

# She must be Stripped Naked: Female Criminality and Mob Encounters in Lagos (Nigeria) from the Neo-Liberal Era

Sharon Adetutu Omotoso, Mutiat Titilope Oladejo,  
Temitope Yetunde Bello\*

## Abstract

Gendered violence in African cities occur in various dimensions. It became rampant in the 1980s due to neo-liberal reforms. Imposing mob sanctions by denuding female suspects of crimes is a phenomenal manifestation of contemporary and urban Africa. The work uses qualitative method to analyse issues of female criminality and naked stripping of women in the cosmopolitan city of Lagos, Nigeria. With evidences of women being stripped by mobs, this study focuses on the trajectories of mob attacks and body-shaming. Stripping women naked and body-shaming feature as an expression of power over the female victim in mob encounters. Deviance and social control theories are used to examine the relationship between female criminality and nudity. Although largely deployed to deter crime, this study establishes denuding of women during mob justice is under-researched and consequently, a significant context to study the dynamics of gendered violence.

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\* Sharon Adetutu Omotoso PhD, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria & Institute for the Future of Knowledge, University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Contact: sharonomotoso@gmail.com

Mutiat Titilope Oladejo Ph.D, Department of History, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Contact: oladejomutiat@yahoo.com

Temitope Yetunde Bello Ph.D, Kola Daisi University, Nigeria. Contact: temitopebello5050@yahoo.com

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## Introduction

The colonial history of Lagos provides a comprehensive understanding of its complicated realities, as huge influx of migrants to urban areas resulted in congestions, deprivation and poverty, which prompted crime and violence. Urbanisation is challenging new social formations in contemporary cities, particularly, in a city like Lagos, where groups of people who barely know each other nor share same traditions, struggle for survival. As old communal living fades off, new forms of citizenship develop, and are often accompanied with deviance, aggression and all forms of lawlessness. It is, therefore, not coincidental that criminal acts and their mishaps arise out of these crises of modernity often affecting women and men differently (Sherrington 2008).

Female criminality featured from the colonial era, as the rate of crimes such as petty theft, kidnapping and drug peddling by women triggered by the prevailing sociopolitical economy escalated. Consequently, in the 1940s the Nigerian Women's Party (NWP) called for the mainstreaming of women into the Nigeria Police Force (NPF) (Aderinto 2012). The argument for the inclusion was based on the fact that female police officers were better positioned as handlers of female criminal cases.

Gendered violence on the streets of Africa's cities is steadily attracting varying scholarly interests. Stripping naked as a sanction imposed on female crime suspects by ad hoc groups in public places is a phenomenal manifestation of urbanization across Africa, and Lagos is a typical specimen of city life where presence of criminal activities and mob attacks justify the expediency to investigate the connecting issues of female criminality and nudity. Nudity, variously described as 'being naked', 'disrobing', 'undressing' and 'stripping', trends in different ways among women. Although, nudity is a cross-cultural phenomenon and not peculiar to Africa, its definition has witnessed a series of contestations in Africa, based on culture, politics, religion and in recent past, fashion. From the political angle, undressing in public is often described by the government as unethical and deviant to the anti-pornographic laws of the states. Religious leaders consider nudity as an aberration and unacceptable irrespective of the circumstance. This work examines how living in Lagos creates a context for female criminality and the subsequent mob justice that respond in form of denuding female suspects.

Female criminality, peculiar to Lagos as a cosmopolitan city, is the basis upon which the masses device gendered correctional means of female nudity. Therefore, female criminality becomes the starting point that situates stripping naked as a mob sanction, putting it in a particular perspective. The Global Status for

Violence Prevention (2014) defines violence as 'an extreme form of aggression, intentionally used, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm and deprivation.' Violence, in this study, is two-sided. There is violence generated from women's involvement in criminality (in instances where women partner with men for criminal acts), and there is violence brought about as the aftermath of such deviance by those who carry out coercive sanctions on the female offenders (in instances of extrajudicial correctional measures deployed by mobs against suspected female offenders). The new trends of criminality associated with urbanisation reflect aggressive tendencies in criminal acts and subsequent societal response. This implies that there is a need to understand the correlations of violent public responses to criminality via mob attacks directed at female deviants.

