

Objectification of Women Through Costuming in Nigerian Music Videos **By**

Grace John Ogbonnaya
Department of Theatre and Film Studies
University of Port Harcourt
talk2auntygee@gmail.com
08036669423

Femi Shaka
Department of Theatre and Film Studies
University of Port Harcourt

&

Emily O. Godspresence
Department of Theatre and Film Studies
University of Port Harcourt

Abstract

The discourse of the Objectification of women in films has become a special area of concern to gender scholars. Women are being Objectified either by portraying them as “Never do well”, prostitutes, nagging or even brainless objects etc, but for the purpose of this work, the paper is looking at how women are being Objectified through costumes in Nigerian hip hop music videos. The video looking Nyash by Flavor will be critically analysed. This paper examines the female costuming of the above mentioned video film and the work is anchored on Immanuel Kants Theory of Objectification. The study interrogates the costuming of the female characters in the video film. This paper is geared towards tracing the causes of women Objectification in Hip hop music videos.

Keywords: Objectification, women, music video, Film, Costumes

Introduction

Contemporary research reveal that costuming an actor or a performer goes far beyond the business of covering the artistes nakedness, for it is through costumes that the members of the audience are led into the physical, psychological, existential and even spiritual attributes of the actor or the performer. Similarly, costume enables us to have a grasp and consequently, interrogate the predominant worldview of the wearer.

The place of costume in entertainment transcends the domain of conventional drama and theatrical production and cuts across other art forms such as films, carnivals, Television reality shows, Beauty pageant, costume parades, variety concerts and Hip hop music videos among others. Interestingly, of all the Para-theatrical avenues those shot in the present time, seems to be more adventurous, sensational and lewd in the portrayal of female characters. It has become a trend in Nigerian hip hop music videos for females especially the dancers to be costumed in shabby and near nude costumes, while their male counterparts who often times are the lead singers are seen well dressed. Therefore this paper is geared towards examining the sustained revealing costumes of the female character in Nigerian hip hop music videos. And this work is a feminist interrogation of the Objectification of women in the Nigerian music video using the above mentioned music video film as paradigm.

Reviewed Theory

Immanuel Kant's Theory of Objectification

Objectification in its lay sense refers to seeing or treating of a person, usually a woman as an object but for the purpose of this paper, Objectification is used with primary focus on sexual Objectification. That is Objectification that occurs within the sexual realm. Interestingly, majority of thinkers conceive the notion of Objectification to be a morally problematic phenomenon. This view finds expression in feminist discussion as Catherine Mackinnon and Andrea Dworkin, influenced by Immanuel Kant's conception of Objectification, have argued that due to Men's consumption of pornography, women as a group are reduced to the status of mere tools for men's purposes (Stanford Encyclopaedia of philosophy, 2010, P. 2) also Barty (1990, P.4) and Bordo (1999, P7) argue that women are Objectified with their appearance. For Kant, Objectification involves lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object. Humanity for Kant, is an individual's rational nature and capacity for rational choice.

According to Kant:

Sexual love makes of the loved person an object of appetite as soon as that appetite has been stilled, the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon, which has been sucked dry....as soon as a person becomes an object of appetite for another, all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another, a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone. (P. 163)

Dworkin (2000) uses Katians language to describe the phenomenon of Objectification. According to her:

Objectification occurs when a human being through social means is made less than human, turned into a thing or commodity, bought and sold. When Objectification occurs, a person is depersonalized, so that no individual or integrity is available. Objectification is an injury right at the heart of discrimination. Those who can be used as if they are no longer fully human in social terms, their humanity is hurt by being diminished (Dworkin 2000, P. 30)

Mackinnon hold similar views with Dworkin as she describes Objectification in the same way Dworkin has done. For Mackinnon

A sex object is defined on the basis of its looks, in terms of its usability for sexual pleasure, such as that both the looking, the quality of gaze, including its point of view and the definition according to use become eroticized as part of the sex itself. This is what the feminist concept of sex object means (Mackinnon 1987, P. 173)

The view so far has revealed that Objectification is a concept that is complex and verse to define. However a more critical evaluation by many scholars reveals that pornography is one means by which women are objectified. It is obvious that much recent feminist works have been devoted to comprehensive philosophical analysis of Objectification, which will hopefully lead to more coherent understanding of the tenet and corpus of Objectification.

Nigeria Music Video (Hiphop)

Hip hop music genre has been popular in Africa since the early 1980's. though hip hop music in Nigeria then was used basically for entertainment. It also served as a veritable tool for criticism of the government of the day in the demand for good governance. Groups and solo artists during that period include Junior and pretty, Daniel Wilson, Plantashun Boiz, Tony Tetuila, Eddy Remedy, just to mention but a few. The Nigerian music industry is evident in the years and this transformation is evident in the quality and quantity of music videos that are released into the market on a yearly basis.

