

Fashion in Parliament: Performances from Nigeria to South Africa

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Abstract: Much research has been done on fashion globally; just as a lot has been documented from the study of politics and of politicians. In spite of these, few studies have found it compelling to interrogate the connexion between fashion and legislative politics in African contexts. This essay engages in a comparative critique of fashion appropriations in the Nigerian and South African National Assemblies by focusing on two respective parliamentarians namely Dino Melaye and Julius Malema. The analysis builds on the thin literature at the intersection between fashion and politics in the African experience. Through an examination of specific instances of fashion performances across the lower and upper chambers of the Nigerian and South African national legislatures; the essay argues that each instance of fashion appropriation is useful in subverting cogent parliamentary concerns, or in drawing parliament's attention to issues both critical and uncritical to the electorate. It draws on

relevant theoretical tracts and strategic interviewing, in order to demonstrate that fashion can pre-empt or usurp parliamentary debate. The essay concludes that fashion, or an obsession with fashion, represents one of several tools deployed by the political class in focusing parliamentary attention on a pre-determined subject or in deflecting public attention from a pending detail of governance and/or the legislative process.

Keywords: Dress/Fashion in Politics; Nigeria; South Africa; People's Democratic Party (PDP); Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF)

Fashion is not politics, after all

Introduction

Fashion, a multi-faceted phenomenon expressed in various cultural forms, is still not studied comfortably within the core precincts of the academy (Lemire 2010). In 2003, a volume on global history caught the eye because its subject index did not include the entry 'fashion'. In this study of legislative appropriations of fashion, a brief historical background is attempted: Perhaps the earliest document of the history of parliament to make reference to 'fashion' in the sense of the dresses of parliamentarians is *A Short History of Parliament 1295-1642*. In the closing frames of the final chapter, the author quotes Baillie, a Scots Commissioner, who had proffered an account of the setting at Westminster Hall

during the impeachment of the earl of Strafford: “At the north end was set a throne for the King, and a chayre for the Prince; before it lay a large wooll-seck, covered with green, for my Lord Steward, the Earle of Arundaill; beneath it lay two other secks for my Lord Keeper and the Judges, with the rest of the Chancerie, all in their red robes. Beneath this a little table for four or fyve Clerks of the Parliament in their black gouns; round about these some formes covered with green freese, where upon the Earls and Lords did sitt in their red robes, of that same fashion, lyned with the same whyte ermin skinnes, as yow see the robes of our Lords when they ryde in Parliament” (Thompson 1953: 264-5). Observed from the extract is the author’s equal concern for the décor of the building as with the lawmakers’ costumes, if not more so. Subsequent documents focused on the history of parliament produced volumes dedicated to the biographies of succeeding Members of Parliament, in addition to architectural praise (e.g. Sainty 1964; Daunton 2000). Considering the otherwise critical charter of the legislature, it is no surprise that these biographies could not and did not focus on the sartorial style of legislators. That was in the age of empire. Subsequent volumes (e.g. Jones 2012) on parliament have followed through the centuries and across different geographic spaces where democracy entailed a deliberative wing. As expected, the tradition to eschew a matter as ‘mundane’ as the fashion of parliamentarians

has been maintained; thus, indicative of the reflective freshness of the present attempt.

Without delving into the private lives of politicians, this essay attempts an analysis of certain fashion instances by two of contemporary Africa's most vociferous and colourful legislative politicians. As will be seen, it is possible to put out a classificatory rationale with which politicians form valences with fashion, the variable constant. In classes of two, three, four, five, or even six, such a classification could be properly justified. The speculative classificatory examples listed below are only sketches of what observation and hindsight can afford at the present time. No one could argue against the necessity of a proper theorization on the nexus between a leader's fashion and a leader's leadership and/or nature. The preponderance, for example, of animal skin in the fashion artillery of Mobutu Sese Seko, the archetypal African dictator (Tharoor 2011) and one of Africa's most recognizable politicians of the 20th century should instigate qualitative investigation. Thomas (2003) highlights Mobutu's fashion rhetoric/slogans of 'zarianisation' and 'authenticity' and the supposed distancing from European influences therein. Yet, he contradicts this with Mobutu's actual dress tastes of 'abacost' which is a French term for 'down with the suit' (Thomas 2003: 958). Presently, Cameroon's Paul Biya and his household continue to hold audiences spellbound

to a panache-filled brand of public appearances from time to time, and from medium to medium. Like Biya, sunglasses were characteristic of the fashion repertoire of Libya's Muammar Gaddafi, Togo's Gnassingbé Eyadéma, and Nigeria's Sani Abacha. Never mind the countless other apparels that constituted part of each leader's public persona. It is anomalous, therefore, that the relationship between such figures' fashion presentations and their leadership styles/quests has yet to be interrogated by the academy in a continent where state power organizes for dramatizing its own magnificence (Mbembe 2001: 104); and where dictatorship and kleptocracy are existential challenges whose amelioration make for logical development-al goals. Only recently, the immediate past governor of Ekiti State, Nigeria, Ayodele Fayose, on his last day of office as governor, left government house for the headquarters of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) sporting a t-shirt with the inscription 'EFCC I'M HERE!' (Sahara Reporters 2018: np). He was accompanied by several politicians and many sporting similarly labelled shirts.