The article examines varying perspectives on stripping naked; presents patterns of criminality in Lagos, explicating female criminality with specific focus on kidnapping and abduction as major crimes connected with women in Lagos; examines female criminality, naked stripping and mob violence in Lagos. It cites examples of mob encounters for theft, kidnapping and abduction recently reported in the media; analyses how violence is gendered through naked stripping body-shaming and social media influence; and the security implications.

This study adopts a phenomenological approach to understanding the milieu of stripping women during mob attacks from the perspective of citizens who described their experiences (Bentz/ Shapiro 1998; Cameron/ Schaffer/ Hyeoun-Ae 2001). Incidences of stripping women naked were drawn from criminal reports and newspapers. The work adopts qualitative method, using in-depth interviews and key informant interviews. Using purposive sampling technique, the study considered five local government areas of Lagos State: Oshodi-Isolo, Ikorodu, Surulere, Alimosho, and Ejigbo, which have been identified by security personnel as notorious for mob attacks (Field Investigation 2019). The selected locations are commercial hubs including marketplaces and densely populated residences largely occupied by low-class communities with inadequate sanitation and low quality housing. Recent stripping incidences from research areas were drawn from newspapers and blogs. The justification for the use of Lagos in this study is connected to its city status and its manifestation of the realities of poverty and unequal development which was aggravated by the effect of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) from the 1980s. The phenomenological approach is adopted to investigate the occurrences of mob attack and unravel latent issues in the encounters. The work uses the interpretation of 'mob' as a

phenomenon to understand the complex nature of crime related to women. The trajectories of Lagos as a cosmopolitan city are considered as a background to articulate the intensity of crime. This approach is expected to inform and support future security frameworks that prioritise gender issues.

Stripping women naked during mob attacks forms a basis for the explanation of gender and sexual violence wherein gender and the dynamics of shaming female bodies and women's sexuality intersect. Forced naked stripping belongs to the category of sexual violence like rape, sexual circumcision, castration, forced prostitution, trafficking and sexual enslavement (United Nations 2014), thus, this study depicts forced naked stripping as a form of Gender-Based Violence that continues to disproportionately objectify and victimise women and girls.

Theoretical discourses on deviance in sociological studies have centred more on men because, according to Heidensohn (2010) and Smith and Paternoster (1987), delinquencies and crimes have involved more of men and they have become the more socially visible agents of deviance. The recent high incidence of women in criminal activities has, however, shown that more women are now deviating and they are taking advantage of dissembling and their positions in homes and family to avoid being discovered (Heidensohn 2010). Deviance and Social Control Theories are used to interrogate the connections between female criminality and stripping naked as a sanction for mob justice. While the Deviance Theory defines the unacceptable act committed by a person as a consequence of the application of some other rules (Heidensohn 2010), a key argument of the Social Control Theory is that individuals' understanding of, and commitment to, the moral codes of a community should voluntarily deter them from deviant acts. Because deviance and the subsequent social reactions are paired in this study, the conception of deviance as being largely subjectively problematic and equally a social construct that is based on the interaction of those in the society, was applied (Heidensohn 2010; Stuart/ Craig 1999). With the growing studies on social control and interrogations of the rationale for the subjection of more women and men to informal social sanctions (Carlen 2002), the need to further expand deviance studies in relation to female criminality and delinquency is rising.

Informal sanctioning by third parties in a given society constitutes negative reactions to deviance and could manifest as embarrassment, ridicule, social discrimination, exclusion and shaming. The third parties who feel the sense of belonging and loyalty to their social group or society and perceive that deviation from norms by particular persons threaten the wellbeing of their people, will not hesitate to employ any form of sanctioning that they deem appropriate for

correction and punishment (Claridge 2020). Despite the personal cost and risk that could accompany such informal and negative sanctions, these third parties often readily see these sanctioning as the good and right thing to do. Aside from rewarding the motives behind some social control mechanisms among formal and informal institutions, restrictive and force-induced elements equally characterise the direction of individuals' conformity to norms.

The more radical explanations of the Social Control Theory examine its negative terms and coercive nature towards persons that have been labelled as deviant, undesirable, problematic (Honkatukia/ Keskinen 2018). Expanding on informal social control, using early feminist studies, Honkatukia and Keskinen (2018) affirm that women and girls were subjected to different, even more intensive social control, than men and boys. Without the possibilities of power shift or provisions for negotiation that the formal social control offers, social control in informal settings can be accompanied by forceful suppression or extreme violation of the perceived deviant. Honkatukia and Keskinen (2018) associate the context of informal social control in the public sphere to include sanctions carried out on the streets by members of the public, but not established state institutions. This makes it become clearer why the administration of justice through mob attacks fits into this present theoretical discourse, where strong informal social control manifests.

