

**FEMINISTS' BODY SENSITIVITY: AN OVERVIEW OF THE WESTERN AND NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVES\***

**Abstract**

*Feminism is the bedrock of the campaign for the guarantee of women's right to choose abortion. Consequently, the radical feminists continuously canvassed for equality between men and women and felt that in order for women to be able to stand on equal footing with their male counter parts, women should be given the right to choose whatever they want to do with her body. Women, the so-called radical feminists, want to possess the right to determine whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term. A right which they claim ought to be free from any intervention. Radical feminists, since the 1960s have fought vigorously to ensure that, the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion, is left to the women, and they are sensitizing women all around the globe to be aware of the existence of such right. This research therefore set out to know whether this idea of western notion of body sensitivity fit into the Nigerian notion of body sensitivity. Consequently, a case study was carried out in Nigeria, wherein interview and focus group discussion was carried out in order to know the exact meaning of body sensitivity as it applies to women in Nigeria. The result shows that, body sensitivity to Nigerian women does not extend to abortion.*

**Keywords:** *Feminism, body sensitivity, abortion, autonomous, culture*

**1. Introduction**

Feminism was (and still is) a western perception. The movement for gender equality emerges from the enlightenment ideas of freedom, equality and dignity of human person. In the laudable works of John Stuart Mills and Mary Wollstonecraft, two of the earliest and the most influential feminists, we constantly see references to reason, rationality and objectivity. Unfortunately, with these apparently lofty thoughts and ideals, came western exceptionalism and its negative aspects- ethnocentrism, racism and imperialism. Through the colonialist prospects and projects, western modern thoughts were introduced to the future nations of the third world. And since then, we have witnessed the uneasy relationship between feminism- with all its western intellectual and philosophical baggage.<sup>1</sup> The second-wave feminism which gained much ground in the 1960s, 70s and early 80s was very much a product of enlightenment thoughts with its almost messianic belief in unlimited progress. Feminists, at this point, had a less nuanced vision of the world. They emphasize universality of their mission. It did not cross their minds for once that, women in other parts of the world had their own rooted culturally specific notion of 'women's right'.<sup>2</sup> Western feminism did not avert their minds to the well nurtured notion of rights as perceived by other women in other part of the world.<sup>3</sup> Second-wave feminists all over were supposed to come together as women and not as anything else-

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<sup>1</sup>S. Hamid, 'Between Orientalism and Postmodernism: The Changing Nature of Western Feminist Thought Towards the Middle East' *4HAWWA* (2006), pp. 76-78.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. Reiner Lewis and Sara Mills note that, 'Second wave Anglo-American feminist theory had emerged from western middle-class women's experiences and developed a form of theorizing-sisterhood that is global'-which assumed that those white aspirations and concerns were the aspirations and concerns of women everywhere. See, L. Reiner and S. Mills, *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader USA: Canada*, Routledge (2003), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup>Feminism is a term conceptualized and adopted by white American women. Placing all women's history under white women's history, thereby giving the latter the definite position is questionable. One uniform criticism leveled by Africans is that, feminism does not see beyond western societies, and this ignores or marginalizes the specific problems of African women. See, N. Masuku, 'Perceived Oppression of Women in Zulu Folklore: A Feminist Critique' (PhD diss., University of South Africa 2005). Any act being perpetrated by women, especially, African women are seen as archaic and primitive. On the issue of genital cutting, the western feminists have refused to see the dangers apparent in a form of action perpetrated by the west which is similar to female genital cuttings in Africa. See, N. Ehrenreich and M. Barr, 'Intersex Surgery, Female Genital Cutting and the Selective Condemnation of Cultural Practices' *40 Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* (2005), pp. 71-74.

not as Black women, not as Arab women and not as Catholic women. The common and over-riding denominator was supposed to be the oppression at the hands of men that each and every woman experienced.<sup>4</sup> This feminism is often equated and linked with radical feminism<sup>5</sup> and hatred for men, the rejection of African traditions and fundamental rejection of marriage and motherhood, and an endeavor to invert the power relationship of genders.<sup>6</sup> It is here asserted that, there are different values and concerns raised by both Western feminism and feminism in other parts of the world. It is based on this contention that the authors have put forth the arguments that western notion of body sensitivity is different from the Nigerian conception of body sensitivity.