The abovementioned politicians aren't legislative politicians with whom this study is primarily concerned. Across the world, several houses of parliament have had their confrontational, physically combative moments. In Africa, Uganda was in the recent news over President Yoweri Museveni's age-limit removal bill. In opposition,

popular musician Bobi Wine has made more statements in speeches and in music than he has with fashion since he became a Member of Uganda's Parliament. Nollywood's Desmond Elliot, a lawmaker in the state-level house of parliament in Nigeria has made more capital as a movie director than he has as a contributing member of the Lagos state house of assembly. Nor is he notable for loud/controversial and often profound fashion statements as are the two case studies assessed here. The duo is representative to the extent of their engagement with the media through the word, the confrontation, and the garb. Two legislators who are arguably the two most visible, fashion-conscious legislative politicians in contemporary Africa, both of whom are vocal, controversial, and ooze a combative image are Nigeria's Dino Melaye and South Africa's Julius Malema. Neither Mr Melaye, who starred in his first movie in 2019 playing himself, nor Mr Malema has professional music and movie careers, yet, both wield as much popularity as singer Bobi Wine and actor Desmond Elliot in their respective countries. More pertinently, Nigeria and South Africa are two of Africa's leading democracies and economies. Both countries are hubs of highly developed media systems with the continent's largest cultural production. At some point in time, Melaye and Malema have both been members of the ruling parties in their respective countries: The All Progressives Congress (APC) in Nigeria, and the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa. Nonetheless,

both Melaye and Malema are presently members of opposition parties in their respective countries: The People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria, and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) in South Africa. Melaye and Malema are both under 45 years of age and among the more 'youthful' demographic of Africa's political classes. Both represent actual youth populations, yet, belong in the select collection of 'young men' in Africa who have been given what they should in life, and as such, neither portrays the 'youth'/dispossessed experience of Africans (Shepler 2010).

The essay is divided into four sections. It opens with a theorization of fashion as a tool of politics and of politicians. The section hinges on an interview with a retired public servant of the Nigerian federal civil service, in addition to conflicting notions from theorists of fashion and of politics. The second section focuses on a medley of events as transpired in the Nigerian national assembly which houses both national legislative chambers of the federal House of Representatives and the senate. The second section is concerned with an erstwhile member of Nigeria's Fourth Republic Parliament whose fashion displays have arguably negated legislative work than done some. The third section centres on an almost equivalent politician in South Africa's national legislature who, unlike his Nigerian counterpart, has exploited solidarity

and managed to lead troops to share in his fashion. The fourth and final section presents the conclusions.

1.0 Theorizing fashion in politics

The following is an extract from a retired public servant whose career was characterised by professional associations with the senior echelon of the Nigerian federal civil service and the affiliated ministerial/legislative politicians. Having spent most of thirty-five years across ministries in the federal civil service, my retiree-interviewee was well-placed to offer frank perspectives on the appropriation and application of fashion by the political class in Nigeria.

Politicians love to dress heavily so as to enhance their charisma; to gain more respect from people...A politician can use fashion to distract from governance issues depending on the nature of followership. If the people are intelligent enough to look at the fundamentals, they can see through a politician's fashion. However, in a less intelligent society, a politician's heavy dressing has the capacity to bamboozle the public...It is important to know though that every human being is a politician (Retiree Public Servant 2018).

The extract subtly delineates the effects of politicians' fashion into two categories that rest entirely on the followership (electorate). From my interviewee's assessment, a politician's deployment of fashion is

effective to the extent of a discerning or undiscerning followership. Once the fundamentals aren't the focus of any subject, and instead the garb of the politician bearing or evading the said subject becomes the focal point, such a society has handed credence to fashion dictates at the expense of core issues. While there is some profoundness to my interviewee's submission, it assumes a somewhat narrow position once alternate considerations are entertained. Indeed, politicians are usually quick to defend the seemingly indefensible in a variant of issues including their jumbo allowances on several occasions. Others have been known to insist that their choice of politics isn't borne out of a commitment to poverty. Also, there is the issue to do with a politician's brand as Terblanche (2011), in a study titled 'You cannot run or hide from social media – ask a politician', writes of the subject: "Politicians try to distinguish themselves from others and, as a rule, devote a great deal of their time on 'brand'-building exercises. Some would go out of their way to attract attention and, for that reason, foster a relationship with the media" (156). Buttressing this angle of a politician's fashion repertoire as brand is the precedent of Empress Eugenie, wife of the famed French Emperor, Napoleon III, who turned out a regent with conscientious resolve and political astuteness (Dolan 1994: 24) in spite of her high fashion which had served to weaken the public perception of her as a strong and capable authority (Dolan 1994: 23). The arguments for a

politician's high fashion extant without ulterior motives are ample. In the end, fashion is filled with symbolic meaning and rooted in tangible structures of production and consumption (Zdatny 2006).