### **Perspectives on Naked Stripping**

The question of what body part should be concealed or covered is unanimously explicated in scholarly works and is often understood in diverse forms (Beidelman 2012). The nature of this discourse, notwithstanding, scholars like Allolio-Nacke (2019) have attempted to provide its unifying description that suits contemporary the African situation. Being nude is not absolutely about the absence of clothes but includes the uncovered whole of human beings. These contributions have largely aided deconstructing existing socio-cultural peculiarities of nudity across the globe. They equally incorporate the understanding that nudity of both men and women has remained a paradoxical phenomenon in human existence, specifically because connotations and manifestations of nudity in Africa have been changing with significant colonial and neoliberal influences.

The perception and identification of nudity in women in pre-colonial Africa, as exemplified in the work of Beidelman (2012), embraced the notion of innocence, symbol of purity and uncontaminated African sexuality that is embodied, for example, in bare-breasted young women dancing rites to enhance their fertility. In most pre-colonial African societies, nudity manifests in cultural practices and

in some parts, includes religious rites. For rainmaking and rain holding, certain cultures in Africa mandate women to engage in naked rain dances (Omotoso 2019). Another instance is the puberty initiation ceremonies of the Fante people where girls involved in the initiation process are temporarily nude as the breasts and the private areas are covered (Sarpong 1977). Culturally, this practice is considered relevant to the preparation of girls for matured post-nuptial lives. African culture, in this regard, accepts nude status in its 'natural' form (Allolio-Nacke 2019) as desired but not as a violation of human rights.

Similar examples exist in Adamawa state, Nigeria, where the Koma people move around freely naked or near-naked in leaves and loins cloths in the precolonial era. Among the Igbo of Southeastern Nigeria in the early twentieth century, nudity was normal for women as it was a part of the accepted and the expected (Bastian 2005). While being naked seems awkward in certain climes and times, it was an acceptable and required norm as means to certain ends in ancient Africa. The advent of the Europeans in Africa brought about drastic changes in the definition of nudity of African women. The Christian missionaries objected to the spiritual or religious initiations of young women because to them, the 'nakedness' of the traditional clads and female naked appearances embodied indecency, immorality, darkness, sinfulness, vanity, disorder and danger. Their submission is founded on scriptural context of Leviticus chapter 20 where uncovering nakedness is associated with immoral acts such as adultery and incest. Keller (1993) explains that the Old Testament, in its narrative portion, describes nudity as an act in humiliation, which erodes dignity, power and respect. The emphasis on clothing and efforts to cover women's bodies were accompanied by attempts to strip them of their traditional decorations and ornaments (Becker 2005; Basden 1966). This, by implication, meant the 'savagery' of African sexuality and culture.

As the cultural and symbolic significance of women's nudity was declining, denuding women was gradually gaining momentum as legal and political enforcement tool by the colonialists. In colonial Western Nigeria, "women were often stripped naked by tax collectors to see whether they were old enough to pay tax" (Mba 1997: 137). This shows nudity largely contributed to why and how African women's nudity served as spectacles of defiance as it started being used to protest or resist oppression in 'traditional' and colonial contexts. Igbo and Niger Delta women of Nigeria used nudity as well as a form of protest in the postcolonial struggles against exploitation (Bastian 2001). Women's bodies are now being objectified and sexualised to meet the exigencies of a capitalist-driven, globalising world (Szymanski/ Moffitt/ Carr 2011). From entertainment, commerce, politics to (ICT), women's nudity in Africa has expanded in trends

and variations as the continent struggles to catch up with the 'developed' world while retaining some cultural heritages. Seemingly radical presentations of (women's) nudity in the West have redefined Africa's interpretations.

Diabate's (2020b) recent study on 'Nudity and Pleasure' connects nudity with the concept of "the pleasure turn" wherein increasing visibility and availability of erotic dance, strip clubs, naked bodies, sexy clothings and the like in major African cities have evolved. These are not only impacting on Africa's socio-cultural perceptions but equally particularising the essence of women's nakedness as a means to meet entertainment and commercial capitalist demands. Contemporary African societies' experience, in advertising communication, female's full and partial nudity (including where nude models are paid for advertising specific brands) as a way to impact consumer behavior (Latour/Pitts/ Snook-Luther 1990).

