

## **Negative Portrayal of Female Bodies in Contemporary Nigerian Musical Videos: A Dialogue**

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### **Abstract**

The video arts have over the years performed a pivotal function of reflecting and prescribing remedies to societal issues. This position has over time been the elemental doctrine of the industry. In Nigeria today, the use of naked female bodies in musical videos by Nigerian singers poses a challenge as it projects a negative influence on the teeming young population that watch the debased presentation of female folk. But the question is, to what extent do these videos influence the society? The idea is that video art should not only entertain and create pleasure but should serve as a tool to instruct and positively influence its audience. Therefore, it has become a pertinent responsibility of the professionals and performer alike to work collaboratively in tackling the stance of the functional relevance of the video arts. The paper concludes that contemporary Nigeria video makers should rather imbibe a deliberate positive attitude towards content creation with a view to redirecting the mindset of the society, by a way of debunking the notion that female bodies are a coherent means of garnering attention to their music creations.

**Key Words:** Negative Portrayal, Female Bodies, Musical Videos

### **Introduction**

The Nigerian music industry is very popular as it has become a leading entertainment source among young and aged people. The

musical pieces are categorized into different genres among which includes; Hip-hop, Afrobeats, Reggae, R&B, Blues, High-life among others.

Video has become one of the most powerful means of enhancing the art of music in Nigeria. As an art form, it is considered the “mirror” of the society because of the significant role it plays in strengthening the society. Film, which musical videos are a part of, generally informs, educates and entertains. Other roles include advertising and strengthening the ties of the society. It is a medium of communication and information dissemination. It keeps the people informed about the happenings around them and the world allover. Film has strong socio-cultural impacts upon the society, due to its inherent ability to reach larger number of the public. No doubt, it is widely used as a tool for awareness creation.

However, the image of women in contemporary musical videos is already taking a different dimension, rather than positive portrayal, women are gradually turning in to scenic elements as musical video makers, instead of employing elements such as; lighting, proper scenic design, sound among others to beautify their videos, have resolved to the use of the female bodies mages, highly represented in an un-dignifying manner to cover up for their lapses in role play and other scenic aesthetics. These Nigerian musical videos portray the feminine characters as objects of sexual gratification, vulnerable and inferior, mere work of art, good for visual satisfaction. Though Particular reference will be paid to “Asake 2:30” and DJ Spinal Dis Love featuring Wizkid and Tiwa Savage for the purpose of this study. The above artist are all Nigeria artist. Asake is a Nigerian Afrobeat Singer and songs writer, DJ Spinal is a Nigerian disc Jockey, record producer, song

writer, label executive and media personality. Wizkid is a Nigerian singer and song writer. He is also a prominent figure in the modern day Afrobeat music scene. While Tiwa Savage is also a Nigerian Singer, Songwriter and actress. She is also refers to as the Queen of Afrobeat.

Female gender have been negatively portrayed to serve the purpose of attraction in the aforementioned Nigeria musical videos. They are seen mainly as objects of beautification, The female character in the music videos obviously presents the gender as an object of mere aesthetics and complete definition of nudity. These female characters are seen in skimpy cloths accompanied by exaggerated erotic dances. To further buttress this show of shame, some female characters are even represented in their birthday coats (naked) all for the purpose of attraction. In a quest to justify this immoral portrayal of the female characters in Nigerian musical videos, a name is given to them “vixen” fondly called video Vixen” they have reconstructed their thinking to the fact that only erotic looks can gain prominence in the industry. These descriptions given to the female gender in these music videos are disturbing and the influence is always on the negative as the female children are forced to grow in line with what they see while the male children perceive what they have seen as the principal formation for attending to the opposite sex. No wonder, Mbachaga D. Jonathan and Ukuma T. Shadrach explains that “the idea is that our art must not only entertain but also establish a reputation that precludes its dismissal as an unserious profession. This image question, no matter how successfully eloquent it has been argued has continued to rear its ugly head at times’ (81). Hence, the entire industry’s approach toward female representation on stage needs repositioning.

