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UNIVERSITY OF THE
WITWATERSRAND,
JOHANNESBURG

Misogyny and romance entangled: Reading gender, sexuality, and Africanness in Afrobeats music videos

By

Simphiwe Emmanuel Rens

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Johannesburg, 2021

DECLARATION

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Declaration by Student:

I, **Simphiwe Emmanuel Rens (Student number: 461701)**, am a student registered for the degree of **Doctor of Philosophy** in the year 2021. I hereby declare the following:

- I am aware that plagiarism (the use of someone else's work without their permission and/or without acknowledging the original source) is wrong.
- I confirm that ALL the work submitted for assessment for the above course is my own unaided work except where I have explicitly indicated otherwise.
- I have followed the required conventions in referencing the thoughts and ideas of others.
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Date: 23 March 2021

SUMMARY

This thesis explored how the musical genre of Afrobeats portrays gendered lived experiences to its global audiences in music videos. As such, the thesis asked, what messages concerning gender, sexuality and Africanness are prioritised by the main artists in the scene? Additionally, the study concerned itself with the conversational tropes emanating from viewer commentary in relation to the portrayals of gender, sexuality, and Africanness in the most popular Afrobeats music videos. 25 Afrobeats music videos with high viewership figures – as at November 2018, when said music videos were downloaded from YouTube – formed the core corpus of data analysed in this study. A second data corpus of two thousand five hundred (2,500) YouTube viewer comments was constructed by downloading the top 100 most-reacted-on viewer comments from each of the 25 music videos. These data sets were first subjected to a quantitative content analysis of the music videos, as well as an inductive qualitative content analysis of the second data set (YouTube comments) before a rigorous multimodal critical discourse analysis was performed across both data sets to advance this thesis's arguments. Masculine and feminine performativties, against their diverse African contextual backdrops, are critically examined.

Masculine performativities, I argue, are implicated in a 'misogyrom' cultural sensibility which fosters gender-relational expressions that are at once implicated in the perpetuation of misogynistic imbalanced gender power relations and notable hyper-romanticism from (heterosexual) men towards women in the analysed music videos. This new concept – which marries the terms 'misogyny' and 'romanticism' – forms part of one of this thesis's original analytical contributions to gender studies. I propose this concept to capture a cultural sensibility wherein the sociocultural dominance of men over women is successfully sustained through the masking of heteropatriarchal misogyny and sexism with men's acts of overt romanticism towards women through lyrics and behaviours appearing to value women as more than mere objects of men's sexual satisfaction, but romantic partners with value more than that which a dominant, patriarchal male gaze often relegates to *just* physical appearance. What this does, is it allows this thesis to read feminine performances in these music videos as variously empowered, agentic and self-determining with regard to sexuality and sexual expression. By so doing, this thesis is able to make another significant conceptual contribution to knowledge by theorising these feminine performativities as 'sexssertive'. This new concept weds the notions of sex/sexuality with the personality trait of assertiveness; to offer a novel way of describing (heterosexual) women's perceived autonomy/agency in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. Considering misogyrom-entangled men and sexssertive women in these music videos, an argument is sustained that the featured men implicitly debase women by constructing false senses of sexual assertiveness and empowerment for women in the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships, as mediated in the analysed corpus of music videos. This thesis purports that depictions of sexssertive women in the analysed corpus of music videos are mere sociocultural façades and should not be allowed to derail the feminist plight towards women's *actual* (sexual) empowerment across their diverse African contexts in and beyond popular media texts.

Keywords: Afrobeats; gender; sexuality; Africanness; representation; popular culture; feminism; postfeminism; femininities; masculinities; misogyrom; sexssertive

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1. BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION: ENGAGING THE AFROBEATS MUSICAL GENRE

Between February 2012 and May 2016, I was employed at a South African Internet-based radio station known as TransAfrica Radio. The station distinguishes itself from other Internet-based radio stations by being the only station that plays/broadcasts 100% African music. While working as an on-air presenter and content producer for the station's weekend brunch show, TransEdge, I was tasked to conduct research and present content on this three-hour programme focused on African arts, culture and literature. The station managers consistently emphasised that the content we incorporated into our shows had to centralise African events, lived experiences, and developments.

This focus on, and value placed over Africa, Africans and 'Africanness' by TransAfrica Radio, influenced my growing interest in the continent, beyond my birth country of South Africa – especially from an arts, culture, literature and musical perspective. It was the musical aspect, more especially, that I would often be preoccupied with, due to a strong liking I developed towards the continentally produced music we featured at this radio station. I would write down the names of artists and their songs and would later search for more of their music and music videos on YouTube; I would also conduct further research on these artists using the Internet. It was this pursuit that exposed me to what I gathered was a West African inspired musical genre 'Afrobeats', which I had long attributed to the late Fela Anikulapo Kuti.

Consuming more and more of this music led me to notice the addition of an 's' to the title 'Afrobeat' and secondly, I realised that this 'Afrobeat' with an 's' was different from that of Kuti (and his sons, Femi and Seun, among others) which we would often play on TransAfrica Radio. Whenever I watched music videos and videographed performances of musicians within these two genres, I found this 'difference' very interesting, especially when it came to the forms of 'visuality' which these two genres prioritised. It was, to a significant extent, through these music videos (and my sporadic viewing of Nollywood films) that I would imagine life in other parts of Africa as a South African citizen who had not travelled the continent much. Nadine Dolby (2006: 32) makes a helpful postulation regarding young people's consumption of popular culture:

> Though youths' ability to consume popular culture is largely dictated by their economic means, and is in some cases constrained by religious or cultural norms, the products of a media-obsessed world shape the imaginative landscape of youth's lives.

I used these "African popular arts and cultural productions" (Spencer, Ligaga & Musila 2018: 3) as conduits to vicariously experience and make sense of life in other parts of Africa. Popular art forms (soap operas, music videos, romance novels, among other), Spencer et al (2018: 4) reiterate, do not always offer mere stereotypical regurgitations of social life, but often invite consumers thereof to deploy the featured storylines and insights as resources "to interpret and make sense of social life."

My engagements with these popular cultural texts in the form of Afrobeats music videos among others, were neither neutral nor void of ideological influence. This is unsurprising because, as Strinati (2004: 211) emphasises through a postmodernist lens:

> […] mass media and popular culture are the most important and powerful institutions, and control and shape all other types of social relationships. Popular cultural signs and media images increasingly dominate our sense of reality, and the way we define ourselves and the world around us.

It was an awareness of scholarly observations similar to Strinati's, coupled with my intellectual positionality as a doctoral candidate in the humanities, that prompted a more critical sensibility on my part, the more I was consuming these popular cultural texts. I became mindful of the ways in which bodies (gendered, classed and raced) and spaces (material and symbolic) were portrayed in the Afrobeats music videos I would leisurely consume as sources of popular entertainment. Increasingly, I found myself at pains to uncritically internalise some of the gender-relational depictions within these music videos. This, however, was a challenge for me given how these gender-relational depictions were, to my mind, not always pleasant in their representations of women's bodies.

While consuming these audio-visual offerings in the form of music videos, I would consciously pay attention to the comment threads on these videos where thousands of other viewers, followers, and fans of Afrobeats music, would express their views about these videos' contents. The tens of thousands of comments attached to these music videos offer an interesting atmosphere of virtual engagement between us as viewers and, presumably, as avid followers of Afrobeats music. Given my interest in this music, and the opportunity to critically engage this musical genre to advance my research interests in relation to gender and popular media, I was motivated to embark on this research project to interrogate the ways in which creators of Afrobeats depict gendered African subjectivities and said subjectivities' sociocultural experiences. I would do this through closely exploring gender representations in this genre's multimodal discourses advanced through the narrative and aesthetic conventions of the music videos produced in the Afrobeats music scene.

1.1. Why the focus on Afrobeats music videos?

The increasing transnational footprint of Afrobeats motivates this study. Considering the number of YouTube views garnered by Afrobeats music videos, for instance, this music evidently commands the attention of Internet-connected audiences who drive figures as high as 95 million views per song. For a consolidated overview of the viewership figures that some Afrobeats music videos attract on YouTube, see Table 1 in chapter four of this thesis. Music videos for Afrobeats songs such as 'Johnny' by Yemi Alade (2014), 'Fall' by Davido (2017), and 'Personally' by P-Square (2013), to mention a few, attract significant viewership figures. For instance, as at November 2018, when data was collected for this study, these three music videos garnered a joint viewership figure of over 278 million unique views.

Acknowledging that YouTube rigorously monitors its view-count apparatus to rule out fraudulent, illegally-acquired views (Blue Fountain Media 2019), we can accept that millions of individual viewers worldwide are consuming these music videos. This, then, renders an opportunity for the creators of Afrobeats music and music videos to widely disseminate representations related, in some ways, to idealised constructions of their lived experiences to these global audiences/viewers. Music and music videos (as multimodal discourses), much like other popular cultural forms such as soap operas, are effective in dynamically staging topical dialogues by deploying affective registers that resonate with their target audiences. In this way, these popular cultural forms manage to effectively – sometimes inadvertently – reiterate thoughts that are either loyal or subversive to existing hegemonic ideologies on sociocultural and, in extension, gendered experiences and interactions, at the moment of consumption by audiences (Spencer et. al 2018).

The challenge in this is that, while this music is perhaps created as mere entertainment for profit-gain and fame, it would be naïve to deny that "the media images that a society produces provide insight as to who and what is important in that culture" (VanDyke 2011: 3). It is accepted by cultural studies scholars and commentators that music videos are one of various mediums through which values and ideals are presented, as the pervasive imagery in music videos tell viewers narratives about what is "normal" in terms of gender, race, class, and sexuality among other aspects (Gow 1996; Jhally 2007; Asakitikpi 2018). What this means, then, is that these texts contain political subtexts beyond their status as artefacts of entertainment and 'harmless' fun, and consumers thereof may unwittingly imbibe the depictions of gendered, sexualised, classed, and racialised lived experiences therein, as fundamentally 'truthful' representations (Sipiora 1991).