Without necessarily appropriating Renée Larrier's argument that power, or rather the lack of power, is figured in masculine apparel (Larrier 2003: 76), it is worth rehashing that textiles indicate the rank of the wearer in parts of Africa. Certain patterns and colours on title cloths are signs of power and leadership. In order to project wealth, high social status, religious piety, and political authority, the ceremonial dress of leaders extends to their horses and/or motorcade. In Africa, textiles and clothing function as visible signs of status wherein the ruling class expends its energy accumulating imported designer consumer goods leaving them vulnerable to the colonial/industrialised vultures hovering overhead (Larrier 2003: 76, 84-5; Rabine 2002: 6). As such, because scholars have for too long been stuck with inquiring what is it that fashion can and cannot say, and if there's a silence because something cannot be spoken about and so must be passed over, does that mean it does not exist at all, or is it merely inarticulable (Bancroft 2012: 149); a classification of tentative lenses for assessing a politician's fashion consciousness is hypothesized. These include the multi-trendy fashion politician, the professional (or mono-trendy) fashion politician, the unprofessional fashion politician, the aloof yet receptive

fashion politician, the aloof and unreceptive fashion politician, the compliant fashion politician (which is essentially one of the professional/mono-trendy fashion politician or the multi-trendy fashion politician), the rebel fashion politician, and the fashion amalgam i.e. the amalgamated fashion politician who can deploy fashion to be any or a combination of the foregoing depending on the mood of a given day and the intention at hand. After all, the fashioned body mediates tensions between personal autonomy and social dependencies; it can be used to strategically manage certain impressions (Murray 2002: 433). Noting as directed by the retiree-interviewee that humans are politicians and politicians, humans, it is given that the grasp of fashion and its appropriation in projecting political goals is different for each politician. Consequently, some politicians understand the terrains of fashion and their applicability better than others. In terms of the symmetry between being a politician and being human, there has also been an increased blur in the gap between the politician and the celebrity owing particularly to the crisscross of these roles over the past 3-4 decades. Whereas it has been argued that politicians' fashion senses have no impact on their jobs (Osiebe 2018a), those politicians who know that fashion provides one of the readiest means through which individuals can make expressive visual statements about their identities (Bennett 2005: 96), subscribe to the notion that being a good leader entails dressing one's best because clothes are

the music of the body which are heard with the eyes. Like quantum physics, it means nothing when a leader isn't observed (Batiste 2016). Yet, the question remains as to how much music an underperforming politician can project on the electorate's retina particularly when such an electorate is unwilling to observe anything beyond a rhythm of progress in the quality of the electorate's livelihood.

There is evidence to suggest that politicians have deployed fashion in negotiating between their ideal ego - how they see themselves - and their ego ideal - how they would like to be seen. Indeed, Terblanche's work compels the critic to project the politician who is perennially before the media and cameras as Jacques Lacan's *imago* possessive of an *identification*, an *idealisation* and a *sexuation* (Lacan 1977). After all, social media have changed how political campaigns are run; how politicians and the public access/share political information; and how opinions and attitudes are formed towards engaging or disengaging from the political process (Dimitrova and Matthes 2018). Yet, there has in fact been documentary/non-mirror admission of a correlation between a politician's smart appearance and a politician's patriotism (Paulicelli 2002) as alluded to by former British Prime Minister David Cameron in his salvo at Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to: "put on a proper suit, do up [his] tie and sing the national anthem!" (UK Parliament

2016). Whereas Cameron's jibe seemed to suggest that a patriotic politician would bother enough as to ensure public appearances in dapper suits, an alternative interpretation suggests that politicians do turn their rhetoric towards fashion mainly to evade discomfiting issues associated with governance as it was in the Cameron-Corbyn episode (Osiebe 2018b). The fluidity at the heart of the subject of fashion as deceptive tool, or fashion as constituting patriotic paraphernalia at the disposal of politicians, makes for something of an endless discourse, the infinite semiosis of meaning (Hall 1987: 137). This essay is not about fashion instances as isolated events, rather the essay presents an account of the accumulation of dress appropriations by two legislators astute with the hydra-headedness of fashion. The study delves beyond the rhetoric of politicians and focuses instead on making meaning from actual fashion performances by two notable legislative politicians of contemporary Africa. In the first case, a character whose fashion appropriations are aimed towards sustained political relevance is unpacked. In the latter, fashion assumes signifier of belonging, identity and social mobilization within parliament and beyond. Yet, the central character of the latter isn't immune from the desires of the former as there are telling similarities between the fashion tastes of Melaye and those of Malema, outside of parliament in particular.

Black people are known for “stylin’ out,” dressing to the nines, showing their sartorial stuff, especially when the occasion calls for it and, more tellingly, often when it does not (Miller 2009: 1).

The inherent intricacies of the scenarios compel drawing from the notion of the workability of political disorder in Africa. Chabal and Daloz’s *Africa Works: Disorder as Political Instrument* (1999) may have been the subject of several scathing criticisms; yet, its conceptualization of the *instrumentalization of disorder* in sub-Saharan Africa presents a paradigm with which to approach an understanding of the materialization of otherwise rascals becoming legislative powerhouses in both countries. The *instrumentalization of disorder* offers lenses to appreciate how Melaye managed to be named senator of the year for consecutive years in Nigeria (Dokunola 2016; Odejobi 2017). The cosy relationship enjoyed by Senator Melaye with the senate leadership and the media portends a veritable instrument in disordered governance. It is instructive that Hungwe and Hungwe (2000) open their review of Chabal and Daloz’s work by referencing the observation that “Institutional structures are the result of political choices of politicised actors... [It is therefore] pointless and perhaps harmful to maintain the myth of administrative neutrality. Rather, the issue is and must be ‘who gets what’ from the political system” (Knott and Miller, 1987: 255-257). Hungwe and Hungwe demonstrate the problematic nature of Chabal and Daloz’s