The attention stimulus that female nudity brings to the psyche of consumers expresses the paradoxes in the connotations of nudity as immoral. Women in advertisements have become stereotypic depictions as their nudity are often used for gendered portrayal and attraction as well as appearing to be largely economically motivated. More recently, the dynamics of women's nudity has been associated with violence; conceived to be a cause of sexual harassment that creates a paradox in the interpretations of violence meted on women. Women's voluntary display of their nudity as deviance during protests has now been overtaken by violence meted out on them as a correctional measure. Gobodo-Madikizela, Fish and Shefer (2014) analyse the way nudity was used to violate a woman held in police custody in post-apartheid South Africa; forceful nakedness was taken as a form of torture and violation. Diabate (2020a) equally explores the variegated narratives of power and victimhood associated with nudity on accounts of African women's helplessness. She notes that: as the most universal and yet the most highly context-driven mode of dissent, insurgent nakedness is not just one thing with multiple interpretations. It is many things. It is a different code to decipher deeper cultural and societal accounts each time it is used, not only in its interpretation but also in its constitution (Diabate 2020a: 2-3). These affirm Tamale's (2017: 57-58) assertion that "the naked body speaks" the language of spectacle, of rebellion, of subversion. It is a strategy that has been used effectively all over the world where covered bodies are the norm.

### **The SAP Era**

By the 1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme, an economic model introduced to postcolonial Nigeria by the World Bank to redirect the state to a

free market system, mainly driven by the private sector, became a major contributor to the complexity of Lagos. The SAP era presented new ways of understanding development and its fallouts especially, the connections of poverty and attendant criminality to survival in Lagos, which depict the realities of development. The resultant effects are mob attacks, involving beating, lynching and burning at stake among others.

Williams (2004) argues that, for the engagement of new patterns in African realities, it is imperative to synthesise and contextualise how understanding such realities conforms with the postcolonial interrogation of continued neo-colonialism which is entrenched in the inability of African states to avoid ties with global capitalist entanglement. The profound complications in the economy of the 1980s with the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) symbolised class changes in the society as the population of the lower class expanded while the need to acquire wealth increased. The renewed configurations of Lagos at this time featured new forms of criminalities triggered by unemployment, lack of housing facilities, uncontrolled migration and, generally, the search for livelihood. Strains created by the adoption of SAP brought to the fore a critique of the criminal forms and violence. The inequalities brewed by the unstable economy led to new forms of violence. In this work, the understanding of Lagos after the SAP-era portrays the consequences of economic problems which compounded existing challenges.

Fourchard (2006) examines the spaces of crime in Lagos and attributes them to common factors underpinned by poverty, connected to spaces described as slums. This notion is evidenced from the colonial era where spaces were segregated with some reserved for colonial officials and the rest for Africans. Migrations to Lagos from the other parts of Nigeria tensioned the spaces left for Africans, thus, slumming cultures evolved. In changing forms, the challenges of development in Lagos manifested in mass unemployment and the city became sensitive to international economic crises at the end of the twentieth century. Yeboah (2000) establishes that the correlation between economic growth and globalisation, with reference to the phenomenon of new African cities, indicates urban forms that shaped the values of livelihood. Scholars on development in Africa agree that tensions created by SAP led to the various forms of discontents, social hardship and misery among the lower social class (Bangura 1986; Olukoshi 1993; Mkandawire 1991). As the level of poverty accelerated, the Lagosians' aspiration for prosperity became gloomy and the rate of deviance and aggression increased. Put together, the inability of SAP to solve Nigerian's

economic problems, due to rural-urban migration mapped Lagos as a space of prosperity and criminality.

Urbanisation accompanied by an increasing population, has instigated the overstretched social and economic infrastructures and brought about the large scale of unemployment and multiplying criminal activities (Adisa 1994). The bloated size and its megacity status entail all forms of contradictions: Ofeimun (2005) ascribed the assault on Lagos' 'citiness' to the slums in the massive skyscrapers. Obono (2007) agrees with Ofeimun's (2005) stance and states that the adverse social conditions stimulate violence and assault parts of everyday life.