Music video texts are imbued with biases, ideologies, and prejudices which either reflect or reiterate existing societal inequalities, biases against certain gender roles, and the reproduction of stereotypical ideologies about certain people in a culture. It is thus important – as emphasised by Jhally 2007 (in Frisby & Aubrey 2012: 84) – that continuous attention is given to the representations of women and men in music videos as these videos render fertile grounds to observe (and be critical of) our cultural values regarding femininity and masculinity. Thus, through continuous critical analyses of popular images of gender, sex difference and sexuality in music videos, studies are able to "contribute to an understanding of contemporary media messages, which may, ultimately contribute to how young people, especially girls and women, are socialized to see themselves" (Frisby & Aubrey 2012: 84). As Sipiora (1991) has noted, while consuming these texts, members of a culture subconsciously come to terms with who they believe they are *supposed* to be, what they *should* look like in appearance, as well as what they should do to fit in.

This study is motivated by these arguments and aligns its thesis with said critiques about popular culture. Essentially, this study wants to make an argument about the ways in which popular media messages continue to play a catalytic role in global discourses about gender and sexuality by either perpetuating or disrupting hegemonic gendered ideals. Further to that, and given Afrobeats' explicit linkage to the African continent, an argument will be made about the idealised multimodal constructions of 'Africanness' in their gendered iterations, prioritised by creators within this musical genre and what consumers thereof express as their perceptions about said constructions.

Afrobeats' popularity with globally-dispersed audiences is leveraged by musicians from other globally-consumed musical genres such as Pop, R&B, and hip-hop who actively collaborate with Afrobeats artists to sustain their own global relevance. We have, thus, seen successful cross-continental collaborations between Afrobeats artists such as Wizkid and U.S-based Canadian hip-hop artist, Drake (*Come Closer,* by Starboy/RCA Records 2017); P-Square and Akon (*Chop My Money* by Konvict Music & Square Records 2012); P-Square and U.S rapper Rick Ross (*Beautiful Onyinye* by Konvict Music & Square Records 2012); Davido and U.S pop artist, Chris Brown (*Blow My Mind* by Sony Music U.K./RCA Records 2019), as well as Wizkid and global pop star, Beyoncé Knowles (*Brown Skin Girl* by Parkwood Entertainment/Columbia 2019), over the past decade. These collaborative pursuits have been instrumental in making the genre of Afrobeats and its artists visible beyond the continent of Africa, and beyond the various African diasporic communities around the world.

It is also this genre's novelty as an increasingly globalised African cultural export and art form that positions it as an under-explored yet valuable territory for critical scholarly engagement. In terms of transnational appeal beyond the confines of the West African countries of Nigeria and Ghana, Afrobeats is a fairly young musical genre whose transnational footprint is traced back to the year 2011 (Hancox 2012). By embarking on said critical exploration of this genre in its 'preadolescence', this study is able to add to a burgeoning literature pertaining to popular culture and the influence of the music video text, specifically, in informing broader socio-cultural perceptions about gender and sexuality in Africa, as well as notions of Africanness as they relate to gender performativity in our context. This route enables me to argue for the role and implications of gender representations in popular culture – much of which has focused on the Global North (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis 1993; Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto 1995; Henry 2002; Baker 2005; Marshall 2006; Rose 2008; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009, for instance). This project, thus, purposefully centres the cultural, social and aspirational ideals multimodally portrayed in these African popular cultural texts, particularly through the lens of gender, sexuality and notions of being African (Africanness).

In relation to popular cultural texts such as African film (for instance, Nollywood), theatre (protest theatre, for instance) and visual arts (paintings and photography, for instance), a focus on African music videos is valuable in problematising how this 'new' African-influenced genre's use of multimodal conventions and aesthetic choices either adds to or disrupts existing insights reported on the portrayal of African subjectivities in African popular arts *by* Africans. Taking it a step further, this study addresses its curiosity regarding the expressions from consumers of these texts, stemming from their engagement therewith on YouTube as "communities of engagement, convened by popular art forms" (Spencer et. al 2018: 3). Due precisely to their performative tendency and alluring capability to invoke responses from their audiences, music videos – hosted on interactive social media platforms such as YouTube – manage to convene viewers in dialogue regarding the issues these videos grapple with. This sense of community and communal interaction is nowhere more evident than on social media platforms, notes Spencer et. al (2018).

With this justification of this study's choice of *this* African musical genre specifically, it is important to render a more in-depth contextualisation of Afrobeats to help situate it in the context of an increasingly globalised music environment and popular culture.

1.2. From 'Afrobeat' to 'Afrobeats': A contextual note

'Afrobeats', a growing musical genre owing its origins to the West African countries of Nigeria and Ghana; began establishing an inter-continental audience beyond its territories of origin when Nigerian singer, D'Banj's 'Oliver Twist' song was played at a 2011 New Year's Eve party in London to usher in the 2012 Olympics year. That moment – particularly instrumental in earning this sound the attention of the mainstream U.K. music scene (Hancox 2012) – laid the foundation to position this music as a contender for global mass audience attention and visibility beyond Nigeria, Ghana and some pockets of the African diaspora (Ofiaja 2017).

Music journalist and critic, Joey Akan (2016), reports that:

> [t]his sound conveys the up-tempo African vibe, and appeals to young vibrant Afropolitan minds. The ensuing music, which is an amalgamation of beats and influences have become popular in the international scene, with technology aiding the spread of the immersive and infectious tunes to all around the world. The export[ing] of this sound does not solely rely on technology. Africans living in the diaspora, through their ubiquitous communities also helped with the spread of the pop sounds emanating from their home countries.

This sound eschews the jazzy, socio-political nuances of the much older, very similarly named, 'Afrobeat' musical genre which "…is, and has always been the musical kind associated with Fela Anikulapo Kuti" (Sithole 2012: 1). Referred to by music and culture writer Alice Finney (2018) as "the baby of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat sound", 'Afrobeat**s**'(Afrobeat with an 's') – as a genre – has been met with dismay by some musical purists who are at odds with the terminology used to describe this 'new' sound (Akan 2016). Their view is that the name 'Afrobeats' is too similar to 'Afrobeat', only for the message to be so dissimilar (Ofiaja 2017; Scher 2015).

Lyrically, the messages entrenched in Kuti's Afrobeat music are, to a notable extent, of an unquestionably political nature (Olorunyomi 1996; Howe 1997; Olorunyomi 2001; Olaniyan 2004; Shonekan 2009; Royster 2011; Sithole 2012; Romer 2015; Gbadamosi 2016). Kuti explored subject matter ranging from anti-corruption to various pro-civil rights issues as fuelled by the then socio-political context of his birth country, Nigeria (Olaniyan 2004; Akan 2016). Sithole notes how Kuti's lyrics are self-evident of the fact that the man was a firebrand who became the bane of the military and civil repressive state apparatus prescribed by the then federalist Nigeria (2012: 1). An influential musician and political commentator, many of Kuti's records called out what he viewed as political corruption in post-colonial Nigeria, by creatively singing about the "…power relations between the big man (Oga) and the marginalised" (Olorunyomi 2001: 36). The songs pointed to what Fela viewed, among other things, as the

hypocrisies of Nigerian men and women he believed to be overly influenced by the West ("colonial mentality" – he would call it); as well as his own embrace of sexual pleasure, drugs, and rascally fun-making (Olaniyan 2004; Royster 2011: 492; Gbadamosi 2016).

Fela's distinct and strategic blend of jazz, African beats, funk and West African highlife in the 1960s and 70s fostered the dawn of a sound and genre that eventually became a global success (Finney 2018; Shonekan 2009). The genre's success allowed Fela to play a pivotal role in transnationalising Afrobeat through performing and spreading the music beyond African borders (Akan 2016) – an unanticipated development as many may not have foreseen "[…] the huge influence that [the] sound would command for many years to come on the global stage, propelling West African music to these heights" (Akan 2016). Evidencing Fela's international footprint, Royster (2011: 492-3) notes how *The New York Times* – in an obituary for Fela after his passing – called him "Africa's most famous musician and his country's foremost political dissident." This success, one assumes, partly aided in making Nigeria, West Africa and (in extension) Africa visible to international audiences, given the audio-visual nature of music as popular cultural form.

His ideological positioning as an artist saw Fela's eventual success in helping to revolutionise the musical structures and political contexts in Nigeria – a cause he felt strongly about (Olaniyan 2004; Olorunyomi 2001; Akan 2016). Fela's Afrobeat "occupies a pivotal position in Nigeria's musical continuum and socio-political discourse" (Shonekan 2009: 127) because it became an alternative medium for critical socio-political expression for Nigerian citizens in the 1970s and beyond. In a way, explains Sithole (2012: 1), the lyrical content of Kuti's music had been utilised as a weapon in the advancement of the political landscape with the aim of creating a humane society. Fela's music, as a result, "was not mere entertainment – but, pedagogically oppositional with the intention of unmasking the injustice of the African postcolonial state" (Sithole 2012: 1). Notably tied to a socio-political 'movement', Afrobeat's modified fusion of jazz, funk, and African beats, fostered a fertile backdrop for Fela's caustic social commentary and political criticism, mostly framed by lyrics filled with defiance, symbolism, satire, and dry humour (Shonekan 2009: 127).

One should emphasise, however, that beyond the socio-politically transformative elements of Fela's music, there was also an unapologetic affiliation to fun, fun-making, sexual pleasure, and the use of substances, among other themes (Olaniyan 2004). These themes added a layer to Kuti's music which some might read as aimless and, at times, hedonistic, fun, entangled in what Tejumola Olaniyan (2004: 2) describes as "…an antisocial counterculture of drugs and

sex and a flamboyant cult of charisma […]". Therefore, while undoubtedly a key figure in the transformation of Nigeria's (in extension, Africa's) then-unfavourable political conditions, "Africa's most controversial popular musician…" (Olaniyan 2004: 2) was in many ways also influential in perpetuating notably sexualised, arguably misogynistic, countercultures that have discursively implicated ideas around gender expressions and gender relations among consumers of his music. This is a sexualised and variously misogynistic discourse whose impact is variously entrenched in the multimodal discourses of 'newer' genres, especially from Kuti's country of birth, Nigeria. These include the Afrobeats genre, said to be the 'grandchild' of Fela's Afrobeat. In this vein, we can see how the ideological position of musical purists against the similar naming of these two genres they deem 'disamilar' (Ofiaja 2017; Scher 2015) is challenged, and variously proven unnuanced.