History has it that in 90s, not too many people were interested in listening to hip hop song not to talk of sitting down and watching the videos. But now in Nigerian music video are as important as the songs in reaching new markets and sustaining the tempo of air play.

With the increase in smartphone usage and cheaper internet data, the ability to view videos online (youtube) and download the latest videos from sites like tooexclusive.com and notjustok.com has never been easier.

As at today, Nigerian music videos are now advanced and producers and directors have moved from using coma shoots/green effect where the video is shot in one house or location, with the aid of cameras like D7, cost of music video production has skyrocketed alongside its technological fascination.

There is no doubt about the huge socio-economic and socio-cultural potentials of the Nigerian music industry.

Costume/Costuming

The origin of costume can be traced from the prehistoric to contemporary origins. According to Laver:

Costume throughout the greater part of its industry, has followed two separate lives of development, resulting in two contrasting types of garment. The most obvious line of division in modern eyes is between male and female dress: trousers and skirts. The Greeks and Romans wore tunis, that is to say skirts, mountain people like the scots and the modern Greeks were what are in effect skirts. Far Eastern and near Eastern women have worn trousers and may continue to do so (P.7)

Lavers concern in the submission above is to underscore the position that whereas classical Greek and Roman civilization identified with trousers and skirt as the two broad divisions in clothing pattern. The sex division turns out not to be the true division at all.

Man has often used cloths and other body adornments as means of nonverbal communications, such as to indicate occupation, rank, gender, emotional state, cultural background, social status and others. The deduction here is that dresses are forms of signals, symbols and icons that communicate these dresses are worn by performers, for the sole purpose of enhancing their performance, then, the dress transforms into costumes.

According to Asiegbu,

Costumes have existed even before the primitive theatre and have been used as sign to relate one message to the other in the contest in which it is

used. The prehistoric man thinks that by imitating animals around the campfire, he can increase his expedition. He wore the skin of the animal to complete his disguise. This idea has been presented as one of the origins of theatre and drama....the concern was to devise a means of appeasing the forces that appear to influence or control the well-being of the primitive man. Thus the early man devised the first costume ever used in performance (P51)

The relationship between costume and costuming cannot be over emphasized because costume remains one of the means by which a character can be distinguished from another character.

Aminikpo (2007) states that costumes are meant to enhance character interpretation and therefore they constitute part of the working tool of the actor (P. 78). She adds that costumes aid actors to project their characters as well as help the audience to attach some level of believability to the actors art. The deduction from the above is simply that costume stands out as a non verbal code of theatrical and filmic communication.

Feminism

Feminism, since its emergence has been subjected to a wide range of definitions, these definitions are drawn from a perspective be it political, economic or cultural of all definitions or feminism, the commonest is that which associate "feminism" with struggle.

Feminism transcends the term struggle, 'it is a collective' term or system of belief and theories that pay attention to women's right and women's position in culture and society.

For Haralambos and Holborn (2004) the development of feminism has led to attention being focused on the subordinate position of women in many societies. (P. 103). They argue that feminism sociologists have been mainly responsible for developing theories of gender inequality. Yet there is little agreement about the causes of this inequality; on about what actions should be taken to reduce or end it.

Haralambos and Holborn went further to present the several feminist approaches that are discernible in contemporary feminist discourse namely Radical Feminism, Marxist and social feminism, liberal feminism and Black feminism.

According to Haralambos and Hollborn (2004):

Radical feminism blames the exploitation of woman on man. To a radical feminism it is primarily man who have benefited from the subordination of women. Radical feminism see society as patriarchal. It is dominated and ruled by man. From this point of view, man are the ruling class and woman the subject class...radical feminist tend to believe that women have always been exploited and that only revolutionary change can offer the possibility of their liberation....(P.103).

Synopsis of Flavour's Looking Nyash

It is a song drawn from his newly released sixteen tracks album compilation entitled Flavour of Africa. In this song Flavor celebrates visually, the heavy physiological endowment of Africa women with big waist and buttocks. The song portrays Africa women as beautiful creatures as a result of their endowment.

As the title of the song implies, it harps on the distractive and erotic tendencies of getting glued to the bosom of an African lady regardless of the size. The song draws emphasis on a woman buttocks as her selling point. Little wonder the music video presents different sizes and built of female buttocks.