## 2. Methodology

Qualitative research is very labor intensive. Analyzing a large sample can be time consuming and most often impractical.<sup>7</sup> Thus, '15' has been said to be the smallest acceptable sample for all qualitative research.<sup>8</sup> However, Charmaz<sup>9</sup> has suggested that '25' participants are adequate for small project and according to Ritchie et al,<sup>10</sup> qualitative samples often lie under '50'. 'Experience of most qualitative researchers (emphasis added) is that, in interview studies, little that is 'new' comes out of transcripts after you have interviewed 20 or so people'.<sup>11</sup> A non-probabilistic sampling was favored as statistical generalization is not within the purview of this study.<sup>12</sup> The non-probabilistic sampling employed in this study is the purposeful or judgment sampling, wherein the authors' uses their judgment as to who can provide the best information needed to buttress the fact that, Western notion of body sensitivity is quite different from the Nigerian notion of body sensitivity.<sup>13</sup> In a purposeful sampling, random sampling makes little sense.<sup>14</sup> The author therefore selects samples from which the most can be learned. In the light of the above, '31' samples were selected for the purpose of this study,<sup>15</sup> '10' out of which were participants from the '2' focus group sessions. Samples were

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<sup>4</sup>Hamid, 'Between Orientalism and Postmodernism,' 76.

<sup>5</sup>Radical feminism identifies patriarchy, or male dominance as the root cause of women's oppression. In other words, women experience discrimination because social relations and social interactions are shaped by male power and privilege. See, A. Burgess-Proctor, 'Intersection of Race, Class, Gender and Crime: Future Direction for Feminist Criminology' 1*Feminist Criminology* (2006), p. 29.

<sup>6</sup>Masuku, 'Women in Zulu Folklore.' Throughout its long history, feminism has sought to disturb the patriarchal culture and assert a belief in sexual equality. Ibid, 22.

<sup>7</sup>Large samples will make it virtually impossible for the researcher to analyze adequately the staggering amount of data to be collected. This is even more so in this particular study where the context dictated the use of only one investigator. (Study done in partial fulfillment of the award of a PhD degree in respect of the author).

<sup>8</sup>B. Daniel, 'From the Life-History Approach to the Transformation of Sociological Practice' in *Biography and Society: The Life History Approach in the Social Sciences*, ed. Daniel Bertaux, London, Sage (1981), pp. 29-35.

<sup>9</sup>K. Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide Through Qualitative Analysis* London: Sage (2006), pp. 114.

<sup>10</sup>J. Ritchie J, J. Lewis and E. Gillian, 'Designing and Selecting Samples' in *Qualitative Research Practice. A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*, eds.J. Ritchie and J. Lewis, London, Sage (2003), pp. 77- 84.

<sup>11</sup>J. Green and N. Thorogood, *Qualitative Methods for Health Research* London, Sage (2004), pp.120. This is the concept of saturation-the point at which no new information are observed in the data. See, Greg Guest, A. Bunce and L. Johnson, 'How many Interviews are enough? An Experiment with data Saturation and Variability' 18*Field Methods* (2006), p. 59.

<sup>12</sup>This is a qualitative research, which is a procedure that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantification. See A. Strauss and J. Cobin, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques* Newbury Park, Sage (1990), p. 17. See also, M. Hoepfl, 'Choosing Qualitative Research: A Premier for Technology Education Researchers' 9*Journal of Technology Education. Electronic Journal* (1997), p. 1.

<sup>13</sup>M. N. Marshall, 'Sampling for Qualitative Research' 13*Family Practice* (1996), pp. 522-523.

<sup>14</sup>D. E. Pokinghorne, 'Language and Meaning: Data Collection in Qualitative Research' 52*Journal of Counseling Psychology* (2005), p. 140.

<sup>15</sup>The sample size was not intended to be this large, but as the interview progressed, (that is after interviewing one sample representing each unit of analysis), the authors realized that, what was being said corresponds totally with the initial theoretical preposition, suggesting that, body sensitivity as viewed by Nigerians is different from the western view of body sensitivity. Hence in a bid to have a non-bias analysis as well as to gather heterogeneous

not selected at once. The authors picked a sample representing each unit of analysis one at a time,<sup>16</sup> until the whole unit of analysis was exhausted. Initial contacts were made via telephone calls to the selected samples. If he or she agrees to participate, a meeting was then fixed. Data was collected through structured interview<sup>17</sup> and unstructured interviews<sup>18</sup> relating to how the participants perceived the idea of a woman being sensitive to her body in order to determine whether or not to carry her pregnancy to term. Focus group discussion, as a form of participant observation<sup>19</sup> was also employed in this study in order to elicit views from these groups. The views of these participants will be analyzed to see whether the western idea of body sensitivity is the same with the Nigerian perception of body sensitivity. An interview guide (pre-drafted questions) was used in order to avoid losing focus and to ensure that relevant questions are asked. Questions asked were both closed and open-ended. While some indicators require a brief and precise answer, it is also desirable to let information emerge from the field. Participants were given opportunity to express their thoughts on the topic as freely as possible. Participants serving as interviewee for this study are non-governmental organizations, league of Muslim and Christian women, African traditionalists, doctors as well as married and unmarried men and women.