Describing the new(er) 'Afrobeats' genre in a *Huffington Post* article, Robin Scher (2015) notes it to be a genre that incorporates:

> […] Ghanaian "hiplife" and Nigerian "Naija" beats — both rooted in the pervasive influence of hip-hop — schizophrenically layered upon grimey British house and generously dipped in autotune. There's even an almost imperceptible hint of Afrobeat which, in genealogical homage or convenient branding (depending on whom you ask), lends this movement its name: Afrobeats.

Ghanaian 'hiplife' is a contemporary musical style described as a fusion of 'highlife[1]' with elements of hip-hop. It is lyrically characterised by simple Twi, Akan and several other Ghanaian languages over hip-hop beats with highlife samples (Aidoo 2015). 'Naija' beats references contemporary Nigerian pop music, significantly influenced by hip-hop and performed in Yoruba and Igbo that may be fused with Pidgin English.

The inclusion of a mere "s" at the end of the new(er) 'Afrobeats' genre potentially renders the fundamental differences between 'Afrobeat' and 'Afrobeats' imperceptible to the lay person. This is an imperceptibility capable of resulting in the two genres being regarded as one and the same when they are not, as evidenced above. Be that as it may, music and popular culture

[1] Highlife music is vastly characterised by multiple guitars fused with jazzy horns. "The emergence of the music that has come to be defined as "Highlife" can be traced back to the early 20th century and the international interest in Africa's Gold Coast, as it was known" (Knibbs 2016). Described by John Collins (1976: 62) as one of "the earliest form[s] of West African neo-folk music", Ghanaian Highlife is a musical genre which "fuses traditional African dance rhythms and melodies with European instruments and harmonies" (Collins 1976: 62). It was the constant influx of Europeans since the 15th century that played a key role in introducing the indigenous population to hymns, shanties, and marches, "and as the Ashanti people organised and attempted the uprising which resulted in the War of the Golden Stool, a musical tradition was born, and the seeds of Ghana's identity were sown" (Knibbs 2016).

journalists, writers, and enthusiasts consider these two genres as circumstantially 'related' given their names and territory of origin and influence [West Africa], among others (Hancox 2012; Scher 2015; Akan 2016; Ofiaja 2017; Finney 2018). The relation drawn between these two genres has, for instance, seen media framings of these musical forms allude to a "colossal metamorphosis" of one (Kuti's Afrobeat) into the other (contemporary Afrobeats) (Finney 2018). Such framings also position Afrobeats as the evolution and, in many respects, antithesis of Afrobeat (Scher 2015). Other framings link these genres through analogy-driven rhetoric situating the genres as parent and child. For example, Finney (2018) calling Afrobeats the "baby" of Fela Kuti's Afrobeat, and Scher (2015) suggesting that a focus on Afrobeats cannot be divorced from Afrobeat because as classic Freudian psychoanalysis dictates, for one to understand the son (Afrobeats), one first needs to understand the father (Afrobeat).

What can furthermore be considered an underlying alignment between these two genres, apart from their strikingly similar names, is an association with a specific 'cause'. Fela Kuti's Afrobeat music mobilised an important cause to conscientise Nigerian citizens (post-independence) about the country's political climate, while the younger Afrobeats is seemingly interested in being an additional conduit for the expression of Africa's 'image' and everyday 'reality' to the world.

Expressing confidence in music's influential potential, Afrobeats artist Richard Abiona ("Fuse ODG") claims that this music is more than just a club fad, but a 'movement' with a message (Scher 2015). Taken from a post on his website, Fuse ODG shares:

> For me, everything is about getting the message across. This movement will shed light on Africa in a positive way and focus on how we can improve Africa. It's not about just plying your talents in the Western world; it's about going back home and helping Africa […]

Over the past decade, the Afrobeats 'movement' has increasingly travelled beyond African borders: not just entertaining listeners, but creating a sense of pride about the continent, her people, and cultures (DJ Edu 2014). This is a pride that is shared by Afrobeats musicians who have been vocal about the significance of the visibility of Africa, Africans, and multi-faceted African experiences within this music (Carvalho 2018; Ward 2019).

Let us consider, for instance, multi-award-winning Afrobeats artist, Davido, in conversation with journalist Priscilla Ward, reflecting on what the global success of this music means for Africa. Davido is of the opinion that:

> [i]t's a great time for Africa, it's a great time for African music. The whole culture as a whole. Growing up it wasn't cool to be from Africa, but now everyone wants to be

> involved in the culture. What you are taught about […] Africa is not really 100 percent of what it really is, because everywhere has its good parts and its bad parts. They don't show you the good parts, the beautiful parts of Africa. The music is being accepted, […] even the clothing, and the food, everything is just coming together (Ward 2019).

A similar sentiment is shared by Afropop and Afrobeats musician and producer Maleek Berry, who was born to Nigerian parents and spent a significant part of his childhood in the United Kingdom. Berry, in an interview with music and culture writer Mariana Carvalho, expressed how the visibility of Afrobeats music and musicians in the West played a significant role in solidifying his sense of pride in being of African descent.

Maleek Berry is quoted as saying:

> Growing up in London, it wasn't exactly cool to be African back in the day. People used to make fun of us all the time and would call us names. It wasn't until I got to college at age sixteen that being African was starting to become 'cool' and we had bands coming out of Nigeria, like 2Face and Mo'hits (both in the Afrobeats scene). They started making African music that actually became cool. These guys were coming from Nigeria but they were fresh, wearing all these diamonds and driving the same cars that the Americans that we grew up watching were driving (Carvalho 2018).

It is suggested that "[t]his new wave of music" is allowing for a more optimistic, arguably multifaceted, representation of Africa to be portrayed to global audiences accessing this genre (Finney 2018), given its cross-continental appeal. Ofiaja notes that this music's cross-continental flow is imperative in encouraging a cultural turn with respect to (Western), non-diasporic perceptions of Africa and African music:

> The perception of African music that exists outside of the African diaspora audience is not exactly sophisticated. Typically, the tropes of exoticism apply. African music fits neatly into the Western cultural lens of 'world music'. Essentially, the music is either something from the past, or something that evokes tribal exoticism in the Western mindset and their understanding of what African representation should be, not what Africa is today. Africa is viewed as being in a time capsule, and not as a dynamic continent that is changing with the times (Ofiaja 2017).

While at the time already extensively produced and consumed across West Africa, it was a particular development which fostered a kind of global 'certification' of the Afrobeats genre into what Western-hegemonic opinion considers the mainstream U.K music scene. This was the playing of Nigerian Afrobeats artist, D'Banj's 'Oliver Twist' song by a DJ at a 2011 New Year's Eve party held at the Thames (London) to usher in the 2012 Olympics year (Hancox 2012). This event, to endorse Hancox, played an early role in rendering this music visible beyond the African continent and diasporic African music enthusiasts. The genre went on to spread into the United States mainstream music scene through a collaboration between American-based, Canadian artist Drake and Nigerian Afrobeats musician, Wizkid in 2016/7

(Easter 2019). This collaboration saw Wizkid become the first Nigerian artist to top the U.S Billboard Hot 100 chart (Easter 2019).

Further 'signs' that non-African audiences are paying attention to the genre include, as Easter (2019) suggests, global music conglomerate – Universal Music Group – announcing its expansion into West Africa with the launch of a Nigeria division of the music label in July 2018. Warner Music Group also confirmed a partnership deal with the Lagos-based label, Chocolate City Entertainment in March 2019. Through such obviously capitalist-driven partnerships and collaborations, Afrobeats musicians are afforded the opportunity to expand their visibility by producing more high-quality music videos, more global tours and performances, garnering global fans in the process.

In light of these developments, it is important to consider how the increasing transnational flows of the narrative and aesthetic tropes of Afrobeats (embedded in this music's multimodal discourses) aid the 'cause' to represent Africa in a specific way and, arguably, to shape global perceptions about the continent and its inhabitants (including their relatives across the diaspora). More specifically, for this thesis, a key inquiry is: in what ways do the multimodal discourses of the Afrobeats 'movement' depict gender relations, sexuality, and 'Africanness' through its visual culture in a time of increasing feminist sensibilities across the continent? This is an interrogatory base that this exploratory thesis is broadly underpinned by.

Rachel Spronk (2009: 501) reminds us that "sexuality is crucial in the development of contemporary notions of selfhood among young urban adults; as a realm of exploration, pleasure and agency, it is related in particular ways to their lives as [diverse youths]". For the young Africans creating Afrobeats, their gender and sexual identities are central to their creative expressions of their lived experiences. How these young Africans multimodally construct their gendered and sexualised identities are interlinked with their notions of 'Africanness' and 'non-Africanness'. Spronk (2009: 501) writes about a group of young professionals in Nairobi, Kenya, for instance, who "within the society … are often labelled as 'Westernized' or 'un-African' because of their implicit and explicit criticisms of conventional gender roles."

Gender role performativity and sexual expression, across diverse African contexts, have been variously implicated in discourses of 'Africanness' and 'un-Africanness' that link gender and

sexuality to oft complicated, at times oversimplified, ideas about Africanness.[2] What such discursive regimes do, is they construct African identities along essentialist notions about gender and sexuality that centralise normative moral narratives of a heteropatriarchal nature. In this sense, notions of an African 'way of doing' gender and sexuality are normalised through performances of gender and sexual identity that are variously linked to heteronormativity and African men's patriarchal dominance over African women across various sociocultural domains because it is argued to capture 'authentic' African values (Sigamoney and Epprecht 2013; Vincent and Howell 2014). Gender, sexuality and Africanness are thus complexly interlinked with the social constructions of identities on the part of the African youth dominating the Afrobeats scene, and a critical analysis of these socially constructed identities in contemporary Africa, offers a valuable contribution to existing literature.

Furthermore, Afrobeats music, approached in this thesis as a popular cultural product, possesses transnational influential potential – through its visual culture – because it offers particular depictions of the people from its continent of origin: Africa. It should, then, be explored in order to contribute a fresh perspective to existing literature on the ideological potential of representations related, in some ways, to idealised, aspiration-driven constructions of the lived experiences of Africans, *by* Africans *to* global audiences. This is especially valuable from a less dominant approach in the academy: the conceptual treatment of the Global South as central instead of peripheral. As such, this thesis carries two key aims as unpacked below.

