities all of which contribute to individual and groups' total self-configuration. By focusing on the social function of dress, the study was able to ascertain the values that Yorùbá people project when they dress; why they dress the way they do, etc.

Colonial rule is something of a paradox: on the one hand, it brought different Nigerian peoples in different conditions under one roof. On the other hand, it introduced new differences without as much as removing the old ones. The advent of colonialism brought important changes to Yorubaland: the termination of the 19th Century Yorùbá War; the opening of all roads within Yorubaland, which were closed consequent upon the war; free movement of men, merchandise and ideas; commercialization of agriculture, which was orchestrated with the introduction of cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber and corn; introduction of a new political system – indirect rule –; introduction of Christianity and Western

Education; introduction of a new health system; abolition of domestic slavery, pawnship, and human sacrifices; uniform currency; construction of roads, railways and harbor, which fostered trade growth and ensured unprecedented socio-economic and political changes in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria, etc. All these developments have important effects on social life in Yorùbá societies. The study identified the various changes occasioned by Islam, Christianity, and colonialism. The study asserted that Islam, Christianity and colonialism played fundamental roles in Yorùbá identity construction, especially the development of a new class of educated Yorùbá people.

On the one hand, the early missionaries considered no Yorùbá converts as truly converted until they donned the European dress. On the other hand, early educated Nigerians regarded European dress as status symbol and they wore them not only to reveal/display their new identity but also to ape the missionaries and the colonial masters. The colonial and post-colonial periods also witnessed increasing production and importation of European textile, which, unlike the indigenous Yorùbá cloths, were lighter, brighter, and cheaper, into Yorubaland vis-à-vis Africa. However, from the 1860, nationalist discourse shifted from agitating for increasing the numbers of Nigerians in colonial government and administration to agitation for cultural renewal and independence. Important to this discourse were (Yorùbá) language and dress. Increasing number of Nigerian nationalists dumped their European dress for indigenous African dress. Many went further to dump their European names for traditional African names. In Yorubaland, the use of Yorùbá dress rose significantly, as the educated or literate Yorùbá men and women who had earlier took to European dress, dumped European dress and took to its use. Also, Yorùbá women, especially the literate ones, combined European dress with the indigenous ones and creating new fashion trends, which stimulated new sales of both the European and indigenous Yorùbá dress across Yorubaland. European dress, from the 1860s, began to reflect the dominant political currents in Nigeria, as cloth-designers began to incorporate pictures, proverbs, etc. which bothered on socio-economic and political developments of the period into their designs. The overarching issues of this

period were the politics of dress and how this underpinned Yorùbá ethno-national identity over the long run.

Tribal marks, loose-fitting cloths, caps, office and formal dress, etc. were either introduced or the existing ones were modified to accommodate Islam, Christianity and colonialism. As the study argued, rather than supplanting Yorùbá sartorial tradition, these multi-layered developments led to sartorial hybridity, which manifested in different forms in contemporary Yorubaland.

There is no gainsaying the fact that contacts with the Arabic/Muslims and Europeans/Christians through religions (Islam and Christianity) and colonialism have left indelible imprints on Yorùbá sartorial tradition. However, they are, as this study has shown, no more than two evanescent ‘episodes’, although with devastating impact, in Yorùbá history. It must be noted, on the one hand, that none of the two episodes was a direct successor to the one before it. Just as Arabic/Muslims sartorial tradition was alien to Yorùbá sartorial tradition, so also was Europeans/Christians sartorial tradition. On the other hand, neither the Arabic/Muslims nor the Europeans/Christians sartorial traditions were able to supplant or displace the erstwhile Yorùbá sartorial tradition. Nevertheless, both aspired to supplant Yorùbá sartorial tradition: for instance, Islam, Christianity and colonial adventurers made concerted efforts at different times to superimpose Arabic and European sartorial traditions on Yorùbá people. These efforts, however, recorded limited successes. Not only did the Ibadan warriors rebuffed the Jihadists who had overran Ilorin and were, from this new capital, introducing Arabic/Islamic culture into Yorubaland, but also stuck to their traditional facial markings, clothing styles, etc.; leaving Ilorin and other conquered Yorùbá territories to adopt *Pele* and loose-fitting clothes common to Arabic/Muslims. The offspring of the Yorùbá who rebuffed the Jihadists later successfully rebuffed the church’s attempt to impose European/Christian dress, which was equated with being genuinely Christians.

