

# **NUDITY AND MORALITY: LEGISLATING WOMEN'S BODIES AND DRESS IN NIGERIA**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In January 2007, the Chair of the Senate Committee on Women and Youth Affairs, Senator Eme Ufot Ekaette, presented a Bill to the Nigeria Senate proposing that public nudity and sexual intimidation should become criminal offences. The bill is the culmination of a long and intense debate in the Nigerian media, tertiary institutions and among religious bodies about the symbolic meaning of women's dress, mobility in urban spaces and morality. Most importantly, it is about the politics of sex. This article argues that while the debate is ostensibly about protecting women from sexual violence and intimidation, it is in fact part of an hegemonic discourse to control and regulate women's sexuality and agency on the one hand, and also to reassert the normative power of heterosexuality as the only legally, theologically and culturally legitimate form of sexuality. The conjoining of the (un)dressed female body in the Nigerian social imagination with sexual violation must be read as part of a wider socio-political inability to articulate an array of contemporary social tensions which the (un)dressed body both enables and disavows.