1.3. Study aims and research questions

This study aims to explore the multimodal discourses of the Afrobeats musical genre, captured in the music video text, so as to elucidate the dominant representations of gender, sexuality and 'Africanness'. This pursuit will allow an argument to be made about how performers, producers and song-writers of this genre construct expressions of their gendered ideals, aspirations and articulated national/continental identities through this popular cultural form. This is valuable given that global audiences engage with this genre's music videos as sites of multimodal representation. A secondary aim of this project is to explore the tropes emanating from viewer reaction-driven comments on the most viewed Afrobeats music videos on YouTube to make

[2] The collection of contributions in the book, *African Sexualities,* edited by Sylvia Tamale (2011), variously theorise the ways in which sexualities have been socially and discursively constructed through the lens of Africanness.

inferences about audience perceptions regarding the multimodal portrayals of gender, sexuality and Africanness prioritised by producers, performers and song-writers of this music.

The research questions

Anchored by the research aims above, this study is guided by a main research question, and two corresponding sub-questions:

- How does the musical genre of Afrobeats portray gendered lived experiences to its global audiences?
    - What messages concerning gender, sexuality, and 'Africanness' are prioritised by the main artists in the scene?
    - What conversational tropes emanate from viewer/listener commentary in relation to the portrayals of gender, sexuality, and 'Africanness' in the most popular Afrobeats music videos?

1.4. Operationalising 'Africa', 'Africans' and 'Africanness': Negating discourses of "reductive sameness[3]"

This thesis's reference to 'Africa' is anchored by two conceptual pillars. Firstly, 'Africa' in this study is used in reference to the continent as a geographical fact: known as the second largest continent in the world, consisting of 52 linguistically, culturally, religiously, economically, topographically, and politically diverse countries. This is a diversity that this thesis remains conscious of. The study holds said consciousness because scholarly contributions have highlighted that much existing literature about the portrayal of the continent in Western media reported a tendency by said Western media to violently diminish Africa by referring to it as a homogenous entity (Nothias 2018). Such framings have stripped the continent and her diverse peoples of their complexly layered expressions of their Africanness.

I use 'Africanness' to capture African peoples' multiple states of being African. Said states of being result in: the organic adoption of African-aligned identity cues such as languages spoken, traditions practiced and cultural beliefs internalised, as well as in the embodiment of socio-ethnical performances of daily lived experiences that are variously associated with the multiplicity of diverse regions across the continent. In short, the idea of Africanness (and Africans) in this study is directly linked to individual (and collective) heritage which partly

[3] I borrow the notion of "reductive sameness" from Charles Ngwena's (2018) publication, '*What is Africanness? Contesting nativism in race, culture and sexualities'*

forges identity constructions linked directly to peoples' (and their immediate familial lineage's) 'land' of origin/ancestry (Ouzgane & Morrell 2005), irrespective of their current geographic positioning. I understand that my deployment of the notion of 'Africanness' is not uncomplicated as it is implicated in political, social and ideological histories.

I am not oblivious to the arguments that 'Africanness' is as much an *idea* with ontological contours that are not fixed (Mudimbe 1988; Said 1979), as it is a "cartographic unit" (Ngwenya 2018: 24). Africanness, as such, "…is a discursive concept with multiple genealogies and contingent meanings" (Ngwenya 2018: 24). Some of these meanings evoke 'unifying' narratives of affirmation, inclusion and collective pride, while others evoke narratives of exclusion and othering (Mudimbe 1988; 1994; Ngwenya 2018). At the core of such narratives is a heterogeneity that we should take care not to repudiate. This thesis strives to maintain the heterogeneity of Africans in its analyses of its empirical object because,

> [f]ulsomely acknowledging the heterogeneity of Africans serves to counter normative homogenising impulses that emanate not just from outside the continent but, more importantly, from within the continent, especially from within the nation state (Ngwenya 2018: 24).

Therefore, my deployment of the idea of Africanness is in alignment with scholars such as Chielozona Eze (2014: 234) who reminds us that, "Africa, to be sure, has always been a complex, diverse continent, and Africans have never shared an undifferentiated identity even though the West has sought to impose one on them." This study's reference to 'Africans/Africanness', then, invokes identities that move beyond 'narratives of autochthony' (Eze 2014). It includes diverse identities, regardless of their current geographical positioning, that actively claim symbolic ties with the continent, whether inspired by birth or ancestral lineage. Furthermore, the study approaches 'Africa', in part, as a geopolitical reality reflected on as a 'survivor' of historical 'victimisation' by the West [through colonisation, most significantly] (Ouzgane & Morrell 2005). Africa, in summary, is approached in this study as a geographical area with a complex history of colonisation, inhabited by people with complex heterogeneities cutting across culture, ethnicity, tradition and sexuality among other facets. These heterogeneities collectively inform said inhabitants' varying embodiments of Africanness even when they emigrate to settle outside the continent.

In that sense, my use of the notions of Africa, Africans, and Africanness, develops through a careful negation of an ontological positionality underpinned by a tendency towards "reductive sameness" with respect to conceptualising Africans and Africanness (Ngwenya 2018: 1). My

aim is to not get stuck in a discourse of Africanness as a homogenised sameness which Charles Ngwenya (2018: 2) calls a discourse of "nativism" as it relates to the naming of Africans by others and, to an extent, by themselves. Nativism, as conceptualised in relation to the labelling of Africans, makes broad reference to the complex historical, discursive, and systematic processes that have instigated homogenised identitarian politics inclined towards "orthodoxy or fundamentalism" in their collective imaginaries about African identity (Ngwenya 2018: 8). These identitarian politics bore harmful implications in their constructions of an essentialist labelling of Africans/Africanness based largely on epidermal and phenotypic foundations (Wiss 1994). This form of labelling variously stripped the peoples of Africa of their complex diversities in culture, sexuality, intellectuality, tradition, among other facets, in favour of an oversimplified focus on skin colour (in this case, blackness). Africanness, as such, was, and still is, notably perceived through the lens of blackness. My thesis will maintain a keen awareness of this historically-charged linkage of Africans/Africanness to blackness without undermining the heterogeneity of these black identities.

Significantly fuelled by European imperialist and colonialist discourses, 'African identity' (expressed in singular terms, capturing a violent disavowal of the plurality in African identities) has been implicated in stereotypical formations that arrogantly conceived it in relation to 'Europeannes' (read whiteness) – a 'European identity' taken for granted as a universally-authoritative epitome of self, truth and reality (Wiss 1994). As Ngwenya (2018: 6) notes,

> The European-spawned identity is a harmful stereotype which comes fully loaded with stigma. It is the product of a white normative gaze and imperialist discourses that were developed as part of giving Africa and Africans a single and simple ahistorical genealogy that, in turn, would invest the institutions of transatlantic slavery and colonisation with purposeful intelligibility for the protagonists.

As a result, a European-centred, race-driven subsumption of African identities maintained socio-ideological dominance by discursively producing a prototypic, commodified, and fetishised African phenotypic identity implicated in harmful binary identitarian politics that encouraged violent hierarchies among 'races' (Ngwenya 2018). What we find, then, is a systemic formation within which we see Africans/Africanness notably linked to "…an Africa biocentrically coded black to mark a prehistoric zone of pathological racial difference and to excise North Africa or 'Arab Africa' from a classification which stands not so much for a geographical territory as for a racialised biology" (Ngwenya 2018: 7). Africa, in this sense, becomes fundamentally imagined as consisting of black, sub-Saharan Africa. White supremacist regimes evolved from such systemic formations that variously constructed black

humanity within violent rhetorics of 'lack' and sub- or non-humanity (Gilroy 1993). Black African people, as a result, suffered tremendous racist oppressions. These oppressive, hierarchised racist regimes had significant bearings on black Africans' notions of selfhood, pride, and identity formations (Gilroy 1993; Ngwenya 2018). Violent colonialist conditionings of generations of black Africans arguably *still* bear an influence on the identity constructions of their descendants across postcolonial Africa (Maldonado-Torres 2007). The identities of the youth creating Afrobeats music and music videos are, thus, implicated in these complexities about Africa, Africanness and blackness. A critical exploration of these black African young people's senses of Africanness – in their multimodal iterations within music video texts – and linkage to gender and sexuality, is valuable.

1.5. Outline of chapters

By way of introduction, this first chapter began with a personal statement to grapple with my positionality as researcher. This personal statement was offered to explain how my experiences as a radio presenter and active consumer of the popular African musical genre of Afrobeats inspired this thesis's focus. In contextualising Afrobeats, the chapter situated this musical genre within a broader discourse of gender and popular culture. This allowed for a justification of this thesis's empirical object of focus, to make a case for why the focus on the popular musical genre of Afrobeats is a worthwhile intellectual endeavour. With the aims and research questions introduced, the chapter concluded with a reflexive exploration of the terms 'Africa', 'African' and 'Africanness' as they are deployed in this study.

Overall, this study is anchored by two aims. Firstly, to explore the multimodal discourses of the Afrobeats musical genre, so as to elucidate the dominant representations of gender, sexuality and notions of 'Africanness.' A secondary aim is to explore the discursive themes emanating from viewer comments on the most viewed Afrobeats music videos on YouTube to make inferences about audience perceptions regarding the multimodal portrayals in relation to gender, sexuality and 'Africanness' prioritised by creators of this music.

Chapters two, three and four focus on this study's research design. Chapter two offers a critical assessment of seminal and contemporary literature pertaining to cultural studies, popular culture, and gender in the media as refracted through scholarship on music. In chapter three, a discussion of the theoretical and conceptual contributions informing the analyses of the data collected for this study, is prioritised. This thesis broadly develops within the intellectual confines of five theoretical bodies of research. Firstly, the study draws on the theoretical pillars

around the notion of representation, as proposed by Stuart Hall (1997; 2013). Secondly, the thesis relies on the propositions underpinning the theory of social constructionism. The three other theoretical pillars upon which this thesis develops, include the theory of gender performativity, psychoanalytic theory (particularly, in its feminist iterations), as well as critical visual analysis in its theorisation of 'ways of seeing' as constructed by, in, and through visual material.

Chapter four follows hereafter with an explication of the study's methodological design and implementation towards the construction of the corpus of data that was analysed. As key data, 25 Afrobeats music videos with high viewership figures – as at November 2018, when said music videos were downloaded from YouTube – form the core corpus of data analysed in this study. Overall, this corpus accounted for a total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysable visual data. For each music video collected, a transcript of the song's lyrics was archived to also be subjected to critical analysis. As an additional data set, a separate textual corpus of two thousand five hundred (2,500) YouTube viewer comments was constructed by downloading the top 100 most-reacted-on viewer comments from each of the music videos collected. These data sets were first subjected to a quantitative content analysis (of the music videos), as well as an inductive qualitative content analysis (of the YouTube comments) before a rigorous multimodal critical discourse analysis was performed across both data sets to advance this thesis's arguments.