Engaging various participants was essential as this study seeks to analyze their views to know the different perceptions attributed to body sensitivity of women, which will aid the study in realizing its objective of

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views, the researcher decided to pursue rival explanations, and more samples were included in the research. Consequently, additional two samples were selected for each unit of analysis. This means that, three samples represented each unit of analysis. By the end interviewing the 21<sup>st</sup> participants in this study, it was discovered that, the same things were being repeated over and over again by the selected samples. This signifies the attainment of saturation. The sample size is sufficient when qualitative researchers achieve saturation. Saturation means that collecting data from additional participants adds no new information to what has already been collected. See, A. H. White, 'Using Samples to Provide Evidence' in *Evidence-Based Practice for Nurses: Appraisal and Application*, eds. N. Schmidt and J. M. Brown, Canada: Jones and Barlett Learning (2011), pp. 247-263. The general principle that guides sample size is saturation of data or redundancy of data. See, W. A. Pitney and J. Parker, *Qualitative Research in Physical Activity and Health Professions USA*: Human Kinetics (2009), p. 44.

<sup>16</sup>The unit of analysis in this study is the views of certain participants on the body sensitivity in the Nigerian context. It is the views of these people (samples) that are studied, not the samples themselves. Hence the views of NGOs, the views of Moslem and Christian women, the views of African traditional religion, the views of doctors and the views of married, as well as unmarried men and women constitutes the unit of analysis for this study. Therefore, in the spirit of looking for heterogeneity of views, the researcher selected 3 samples to represent each of these units of analysis.

<sup>17</sup>This is a formal interview with questions already written down as a guide for the researcher to follow. See M. Dunne, J. Pryor, and P. Yates, *Becoming a Researcher: A Research Companion for the Social Sciences* England, Open University Press, (2005), p. 28. A formal interview conducted when the researcher knows exactly what information is needed. It is usually conducted with the help of an interview schedule or guide. See also, A. Yaqin, *Legal Research and Writing* Kelana Jaya, Lexis Nexis, (2007), p. 170. In a structured interview, the interviewer asks all the respondents the same series of pre-established questions with limited set of response categories. See, A. Fontana and A. H. Prokos, *Interview: From Formal to Post-Modern* California, Left Coast Press, (2007), p. 19. See also, C. Lorenza, *Step to Success: Interview Others* London, A & C Black Publishers, (2006), p. 11.

<sup>18</sup>An interview conducted in an informal (non-guided) manner to elicit information on the experiences, opinions, attitudes, feelings or perceptions. See, Yaqin, *Legal Research*, p. 170. The objective of an unstructured interview is to collect information on some preliminary issues so that the researcher can formulate ideas of what variables need further in-depth investigation. See, U. Sekaran, *Research Methods for Business: A Skill Building Approach* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., United Kingdom, John Wiley and Sons Ltd, (1992), p. 190. Also for the aim of an unstructured interview, see Fontana and Prokos, *Interview*, pp. 39-40. The unstructured interview has been vigorously described as naturalistic, autobiographical, in depth, narrative or non-narrative. See, L. Blaxter, C. Hughes and M. Tight, *How to Research* 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., England, Open University Press, (2005), p. 172. See also, J. Holland and C. Ramazonoglu., 'Coming to Conclusions: Power and Interpretation in Researching Young Women's Sexuality' in *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* eds. M. Maynard and J. Purvis, UK and USA, Taylor and Francis Ltd, (1994), pp. 125-135.

<sup>19</sup>H. Palsson, 'Participant Observation in Logistics Research: Experiences from an RFID Implementation Study' *International Journal of Physical Distribution and Logistics Management* (2007), p.150. This paper suggests that, the comparison between interview studies and participant observation are to a large extent, also valid for focus groups.

distinguishing between western perceived notion of body sensitivity and Nigerians’ perceived notion. During the data collection, the researcher secured 21 Key informants and 2 focus group sessions (the focus group ‘1’ comprised of four participants, while the focus group ‘2’ comprise of six participants)<sup>20</sup> consisting of both Christians and Moslems. They came from various backgrounds and professions, had varying qualifications and worked in both government as well as non-government organizations. The participants that took part in the study lived across eight towns within Nigeria namely, Ilorin, Ile-Ife, Osogbo, Ilesha, Lokoja, Ajaokuta, Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. These towns can conveniently be distributed within five different States within the country namely, Kwara State (Ilorin), Osun State (Ile-Ife, Osogbo and Ilesha), Kogi State (Lokoja and Ajaokuta), Lagos State (Lagos) and FCT (Abuja). The choice of location is further to ensure heterogeneity of views.