This study therefore, aims at adding to the body of publications geared towards correcting the ills against the feminine gender. This is against the backdrop of women imaging; as some of these Videos have given a kind of coloration to women that is fast becoming a recent normal. This careless portrayal is blamed on the female gender as they indulge in un-dignifying activities such as half naked dress or as far as appearance without clothes on (complete Nudity) which culminate in to what Okpokwasili Agatha refers to as, female gender treachery. In her words

with the rate women have thrown caution to the wind in their ways of dressing. Nudity among women has become the order of the day. The line between decency and nudity is becoming fuzzy. Our women especially our young girls prefer going almost naked on the street than dressing decently. They even coined an adage for it in Nigerian parlance “using what you have, to get what you want” (152).

This mindset depicts how far women can go to satisfy their inclination. Their reason for doing this according to her, may not be farfetched from what a French female philosopher Simone De Beauvoir, said in her book “the second sex” that men see women as a “sex being”. A being whose singular objective is to satisfy the whims and caprices of her master, man. She further states that.

“Our clothing reveals our essence to the world. It tells the world our stories, our inner thoughts, our aspirations, who we are then and who we want to be. Our dressing reveals the sum total of our personality. In dressing, we equally exercise our freewill and show the world how to address us. One of the easiest ways to identify yourself with a group that you wish to belong to is to dress like them (153).

With the rapid development Nigeria as a country is facing especially in the areas of technology, craft and fashion which the film industry is highly inclusive. Most of what we are witnessing today is the products of Westernization brought by globalization which obviously, is the driving force. Video makers no longer see it fashionable to continue the traditional way as the attention of the audience is drifted away from the conventional aesthetic appeals obtainable in the traditional theatrical elements. W.B Worthen in his essay Brecht attacks the bourgeois notion that the theatre can be divided into two kinds of art, as though drama were either instructive or entertaining. Worthen stressed that; "Brecht dialecticizes these categories, showing that they define one another and therefore, exist within one another, that realistic plays (performance) after all not only entertain their audiences, but also offer an image of the world, a kind of instruction"(919)

Dress for example, which is a major element known as costume in the industry, used to tell; local, period, mood, time of the day among others has gradually deviated from these roles. Dressing in the Nigeria or the African way is no longer fashionable among the female characters portrayed on our musical screen today. Hence the video makers are in competition with the western world at the detriment of our moral values. The situation Okpokwasili, Agatha observed that, it has sparked mixed reactions in the society. In her submission; "Some see it as prostitution but the perpetrators see it as "trend" a fashion trend that promote moral degradation. It is even more worrisome when women expose parts of their bodies which ordinarily should be covered (164). This worrisome development is a major characteristic of the contemporary Nigeria musical video.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

To what extent do our videos influence the society? The idea is that our videos must not only entertain but also establish a reputation that precludes its dismissal as an unserious profession as rightly pointed out by Mbachaga (81). The following questions are pertinent: What is Video? What is it for? How does it work? What can it teach us? What effect does it have on human behavior? These fundamental questions are considered with a view to form the basic concept of video as espoused in this paper. Video is an electronic medium for the recording, coping, playback, broadcasting and display of moving visual. It is a work of visual art that stimulates experiences and otherwise communicates ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or atmosphere through the use of moving images. According to Abone, Clementina (23) visual elements of cinema need no translation. They give the motion picture a universal power of communication. Films are also artifacts created by specific cultures which reflect those cultures and in turn, affect them. The Federal Republic of Nigeria National Film Policy (2000) posits that the film is a unique means of communication. Its visual bias gives it the most universal appeal and impact" (page 1, section 1.1). Abone (23) extols film the silver screen, as one of the most important weapons by which the character of a nation, its image, identity, its culture, its peculiar sounds, politics, economy, its aspirations and achievements are impressed on the popular mind throughout the world. The film's strange and wonderful quality lies in the ability of the film makers to create, innovate and exhibit something that exceeds, beats expectation and imagination. Film are produced by recording actual techniques and other special effects. They are series of

individual frames but shown in rapid succession the illusion of motion is given to the viewer.