Chapters five, six and seven encapsulate this thesis's analytical contributions. Chapter five concurrently engages the findings from the quantitative content analysis of the music videos, as well as the inductive qualitative content analysis of the corpus of YouTube comments. By so doing, the chapter lays an evidentiary foundation of the dominant representational patterns prioritised in the collected music videos by grappling with a series of descriptive statistics relating to screen time devoted to gender performance, sexuality/sexual expression, as well as contextual indicators of 'Africanness' as visually arranged in the analysed music videos. In conversation with these descriptive statistics of the visual data, the chapter highlights dominant themes emanating from the analysed YouTube viewer comments in relation to the gendered, sexualised, and Africanised depictions in the corpus of music videos. This aids the chapter in making careful inferences about viewer perceptions regarding this musical genre and its multimodal discourses.

Interpretations of the results from the quantitative content analysis highlight that sexuality and sexual expression, in the analysed music videos, are gendered in ways that significantly

objectify women's bodies more than that of men. The (mostly black) women's bodies centralised across the analysed music videos are subjected to longer screen time during which they are visually rendered in hypersexualised ways that sexually objectify these women for the diverse black male visual perspectives mediated in these texts. Furthermore, the findings demonstrate that gender performances, as multimodally depicted in these music videos, are anchored in intricate forms of power relations that significantly render men as domineering and women as subservient, sexually-alluring, 'decorative objects', at the service of (heterosexual) men and their self-aggrandizing masculine expressions. Another key pattern in the findings is the consistent centring of a particular feminine aesthetic with regard to the physical appearances (body type, skin tone/complexion, hairstyle) of the women featuring as key characters in these Afrobeats music videos. The chapter highlights a prejudicial bias, in the corpus of data, favouring a black beauty aesthetic that centres young, slim or curvy built, abled-bodied, light-skinned black women whose heads are most often styled in the form of weaves, wigs, or hair extensions. The psychosocial implications of this representational trope on black female subjectivities are engaged in said chapter. Concerning the visual depictions of the diverse African contexts against which these gender relations play out, the findings demonstrate a framing of Africanness that emphasises ideas of affluence. This means that Africanness is variously constructed through contextual indicators of luxury and lavishness that appear to visually promote notions of Africanness notably divorced from ideas of poverty and struggle, among others.

What it is revealed from the inductive qualitative content analysis of the YouTube comments, is that commenters' perceptions about physical appearance and performance ability, are notably gendered in ways that place the featured women's bodies under constant surveillance. While the physical appearances and perceived performative prowess of the visually mediated men's bodies are sporadically commented on by viewers, it is women's bodies that are more consistently subjected to the opinions and assessments of viewers of these music videos. The contents of said opinions and assessments are underpinned by a tendency to scrutinise the physical appearances and performance abilities of the women's bodies in ways that appear to differentiate them on the basis of their blackness and embodied Africanness. That is to say, their perceived 'black beauty' and 'unique' dancing abilities are variously linked, by commenters on these music videos, to their perceived Africanness.

Using some of the key findings offered in chapter five as analytical points of departure, chapter six offers a close reading of performances of manhood and masculinities in the corpus of music

videos. This is done to provide a nuanced reflection on the dominant constructions of masculinities as performed, sexualised and Africanised across the corpus of visual data. The chapter highlights four dominant 'ways of seeing' African masculinities through the corpus of analysed music videos: namely, they are depicted as 'heteropatriarchal masculinities', 'breadwinner masculinities', 'sexualised masculinities', as well as 'romance-oriented masculinities'. Through a feminist-aligned critical multimodal discourse analysis of the salient, as well as the implicit depictions of said forms of masculinities in the collected Afrobeats music videos, chapter six advances an argument that the representational patterns characterising these masculine performances are undergirded by a dialectical cultural sensibility that is at once misogynistic and romance-oriented towards women. Based on this observation, the chapter proposes a new term, labelled '**misogyrom'**, to capture this cultural sensibility. It is here that this thesis offers one of its significant contributions to knowledge (see pages 153-157).

These pertinent findings are stretched into chapter seven which explicitly prioritises a close reading of performances of womanhood and femininities in the corpus of Afrobeats music videos. This chapter foregrounds more evidence of both sides of the complex dialectic of misogyrom. In other words, chapter seven further emphasises the ways in which this musical genre's multimodal discourses are misogynistic, while also demonstrating the pervasive traces of romanticism which can variously be read as signs of egalitarian treatment by black African men towards the women across the hyperreal contexts crafted in the analysed music videos. By so doing, this chapter is able to theorise feminine performativities as '**sexssertive'**. This new concept – which constitutes another significant aspect of this thesis's original contribution to knowledge – weds the notions of sex/sexuality with the personality trait of assertiveness (see pages 182-192).

It will also be shown in chapter seven that a narrow, discriminatory standard of female beauty characterises the physical appearances of the black African women hypervisiblised within these music videos. As such, the chapter will show that notions of 'sexssertiveness' and sexual agency are variously attributed to women who conform to this limited, arguably whitewashed, standard of feminine beauty emphasised in the corpus of music videos. By way of conclusion, chapter eight follows with a comprehensive overview of this thesis's main arguments, and their implications and contributions to existing bodies of knowledge. Also provided in chapter eight, are brief notes on where future research into this thesis's empirical object of focus may be taken.

2. CULTURAL STUDIES, POPULAR CULTURE AND GENDER IN THE MEDIA

This chapter foregrounds key scholarly literature relevant to the intellectual framing of this thesis within broader scholarship on cultural studies and popular culture. The chapter kicks off with a discussion focusing on the interdisciplinary research field of cultural studies so as to provide a broad understanding of this approach, in relation to this current thesis. As far as possible, linkages of these discussions to an African context – from which this thesis draws its objects of focus – are sustained. The section on cultural studies is followed by an engagement with the notion of popular culture as a central area of focus in this thesis. Here, I offer a working definition for how this conceptually slippery notion is deployed in this thesis by borrowing from John Storey's (2018) conceptualisation of the idea. Throughout this discussion, an awareness of the complicated nature of the notion of popular culture is maintained, so as to highlight the complexities around defining and studying popular culture in any context.

Having operationalised this study's use of the notion of popular culture, I move on to make an explicit linkage thereof to the multidisciplinary sub-field of gender studies. In this section, I evaluate existing literature that forges an analytical linkage between the study of gender in relation to popular culture. This is achieved through three sub-sections wherein I review literature on gender studies and popular culture through three thematic strands of feminist theories. In sub-section 2.3.1, I engage a discussion of feminist theories noted to have variously highlighted the dominant ideologies about gender difference as captured in media and communication texts. By offering this discussion, I position my thesis within existing bodies of work concerned with how heteropatriarchal ideological and cultural formations bear an influence on the kinds of representations of gendered bodies in popular media forms.

Sub-section 2.3.2 follows with a discussion of feminist psychoanalytic theory and its deployment in the study of gender representation in the media. Forming a key pillar of this study's theoretical framework, literature on psychoanalytic theory in its feminist iterations, are pertinent to aid this thesis in its partial aim of making a fresh contribution to Global South literature on how – several decades after Mulvey's initial propositions in a different context – evidence of a dominant (heteropatriarchal) male gaze can still be observed in popular media cultures. In the context of this current thesis, the intersection of said dominant black African male visual perspectives – in the popular cultural texts analysed in this study – with constructions of (mostly, black) African female subjectivities, will be demonstrated. Lastly, in sub-section 2.3.3, I grapple with existing literature on postfeminist media cultures and their

argued roles in gender representations in contemporary media texts. Similarly, throughout this sub-section, linkages of this literature to the African context are made, in order to highlight the relevance of this literature to the central context within which this thesis develops: the Global South region of Africa. In this sub-section, I am able to draw parallels between performances of femininities within an African context and their seeming alignment to postfeminist cultural sensibilities as evident in popular culture.

2.1. Cultural Studies: Making sense of popular culture

Given its preoccupation with critically exploring the social construction and role of culture across societies, the cultural studies school of thought remains instrumental in guiding our understanding of social life, social processes, social identities, as well as social change and, to an extent, conflict. 'Culture', in this thesis, is deployed through a social sciences critical lens which broadly refers to the concept as a set of non-fixed, continuously changing human practices directed at (re)producing various kinds of meanings about the world through the efforts and 'works' of, more especially, artistic, intellectual, and 'ordinary' subjectivities (Storey 2018; Barber 2018). Said meaning production pursuits take on various forms carrying symbolic significance for both producers and 'interpreters' thereof (Hall 1997; 2013). These symbolic significances are value-laden because they are entrenched in the creation of social orders responsible for organising people and their social practices into categories of 'acceptability' and 'unacceptability', 'respectability' and 'non-respectability', 'officiality' and 'un-officiality' (or vernacular). Essentially, 'culture', in this sense, promotes the division of a peoples along socio-symbolic, socio-political and socio-economic lines. This, in turn, has a significant influence on identities (Hall 1997; 2013; Rose 2001). In the sub-section following this, I further discuss the notion of 'culture' to arrive at a working definition for the concept of 'popular culture' as an arena of academic inquiry.

Historically, cultures had been divided into 'high' and 'low' culture. The politics involved in this distinction are complex. At a basic level, 'high' cultures had been defined as the cultural practices of a small group of elites with strong economic and cultural power (Gripsrud 1989; Kellner 2011; Barber 2018). Cultural superiority/legitimacy was afforded to those who possessed economic dominance in society, thereby maintaining sociocultural status and prestige. Put simply, high culture was associated with the tastes, interests and activities of individuals (small groups of elites) who boasted economic power, resulting in the marginalisation of the cultures of 'the rest' to be labelled 'low culture' (Gripsrud 1989; Kellner 2011).

The low cultures, thus, were the cultures of the masses: that is, much of the people with little to no economic status or authority. These 'mass cultures' – given their association with the economically-constrained classes – were persistently relegated to positions of 'unimportance' by the minority elite tastemakers. This social order – thriving on the side-lining of the practices and efforts of the majority/masses – was instrumental in maintaining social power relations whereby the minority elite classes could subordinate and subjugate the majority working, economically-constrained classes (Kellner 2011).