TABLE I. Background information of participants (Interview)

	Study Areas	Occupation	Education	Religion	Sex	Unit of Analysis
KI1	Ilorin	Politician	MBBS	Islam	M	Doctors
KI2	Ajaokuta	Orthodox Doctor	MBBS	Christianity	M	Doctor
KI3	Lokoja	Orthodox Doctor	MBBS	Christianity	F	Doctor
KI4	Ilorin	Retired Civil Servant	Diploma	Christianity	M	Married Man
KI5	Ilorin	Islamic Cleric	Primary School Certificate	Islam	M	Married Man
KI6	Abuja	Banker	B.sc	Islam	M	Married Man
KI7	Ilorin	Trader	B.sc	Islam	F	Married Woman
KI8	Lokoja	Nurse	School Nursing Certificate	Christianity	F	Married Woman
KI9	Ajaokuta	Hospital Attendant	Primary School Certificate	Christianity	F	Married Woman
KI10	Lagos	Student	Student	Islam	M	Unmarried Man
KI11	Ilorin	Banker	BA	Christianity	M	Unmarried Man
KI12	Lokoja	Civil Servant	BA	Islam	M	Unmarried Man
KI13	Abuja	Teacher	National Certificate of Education	Christianity	F	Unmarried Woman
KI14	Abuja	Civil Servant	Diploma	Christianity	F	Unmarried Woman
KI15	Ilorin	Student	Student	Islam	F	Unmarried Woman

<sup>20</sup>Focus group interview is an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic. Groups are typically 6 to 10 people with similar background who participate in the interview for one or two hours. See, Patton, Michael Quinn, *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition (California: Sage Publication, 2002), 385. See also, Danuta Przepiorkowska, ‘An Interpreted FOCUS Group Interview as a Type of Interpreter-Mediated Event’ in *Translation Effects. Selected papers of the CETRA Research Seminar in Translation Studies2009* ed. Omid Azadibougar, (University of Warsaw 2010), 7.

KI16	Abuja	NGO Director	B.sc	Islam	F	(Dawah)Non-Governmental Organization
KI17	Ilorin	Nursery and Primary School Proprietress	B.sc	Christianity	F	(Girls' Guide)Non-Governmental Organization
KI18	Abuja	Secretary FIDA Office	LL.B, BL	Christianity	F	(FIDA) Non-Governmental Organization
KI19	Ilesha	NGO Director	Pharmacist	Christianity	F	(Disabled Children) Non-Governmental Organization
KI20	Ile-Ife	Senior Lecturer, Obafemi Awolowo University. Ile-Ife	PhD	Christianity	M	African Traditional Religion
K2I	Osogbo	International Renowned author and Chief Priest	.....	Traditionalist	M	African Traditional Religion

a. Source: Field study 2012.  
KI: Key Informant.

TABLE II. Background information of focus group session '1

	Study Area	Occupation	Education	Religion	Sex	Unit of Analysis
FGS1a	Ilorin	Nurse	School of Nursing Certificate	Christianity	F	Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
FGS1b	Ilorin	Headmistress of Public School	National Certificate of Education	Christianity	F	Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
FGS1c	Ilorin	Trader	Secondary School Certificate	Christianity	F	Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)
FGS1d	Ilorin	Secretary Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria	B.sc	Christianity	F	Women Wing of Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN)

b. Source: Field study 2012.  
FGS: Focus Group Session

TABLE III Background information of focus group session ‘2’

	Study Area	Occupation	Education	Religion	Sex	Unit of Analysis
FGS2a	Ilorin	National Trustee of FOMWAN and Proprietor of Secondary School	BA	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
FGS2b	Ilorin	Teacher	National Certificate of Education	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
FGS2c	Ilorin	Business Woman	Secondary School certificate	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
FGS2d	Ilorin	Civil Servant	B.sc	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
FGS2e	Ilorin	Civil Servant	B.sc	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization of Nigeria (FOMWAN)
FGS2f	Ilorin	Trader	Primary School Certificate	Islam	F	Federation of Muslim Women Organization (FOMWAN)

c. Source: Field study 2012  
FGS: Focus Group Session

### 3. Results

It was the belief of the majority of the participants that sensitivity to the body of a woman to the extent that the woman will want to do away with the baby inside her is quite foreign to Nigeria. The participants will want to believe that, no woman in Nigeria will ever take that as an opportunity. Taking that as an opportunity, they say, will mean the woman is sidelining her husband. The view expressed by the participants is illustrated in the table below;

TABLE IV Subtheme of Body Sensitivity by interviewed participants

Western Idea	1	2	3	4	5	6	10	16	17	18	19	21
Spiritual Idea	4	9	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cosmetology	10	11	12	13	14	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Procreation	7	8	16	18	19	20	21	-	-	-	-	-

d. Source: Field study 2012.

e. Numbering in the table represents key informants (KI)

TABLE V: Subtheme of Body Sensitivity of Focus Group Sessions

Western Idea	FGS1	FGS2
Spiritual Idea	FGS1	-
Cosmetology	-	FGS 2

f. Source: Field Work 2012

This table reveals that the majority of the participants view the issue of body sensitivity as a western phenomenon which does not fit into the Nigerian set up in terms of spiritual idea, cosmetological idea as well as the Procreation role expected of women in Nigeria generally. The emerging themes from the multiple group sessions are similar to one another. The subthemes that emerged from the study are discussed hereunder.