### **Negative Portrayal of Female Bodies in Nigerian Musical Videos**

The idea of musical videos coming in to the Nigerian music industry was warmly received and was thought to be a game changer in the sense that, high expectations were placed on the industry in terms of correcting the misrepresentation given to the image of the black man by the foreign entertainers. In view of this, Emelobe Emeka Dibia observes that, it is disappointing to note that “a great deal of home videos produced in Nigeria portray women as prostitutes, objects of ridicule and so on” (211). There is not gain saying the fact that, the Nigeria Musical industry is also trading the same path. Rinre Aminu observes that; “To promote their songs, artist and video producers will go the extra mile for them to hit their goals, sometimes forgetting the goals of a good music video which is to be able to put together performance and delivery which exhibit beauty and a unique concept” (14) . The writer further explains that most popular appearances on music videos today are “women”, having a lot of them in a video means good marketing and promotion. Ayakoroma mentioned this when he said: “The emergent privately driven video film industry arrived the scene with unfortunate thing; the industry became a jungle where anything could happen as far as those who funded the productions went smiling to the banks” (6). These women characters in most of the musical videos exhibit a lot of undignifying characteristic, rather than portraying the women in their strengths, potential abilities and their artistic capabilities. Rinre states that; Nigerian music industry could be argued to rely

on representation of women to satisfy the sensual view of the audience in order to make more profit.

The select videos for this study represent most of the general tendencies that are typical of the representation of women in Nigeria Musical videos. Hence Ayakoroma Barclays states that,

it is very imperative for filmmakers to understand that they bear the responsibility of being their countries image makers, nationally and internationally. He adds that “Rather than portraying women as perpetually shallow minded, nymphomaniac, illiterates and incapable of rational judgment and tied to the man’s apron strings (2)

Judging from the above therefore, proactive action should be taken and well defined measures put in place to rectify this stereotypical state of affairs of women especially to show a proper image of the country, nationally and internationally.

On the contrary, one thing so certain that distinguishes and explains the difference in appearance and presentation of women in music videos of the 70s, 80s and even the 90s, for example, is that video makers depended on originality. Originality here is hinged on the basic performance elements such as special effects, scenic design/location, colour, costume and makeup among others. Gordon Graham buttressed on this when he mentioned G.W.F Hegel who is most closely identified with a cognitive theory of art. In his remarks, Hegel tried to see the philosophical importance of distinguishing between the fine arts, given different account of their nature and value thus: “The five arts he distinguished are music, painting, sculpture, poetry and architecture”, he further opined that art in the modern period is effectively dead” (52). On this view, Gordon (3) in his book titled



*Philosophy of the Arts; an Introduction to aesthetics.* Answers very fundamental questions; What is Arts? And what makes the art valuable? In answering these questions, quoting Hume, he argues that the important thing about art is “its agreeableness”, according to him, the pleasure we derive from it is a matter of our sentiments, not its intrinsic nature. Whereas, the contemporary video makers adopts what is been projected by the western world. Female artist of the 70s, 80s and the 90s made use of their cultural and traditional practices in the music, they blend there cultures into their music. But on the other hand, the present generation is trying to copy how women are presented in the western world, especially African-American women. According to Ikamara Larasi (106) Western world music industry presents women especially African-American women as ‘Gold Diggers’ and sex offenders. The Nigerian music industry having copied must of these stereotypical behaviour from the Western world, presents women in ways that devalues the reality of things.

### **A Critique of Asake’s 2:30 and DJ Spinal’s Dis Love**

As earlier stated, film is a unique means of communication, it is one of the most important weapons by which the character of a nation, its image and identity is showcased to the world, The film's strange and wonderful quality lies in the ability of the film makers to create, innovate and exhibit something that beats expectation and imagination rather than stereotypical portrayals.

The choice of these two videos is just a standpoint to discuss the immoral tendencies in the contemporary Nigeria music industry, and how it has become a cover-up for film makers.

Ahmed Ololade Asake known professionally as Asake is one of the fast rising Nigeria super star who rose to prominence in 2020.

According to tonpeak.com, 2:30 was a follow-up to his previously heard single “Yoga”. The song was written by Asake and produced by Blaisebeat and magic stick. The song is a boastful portrayal of Asake’s personality bringing to clear terms what he is capable of, ranging from his wealth, strength and connection. It was released early 2023.

Taking a critical observation of the contemporary Nigeria Music Videos, there is a complete deviation from the real essence of music video as must often, the lyrics of the songs are in opposition to the videos which originally are supposed to serve as complement. Just as in the lyrics of the song 2:30;

Tranquility tranquility  
I no get time to de form activity  
Ko le kalas, I de find stability  
Like Abacha money long infinity  
What’s the chances  
What’s the probality  
To see a better version of me with agility  
No you can’t fake reality.