proposition stating that “their rhetoric serves to conceal/mask the role of hegemonic politics where particular interests are dominant” (Hungwe and Hungwe 2000: 271). Chabal and Daloz opine that Africa’s institutions are in a state of ‘disorder’ owing to ineffective institutions and prevalent corruption. However, this state of disorder, according to the duo, is functional and is indicative of a uniquely African developmental path where [almost] everyone is a participant, and [almost] everyone has something to gain from corrupt practices. The authors lament that “[Africanists] have confused development and Westernization, thus making it difficult to grasp the singularity of what is taking place on the continent in terms of modernisation. Not only have we been prone to explaining current events in Africa as a process of ‘backwardness’, but we have been slow to understand the complex ways in which political change is taking place in Africa” (Chabal and Daloz 1999: 50). Notwithstanding, Chabal and Daloz’s three main premises of pervasive corruption and ineffective institutions; a unique culture and mind-set of the African; and the functional disorder inherent each bear relevance to the indiscriminate appropriation of fashion for political styling/influence in Africa. A caption from a 2015 issue of *Quartz Africa* reads: ‘Nigeria’s legislators will get \$43 million of taxpayers’ money for a wardrobe allowance’ (Kazeem 2015). Whereas such a caption sets the foregoing discussion in practical light, it also suggests an

institutionalization of disorder rather than a mere *instrumentalization*. The following section focuses on dress/fashion manifestations of Nigeria's post-independence executive leadership.

2.1 Nigeria, executive leadership, and statements of fashion

The subject of the fashion of Nigeria's leaders has generated substantial commentary in the non-academic media. Within the academic literature, however, Renne (2004) attempts perhaps what constitutes a lone and limited engagement of how Nigerian politicians saw the transition from military rule to civilian leadership in 1999 as a welcome shift from khaki (military garbs) to *agbada* (an originally Yoruba term meaning: free-flowing men's robes. The term itself and the dress type it represents are both widely used across Nigeria) (Renne 2004). The outcome of this combined academic and non-academic body of knowledge production has been the realization that through Nigeria's post-independence years, the nation's leaders have sought to identify markedly more with the dress code associated with their places of origin. It is observed that beyond the military rulers of Nigeria who often sported their military regalia as uniform, other leaders have also managed to grind out a uniform of sorts with which they were/are identified by, while in office. The first Prime Minister of Independent Nigeria, the well-spoken Alhaji Tafawa Balewa was known to be typically

clothed in a garb identifiable with his origins in today's Bauchi State. Nigeria's Second Republic president Alhaji Shehu Shagari hails from Sokoto and as such dressed as a Sokoto man with a characteristic Sokoto headwear. Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua perhaps never appeared publicly looking anything but like a Katsina man. Olusegun Obasanjo and Muhammadu Buhari are both one-time military rulers who returned to power as civilian presidents with two-term mandates. They have both made a point of dressing from their origin's outlook: the former as an Egba man and the latter as a Daura man, irrespective of their multi-faceted pandering and posturing to Nigeria's various ethnic dress styles through electoral campaigns. Then there is Goodluck Jonathan – Nigeria's first president from the Ijaw ethnic group. The hat worn by the Ijaw people and others in the south-south region of Nigeria is an entirely borrowed fashion. Jonathan almost always wore this hat through his five-year stint as President. Yet, research into this cult of fashion affiliation by the multi-ethnic nation's executive leaders is rather thin if not outrightly non-existent. A key issue here is to be seen in how the clothing styles of executive leaders, particularly presidents, have tended to influence fashion trends in the country, at least among fellow men. The dynamic is such that President Obasanjo's type of Yoruba cap became widely worn across the country, even by 'non-Yorubas' during his presidency (1999-2007). It ceased shortly after President Yar'Adua ascended, and

completely during Jonathan's presidency. Even Jonathan's hat was common, at least among some politicians: for example, the senate president at the time, David Mark shared in wearing hats similar to Jonathan's even though he is from a different region in the country. Presently, President Buhari's slim kaftans are the major fashion trend among men too.

With democracy comes a broader band of political leaders such that not only do the attires adorned by presidents and governors matter to the socio-political and cultural contexts, but also the dress choices of legislators. As with Nigeria's post-Independence executive leaders, it is the wont of Nigerian legislators to dress pro-origin for public engagements including in performing their main legislative duties. This tendency is often punctuated by a seeming kowtowing to the colonial wherein these politicians choose to wear English suits and much more. However, there isn't much that is being said here for even the so-called traditional attires that are 'origin compliant' do make use of imports right from the foundational fabric in most cases. The key concern for this essay, therefore, is that whereas there is a healthy and exciting body of research on fashion across the continent (e.g. Grabski 2009; Loughran 2009; Rovine 2009a; Rovine 2009b; Farber 2010; Nwafor 2011; Ajani 2012; Nwafor 2012; Nwafor 2013; Tade and Aiyabo 2014; Wipper 2014; Mastamet-Mason, Müller and van der Merwe 2017), there

is a lacuna in corresponding volumes focused squarely on interrogating the intersection between fashion and political leadership, as yet. In Nigeria, studies on the executive and legislative arms of government are largely preoccupied with issues such as corruption (e.g. Onele 2015) and violence (e.g. Ibrahim, Liman and Uke 2013). In spite of this, there hasn't been a framework to read the abuse of fashion or the absence of it, as a corruption or as a violation of executive and legislative tenets and functions. This essay isn't of such a scope as to address these myriad of possible and probable perspectives. However, by focussing on two media-proclaimed style icons, it attempts a step in drawing attention to the distraction and/or impetus fashion could constitute in the legislative and governance processes. In terms of having a global scope, Hansen (2004) offers an anthropological perspective on clothing, fashion and culture. Yet, in its section on Africa, there is little beyond a rehash of the literature on the influence of colonization, Islam, Christianity, and general missionary work on African fashion tastes.