By implication, at every point or space, the lower class neighbourhoods and markets are prone to being assaulted by hoodlums and jobless youths who perpetrate mob justice because they are loosely organised and exposed to intense poverty. The paradoxical setup of Lagos is profoundly presented in Obono's (2007) statement that:

“...it represents a virtual necropolis replete with corruption, poverty, crime and sprawling corpses...However, this modern metropolis, the largest in Nigeria, is also celebrated for its life, ethos of hard work, ingenuity, and capacity for local technological innovation and adaptation.”  
(Obono 2007: 31)

Consequently, mob attacks in Lagos date back in time, foisted by SAP induced imbalance which created unemployment, lack of housing and livelihood among the inhabitants who are strange bedfellows. The coagulation of people from various parts of Nigeria, and neighbouring countries, qualifies Lagos as a dwelling place for divergent peoples. Driven by the general mentality that the city is a land of opportunities driven by informality, an average Lagos resident, either male or female, poses as manipulators and risk-takers, willing to apply every imaginable strategy for personal gains, which, in the words of Gandy (2006), is a result of economic instability and petro-capitalist development. This ultimately allows for high-level criminality often resulting in mass attacks on culpable persons by a faceless crowd.

### **Female Criminality and Mob Encounters in Lagos**

The literature on criminological studies has shown how criminal activities involving women are increasing. This has been traced to women's opportunities or exposures created by 'modernisation', urbanisation, industrialisation and

what Ebbe (1985; 1989) refers to as “the collapsing kinship ties” (especially in urban centres). In recent times, the focus of criminality studies has gone beyond concentrating on the “criminal man” (Hussein 2018) to include critical looks into female-related crimes. Socio-economic conditions and the urge for survival in cities over the decades have increased the active involvement of women in several avenues of earning livings. Few and earlier works that discuss female criminality attribute their discourses to minute crimes that are not only seen as feminine in nature but which do not attract strict formal criminal penalties and punishment. In the more recent past, women have been discovered as capable of committing virtually all forms of crime and participating in different kinds of deviant behaviour transcending sex-related offences, witchcraft and petty stealing (Chukwezi 2006). They are now engaged in sophisticated robbery, kidnapping and different forms of organised crimes.

Female criminality has become more problematic as the dynamics associated with its incidences are occurring and studied. From the common perspective that men are more violent and are found more as perpetrators of crime, the assumption or conclusion that women criminals should be ignored or identified as those who are helpless and, therefore, require sympathetic treatment rather than punishment, emerged (Smart 1992; Sulaiman, et al 2016). However, an increasing number of women are getting entangled in organised crimes, accompanied by the use of violence, and as perpetrators or participants rather than victims or accomplices (Zimudzi 2010; Kriegler 2012).

Women are no longer perceived as mere criminal tools or “pliable auxiliaries” of illegal syndicates who use their bodies or biological make-up to maintain and sustain their gang identities (see for example, Female nude encounter 4). As the views towards gender gradually change, and wider structural opportunities are available for women, there also emerged an inevitable side effect: increased female criminality and deviance (Rennison 2014). Notably, the institutional actions against crime have not followed the same trend of increase as that of increased female involvement in crimes. For instance, Lagos has housed the first and only separate prison for female offenders in Nigeria since 1955 (Premium Times 2017). Sulaiman et al. (2016) note that the court and police mostly exonerate female offenders by adopting a “medical explanation” for female crimes and, stressing a rationale for abnormality and the need for treatment rather than punishment. Zimudzi (2010) adds that female offenders in the criminal justice system have benefited from lenient treatments by male judges. Contrarily, more recent developments show that police women tend to be harsher in handling female criminals before handing over of case to the judicial system (Aborisode/ Oni 2020). Regardless of these new developments, informal control mechanisms

(such as mob justice) to dispose of crimes committed by women are deployed and maintain strongholds in African countries, particularly, in Nigeria (Fry 2014). Notably, since the pre-colonial era there were widely reported instances where women deployed nudity to ridicule their opponents and express grievances, this existed on equal footing with the subjection of female offenders to public ridicule (including denuding) by mobs. This was described by Chukwezi (2006) as internal and external cultural mechanisms for enforcing moral codes.

A major trigger to mob actions meted on women is kidnapping. It entails child abduction and kidnapping for rituals and for ransom. 'The selection of victims is more targeted and the kidnappers see it more as a business transaction, trying hard to extract money from their criminal activities' (Sahara Reporters 2020). SB Morgen Consult (2019) features Lagos as the city with frequent kidnapping cases. The Report records twenty-four cases of kidnappings for ransom in Lagos between November, 2011 and March, 2020. This is compared with other regions of Nigeria, where kidnapping in Nigeria shows that Bayelsa, Delta, Kaduna and Rivers are four of the top ten states with the highest number of kidnap incidences in Nigeria. Borno and Adamawa are reported to have a high rate of kidnap attempts linked with the activities of Boko Haram.