#### **4. Discussion of Findings**

##### **Western Idea of Body Sensitivity**

Most of the participants interviewed said that being sensitive to what happens to a woman's body in Nigeria is a new phenomenon which cannot be viewed as an opportunity for women in Nigeria. Viewing it as an opportunity will be tantamount to going radical and western. The Western notion of body sensitivity has been linked to female inequality brought about by female biology. The 'Dialectic of Sex'<sup>21</sup>, written by Shulamith Firestone, in 1970 was one of the first studies to outline a radical feminist explanation of female inequality. According to her, it is the system of reproduction within the biological family which is the fundamental cause of gender inequality. Women are dominated primarily by men because of female biology; menstruation, childbirth and the menopause, all created physical difficulties. Women are particularly dependent upon men when they are pregnant<sup>22</sup> or are breastfeeding<sup>23</sup> and the long period of human infant dependency created further dependency for women since they are obliged to care for these infants. This being the case, if women are to achieve gender equality, they must first achieve biological equality via elimination of their biological disadvantages. The way suggested by Firestone is the technological separation of reproduction from the female body, which is a necessary condition for women's liberation.<sup>24</sup> The feminist truism that, 'the personal is political' may never be more apt than in body politics. 'Body Politics', the dispute over the degree of individual (female) and social (male) control of the body, eventually became a driving force behind the campaign for reproductive right for women. The right for women to make decision about their own bodies was a sine qua non for women's liberation. Feminists believe that, they will never be free and healthy if they did not have the right to reclaim their bodies from the sexual slavery of pregnancy,

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<sup>21</sup>Sex class sprang directly from a biological reality: man and women were created different and not equal. See, S. Firestone, *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution* New York, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (2003), p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Pregnancy is a form of intrusion and invasion into a woman's body. Pregnancy connects women with life, and this is something which all women should resist and frown at. This is where the original feminist argument for reproductive freedom comes about, which in turn, relates to the definitive feminist insight that pregnancy- the invasion of the body by the other to which women are distinctively vulnerable- is an injury and ought to be treated as such. See, R. West, 'Jurisprudence and Gender' 55*University of Chicago Law Review* (1988), p.30. Pregnancy was described by Robin West as an 'invasive harm'. See, R. West, 'Desperately Seeking a Moralist' 29*Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* (2006), pp.1-2. <http://www.law.harvard.edu/students/orgs/jlg/vol291/west.pdf> accessed June 15, 2012. See also, R. West, *Caring for Justice* New York, New York University Press, (1997), p. 94.

<sup>23</sup>Infant feeding occurs in the context of continued gender inequalities and in the context of a feminist movement that left women vulnerable to a system that defined male body and mind as the norm. Feminists argue that, we need a feminist movement that fully incorporate women's needs as biological and reproductive social beings, alongside their needs as productive beings and a movement that defines the female body and mind as the norm. See, P. H. Smith, 'Is It Just So My Right?' Women Repossessing Breastfeeding' 3*International Breastfeeding Journal* (2008) accessed June 16, 2012, <http://www.internationalbreastfeedingjournal.com/content/3/1/12>.

<sup>24</sup>See West, 'Jurisprudence and Gender'. With the biomedicalization of reproduction, women's bodies have been gradually instrumentalized, de-composed and finally constructed. Reproduction nowadays is seen as a medically managed problem. The last three decades have seen the advent of such high tech reproduction interventions as, fertility drugs, IVF, donor eggs/sperm, donated embryos, surrogate mothering or more advanced ones as transfer cell nuclei, embryo splitting and even the potential cloning of adults. See, S. Hubei, 'The Womb: From Sanctuary of Life to Public Space, Women's Body in Assisted Reproduction' L1 1*Studia Universitatis Babeş-Bolyai, Theological Catholica Latina* (2006) accessed June 15, 2012, [http://roateo.ubbcluj.ro/studia/st\\_Hubei\\_2006\\_1.pdf](http://roateo.ubbcluj.ro/studia/st_Hubei_2006_1.pdf)). See also, S. Franklin, 'Transbiology: A Feminist Cultural Account of being after IVF' 9*The Scholar and Feminist Online* (2010/2011) accessed June 15, 2012, [http://barnard.edu/sfonline/reprotech/print\\_franklin.htm](http://barnard.edu/sfonline/reprotech/print_franklin.htm).