2.2 Dino Melaye: showman cum rascal parliamentarian of Nigeria's Fourth Republic

The following is an excerpt from a 33-year-old Lagos-based fashionista on his impressions of Dino Melaye's job as a legislator and of Melaye's dressing proclivities:

I don't know much of what he does as a senator so I don't know if I can really comment on it. About his fashion sense, he wears nice trendy things that young people like. He has an interesting sense of fashion. I like some of what he wears but I don't know much of what he does. I don't know his job; I am not aware of what he does or what he is supposed to be doing (Osiebe 2018a).

Until November 2019, Dino Melaye was the senator representing Kogi west senatorial district in the Nigerian upper legislative house (Jide 2017). Melaye assumed national recognition in the country when as a member of Nigeria's lower House of Representatives representing the people of Kabba/Bunu/Ijumu federal constituency in Kogi State; he made a habit of either supporting or opposing the house leadership depending on the sort of patronage he found accruing to himself (Owete 2016). It did not matter what the issues before the house leadership were, his stance was predicated on whether his position was favourable or unfavourable to himself. In September 2007, at the inception of the 6th National Assembly, Melaye – a first-time lawmaker – had been appointed Chairman of the House Committee on Information and National Orientation a few weeks earlier. As such, it did not matter that the House Speaker, Patricia Etteh, was embroiled in a corruption scandal about the renovation of her official residence at the cost of 628 million naira (some 4 million dollars at the time). Melaye's support for Etteh was unwavering to such a point that he engaged in

physical combat with at least two of his legislative colleagues who were campaigning that the Speaker be impeached. “That was how [Melaye] first came into national prominence as an extremely troublesome and controversial figure” (Owete 2016: np). By 2010, therefore, having resigned as Chairman of the House Committee on Information and National Orientation and having been re-appointed by Etteh’s successor, Dimeji Bankole, Melaye’s state of clothing made headlines. On June 22, 2010, Melaye along with some others were expelled from the House of Representatives and forcefully ejected from the chamber leaving Melaye sporting tattered dresses. This was how Festus Owete framed the incident in his special report for Premium Times: “[Melaye and others] were almost stripped by the pro-Bankole lawmakers, who tore their clothes in the process in the full glare of the students of City Royal Secondary School, Nyanya, a suburb of Abuja, who had come on excursion to the House” (Owete 2016: np).

Melaye has announced severally that he holds an ambition to be President of Nigeria (Independent Television and Radio 2016; Oak TV 2016). As such, the present focus on a case such as his is doubly appropriate. Through the course of occupying senatorial office, Melaye was and has continued to engage in a series of public spats with the governor of Kogi State, Yahaya Bello. The former’s desire to unseat the latter is not in

question. In fact, much of his senatorial spell was spent antagonizing the governor (and vice versa) either within Kogi State or from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja where the senate is located. Further, between 1999 and 2007, Melaye is reported to have served as a henchman for erstwhile President Olusegun Obasanjo in getting certain unofficial things done (Jide 2017). So far, this seems the only plausible explanation for Melaye's somewhat nauseatingly displayed wealth. He is renowned as a social media show boy who basks in the display of automobiles of various kinds which are registered "DINO 1 – DINO ∞" and more recently "SDM 1 – SDM ∞" (SDM is an acronym for Senator Dino Melaye). Images of Melaye riding power motorbikes are equally adornments across social media pages. Rapper, Kach, son of Nigeria's recent past Minister of State for Petroleum Resources, Ibe Kachikwu, recorded an audio-visual for the song 'Dino' (Kachikwu 2017) wherein Melaye makes a cameo appearance sporting a shirt with the inscription 'LEGEND'. The song is a praise of Melaye who financed the video which was shot on site at his residence in Abuja. Indeed, Melaye lives like a regular celebrity socialite posting pictures of his activities and locations during his travels. In a recent and bizarre episode, he took a shot with the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin. While grinning end to end with a look of fulfilment, Melaye wrote of the photo he shared via his Instagram page thus: "With President Putin holding me tight

today...” (Ewubare 2017). Melaye, who is presently unmarried following at least two public separations, is also a darling of Nollywood and enjoys the company of the actors and actresses, particularly the latter. Born January 1, 1974, he celebrated his 44th birthday in January 2018 rather loudly and lavishly with key players from the Nigerian entertainment establishment present (Daniel 2018). The party was themed ‘Pirates of the Caribbean’ (Bella Naija 2018) and Melaye was fully dressed as Jack Sparrow for the occasion (Toromade 2018). A year earlier, he had staged what he tagged a soul train party to celebrate his anniversary wherein his attire was conspicuously old-school themed (Gistmania 2017).