Costuming of Looking Nyash

It has been established that costume design helps to define the character and their relationship as well as establish their relative importance (Brockett and Ball, 2014. P. 397). In this music video, costuming was executed in line with the thematic thrust of the song as well as the production concept. The song simply draws our attention to the different sizes and shapes of the female buttocks which the singer refers in pidgin as "Nyash"

The major characters who are largely females are costumed with skimpy dresses of bikini and bralet, while some are half naked. The essence of these costumes is to reveal the curves and contours, especially the buttocks of the females.

Objectification of women in Hiphop music videos

In Flavours looking Nyash, we are confronted with various visual exposures of female characters that are costumed with highly revealing costumes. These partially naked female characters are portrayed as objects through their costumes. These female characters are presented against the background of the inscription 'Looking Nyash' (the title of the song). The plate bears testimony to the Objectification of women which is portrayed in the music

video. Importantly costuming in Flavours looking Nyash corroborates Kants position that Objectification involves lowering of a person, a being with humanity, to the status of an object.

Upon a more critical examination of costuming in this music video, one notices that the entire concept of the visuals is tailored towards the objectification of the females. Ordinarily the mere mention of “Nyash” (buttocks) translates in nudity since the human buttocks that is covered with cloth would still remain buttocks. The deduction that can be gleaned from the costuming of female characters in Flavours Looking Nyash is that women are not placed in a role where they can take control of the scene, instead they are simply put there to be observed from a masculine point of view.

PICTURE



Plate 1

Song: Looking Nyash

Artiste: Flavour

Source: Online (youtube)

Flavour poses against the backdrop of female characters who are dressed in Bikinis

In the plate above one can see that Flavour is well dressed, covered up in fashion while all Flavours dancers are totally nude exposing their buttocks. This is a total Objectification of female body, thereby making it or turning it into a commodity or a vehicle for the sales of flavours music.



Plate 2

Song: Looking Nyash

Artist: Flavour

Source: Online (youtube)

A side view of Flavour and a female character in highly revealing Bikini

In plate 2 above, Flavour is displaying his Macho body and all that is being put on display is the dancers buttocks for the sale of the music videos.



Plate 3

Song: Looking Nyash

Artiste: Flavour

Source: Online (youtube)

A Random sampling of female characters in Bikinis in and outside a Boxing Ring, also flavor is seen carry a naked female character

Plate No 3, Flavour again is sitting down, relaxed and on another picture Flavour can be seen basically carrying a naked women.



Plate 4

Song: Looking Nyash

Artiste: Flavour

Source: Online (youtube)

Female characters in Bikini, while Flavour is seen well dressed

Again the display of female buttock (Nyash) while Flavour is well dressed, while the female characters are like Mannequins (that is dummies used for displays) which are used to sale the music videos.

In these plates we can see random sampling of female characters in Bikini and outside a boxing ring. The costumes are designed to expose their buttocks and their chest region. Flavor is seen carrying a female character with heavy and naked buttocks on his shoulder in the music video.

In the pictures we see pictorial exposures of females in the video who are dressed in highly revealing costumes. All the female characters are costumed in Bikini in an attempt to emphasize the shape of their buttocks (Nyash), while flavor is costumed in a black pant trouser and a black jacket with shoes. In this music video flavor beckons on his audience to come and see varieties of women buttocks, thereby objectifying women, as the female characters are shown in color brown which is similar to one shown in their complexions. From a distance and coupled with use of atmospheric lighting, one could easily conclude that they are completely nude. This is a typical example of women being objectified.

Conclusion

This paper underscores the fact that Nigerian hip hop music videos costume women shabbily and skimpily with the motive of Objectifying them, seeing women as object for use or a thing.

A critical reading of the music video under study authenticates the papers earlier thesis that nudity has become a norm as well as a yardstick for successful hip hop music video in Nigeria.

Women are seen as object for sales of video films, using the female nakedness as the selling point of the videos.

References

- Aminikpo, F. (2007). Basics of costume and make-up arts. In Henry Bell-Gam. Ed. *Theatre in Theory and Practice For Beginners*. pp. 78-93.
- Asiegbu, N. (1996). Characterization through make-up and costume: An analysis of the role of make-up and costume in the Nigerian home video. Unpublished M.A. Thesis. Department of Theatre Arts, University of Ibadan.
- Brockett, O. (1999). *The theatre: An introduction*. 4th. ed. Rinehart and Winston.
- Dworkin, R. (October 21,1993). Women and pornography. In *New York review of books*.
- Haralambos, M & Holborn, M. (2004). *Sociology: themes and perspectives*. Harper Collins.
- Laver, J. (1969). *Costume and fashion*. Thames & Hudson.
- Okoh, J. (2012). *Towards feminist Theatre*. University of Port Harcourt Press.