On the one hand, Mojola Agbebi and many others took the church headlong on the sanctity of indigenous dress over European dress. On the other hand, others in colonial employment openly condemned the use of European dress (daubed ‘office dress’ or ‘uniform’) that were essentially made for temperate regions in

Nigeria's tropical climate, as both unhealthy and ambivalent of the so-called civilization the European missions and colonial administrators claimed they were spreading.

The high point of these contestations was that the wearing of traditional dress, as against Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dress became a nationalistic issue. To use Yorùbá dress was (and still is) to be Yorùbá and good, unsoiled and honest; while to use Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dresses was (and still is) to be unpatriotic and bad; corrupt and dishonest. In addition, indigenous Yorùbá dress embodied power, both spiritual and secular. Owing to the powers in them, whether real or putative, Yorùbá dress is regarded as sacred, as it shares the status, power, and identity of its wearers. Hence, a king needs not attend a function physically; so far one of his symbols of office is present at such occasion. In similar fashion as Christianity, the dress ensembles of deity priests and priestesses were regarded as potent as the powers reposed in these priests, and just as the biblical woman with issues of blood touched the hem of Jesus' cloak and was healed, dress ensembles of priests and priestesses are believed to be equally potent. Dress' overt function therefore goes beyond the existential value of covering human nakedness and preventing same from unsolicited and unwanted gaze to include complex phenomenon such as power, age, sex, status, office, etc. In fact, for the Yorùbá, the dress not only makes the monk, but also establishes, reinforces, and sustains the monk.

At yet another level, nudity and unwrapping of the human body is also a form of dress. This broad conceptualization of dress in Yorubaland showed the sacredness of human body and the power inherent in unwrapped or naked body. Women, from time immemorial, have used this medium to check governmental excesses and to rein-in erring leaders. Alake Adedamola, during the colonial period, was removed from office when Egba women staged a naked protest against him. Ekiti women staged a naked protest to demonstrate their abhorrence to the electoral malfeasances that characterized April 2003 Governorship elections! Cases of naked protests and unwrapping of the human body as political tools abound in Yorùbá history. The study argued that whether or not the human body is dressed; Yorùbá dress also constitutes a political tool that is capable of having physical and

spiritual impact. Therefore the generality of Yorùbá believed that dress is essential to life.

Ignorant of these values inherent in Yorùbá dress, missionaries and colonial administrators attempted to impose European sartorial tradition on Yorùbá people, a step that was met with stiff opposition. The initial acceptance of European dress, the study argued, soon gave way to open rejection, if not rebellion. Even now, contemporary Yorùbá people view European sartorial tradition as essentially corrupt, immodest and unhealthy.

Notwithstanding the protests mounted by Yorùbá nationalists against imposition of European sartorial tradition, women's dress witnessed a dramatic change and it can be safely argued that while men were busy fighting against cultural colonization in dress and language, their wives, daughters and sisters were busy experimenting with European dress and adapting them to suit their new-found sartorial freedom. So, contrary to generally held assumption that women were carriers of culture, the study argued that men, rather than women, are the carriers of Yorùbá sartorial culture.

In spite of the above, the admixture of health and moral reasons as underlying factors behind the protests against imposition of Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dress over and above indigenous Yorùbá dress may be, in the case of health, reasonable and therefore right and justifiable. The moral aspect of the argument, the study argued, lacks any empirical evidence.