Beyond the torn clothes he proudly paraded in the chambers of the House of Representatives and his lavishly adorned birthday celebrations, a number of additional events have triggered the fashion rascal in Melaye to make visual statements sometimes bordering on the ludicrous. In 2017, Melaye himself became a bona fide popular musician when he recorded a viral song and dance ‘Ajekun Iya’ (Bada 2017) originally intended for a senior colleague of his, Senator Ali Ndume, who had asked for an investigation into his insinuations that Melaye did not graduate from the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria as claimed in his credentials (Adebayo 2017). Whereas Melaye continued to perform the song – in a bid to mock ‘haters’ - at public functions including at the Notting Hill

carnival in London where he was booed by an unappreciative crowd (Toromade 2018), the song has been redone by a number of others including by Seun Kuti (Legend View 2017), son of the late Afro-beat maestro Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. In one of Melaye's subsequent tirades on Yahaya Bello, he performed the song 'Ajekun Iya' complete with a uniformly tailored, well-attired aso ebi live band (Egbas 2017). However, the bit of importance from this episode to the present section on fashion and its implications in the Nigerian parliament, is that Melaye wore an academic gown to the senate plenary (Agboga 2017), after the Vice Chancellor of the Ahmadu Bello University confirmed that Melaye did indeed graduate from the institution, thus, clearing him of the allegations made by Senator Ndume. In this instance, therefore, Melaye appropriated an academic gown dressing to parliament in celebration of his vindication by the Vice Chancellor. This must have boosted Melaye's ego, but it was of no consequence in terms of legislative output to the public, except the entertainment/comical effects. The institutionalization of disorder at the highest levels of legislative politics in Nigeria need not be overstated. Yet, there is more: On February 14, 2018, the Nigerian senate sat. As with other pro-colonial tendencies, Valentine's Day is marked in Nigeria in a manner reminiscent of Chinua Achebe's 'crying more than the bereaved'. Alas, Melaye was on hand in the senate chamber sporting a velvet red jacket and a bow

black tie to mark the day. Then senate president, Bukola Saraki, described Melaye as “best dressed in the spirit of today’s Valentine’s Day to move the motion for the adoption of the minutes” (News Headlines 2018). The senate president’s words resulted in the following response from Senator Oluremi Tinubu, after Melaye had obliged Saraki and so moved:

Mr President, thank you for actually inviting me. I should be the one to move the motion because...I’m a ranking senator senior to your beloved son. {Laughter ensues} This is what they call partiality [...] He is your beloved son in whom you are well pleased. We know that. And you also gave him the best dressed! I beg your pardon. Did you look at me? I have roses all over. Today it’s roses that depict the day. He doesn’t even have a single rose. But since I’m not your son, I would gladly second the motion ably moved by your beloved son in whom you are well pleased. I so second (News Headlines 2018: np).

From the foregoing remarks, lay legislative knowledge reveals that the senate president flouted an existing rule by asking a junior senator to precede a senior senator having been carried away, or at least appeared to have been carried away by Melaye’s compliance with St. Valentine’s Day fashion. Whereas this was not lost on the senior senator who made light of it, her approach (quoted above) and the senate president’s gaffe speak directly to the subtext of this essay. The senate president thanked her accordingly: “thank you our beloved Valentine of the

chamber” (News Headlines 2018). The institutionalization of disorder through Melaye’s deliberate dress choices, his sync with the leadership of the senate and the exploitation of these by the individuals/players involved is demonstrated. In the Valentine’s Day performance, watchers of the Nigerian legislature witness how the appropriation of certain political advantages and privileges, wherein Melaye’s fashion choices play a significant role in the processes, is done. There is no gainsaying that the said fashion appropriations are illustrative of a legislative politician’s appetite for public attention, public relevance and public stature. In particular, his audacity to wear an academic gown to the senate chamber so as to exploit a point that had been made showed the judgement and temperament of a politician capable of going unique lengths to justify being deserving of his place as a legislator in the Nigerian senate. In 2019, Melaye made a formal bid for the governorship of Kogi state, but lost in the PDP primaries. In November of the same year, Melaye’s senatorial seat was declared up for re-election having lost his appeal against the verdict of the National Assembly election petition tribunal which had ruled in favour of his opponent, Smart Adeyemi of the APC. Having made an indelible mark on the fashion wardrobe of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic legislative life, Melaye lost his senate seat in November 2019. The following section unpacks another African legislative politician through the

contradictions that exist between his rhetoric and his fashion performances.

3.0 Floss amidst anti-corruption rhetoric: Between Melaye and South Africa's Malema

Arguably the closest piece of research to the intersection of fashion and legislative politics transpired in South Africa through Alude Mahali's work (2016) on the EFF's workers' tropes. Before engaging with Mahali's contribution, Leitch (1996) observes that dress is cultural capital, serving political designs, consorting with hegemonic norms and domination; bearing a regulating force that incites conformity and resistance at times. "To adopt a uniform is to choose a socioeconomic milieu and a future; the manufacture and maintenance of clothing involve domestic economies and various trades and guilds" (Leitch 1996: 122). Julius Malema has, thus, proven skilled at using his own sense of style, both in rhetoric and in cloth, to his advantage - a skill, Goldhammer (2014) writes with conviction, is shared with Mandela. The EFF's contribution to the fashion in parliament discourse is strengthened by the synonymy of the party's uniform with a fashion culture. Focusing on post-apartheid South Africa, Mahali (2016) is concerned with the domestic worker dress as appropriated by MPs of the EFF led by former Youth League President of the ANC, Julius Malema. Mahali's concern came through when she asks whether there is substance beyond the