Numerous accounts of child abduction and kidnapping for rituals might have been unreported or underreported. Kidnapping and abduction, being criminal acts, serve as means to further executing other criminalities. Kidnapping children for rituals or trafficking is one of the offences that trigger mob attacks. In the case of child trafficking, the syndicated networks of perpetrators are across West Africa and the whole continent as well. The advent of globalisation has further expanded kidnapping; it has now transcended national boundaries and it is run by organised syndicates for human trafficking. Modern slavery within the context of human trafficking now largely involves women. It is common for women to participate as syndicates in kidnapping for ransom. They keep kidnapped victims and offer care-giving services. Despite the sanctions put forth by the state government, mob justice persists as a form of informal justice. To this end, Lagos State has strengthened the penalty for kidnapping; the "conviction for kidnapping now carries a life sentence" (Nigerian Crime and Safety Report 2019).

### **Narratives on Stripping Women Naked**

In often crowded areas of Lagos, mob actions are prevalent on streets, markets and motor parks. Increased female criminality has contributed to the changing narrative in the discourse on nudity. Forceful denuding which often form an

authorised enforcement procedure during interrogations and in detentions, now increasingly features in contemporary African societies among publicly active angry crowds. Stripping suspected females naked by the mob explains the relationship between deviance and associated sanctions from moral and legal justifications' perspective. Previous discussions on "illegal" forced nudity also include instances from proliferation of armed conflicts in Sub-Sahara Africa (Beidelman 2012) but this may not be preceded by suspected involvement in criminality by victims. While the extent of legality and fairness of forced nudity used in international settings for searching contrabands remains debatable (Sjöholm 2018), stripping women and girls naked by irrational and non-law-abiding ad hoc groups is an under-researched aspect of sexual violence (Sjöholm 2018).

A female fruit hawker in Ikorodu part of Lagos state, stressed that: "stripping women naked for everybody to see after being suspected of committing any crime is becoming rampant anytime hoodlums 'area boys' catch anybody" (Interview with Ms/Miss Tosin Oyeyemi, Ikorodu, Lagos, 2020). The Gender component of forced naked stripping is evident because the public presence of denuding places women, who are linked more with the private sphere, at more vulnerable position and situation. The peculiarity of Lagos as the epicentre of female criminality and mob violence is evident in the account of a trader in Aswani Market who talked at length on the issue:

"Everybody wants to come to Lagos. Lagos is for the all categories of people and some of them will do whatever they can do just to survive and be relevant in this city. I have been living and trading in Isolo for more than twenty years and I must tell you that this place is full of all sort of people...Women are also part of the gangs and when they are caught, no mercy even if you are a woman. These people here are very daring." (Interview with Mrs. Idowu, Isolo, 2020)

#### *Female Naked Stripping Encounter 1 (Theft)*

Vanguard, a Nigerian Newspaper, in a special report in 2014, raised issues on a November 2013 mob attack in which two women, who were accused of stealing pepper, in the Ejigbo area of Lagos State were beaten and stripped naked by a group of men, and thereafter sexually assaulted by the insertion of pepper in their private parts. According to the report:

“The incident became public when the footage was posted on the social media[...] They were alleged to have gone to a pepper shop at the central market, Iyana Ejigbo, in the night and stole pepper before they were caught by a group of vigilante who descended on them.” (Akoni 2014)

The response of law enforcement agents to the incidence was motivated by the intervention of civil society groups, such as the Women Arise for Change Initiative, who on December 23, 2013, led a protest to the Lagos State House of Assembly.