7.2. Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Sartorial Tradition

As the study showed, Yorùbá sartorial tradition is about two things: change and continuity. Influences from Islam, Christianity and colonialism interfaced with indigenous dress system to produce the contemporary Yorùbá sartorial tradition. In contemporary Nigeria, Yorùbá people are not only famous for their traditional dress, but also European dress. It must be asserted that although Yorùbá people protested the imposition of European dress by the Church and colonial administrators during the colonial period, but no sooner had independence replaced colonialism than the Yorùbá people went back to European dress. As the study argued, the reasons for this turnaround deals with the political economic system handed over to Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria at

independence. In so far as independence did not lead to returning the various groups that formed contemporary Nigeria to their pre-colonial stages, but continued from where the colonial masters stopped and heading forward; the need for employment and capitalist enterprise that followed colonialism made it mandatory for contemporary Yorùbá people to continue in the colonial bureaucratic tradition. Invariably, European dress persists in contemporary Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria because it serves as a marker of political transition between city-states to nation-state; between traditional, indigenous authority to contemporary political class created by colonialism; between honesty of purpose and corruption; between khaki and *Agbada*, denoting military rule versus civilian rule; force versus deliberation; war versus peace; corruption versus prudence; etc. These dichotomies and their multi-layered meanings are parts of the meaning making processes that Yorùbá people encapsulate in their dress.

Essentially, the use of indigenous dress is equated with applauding traditional values and leadership while holding political values and leadership instituted by colonialism in abeyance. Invariably, the mixing of indigenous and western dress symbolizes incorporation of indigenous with contemporary leadership structure. Conceived in this way, this study steered the arguments on dress and the construction of Yorùbá ethno-national identity away from clothing consumption to the materiality of cloth as a strategic resource for the unmaking and remaking of persons and identities.

7.3. Yorùbá Dress and Globalization

Globalization, in relation to Yorùbá dress, has manifested in two broad ways. On the one hand is the influence and incorporation of foreign or other sartorial traditions into Yorùbá dress culture, while on the other hand, is the imbibing and wearing of foreign dress culture by Yorùbá people. Attention has been given to the first, while a whole book can be written on the second. What shall be done on the second issue on globalization and Yorùbá dress here is to briefly outline the implications of these on the kernel of Yorùbá dress.

Like in other parts of the world, a feature of this second form of globalization in Yorùbá dress deals with Yorùbá people

imbibing in the jeans culture. The jeans culture is used here to describe the wearing of American-type jeans, business suits, tee-shirts, fez-caps, assortments of perfumes, etc. While it may be extremely difficult to date this development, it can however be said that its widespread usage cannot be dissociated from the era of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s. Whichever way it started, the fact remains that a drastic and sudden cut in government spending and drastic measures on the economy ensured that young men and women in Yorubaland, most of who had become jobless, soon find the wearing of jeans, tee-shirts, etc. as a way of coping with the austerity measure and this, today, has assumed a mark of not just sophistication but also of civilization. Hence, jeans culture is no longer limited to private use or associated with poverty, but now considered as standard dress. The enduring appeal of this type of dress does not lay on popularity and being foreign, but also on been trendy.

For many in Yorubaland, jeans and other clothes in this category not only speak of being young, but also of being ready to get into the trenches and get dirty. So, they are regarded as both work clothes, office clothes and fancy clothes. Institutions such as banks, insurance and telecommunication companies, etc. now encourage, if not mandate, their staff to use this type of dress, most especially on Thursdays and Fridays. Hence, it is commonplace in contemporary Yorubaland to see a Chief Executive Officer of a blue-chip company who, in the course of the week, had dressed in American business suit to turn up at the office on Friday in a pair of jeans and a branded tee-shirt with a fez cap.