hence, the focus on sexual liberation and reproductive right, particularly the right to abort an unplanned or unwanted fetus.<sup>25</sup>

In a related work by Frances Olsen, it has been observed that women should have a voice of their own. They should have autonomy so as to be able to decide what to do with their bodies. To her, any regulation by the state to prevent women from doing whatever she wants is a form of patriarchy.<sup>26</sup> Gaining the access to safe and legal abortion finally allowed women to have the basic right of controlling their own bodies.<sup>27</sup> Right to abortion has equalized women by giving them the right to determine whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term. This is equivalent to giving them the right to manage their own bodies. Without abortion, women would be unjustly forced into motherhood. Denying women this right will also force them into submissive role in society.<sup>28</sup>

### **Nigerian Idea of Body Sensitivity**

While the western idea of body sensitivity has been linked to women's inequality as a result of her biology, and consequently, the hatred for pregnancy, Nigerian woman idea of body sensitivity is in the opposite direction of the westerns'. This is because, in Nigeria, pregnancy is loved, not hated, because, it constitutes power.<sup>29</sup> Motherhood is often defined as an automatic set of feeling and behavior that is switched on by pregnancy and the birth of a baby. It is an experience that is said to be profoundly shaped by social context and culture. Motherhood is seen as a moral and psychological transformation whereby a woman comes to terms with being different in that she ceases to be an autonomous individual because she is in one way or the other connected to another- her baby.<sup>30</sup> Motherhood is a joyful and privileged state for a woman because in pregnancy, the woman is said to 'glow and shine' and she receives special attention especially from her husband and mother-in-law. No matter the skills, the desires and the talents of a woman, her primary function is that of motherhood.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>J. M. Jaffe, 'Borderland Bodies: Queering Intersectional Health Activisms' (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 2009).

<sup>26</sup>F. Olsen, 'Statutory Rape: A Feminist Critique of Rights Analysis' in *Feminist Legal Theory: Readings in Law and Gender* eds., K.T. Bartlett and R. Kennedy R, Boulder: Westview Press, (1991), p. 306. See also, C. B. Whitman, 'Review Essay of Statutory Rape: A Feminist Critique of Rights Analysis by Frances Olsen' *17Feminist Studies* (1991), p. 496.

<sup>27</sup>P. Smith, 'Feminist Philosophy of Law' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2009) accessed June 15, 2012, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/feminism-law/>.

<sup>28</sup>Pregnancy works to condemn women to second class citizens. See, C. Pomeroy, 'Abortion and Women's Rights: Unification of Pro-Life and Pro-Choice through Feminism' (2008) accessed June 15, 2012, <http://serendip.brynmawr.edu/exchange/node/1845>. When women are compelled to carry and bear children, they are subjected to 'involuntary servitude'. See, A. Koppelman, 'Forced Labor Revisited: The Thirteenth Amendment and Abortion' in *The Promises of Liberty: The History and Contemporary Relevance of the Thirteenth Amendment*. Alexander Tsesis New York, Columbia University Press, (2010), pp. 1- 2.

<sup>29</sup>Motherhood in some quarters is seen as a sacred and powerful spiritual path for a woman to take.. See, R. Akujobi, 'Motherhood in African Literature and Culture' *13CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture* (2011), pp. 1-5 accessed June 11, 2012, <http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/>.

<sup>30</sup>It should be noted here, that western feminists want to be autonomous so that they will have a right to decide what to do with their pregnancies. Women in the western world want to have a voice of their own in order to decide whether or not to carry a pregnancy to term. This autonomous ambition must not be interfered with by the government, or anybody for that matter, not even their husbands. Any attempt to interfere with this autonomy is seen as a form of patriarchy. See Olsen, 'Statutory Rape,' p. 496. It could be seen that, when a Nigerian woman is pregnant, she wholeheartedly surrenders her autonomous notions for the sake of the child connected to her. It should also be noted that, this aspect of connectedness of a baby to her mother has been frowned at by the western women.