And in another verse you hear something like;  
“You can call me Mr. money”





**Screenshots from Asake's 2:30 video**

All the above are lyrics from the song 2:30. However, taking a closer observation of the music video, there is a complete

disconnect on what the song is saying and the projection of female characters in the song. While Asake in his lyrics counts his achievements, connections and ability to command respect and total submission. The female characters are rather portrayed as mere sex object. This is evidenced in the erotic dances, sensual dress display, to mention but a few. Sexism has influence the cultures of today's Nigerian youths and it has given a new meaning to the images of women in music and films. On the other hand, Oluseye Desmond Sodamola, professionally known as Spinall. (Dj Spinall) is a Nigerian disc Jockey. Who first gained prominence in 2004, while working as a Radio DJ at Ray-power 100.5 FM. His song Dis Love featuring Wizkid and Tiwa Savage, was released July 2019. The song talks about love as well as the ability to spend money for it.

Judging from the lyrics of the song, it shows clearly that the feminine gender is reduced to the point that money can get her do anything. This misrepresentation is evidenced in the video in different forms. Also the fact that the female characters are paid to accept such roles and present themselves naked for the purpose of 'beautification and attraction' in the videos, is a loud voice in consonance with the lyrics of the song.

In the song, one will find lyrics like:

Baby girl I love you  
Sit down on it.  
Baby girl come whine up on it.  
I know you love this beat,  
Sweet melanin  
Oh, you could be my sweet seniorita

This verse basically has reduced the female gender to nothing but a mere sex toy, who is remote controlled by money. Once money

is involved she is ready to satisfy man's sexual whims. And to further portray the woman as an inferior being and lacking in wisdom, rendition of empty and fake adjectival nomenclatures, as obtainable in the lyrics above "Sweet Melanin" my Sweet Senorita to make the female being feel important and act in consonance. In another verse.

American girl come whine up for me  
My Jamaican girl come whine up for me  
Ojota girls come whine up for me  
My Caribbean girls come burst up for me.





The lyrics above, demonstrates clearly that, these girls are from every corner at the beck and call of the man who has capacity. This no doubt shows that, they are called only when they are needed.

Using these two music videos as a hinging point, the female characters in the contemporary musical videos in their erotic

dances and sensual dresses or completely nudity will proudly perform to the lyrics that have portrayed them as good for nothing but sex tools.

Umoh also called “prince of Love in an interview with Nigerian Tribune, once said that most lyrics in contemporary music were not conveying any positive message but were selling because of their beats or the artists. In this light the downpour of nude female artists in recent videos could be attributed to attention seeking. In the same vein, Rev. Fr. Pius in the Nigerian Tribune had said that such a trend had not added any value to the nation and female gender as well. But that such trend is a sign of people who are not proud of their culture, and still mentally colonized by believing that everything that is Western in nature is good. It is therefore, disheartening to accept the reality in the contemporary Nigerian music industry, where the feminine gender is not seen from the creative point of view but rather, an object used by the male gender to make their ends meet.

### **Conclusion**

Video as an art form should depict the society in reality and in doing this attract people to move towards the right ideas as well as pushing for a change in the society. Video here is used to compliment music which is a vital tool to confront social ills highlighting the prevailing problems that are affecting Nigeria as a Nation, as well, entertain the populace, however, the recent portrayal of these women characters in most of the musical videos exhibit a lot of un-dignifying characteristic, rather than portraying the women in their strengths, potential abilities and their artistic capabilities. The Nigerian music industry could be argued to rely on representation of women to satisfy the sensual view of the

audience in order to make more profit. If our music videos are allowed to become suicidal instruments in the minds of the audience, then it is rather unfortunate.

### **Recommendations**

Film, known to be a vehicle that project and promotes the societal ideology and identity, if not properly checked can drive home a lot of negative influence. To this end therefore, the National Film and Video Censors Board, set up by Act No. 85 of 1993 should step up in its responsibility as enshrined in the law to classify and ban all videos depending on vulgarized female bodies to attract attention of the audience.

Worthy of mention is the film makers themselves, rather than blindly following the so called 'trends' in the western world's music, attention should be withdrawn to the basic tenets of video making in Nigeria as observed in the paper.

It is also not out of place for video makers and the academia to embark on sensitization campaign, to first of all create awareness on the idea of vulgarizing or objectification of female bodies in our contemporary music videos. Hence use different media in recasting the minds of artists and actresses and the general public toward accepting products with genuine artistic values.

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