While no evidence exists to support the fact that Yorùbá people used perfumes any time in their history before contacts with Islam, the introduction of the two world religions also brought about the use of assortments of perfumes, incenses, creams and deodorants in Yorùbá dress-world. Based on available information, the oldest perfume in Yorubaland is *Bint El Sudan*. It was believed to have been introduced to Yorubaland by either Muslim cleric from Northern Nigeria in early 1920s or through trade with the Sudanese around this period. In contemporary Yorubaland, assortment of perfumes and creams such as Coca, My-Only-Man, Channel 5, Joy, Nevea, Hugo Boss, Lacoste, Axe, Cocoa-butter,

Nku Cream, Pearls, etc. have replaced shear-butter, palm-kernel and cocoanut oils.

As already noted, in Nigeria today, a Yorùbá man is easily distinguished from, for instance a Hausa man not only on account of language, but most certainly on account of dress. For an average Yorùbá man or a person from Southern Nigeria, the jeans and Lacoste culture marks sophistication, western education and, in most cases, Christianity.

From previous chapters, we can unmistakably argue that Yorùbá sartorial tradition has always responded to stimuli from within and without its environment. Contemporary Yorubaland is dominated by a jeans and Lacoste generation of young boys and girls, who not only revel in wearing hybrid dress, comprising of Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá dress; but also cross-dress. It is now common for girls to wear shaved-hairs, jeans trousers, shirts and fez-caps just like their male counterparts while the boys also wear earrings, plait or weave or braid their hairs. In addition to all these, girls and boys are now wearing their trousers and skirts in such a way that a sizeable part of their buttocks are in full public glare. This is called 'sagging'. In addition to these, it is also commonplace to see young males use earrings, necklace, leg chains, etc.

From time immemorial, Yorùbá dress aims at presenting the dressed body (to both the self and others) in ways that evince pride and the value of being an *Omoluabi*, the soul of Yorùbá peoplehood noted in Chapter Two. This essentially entails being well-behaved, well-dressed, lofty in speech and conduct, fashionable, urbane, etc. Given the above, one can ask what value this new dress culture evinces. Can we arrogate this to globalization (of culture) or a collapse of Yorùbá sartorial values? In addition, given that Yorùbá sartorial tradition also established and reinforced individual and corporate identity of the Yorùbá people; whose identity - individual and corporate - is this globalized dress culture accentuating?

Using the social identity theory discussed in chapter one as a guide, answers to the above question and such other ones that one may raise in relation to sagging and associated dress ethos, could be found in the Eric Erikson's analysis of social identity opinion of Weinrich, who posits that how one construes oneself as

aspires to be in the future will differ considerably according to one's age and accumulated experiences. Weinrich's Identity Structural Analysis, a structural representation of individual's existential experience through which the relationship between individual and social space are organized, offers more insights into the new dress culture. As Weinrich noted, the process of forming a viable sense of identity in any social space starts from adolescent, where young members of the group learn group cultural traits through exploration and commitments. Four notable developments from this stage are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Identity diffusion is when a person lacks exploration and commitment to those group cultural traits that makes the group distinct from other groups. Identity foreclosure describes a situation whereby an individual failed to imbibe a group trait in the past, but now wish to commit to some group values or goals. Identity moratorium describes inability to commit oneself to a choice made. In such cases, the person displays a kind of flightiness. Lastly, identity achievement is when a person makes a choice of group trait and commits to it.

From the above, it can be argued that the new and globalized dress culture signposts identity crises associated with adolescents, especially at the start of a new thing. Unless this identity crisis is resolved at some point in life, this may be carried through an entire life.

7.4. Conclusion

From the study so far, we can conclude that although the biological functions of covering human nakedness and shielding it from unsolicited and unwanted visual intrusion remains cardinal to why people, not Yorùbá people alone, dress; the social functions of dress, that is dress as communicator of values, remains the most important part of Yorùbá sartorial tradition. The primary concern in social theory of dress, upon which the analysis in this study rests, is that dress, as a communicator of values, plays fundamental roles in how self and group identity is established, maintained, and altered. As the analyses in this study have shown, Yorùbá dress is a form of non-verbal communication, a language whose vocabularies, lexis, structure, etc. is mutually intelligible and understood by the Yorùbá people. In addition, as a non-verbal

linguistic code, it exerts a great influence on structure and process of Yorùbá's sense of self both at the individual level and at corporate level.