That being so, however, burgeoning bodies of work in cultural studies do not take for granted that said marginalised cultures are associated with the majority of the masses. Such studies, thereby, variously construct the practices and efforts stemming from the marginalised cultures as 'popular' culture. It should be noted that this way of looking at 'culture' remains implicated in ongoing scholarly debates around the validity of such distinctions between 'high'/'low' cultures or 'elite'/'popular' cultures. A neat distinction between 'elite' and 'popular' culture is a conceptual slippery slope imbued with complexities that should be acknowledged. Barber (2018: 9) helpfully captures this point:

> A sociological definition of popular as 'pertaining to the common people' also has its problems for more recent periods, right up to the present day. It remains an open question to what extent elites are culturally distinct from non-elites in any given social setting, and in what ways. Cultural differentiation changes over time, for example when the cultural markers of an elite's privilege become more widely available and lose their leverage.

This study similarly sustains an awareness of the slippery nature of the notion of the 'popular' as it relates to culture. However, it is precisely the idea of 'popularity' associated with mass culture that render said practices and efforts variously influential given their widespread accessibility. As Barber aptly reminds us: "[…] popular culture gives unique access to the views of those people excluded from power and privilege" (2018: 3). It should thus remain in the interest of social scientists to closely study the nature of, the artefacts produced within, and the ideological contents of what we understand to be 'popular culture'. While so doing, social scientists should not lose sight of the conceptually slippery nature of the concept of 'popular culture' because "…popular culture is in effect an empty conceptual category, one that can be filled in a wide variety of often conflicting ways, depending on the context of use" (Storey 2018: 1).

In that vein, for this thesis, the Global South context of the African continent is central. This is so due to the media texts that make up the empirical object analysed in this study. The Afrobeats

music videos analysed in this study are approached as African popular cultural texts resulting from the practices and efforts of 'ordinary' African youth. This study aligns with Barber in emphasising that, "popular culture in Africa is a product of everyday life. It is the unofficial, the non-canonical. It is usually taken to mean the culture of 'ordinary people […]" (2018: 1). As such, one key reason behind the classification of these texts as 'popular' is that they allow the African youth producing them to widely express not only their *own* views and daily experiences, but also those of the masses – across their culturally diverse contexts – who actively consume these texts. To reiterate, this thesis's classification of these texts as 'popular culture' does not escape the complexities associated with this label.

'Popular culture', in the African context, is indeed also a significantly contested concept. Research into 'African popular culture' should therefore also approach the 'field' with a keen awareness of its conceptually complicated nature. As Barber (2018: 7) observes:

> If African popular culture has become a field, however, it's not really clear where that field's boundaries lie or by what criteria certain forms are included or excluded, and this is because of the ambiguities of the term 'popular'. It's a slippery, disputed term wherever it is used. In Africa, there is the added unease that a category shaped essentially by the class relations of the industrial West should be applied to the incommensurable historical experience of Africa. Some influential scholars therefore use the term more or less under protest, in quotation marks, for want of a better one.

That notwithstanding, cultural studies researchers across the African continent, appreciate the scholarly value in studying 'popular culture' within this region through various analytical lenses. This current study, then, follows suit by building on the works of researchers of (African) popular culture.

2.2. Studying popular culture

To study popular culture, John Storey (2018) reiterates the importance of arriving at an operational grasp of what we mean by culture in relation to 'popular'. Drawing on Raymond Williams's contributions, Storey (2018) outlines three broad definitions of the notion of 'culture' in alignment with attempts to link it with the 'popular'. Firstly, we may refer to culture as a broadly developmental process steered by intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic motifs. In this sense, the idea of culture or cultural development is largely based on spiritual, intellectual, and aesthetic factors as the central driving forces. Here, cultural development is associated with the works and activities stemming from, for instance, the 'rare' and 'great' philosophers, distinct poets, and the 'great' artists, mostly from the West (Storey 2018). Culture, secondly, has also come to be understood as referring to "a particular way of life, whether of a people, a

period or a group" (Williams 1983: 90). This understanding of the notion pushes its boundaries beyond the intellectual and aesthetic factors captured in the first definition outlined above. Here, the idea of culture or cultural development encompasses the development of other factors such as, for instance, "literacy, holidays, sport, religious festivals" (Storey 2018: 2), and the goings-on therein.

Thirdly, it is also suggested that the notion of culture may be deployed to make reference to the often-tangible practices and works stemming from intellectual and/or artistic efforts across diverse contexts. This means, in other words, that culture may also be encapsulated in the "texts and practices whose principal function is to signify, to produce or to be the occasion for the production of meaning" (Storey 2018: 2). Storey lists a few examples of texts and practices with which we can associate this third definition of culture: ballet pieces, poetry, the novel and other similar (fine) art. As Storey (2018: 2) helpfully summarises:

> To speak of popular culture usually means to mobilize the second and third meanings of the word 'culture'. The second meaning – culture as a particular way of life – would allow us to speak of such practices as the seaside holiday, the celebration of Christmas, and youth subcultures, as examples of culture. These are usually referred to as lived cultures or practices. The third meaning – culture as signifying practices – would allow us to speak of soap opera, pop music, and comics as examples of culture. These are usually referred to as texts. Few people would imagine Williams's first definition when thinking about popular culture.

This idea of 'popular culture' is helpful for this study's intellectual development. I borrow the idea of popular culture from Storey's conceptualisation thereof in my own critical pursuits of the Afrobeats musical genre as itself based on diverse signifying practices (visual and aesthetic practices) and texts (music videos, for instance), capable of engendering ideological worldviews that may (in)advertently be associated with 'Africanness' by, for instance, non-African interpreters of these signifying practices. These entrenched ideological worldviews require critical analysis so as to interrogate their relations to the Afrobeats musical genre as a popular cultural landscape, fostering the widespread flows of "the views of those people [that are, arguably] excluded from power and privilege" (Barber 2018: 3).

I regard ideology, in this instance, in a "general sense to refer to power relations outside those of, [for instance], class" (Storey 2018: 3), which has been a dominant and important approach in as far as defining ideology. Given this study's aims and central focus on scrutinising gender and sexuality expressions in the hyperreal contexts captured in Afrobeats music videos, I find value in aligning my analyses of these popular cultural texts along scholarship linked to how "feminists speak of the power of patriarchal ideology, and how it operates to conceal, mask

and distort gender relations in our society" (Storey 2018: 3). It is with this intention that I am approaching the texts produced within the Afrobeats music scene – as popular cultural texts articulating 'everyday life' – to elucidate the dominant and idealised gender relations. Graeme Turner reminds us that,

> [p]opular culture is a site where the construction of everyday life may be examined. The point of doing this is not only academic – that is, as an attempt to understand a process or practice – it is also political, to examine the power relations that constitute this form of everyday life and thus reveal the configurations of interests its construction serves (2003: 6).

In this thesis, I attempt to achieve exactly that: critically examine the multimodal discourses embedded in the Afrobeats music video texts analysed in this study, to closely scrutinise the power relations entrenched in the articulations of 'everyday life' as they relate to gender relations and sexuality expression across the diverse African sociocultural contexts depicted therein. Furthermore, I agree that "as members of the society and participants in the power struggles [engrained in popular culture], readers [of popular cultural texts] also inject their own political beliefs in the interpretation of texts. All readers are readers in politics" (Mwangi 2004: 17). Therefore, all viewers of Afrobeats music videos are viewers in politics, and their interpretations are pertinent to this study's thesis. In particular, their interpretations relating to gender and sexuality.

2.3. Gender and popular culture

Gender, as an analytical category in the study of popular culture, enjoys much scholarly attention in the humanities. This is unsurprising, given that gender relations – in their diverse formations across cultures – remain politically-charged, value-laden societal attributes the world over. In other words, relations between women and men – across diverse cultural contexts, including how said relations are framed in popular cultural texts – carry power dynamics not to be taken for granted. This observation is what largely prompted the approaching of popular culture through the lens of various feminisms (Storey 2018). Storey (2018: 152) notes that "[i]t is feminism that has placed gender on the academic agenda". Feminist theorists have thus, through their diverse theoretical positionings and analytical approaches to popular culture, emphasised two key assumptions that continue to variously guide the works of contemporary scholars. So notes Rakow (2009: 186):

> The first [assumption] is that women have a particular relationship to popular culture that is different from men's. […] The second assumption is that understanding how popular culture functions both for women and for a patriarchal culture is important if

> women are to gain control over their own identities and change both social mythologies and social relations. […] Feminists are saying that popular culture plays a role in patriarchal society and that theoretical analysis of this role warrants a major position in ongoing discussions.

As such, ongoing feminist theories in the humanities and social sciences – particularly in the domains of media and communications – cover various areas of inquiry. As they relate to the study of popular culture, feminist theories "share a common emphasis on the examination and explanation of gender and gendered power within [popular] texts" (Cuklanz 2016: 1). Various bodies of feminist literature have, as a result, made notable contributions to how we see gender and gendered power relations by focusing on these aspects in their analyses of popular cultural texts with the central goal of encouraging justice in relation to gender across diverse sociocultural and socioeconomic domains. This is why, at its best,

> […] feminist theory in communication should account for not only the interplay of gender and power, but also the relevance of other textual elements including race, sexuality, and class. Power imbalances of gender are understood as intersecting with power relations of class, race, sexuality, and other categories including religion and ethnicity. Sophisticated feminist communication theory should attempt to take these various elements into account (Cuklanz 2016: 1).

This form of intersectional analysis is crucial, and this thesis preoccupies itself with reading gender performances in tandem with the categories of sexuality and sexual expressions, as well as notions of socio-geographic identity (Africanness), as they relate to the subjectivities centralised in the visual discourses of the Afrobeats musical genre captured in the corpus of music videos analysed in this study.

Since their notable development around the 1970s during what has been characterised in Global North literature as 'second wave feminism', feminist theories have evolved and expanded in their areas of critique of the media and mass/popular cultures. In this sub-section, I engage three key thematic strands of feminist theories as they relate to the study of media and communication. I then variously put these literatures in conversation with studies that have centralised gender and gender relations in their critical analyses. The three thematic strands of feminist theories to be engaged below are, (i) feminist theories highlighting dominant ideologies about gender difference captured in media texts, (ii) feminist psychoanalytic theory's deployment in the study of gender representation in the media, as well as (iii) studies on postfeminist media cultures and their roles in gender representations in contemporary media texts.