EFF's 'symbolic imagery' and 'self-fashioning'. Mahali's point is more on the subversion of inference represented by the political party's appropriation of the domestic worker dress as uniform than on how it promotes/mitigates legislative work. The ANC fought hard to ban the uniforms of EFF MPs and had some of them expelled from parliament (Makinana 2016). This incurred the following reaction from Malema: "To you proper is white, to you proper is European. We are not white; we are going to wear those uniforms...We are defying colonialist decorum. We are not English-made. We are workers, and we are going to wear those clothes and we are unapologetic about it" (Goldhammer 2014: np). Like Melaye who is the author of a book titled *Antidotes for Corruption: The Nigerian Story* (The Punch 2017); Malema is the subject of several allegations of corruption and accusations of a lifestyle of ostentation. Yet, it is difficult to ascertain how the uniform of the EFF or the lavish regimen of its leader goes contrary to mass welfare in South Africa. Indeed, Malema has since offered what must be a series of classic defences to his critics. Of the masses, Malema stated: "We don't want them to stay in shacks, that's why we can't stay in shacks...How are you going to inspire them when you are also going to stay in a shack?... We don't have to stay in Alexandra to liberate people of Alexandra. They want to get out [of] that situation, they don't want people to come and join them. That's stupidity to think like that... We'll never stop

wearing anything, because your commitment doesn't derive out of what you wear. It's about the heart. We have the heart for the poor" (Destiny Connect 2014: np). An obvious rejoinder would be to question what the essence of the uniforms are, since they do not necessarily depict the heart of a wearer. More than this, while the bulk of the foregoing submissions from Malema may sound inspiring, he is reported to be in debt to the tune of millions of rand and also facing charges of tax evasion (Destiny Connect 2014). There appears to be a penchant for disorder among the political class in Africa, and the 38 year-old Malema, supposedly a new breed politician, is not immune to the malady that plagues politics in Africa. What cannot be denied of Malema, though, is a grasp of a guide for a leader's sartorial charter. Moreover, a uniform can barely constitute a distraction beyond the initial spectacle of the domestic worker dresses adorned by EFF MPs in the South African parliament. Over time, it would only serve to distinguish MPs along party lines and be no more of a uniform than suits are in the West. Plus, Malema's use of words is worth evaluating: for why continue to wear uniforms of the very people he purports to be fighting to liberate from having to wear uniforms? Indeed, why ridicule suits only to proclaim worker dresses that were designed by the very people who designed the suits he condemns? The contradictions in Malema's actions and rhetoric are reminiscent of Mobutu's 'zarianisation' through French-made suits.

Malema is probably the most wilfully misread, misconceived and misrepresented figure in South African politics. He...[understands] the challenges confronting disadvantaged South Africans...At...31, Malema [had] already become one of the most controversial political leaders of his generation [...] Although wealthy by any standard, Malema represents the mass of the people while also positioning himself as an icon for the black middle and upper class. He seems to effortlessly straddle the gap between being a champion of the less privileged and a symbol of successful and affluent young blacks (Akinola, Tella and Adeogun 2015: 109).

Beyond Mahali's work, there have been considerable studies bordering on the Malema persona (e.g. Hyde-Clark 2011; Kotze 2012; Posel 2014). Also, since the birth of the EFF, further studies have expanded the frame to include the revolutionary-attired party as well: Robins' (2014) conceptualization of 'slow activism in fast times' highlights the effects for 'media spectacle' by acts such as the EFF's. Mbete (2015) captures the EFF's uniform and rhetoric as *performative elements* with dire consequences for South Africa's politics of dangerous populism. Yet, associated scholarship ought to resist the tempting risk of reducing the EFF's politics of liberation to a politics of fashion (Davis 1994). This is certainly a difficult task being that for Malema, there is little or no middle-ground between a penchant for activist fashion, as demonstrated by the EFF's uniform, and outright ostentatious tastes as he has had to defend severally. It is incontrovertible,

however, that the very existence of a distinct workers' trope in South Africa prior to its appropriation by the EFF speaks to the 'political disorder' credentials in that country as Chabal and Daloz describe. It remains to be seen if the EFF's attire borne statements would be retired as some of the party's intended goals are achieved with time. Or would the uniform be continually deployed through successive spates of development/rebranding rhetoric in order to hold on to the emotional sway and populist benefits it presently attracts? The oxymoron of the first two words in the EFF's identity 'economic' and 'freedom' unravels; for there can be no talk of 'freedom' where an 'economy' is involved, let alone fight for an 'economic freedom'. Indeed, there is a sense in equating this with James Joyner's critique of 'mandatory voluntarism' (Joyner 2009): Here is a party which prides itself on freedom, yet, its MPs must demonstrate allegiance by sporting uniforms in solidarity? Political ideologies have perennially challenged the African politician for decades. It beggars belief that all of a sudden, droves of politicians not only key into Malema's philosophy but do so all the way to adopting his costume. Since the ability to possess power often dissipates when signs of power are removed from view (Aris 2006), it is worth pondering if Malema would consider his authority challenged were one or some of the EFF's MPs to carry on without uniforms, or to boycott uniforms in staging a party protest, for example.

The red berets are intended to convey revolutionary zeal and discipline, and are a tribute to the likes of Che Guevara and Thomas Sankara, with the added bonus of party members being easy to spot in a crowd. A pool of red is increasingly visible at public events in South Africa including recent memorial services for Nelson Mandela (The Economist 2014: np).