<sup>31</sup>This is different from the western perception, where reproduction is subject to agreement between couples- whether or not to have children is well spelt out before marriage. This is not so in Nigeria (Africa, generally) where woman aspires to be a mother someday. Motherhood in Africa is seen as a God-giving role and for this reason, it is sacred. Africans take motherhood to be all about children. Every woman is encouraged to get marry and get children in order to express her womanhood. See Akujobi, 'Motherhood,' pp. 1-3. Despite the fact that, in most Yoruba culture, a wife is referred to an 'eru' (slave) yet, it is still the dream of almost every girl to get married, because through the institution of marriage, she can become a 'proud mother'. By becoming a mother therefore, a woman is promoted to the most esteemed position in which she can be referred to as a 'precious stone'. Therefore, it is a tragedy for a woman not to have a child, and this is reflected in a Yoruba song;

Motherhood is considered to be very paramount in Yoruba culture as the preservation of the entire humanity depends on the role of mothers in the society.<sup>32</sup> This is another reason why some of the participants interviewed viewed that, the western perception of body sensitivity is quite different from the Nigerians' perception of body sensitivity. The view was that, procreation is an important aspect of Nigerian women.<sup>33</sup> Other reasons that distinguishes western body sensitivity from the Nigerian women's notion, is that, while some of the participants talked about body sensitivity in line with their spiritual beliefs, some linked body sensitivity to cosmetics. The former held the view that, they cannot unilaterally take decisions as regards their bodies since their bodies; do not belong to them exclusively. This category of participants emphatically places the authority of decision making over their bodies on God, followed by their husbands. They said that, their bodies are the temple of God.<sup>34</sup> Our bodies would be in God's image. Our bodies would be the house of our spirit. We came to this earth that we might have a body and present it pure before God in the Celestial Kingdom. The great principle of happiness consists in having a body. The devil has no body, and here in, is his punishment.<sup>35</sup> Satan learned about this truth about our body. Therefore, he tries to do everything he can to get people to abuse or misuse this precious gift- the body. He has filled the world with lies and deceit about the body. He tempts many to defile this great gift of the body through unchastity, immodesty, self-indulgence and addiction. He seduces some to despise their bodies; others, he tempts to worship their bodies. In either case, he entices the world to regard the body as an object.<sup>36</sup>

It is the contentions of the participants that sensitivity about the body to the extent of wanting to do away with a pregnancy is a satanic idea. They feel that, it is because the devil has no body that is why he has filled the heart of people with such an idea so that, the people will do something which is against their body as the temple of God.

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'*omol'okun, omon'ide. Eniat'owasayetikobimo, aiyeasanlowa*', meaning 'a child is a coral bead, a child is silver. A person, who has none, has not lived a fulfilled life'. A child is referred to as '*okun*' (beads). These are a type of traditional necklace worn by *Obas* (kings) and *Ijoye* (chiefs). Wearing of '*okun*' is a symbol of royalty and authority. Using royalty symbols to describe a child, therefore, may be interpreted to mean that a child confers on his/her mother power to exercise authority in her husband's house. The importance attached to motherhood has reduced the negative effect of being referred to as an '*eru*' on the psyche of women. See, T. Makinde, 'Motherhood as a source of Empowerment of Women in Yoruba Culture' 13*Nordic Journal of African Studies* (2004), p. 167 accessed May 10, 2012, <http://www.njas.helsinki.fi/pdf-files/vol13num2/makinde.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup>Makinde, 'Motherhood as a source,' p. 166.

<sup>33</sup>Woman is the creator of human race. She is the first human contact, the first face, the guide and the mentor of humanity. See, Sweet Mocha-Monroe, 'The Woman- the Mother of Humanity' (2009) accessed June 16, 2012, <http://sweetmocha-monroe.hubpages.com/hub/THE-WOMAN>. Women, as females, perform an indispensable and arduous role in ensuring the continuation of human race. The child bearing responsibility is of great importance: human existence and continuation depends upon it. See, S. Shehabuddin, 'Female Leadership in Islam' *Islamic Foundations International Inc* Article 43, accessed June 16, 2012, [http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles\\_401\\_450/female\\_leadership\\_in\\_islam.htm](http://www.irfi.org/articles/articles_401_450/female_leadership_in_islam.htm). To the Yorubas, the primary purpose of marriage is sustaining the Yoruba race through legitimate and responsible procreation. See, Professor O. Alaba, 'Understanding Sexuality in Yoruba Culture' 4 *Understanding Human Sexuality Series* (2004), p. 1 accessed June 16, 2012, <http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/alaba.pdf>.

<sup>34</sup>'Don't you realize that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own. Corinthians 6:19. New Living Translation (2007) accessed June 16, 2012, [http://bible.cc/1\\_corinthians/6-19.htm](http://bible.cc/1_corinthians/6-19.htm). Following from Apostle Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 7:11, the evangelical position is that, every Christian is charged with the responsibility of chastity and to maintain the sanctity of human sexuality within a controlled space from the understanding that the body is 'the temple of Holy Spirit'. Consequently, the wife should be obedient and must submit completely to the husband. See, Professor M. A. Ojo, 'Religion and Sexuality: Individuality, Choice and Rights in Nigerian Christianity' 4 *Understanding Human Sexuality Series* (2005) accessed June 17, 2012, <http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/ojo.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup>See, *The Words of Joseph Smith: The Contemporary Account of the Nauvoo Discourses of the Prophet Joseph*, A. F. Ehat and L. W. Cook, Religious Study Centre, Brigham Young University: Christian Books and Bibles, (1980), p. 60.