#### *Female Naked Stripping Encounter 2*

*(Narratives on Child Kidnapping at Ajao Estate, Lagos)*

A teenage girl was saved by the uncle, who coincidentally drove through the street (Ajao Estate), while the purported female kidnapper was committing the crime. The angered residents battered and stripped her naked. (Crime Watch 2017)

#### *Female Naked Stripping Encounter 3*

*(Narratives of Child Kidnapping at Dopemu, Lagos)*

In March, 2016 in Dopemu area of Egbeda, Lagos, a woman in her 50s, who was suspected of attempting to kidnap or abduct a child on his way to school, was mobbed. She was tortured and stripped naked by the youths before being rescued by a female police officer. (Adola 2016a)

#### *Female Naked Stripping Encounter 4*

*(Narratives of Child Kidnapping at Surulere, Lagos)*

Alleged plan by a female kidnap syndicate to abduct some students on their way to school last Friday in Aguda area of Surulere, Lagos, was botched, following the arrest of three of its members. The women were said to have succeeded in cajoling six students who were heading to a public school on the Island and zoomed off towards Orile/Mile Two. Immediately, the students cried for help, saying the people were kidnappers. Sensing trouble, the kidnappers immediately sped off. Unfortunately, they drove into a pothole which bust one of their tyres [...] they were caught at Abu street. The ladies were stripped naked and their

vehicle destroyed. They would have been set ablaze but for Police intervention. (Akoni 2014)

### *Female Naked Stripping Encounter 5*

*(Child Kidnapping at Ikorodu)*

A child kidnapper was yesterday caught, beaten, stripped and paraded naked at Owode Ajegunle in Ikorodu Road area of Lagos. It was a victorious moment for the residents, because for the past few months, over five children had been reported missing from the same area. Luck ran out of the kidnapper, a woman in her late 30s/40s, as she was trying to escape with the two children she abducted in front of a primary school [...] the woman who saw the children alerted people around the community and the kidnapper was apprehended and given the beating of her life. Thereafter she was stripped naked and paraded before she was rescued by the Nigerian Police. The kidnapper reportedly confessed she sells each child to her buyers for the measly sum of 50,000 naira. (Adola 2016b)

### **Triggers of Stripping Women Naked**

Understanding the trauma associated with the victimised brings to the fore the question of stripping women naked as victims of mob justice. Sanctioning of deviants by mob actions has become a critical issue when such sanctions bear some peculiarities of violence that accompany denuding and concentrate more on a particular gender – women. This act of informal and negative social control, is oftentimes executed by several bystanders who take advantage of their number and situation to inflict violence on female crime suspects without taking personal responsibility for their interventions. Stripping women naked is another dimension to mob practice and violence against women; it reflects the society's disregard for women's dignity and the rule of law (Interview with a Mrs. Bose Bakare, Lagos, 2020). It is characteristic of a particular force and coercive avenue through which informal agents assert social control on perceived and/or proven deviants. The factors highlighted below are contextual in nude stripping.

### *The Context of Patriarchy*

Africa's social formation is defined by inequality where women are perceived as the weaker humans (Chowdhury 2014). In situations of suspected crime involving women, people are 'quick' to use perpetration of street violence to communicate to the suspect victims about the powerfulness of men. Responses to mob

action and violence meted on the women indicate how female crime and sexual violence are not only intertwined, but where the society finds another avenue to, according to Sivakumaran (2007), consider women guilty of attracting violence against themselves. It was confirmed that “the women caught taking away other people’s children caused whatever treatment they face for themselves” (Interview with Mr. Shonde 2020). The cultural perspective is upheld and stated that often times, men see it as their traditional right to control or discipline women through physical means. By extension, genital shaming, sexual harassments and other forms of sexual violence have been internalized as an acceptable way of punishing women and are embodiments of unequal power relations between males and females (The Panos Institute 2003). Apart from asserting masculine control, denuding women is equally an avenue of sexually harassing women and devaluing their bodies by stripping them naked.

That the Lagos mob constantly gets involved in stripping women naked before beating and simultaneously parading them on the streets, is a manifestation of Szymanski, Moffitt and Carr’s (2011) description of sexual objectification of women. During mob attacks, as narrated in all the above female stripping encounters, women’s bodies are singled out to serve as physical objects of sexual desire and for visual pleasure. One of these instances of violence is vividly described in the Encounter 1 above where the mob make mockery of, and pass degrading comments about women’s body parts. Yet, Amnesty International (2008) classified sexual harassment as unacceptable conducts and carried out by a mob, creates a hostile environment and denies the suspect access to fair justice.

### *Body-shaming and the Social Media Influence*

Body-shaming of women by the mob has largely been enhanced by the presence of the social media. Bello’s (2019) description of the social media as the extension of the mob further depicts the role played by social media users and influencers in promoting body-shaming of women in mob encounters. Whitman (1998) analyses shame sanction and this affirms the submissions of some of the female respondents that stripping women naked during mob attacks always accompany lynching and other forms of “public humiliation” that promotes the spirit of “public indecency,” brutality, social hierarchy and “gender discrimination.” Whitman (1998) holds that as punishment through execution equals deprivation of life, the punishment of women through body-shaming as a sanction is also tantamount to the deprivation of their dignity. Under the disguise of inflicting punishment, the priority of attackers is to body-shame the women by parading

their nakedness and engaging in series of feminised sexual assaults and harassments.