2.3.1. Dominant ideologies about gender difference in the media

Feminist theories that focus on gendered content in popular media texts partly do so to discover gendered patterns of representation so as to make cases for the relations of power that underlie said media texts (Cuklanz 2016). Bodies of work emerging from this approach to media texts have variously "posited that cultural devaluation of women has led to many patterns of gender difference" (Cuklanz 2016: 2) in popular culture that need to be dissected to encourage a deeper reading of the problematic nature thereof. Early feminist theorists such as Gaye Tuchman (1978) have advanced arguments pertaining to women's representation in, for instance, mainstream news texts. Such arguments had partly posited that women's overall visibility in mainstream media texts were evidently lower than that of men. In Tuchman's (1978) chapter, "The Symbolic Annihilation of Women in the Mass Media", she analyses several media forms, arguing that women were mostly absent in those mainstream media texts. Such discrepancies, as noted in early feminist critiques about gender representation, have persisted over many years since initially demonstrated. As such, burgeoning feminist theories have argued that women's lack of power to create and define the subject matter in media content and products, broadly undergirds the lingering disparities in media representation, as noted by scholars such as Tuchman (Cuklanz 2016). These arguments were largely characterised by what became labelled as 'liberal feminism' (Baehr 2013; Storey 2018).

Much liberal feminist approaches to popular culture have concerned themselves with critiquing the unequal representation of men and women in media and popular culture. This strand of feminist critique broadly speaks to the idea that, if power is indeed equally distributed among men and women across societies, then equal representation should seamlessly appear throughout their cultures (Storey 2018). If not, then there is evidently a structural formation that is unfairly privileging one group over the other. In this regard, the privileged group is men (through various patriarchal cultures). What transpires, as a result, is that patriarchal cultures succeed at limiting and lessening the power, abilities and agencies of women through limited representation of this group. This is said to undermine women – as far as sociocultural self-determination is concerned – and distract us from conversations about women as leaders beyond the limited domain of the home.

Over time, these gender discrepancies – as they relate to women's visibility in mainstream media content – improved, and women are seen to feature more notably. However, feminist scholarship then demonstrated that the patterns of representation of women that *do* exist, are implicated in dominant ideologies about gender which, for instance, implicitly (re)-enforce

cultural beliefs that women belong in the domestic space of the home, as opposed to the broader public sphere or workplace (Cuklanz 2016). Additionally, said feminist scholarship argued that societies' persistent biases against positive connotations of women's power, fostered the evidently biased depictions of women's and their male counterparts' sociocultural efforts in a range of media genres.

Considering, for instance, the genre of news media (particularly in relation to gendered coverage of sports and politics), studies have shown that:

> Mainstream news coverage of sports […] exhibits gendered mediation, with a preponderance of coverage focusing on men and male sports contests. Further, when women are featured, there is often more emphasis on their personal stories and lives, less visual emphasis on their athleticism, and more focus on sexualized imagery. (Cuklanz 2016: 3).

Our cultural biases against women in the public sphere enforce some of these skewed representations of this group, where news coverage tends to notably refer back to women's domestic roles, even during coverage of subject matter that does not appear in any way linked to aspects of the domestic domain. What we witness, then, is that "[w]omen's roles and contributions are diminished through coverage following these patterns, as they continue to be valued more for their bodies than for their ideas or real contributions to, [for instance, politics or] their sport" (Cuklanz 2016: 4).

Beyond these valuable findings with regard to women's representation in the media, pockets of feminist scholars have emphasised the need to further scrutinise such findings by particularly paying attention to the aspect of race. As such, there emerged countless 'black feminist studies' that have examined the ways in which black women's bodies are represented in the media. What these studies have shown is that black women are often times either completely absent from public, mediated discourse or, when they are indeed made visible, black women's bodies become "a source of spectacle" (Ligaga 2020: 126). That is, black women's bodies are culturally stereotyped along notions of abnormality, deviance and hypersexuality (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013). During such culturally stereotyping depictions of black female forms, these depicted black women are stripped of other layers of their identities by being deliberately objectified for their sexualities and bodily physiques (Noble 2013). Existing black feminist studies helpfully remind us that in our celebration of the growing visibility of women in popular cultural texts, we must remain acutely aware of the prejudicially lopsided depictions of black women. This is because, in a white-dominated society and system of media ownership,

> [When] the Black body comes into view, […] conceptions of sexual-subjection or social disparities are discussed. That is, when Black women's bodies are on display to be ridiculed (e.g., the focus on Serena Williams' buttocks), or when sociopolitical agendas use Black women experiences as scapegoats (e.g., Black women targeted in welfare reform). The ways Black women's bodies are viewed as spectacles in the general public and especially in sex industries, for the leisure and pleasure of men, is rooted in racialized gendered intersections of power, privilege, and oppression (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013: 645).

This thesis's object of focus – the Afrobeats music video – is a popular cultural text that significantly centralises black women's bodies across the culturally diverse contexts captured in the hyperreal narratives of these music videos. As such, this study heeds the call made in black feminist studies to specifically scrutinise the ways in which black women's bodies are represented in popular culture. In this case, an argument will be advanced regarding how African black women are depicted in contemporary African popular culture to add to existing feminist scholarship from the Global South. A keen awareness of the importance hereof is not taken for granted because the media and media imagery about black (women's) bodies "[…] determines how blackness and people are seen and how other groups will respond to [black women] based on their relation to these constructed images" (hooks 1992: 5).

Given this current study's focus on the popular African musical genre of Afrobeats, a specific focus on the popular cultural landscape of music is valuable at this point. Anyone going about a random online search for music videos from the Afrobeats musical genre will witness how notably male-dominated this genre is. The leading artists and performers in this scene are predominantly black African men, most often of West African origin (Nigeria and Ghana, specifically). As such, the music video storylines and lyrical content in the songs produced from this musical genre engender an unapologetic masculine aura that significantly shapes the multimodal discourses of this music, as they relate to gender relations.

Given its overt characteristics of being significantly young, black, male-dominated, as it relates to its visual discourses, it is perhaps no surprise that Afrobeats music is consistently linked – in various studies into this genre – to the globally influential musical genres of rap and hip-hop (Eze 2020; Adeniyi 2020). Emmanuel Adeniyi (2020) even goes as far as using the labels 'Afrobeats' and 'hip-hop' interchangeably in a study that examines the antipathy of religious persons/institutions in Nigeria towards the hip-hop genre. As such, rap and hip-hop's global influence can be traced beyond their (black) American origin, notes Onanuga and Akingbe (2020). This is a crucial observation that helpfully builds on Eric Charry's (2012a; 2012b) seminal work on hip hop in Africa. These genres' "utilitarian aesthetics have been truly

restructured, remodelled, repackaged, and even calibrated to reflect the dynamic social changes that continue to be witnessed in Africa" (Onanuga and Akingbe 2020: 1). As Evan Mwangi (2004: 7) reminds us, "[i]t is in hip-hop that the youth most intensely appropriate western culture while at the same time resisting its hegemony to forge a new form of nationalism." I use an extensive, yet broad, definition by Brunson (2011: 6) to capture what the term 'hip-hop' makes reference to in this study:

> Hip-hop is a North American cultural phenomenon that was created in the early 1970s. The roots of hip-hop are usually ascribed to New York's South Bronx and the introduction of the Jamaican sound system. Its cultural forms or common activities – DJing (i.e., "turntablism"), rapping (i.e., "emceeing"), dancing (i.e., "breaking" or breakdancing), and art writing ("graffiti art") – function as a source of identity formation and social status by and for Black and Latino young people.

Evidently much more nuanced as opposed to merely being a musical genre, hip-hop may be regarded as a lifestyle within which many a youth (re)-construct and (re)-imagine their senses of selfhood and/or national identity in a continuously globalised world (Brunson 2011; Rose 2008; Chang 2007; Price 2006; Mwangi 2004). In the African context, "it has been primarily young people…who embraced this distant relation" between hip hop lifestyle and African identities (Charry 2012a: 1).

The popular cultural phenomena of rap and hip-hop have been the subject of innumerable studies that went about examining the visual culture (captured in music videos and live performances, for instance) and lyrical contents dominating in these musical genres. Many such studies have made similar findings related to the dominant socio-ideological themes prioritised by creators of these genres. One such finding is that hip-hop and rap music videos "have placed an emphasis on themes of materialism and misogyny" (Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009: 134). A number of studies on the discourses in hip-hop and rap music have reported on the prevalence of explicit consumerism through the mediation of conspicuous consumption engendered by the visual and lyrical contents produced by (male) artists prominent in the mainstream hip-hop and rap music scene (e.g., Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto 1995; Henry 2002; Baker 2005; Marshall 2006; Rose 2008; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Pieterse 2010). Further to that, men and women in many of the music videos from this genre differ in their portrayal of the themes of materialism and misogyny. Women characters, specifically, are significantly reported to be more likely to appear as recipients of men's material wealth and as objects of sexuality, whereby "women [tend to] more frequently [be] the object of explicit, implicit, and aggressive sexual advances [from men]" (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis 1993: 745; Conrad, et al 2009).

On the theme of materialism, in the African context specifically, studies have proposed interesting considerations around how materialism and consumerism link to notions of masculinity/manhood that prevail beyond popular cultural forms such as rap and hip-hop music videos. For instance, across the African context, young, class-diverse men spanning culturally diverse contexts have been variously reported to align to a materialist, 'breadwinner'-aligned sensibility in terms of how they speak about manhood and masculinity as 'everyday' gender cues (Groes-Green 2009). The breadwinner ideal – considered a form of performative masculinity – is related to the social process through which (heterosexual) men accrue and maintain sociocultural authority by economically providing for their female partners and families. Studies on masculinities in the African context have reported on this form of income-based masculinity where 'manhood' is partly constructed and expressed through men's ability to financially provide for their female counterparts and families (see, for instance, Silberschmidt 2001; Hunter 2005; Cornwall 2003; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005; Ratele 2008; Langa 2020). Young (heterosexual) men in Africa have variously based their manhood on their (in)ability to 'provide'.