Still, it behooves asking what contributions Malema's cult of red berets has made to confusion and anarchic disorderliness in South Africa's body politic. The Economist reports how: "Red berets (selling for R80, or around \$8) have become so popular among EFF members that there are reports of beret shortages and beret-snatching incidents among comrades". An organizer of the EFF in fact offered that: "When we can't give people berets, they just grab them off our heads and run away..." (The Economist 2014: np). With reference to the pantsuit parties in solidarity with Hilary Clinton's presidential bid in 2016, the polo and khaki uniforms of white supremacists during demonstrations in Charlottesville, and the berets of the Black Panthers in 1960s-70s America, Delgado (2018) problematizes the confusion between political dressing and fashion. Arguing that "political dressing may be fashionable, but it isn't fashion" (Delgado 2018: np), Delgado blames the confusion on a capitalist all-encompassing fashion industry that takes advantage of erroneous use of the terms

“dress, style and fashion [interchangeably] without regards for their fundamental semantic difference” (Delgado 2018: np). Indeed, the EFF’s adoption of a political dress and its induction as fashion raises fundamental questions in fashion theory (Encomendero 2018). What do uniforms, including uniform berets, make of Malcolm Barnard’s argument that since there are alternative interpretations of garments between the designers and the wearers, meaning cannot be a product of the designer’s intentions? (Barnard 1996: 71). How much does the case of the EFF complicate that notion? Surely, there comes a point in the production process when uniform designers and uniform wearers reach a synergy in their interpretation. With uniforms – which are just as much consumer goods as any other – the designer’s intentions are pre-determined by the wearer’s preferences/instructions; and in the due course of expansion and sustained reproduction, there transpires an equilibrium wherein a designer’s intentions are as meaningful and as factually equivalent as the wearer’s. Trade unions’ emergence follow similarly.

4.0 Conclusions

This essay has highlighted the significance of fashion to the growth and management of two legislators’ personal profiles in Nigeria and South Africa. The analysis has not succeeded in isolating the accruals of these legislators’ ostentatious, even though sometimes distasteful, fashion

to broader legislative processes nor to the constituents whose welfare they are otherwise mandated to vigorously address. As has been seen, the senses in which these two African legislative politicians regard their appearances in relation to how their legislative functions and extant social personas are received, do matter much to them and to institutionalizing disorder in the continent's politics. It is noteworthy that both men grew from humble beginnings, a fact that gives credence to the Lacanian/Freudian read of both men's vestimentary excesses as the inevitable outcome of past deprivation. To be sure, clothing provides the occasion for the subversion of established modes and the rejection of the dictates of accepted norms. Fashion certainly does introduce the vocabulary and accompanying signifiers of hegemony, assimilation, *subversion* and *resistance* (Thomas 2003: 954, 957). The essay focused on two politicians who engage in a great deal of communication through fashion. Whereas the former represents big dressing in Nigeria, the latter symbolises utilitarian apparel in South Africa's parliament even though his fashion conduct outside of parliament is as big, if not bigger, than his Nigerian counterpart's. When the fashion focus of the two politicians is assessed against the backdrop of the sorts of wardrobe allowances enjoyed across legislative politics in 'uniquely developing' Africa, an institutionalization of functional disorder endorsed by most sections of the followership, becomes apparent. It is observed that

Melaye's fashion antics, on the average, are deployed towards boosting his ego while their relevance to matters of parliamentary deliberation is at best marginal and conversely for self-promotion. Melaye communicates his political outlook and charter as one of abundance through his ostentatious fashion tastes, which is in truth a culture. On the other hand, the EFF's workers' trope has the distinctive effect of being a signifier before the fact of parliamentary discourse and/or rhetoric. Nonetheless, Malema and his troops have deployed their rhetoric effectively for the masses' causes such that in just two years of the party's formation, it became the third largest party in South Africa (Mbetse 2015).

In closing, it is fitting to refer to the essay's epigraph with which a disagreement is registered. It is inaccurate to state that "fashion is not politics" (Tungate 2012: 127). After all, fashion is politics and much more, just as politics entails much; but fashion too. Future research may want to interrogate the gender dimension in politicians' fashion. Indeed, the strongest claimant to variety in these contexts materialise only through an assessment of the women's wardrobes (Cunningham 2003). Angela Merkel, Hillary Clinton and Theresa May have each distinguished themselves with a chosen format of appearance however varied and different the three may be from one another. The same cannot be said of the former president of Liberia Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Whereas there is a distinguishable format to her dress code, the impact of colour application makes a ton of difference in the overall apparel of Liberia's strong lady. Because dress functions as a salient and powerful political language (Allman 2004: 2), it may be worth asking what the relationship(s) between the cloth choices of female political leaders and the nature of their leadership might be. Indeed, what are some of the challenges female politicians face in developing a wardrobe, considering that what constitutes a wardrobe for female politicians isn't as clear-cut as what does for male politicians which are suits and/or a traditional/national outfit for the average African male politician. Subsequent research may also engage the fashion of South Africa's executive leadership more closely, if only to quell the fixation on Malema and his EFF, in the fashion literature of South Africa. Researchers of fashion should approach the subject confidently in the conviction that dresses tell more about humanity than do philosophers, novelists, preachers, and learned men; for fashion is a richly privileged site from which to survey a society (Zdatny 2006). Through fashion, we discover the moral attitudes and the legislative values of the time (Dolan 1994: 22). The focal take-away from this study is that going forward; fashion appropriations in parliament ought not be performed for effect sake, i.e. to shore up for 'political powerlessness' (Larrier 2003: 85). There must be some positive incentive for the larger good of society. Whereas the foregoing

offers an introductory framework for understanding fashion consciousness in legislators/politicians historically, the expectation is that henceforth, fashion appropriations and invocations are characterized necessarily by positive valences.

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