Ultimately, the intention transcends the common use of denuding as a correctional measure. A nexus between stripping naked and the mob, as revealed in the narratives above, is how these informal crime control mechanisms have, in a short while, crudely transformed the spots, where the purported 'justice' is perpetrated, into pornographic scenes that attract a larger number of spectators. Some of these members of the mob participate actively in the assault while others passively take part by merely observing and following the new trend of painstakingly filming or taking pictures of the entire incident. Filming of women who have been stripped naked by an angry mob and sharing of these sexualised female body images is a form of body-shaming that Honkatukia and Keskinen (2018) affirm as media encounters of informal crime control.

### **Security Implications of Female Naked Stripping**

The roles of women in kidnapping have expanded the security concerns of Lagos in two ways. One is the drive for survival, which is largely hidden in decisions taken to seek livelihood. The neoliberal and capitalist peculiarity of the Lagos city heightens women's struggle for survival and have forced certain women into criminality for survival. The nature of crime, as evident in the narratives of the women is group-based. They work as criminal syndicates and they earn wages from their operations (Interview with Zone 2 Police PRO Lagos State, 2020). In pursuance of their liberation objectives, women are exposed to the high living standards of urban settlements, which often make them take up new roles as house heads and breadwinners. These challenges may aggravate their likelihood of committing crimes or joining of syndicates.

Stripping naked as mob practice in the security concerns of Lagos State have been heightened as women suspected of crimes have incessantly become the targets of mob attacks. Mob attacks on women explain the complex, complicit and subversive nature of the city life in Lagos State contributed largely to violence against women, since shaming women via naked stripping is a form of victimization. The shaming of suspected women by denuding them during mob attacks is mutually a combination of street crime and sexual assault. This way, nudity emerges as a high-end display of punishment for victims.

Brennan-Galvin (2002) articulates these forms of violence as social and economic. It is important to acknowledge that the feature of the Lagos city and constant migration into Lagos State from other states of Nigeria are some of the underlying factors that contributed to an increase in crime rate and victimization

in the state. This is because disillusioned migrants, who fail to attain their desired prosperity due to poverty, inequality and social exclusion could become perpetrators of mob practice at any instance. Stripping of female victims of mob attack, as it is in Lagos State, is a sexual agency that frees up access to the female body. The sexual agency poses a perspective on the issues of gender and security. Mobbed bodies of women proves that the denuding of suspected women-criminals in mob situations is used as an informal sanction against crime and as a means of feeding the masculine pleasure (Interview with the female officer on Gender Desk).

## **Conclusion**

Violence against women in African cities necessitates mob-sanctioning of suspected female criminals. The social and economic contexts of stripping suspected criminal women naked in Lagos State analysed in this article has provided an additional dimension to understanding gendered violence. Various crimes and public's informal, aboriginal responses occurring in Lagos State affirm that urbanisation creates a significant context to identifying how the connotations and dynamics of female nudity have changed over decades. The peculiarity of informal sanctioning of deviant women by way of naked stripping equally informs the reality of sexual violence and the threat which gendered violence in public places poses to women.

Instances of female mob-related denuding in Lagos State justifies the urgency to critically address issues that propagate violence and insecurity of women in public places of cities across Africa. Successive governments in Lagos State have been introducing regulations to address criminality in its various manifestations. These include the establishment of security task forces (to supplement the limited number of available security personnel), welfare agencies (to ensure that citizens' rights are not trampled upon), collaborations with civil society organisations (for public enlightenment and advocacy) and frequent sensitisation of the populace on the menace of criminality and extrajudicial activities. Lagos as an urban space is still a work in progress in the pursuit of sustainable development goals of which poverty reduction and gender equality are key.

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## **Interviews**

Interview with a Mrs. Bose Bakare, Lagos, 2020

Interview with Mrs. Idowu, Isolo, 2020

Interview with Ms/Miss Tosin Oyeyemi, Ikorodu, Lagos, 2020

Interview with the female officer on Gender Desk, 2020

Interview with Zone 2 Police PRO Lagos State, 2020