As a form of non-verbal communication, Yorùbá dress entails two distinct things: appearance and discourse. While appearance describes the outward expression of Yorùbá's identity through material things, dress as an example; discourse describes the inherent meanings associated with such material expressions. Although dress, as a language, is used in communication encounter among Yorùbá people, dress is however seen, processed and interpreted before verbal communication. Dress, therefore, takes pre-eminence over verbal communication in establishing and reinforcing identity - individual or group.

As is the case with all communication encounters, messages are coded using language, which could be verbal or non-verbal, by a source who encodes the message, (as we have seen in the case of dress, colour, style, semiotic of meanings, attachments, etc.) and transmits this through appropriate media to a receiver who decodes the message. This process, dubbed a review in this study, plays important role in identity construction. For instance, when a review (by the receiver) tallies with the intended message from the source; a successful communication is said to have been established. Where the reverse is the case, the source's message is challenged. Whether a communication is going to be established or challenged depends on whether or not both the source and receiver exists in a community of taxonomic sameness. Where they mutually understand the semiotic of meanings inherent in dress, a community is built. In this way, the language became inexorably tied to the community and vice versa.

It must however be noted that situations may arise whereby a source may code a language wrongly or a receiver may decode a language wrongly. This may occur deliberately as a form of protest (Ekiti Women's naked protest is a good example) or accidentally due to poor knowledge of the language (the discussions on *Ara-Oko* is an apt illustration of this). Situations such as these do nothing to invalidate the acceptance of the language within the group. Viewed in this way, Yorùbá dress became more meaningful when considered within the context of Yorubaland's socio-economic, political history and material culture.

It is in context of the foregoing that the varieties of dress, uses, and changes that Yorùbá dress has witnessed became meaningful in the general consideration of how Yorùbá dress built into Yorùbá identity. As the study has shown, Yorùbá people project the value of being an *Omoluabi*, a generic term for everything good, lofty and of good report.

Yorùbá people dress to appear acceptable both to themselves and to others. Appearance, here, deals essentially with both the self and others (the public). The first deals with how an individual view him or herself as an individual, while the other deals with how others see the individual. An individual's self-identity is validated when there is agreement in his or her own opinion of him or herself and those of others about him or her. Where opinions coincide, the individual's self-identity is validated, but where the reverse is the case, the individual's self-identity is challenged. To ensure correspondence between an individual's self-identity and those held by others about him or her, humans seek, using different means and methods, to influence not just their own perception of themselves, but also how others perceive them. Dress, one of the ingenious means through which humans seek to influence perception, therefore plays fundamental roles in establishing, altering, projecting self-identity not only of oneself to oneself, but also of oneself to others as well as of others to oneself.

As already shown, *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe'Jo Da* may give different views or identities about a couple, they also mirror family cohesion and togetherness. Facial marks, caps, beads, and religious dress may reflect origin, ranks and other cherished categories; they may also show power and devotion at the same time. Not minding type, colour or circumstance of usage, it is this capacity of Yorùbá dress to communicate values, the most fundamental being the virtue of being an *Omoluabi*, which compels Yorùbá people to take the greatest care in presenting themselves to both 'the self' and to public.

Although Islam, Christianity, colonialism, Western education and a host of associated developments have impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition, Yorùbáness still remained an expression of what had already existed, a critical component of which is Yorùbá dress. Notwithstanding these changes, the links between Yorùbáness and Yorùbá dress still remains active and, as already

shown, these links will always remain active. As noted in the study, just as it is difficult to separate a bone from its marrows and still ensure the harmonious functioning of the body, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove Yorùbá dress from Yorùbá identity.