<sup>36</sup>In the face of many satanic falsehoods about the body, 'I want to raise my voice today in support of the body. I testify that the body is a gift to be treated with gratitude and respect'. See, S. W. Tanner, 'The Sanctity of the Body' (2005) accessed June 18, 2012, <http://www.lds.org/general-conference/2005/10/the-sanctity-of-the-body?lang=eng>.

If the body is treated like a temple, there would be a dramatic increase in chastity, modesty, observance of the words of wisdom and similar decrease in the problems of pornography and abuse. This is because the body, like the temple, will be regarded as a sacred sanctuary of the spirit. Just as no unclean thing may enter the temple, people will be vigilant to keep impurity of any sort from entering the temple of their bodies. Likewise, people will also keep the outside of their bodily temples looking clean and beautiful to reflect the sacred and holy nature of what is inside; just like the church does to the temple.<sup>37</sup> While trying to keep the outside of bodily temples clean, the contention linking body sensitivity to 'body being the temple of God' has also gone in line with cosmetics and appearances because, people have been urged to appear in dresses and act in ways that reflect the sacred spirit inside them.<sup>38</sup> Hence, the body is God's sacred creation. People should respect it as a gift from God, and should not defile it in any way. Through the way you dress, you can show the Lord that you know how precious your body is. The way you dress is a reflection of what you are on the inside.<sup>39</sup>

The latter group of participants linked their being sensitive about what happens to their bodies, to cosmetics. These set of participants viewed body sensitivity in the way they look, their appearances as well as their attractiveness. In short, they went cosmetological.<sup>40</sup>

Dressings are meant to serve some definite purposes. They are part of people's culture and they define their tribal or ethnic identity. Apart from dresses being a means of cultural identity, they are for ornamental or aesthetic purposes, for protection of the body against harsh weather conditions<sup>41</sup> as well as covering the intimate parts of the body.<sup>42</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In the light of realizing the fact that, African feminism as a body and movement is shaped by African contexts and experiences, it is clear from the facts above that body sensitivity as perceived and believed by the western feminists is very different from the way body sensitivity is perceived by Nigerians. The problem that most African female scholars have with western feminism is its failure to consider the historical and social specificities in which African women struggle to determine their individual and collective destinies.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Body sensitivity is a pervasive phenomenon in authentic traditional Nigerian culture, and language is the poetic route of locating body image and beauty perceptions within traditional African consciousness. Female beauty in particular is inscribed in traditional cultural codes in relation to body parts, complexion, overall physiology and aesthetic appearance, often subject to corresponding moral evaluation. See, T. Olorutoba-Oju, 'Body Images, Beauty, Culture and Language in the Nigerian African Context' *African Regional Sexuality Resource Center* (2007), pp. 4-5 accessed May 9, 2012, <http://www.arsrc.org/downloads/uhsss/olorutoba-oju.pdf>.

<sup>41</sup>These purposes are important especially, as they form major aspects of person's personality. The African culture, and particularly that of Nigeria, encourages modest appearance as do Christian and Islamic religions. See, Jacob Omede, 'Indecent Dressing on Campuses of Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria: Implications for Counseling' *Journal of Engineering Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies* (JETERAPS) 2, No.4(2011):228. Accessed June 18, 2012, <http://jeteraps.scholarlinkresearch.org/articles/Indecent%20Dressing%20on%20Campuses%20of%20Higher%20Institutions%20of%20Learning%20in%20Nigeria.pdf>.

<sup>42</sup>Quran 24:31 and Quran 33:59, provides that, believing women are enjoined to cover all parts of their body except the face and the hands when they go out of the house or in the public. Islam places much emphasis on modest dressing- the hijab. See, A. A. Oba, 'The Hijab in Educational Institution and Human Right: Perspective from Nigeria and Beyond' *Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue* (2009), p.51.

<sup>43</sup>Emphasizing plurality, Nnaemeka asserts that, 'to meaningfully explain the phenomenon called African feminism, it is not to western feminism, but rather to African environment that one must refer'. African feminism is not reactive; it is proactive. It has life of its own rooted in the African environment. See, Evan Mwangi, *African Writes Back to Self: Matafification, Gender, Sexuality* (USA: State University of New York Press, 2009), 241. See also, Lynne E. Ford, *Women and Politics: The Pursuit of Equality* (Wadsworth: Cengage Learning, 2010), 24.