A study conducted in Mozambique found, for instance, that with the increasing class and income gaps between middle-class and working-class men in the city of Maputo, a young man participating in said study expressed a sentiment that a 'moneyless' man is a worthless man in the eyes of women (Groes-Green 2009: 289). The motivation behind this view stemmed from a sociocultural, heteronormative perception that by virtue of being unable to financially provide for his girlfriend/lover, a man may be regarded as 'unmanly' in society's eye (Groes-Green 2009). Other earlier studies conducted in Africa have reported similar findings. Consider, for instance, work done by Mills and Ssewakiryanga (2005) with young university-going participants in Uganda. The study demonstrates the relationship between money (and other material commodities) and collective imaginaries of manhood as it was evident in responses from many male participants that "money was the single most significant symbol through which they imagined, practiced and understood their sexual relationships with women" (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005: 91). For poorer, economically constrained young heterosexual men, then, their senses of masculinity are said to be in states of fragility because by being unable to materially 'provide', they may have "…lost most of the patriarchal dividend. For instance, they have missed out on the economic gain over women that accrues to men in employment [...]" (Connell 1995: 116). Their pursuits at dominating over women are, in other words, somewhat crippled. The theme of materialism being central in men-dominated media forms is, arguably, not a surprising trope to contemporary cultural studies scholars.

It should be noted, importantly, that while these dominant notions of masculine expression through male 'provision' politics variously prevail across African contexts, several bodies of work on masculinities in Africa, have demonstrated socio-ideological shifts in this regard. Part of these socio-ideologically dissenting embodiments of what it means to be 'a real man', for instance, have been theorised as expressions of 'alternative masculinities' in that they actively negate hegemonic iterations of masculinities as typically associated with risk-taking, domineering, and violent behaviours (Langa 2020). A recently published longitudinal study by South African psychologist, Malose Langa (2020), that explored – over a period of almost 12 years – how young South African township boys constructed their masculinities, reports on notable expressions of alternative masculine identities that appear to value the egalitarian treatment of women and other men. Thereby, alongside the dominant iterations of black African masculinities as associated with risk-taking behaviours, violence towards women and other men, characterised by criminal activity, among others, are alternative inflections of masculine performativities in Africa that go against the 'problematic' masculine expressions reported across many studies into masculinities in Africa (Langa 2020). These alternative masculinities variously engender a positive shift in how (black) masculine performances are (re)imagined due to their dissent from the tropes of violence and aggression. That notwithstanding, the prevalence of the themes of violence and aggression, across masculine sociocultural and artistic expressions by black men, cannot be taken for granted.

The theme of violence and aggression towards women's bodies, as variously featured in the music videos produced from rap, hip-hop and other male-dominated musical genres, takes on other oft non-sexualised forms as well. A widely reported convention in popular music including rap and hip-hop, is the consistent mediation and normalising of implicit and explicit forms of aggressive behaviour or violence, especially towards women through lyrical and visual expressions (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis 1993; Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Banning 2007). In such depictions, women are variously depicted as victims of violence and in need of rescue/protection from men.

More studies have demonstrated the intersectional prevalence of the themes of materialism, misogyny, violence and sexism within the musical genres of hip-hop and rap. Highlighting a trend in these musical genres' visual formations, Fitts (2008: 211-212) notes that,

> […] trends in mainstream, commercial rap music videos rely on formulaic video imagery that emphasizes rappers' accumulated wealth and property (such as houses, cars, jewelry, and women). This formula, manifested in what is otherwise known as the "booty video," reinforces the increasing use of an urban sensibility in music, television,

> and films that exploits a mediated understanding of black, urban aesthetics. The expression "booty video" derives from popular culture vernacular that references the [hip-hop and rap] video's overwhelming representation of women's posteriors, particularly those of black, Latina, and racially ambiguous women […]

Samson Eze's (2020) recent study focuses on popular Afrobeats artists (or hip-hop, depending on whom you ask), Wizkid's music. He explores the depictions and prevalence of patriarchal structures in this musician's artistic renditions. Eze demonstrates the prevalent proliferation of hip-hop culture in the Nigerian context; explicating how hip-hop, as an American trend, is creatively adopted, adapted, and popularised in Nigeria. To Eze,

> […] a recurring strain in hip hop, globally, is its misogyny and objectification of women as sex symbols, and these tropes are perpetuated in the sexist representations of women in lyrics, videos, and live performances. … [Eze argues] that the use of derogatory words objectify women, and serve as a means of boosting an ostensibly masculinist status, as they impact commercial viability in the Nigerian hip hop music industry (Onanuga and Akingbe 2020: 4).

On the whole, given its noticeable alignment with global hip-hop culture, the Afrobeats musical genre is argued to be variously implicated in the reproduction of regressive patriarchal cultures that continue to bear an influence on the "thingification of femaleness" (Adeniyi 2020: 59) in its visual culture. To be sure, such noted cultural alignments between hip hop and African musical genres such as Aforbeats are not without criticism by segments of African people at odds with the socioculturally regressive inflections therein. As Eric Charry (2012a: 1) reminds us: "Some Africans, young and old, vigorously object to some of the surface values purveyed in commercial hip hop culture, such as the pursuit and display of high price consumer goods, glorification or romanticizing of street violence and vulgur language, and public degradation of women".

A study undertaken by Ifeoma Vivian Dunu and Gregory Obinna Ugbo (2015) in Nigeria, honing in on the music lyrics of popular Afrobeats artist, Flavour – as they relate to women and their bodies – reports several interesting findings. For instance, in a focus group discussion about the nature of Flavour's musical lyrics in regard to women, a female participant alluded to a thought-provoking observation which captures particularly how a misogynistic and sexist patriarchal culture operates in this music. As Dunu and Ugbo (2015: 46) aptly summarise:

> The women pointed out that although most of Flavour's songs tend to adore, praise and make women prominent; it only creates false pretence of empowerment that only serves to secure the woman for the man's satisfaction and fulfilment.

It is the idea of a 'false pretence' highlighted in this finding that partly captures how, at times, misogyny and sexism can be subtle and, as a result, go under the radar as mere ordinary gender-relational behaviour. Subtle sexism has also been partly theorised as 'benevolent sexism' (Glick & Fiske 1997; Glick & Fiske 2001; Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison 2003). The notion of benevolent sexism emerges from the theorisation of gender-relational sexism as 'ambivalent' in many regards. This is known as the Ambivalent Sexism Theory (Glick and Fiske 1997). This theory "distinguishes between hostile and "benevolent" sexism (each addresses issues of power, gender differentiation, and sexuality)" (Glick and Fiske 1997: 119). In its sociocultural manifestation, benevolent sexism occurs under gender-relational conditions where attitudes that are subjectively regarded as positive – on the part of the sexist individual – towards women in 'traditional' roles are (re)-enforced. Here, notions of protective paternalism, idealisation of women through a domesticating lens, as well as a normative desire for intimate relations as 'expected' by men from women, variously prevail. In essence, "benevolent sexism comprises a set of attitudes that favor keeping women in restricted roles, but are subjectively positive in feeling tone. Such attitudes may result in male behavior that could be considered prosocial" (Viki, et al 2003: 533).

Prosocial gender-relational behaviours may, arguably, slip into notions of romanticism when considered through a heteronormative lens of idealistic love. A positive regard towards men is likely to develop among women who, for instance, find themselves variously subjected to the courteous, hyper-considerate behaviours from men in various social settings. For example, for a man to 'rescue' a woman from a violent situation (i.e., the "damsel in distress" media trope [Schroeder and Borgerson 2015: 1724]) or, in this instance, for Flavour to "adore, praise and make women prominent" in his artistic expressions; he may be considered romantic in heteronormative terms. This 'romantic' element could partly stem from how "fictional fantasies" (Spencer 2014: 72) captured in the literary genre of romantic novels, [tend?] to construct such behaviour when displayed by men toward women.

The romance genre and its 'mass-produced fantasies for women' (which includes the romantic novel) (Modleski 2008), have been variously criticised by pockets of feminist theorists who maintain that the genre is regressive for the feminist plight and is imprisoning women in utopian 'imaginary communities' that blind them to the actual toxic nature of a sexist, heteropatriarchal culture that superiorises men over women (Hollows 2000; Spencer 2014; Storey 2018). Literary and feminist critics, notes Spencer (2014: 71-72), have made various dismissive arguments about the genre and its consumers:

> Romance novels have been dismissed and branded by most literary and feminist critics as escapist and frivolous, as misrepresenting real life problems. 'Romance readers on the other hand, are described as masochistic, "regressive" and passive. Some feminist critics have gone as far as to accuse feminine narratives and their readers of colluding with patriarchy' (Spencer 2014, drawing on Hollows 2000).

Essentially, captured in such critiques – while also convincingly challenged (Modleski 2008) – is a view that the uncritical sentimentalising of men's prosocial behaviours towards women heightens the risk of missing the sexist subtleties entrenched in such behaviours. Gender relations that are characterised by benevolent sexism thrive on the perpetuation of "paternalistic chivalry", wherein masculinist attitudes that are at once courteous/considerate toward women are also notably restrictive with respect to their "tolerance" of what are deemed 'appropriate' behaviours from women in the domains of courtship and sexuality (Viki, et al 2003). This thesis will show the ways in which these theoretical contributions in existing literature are affirmed or negated through its empirical object of focus. This is a valuable pursuit, as such findings are argued – across burgeoning feminist analyses of popular culture – to carry implications with respect to gender performance and sex role stereotyping, as well as the development of either negative or positive attitudes towards women. And in this case, black African women.

2.3.2. Psychoanalytic theory and gender representation in the media

Theories in feminism that focus on objectification and various forms of looking ("gazes") – as they relate to patterns of representation in media and communication – have made strides in problematising gendered representations across texts such as television programs, popular music, film, and advertising (Cuklanz 2016). These theories have especially focused on the patterns of representation of women's bodies in media cultures, offering telling insights about the nature of, specifically, the heterosexual male gaze in media and communication texts. It was Laura Mulvey in an essay hardly consisting of thirteen pages, who laid a strong analytical foundation in the domain of film theory by demonstrating "how popular cinema produces and reproduces what she calls the 'male gaze'" (Storey 2018: 109). In this influential piece, and several others to follow, Mulvey described her efforts as a 'political weapon' used to demonstrate how the unconscious of our patriarchal society has shaped the art form of film. As it relates to patterns of representation of women's bodies in film, two broad arguments are advanced: the woman is the central object of male desire, and she is often the signifier of the threat of castration.

By drawing on Freudian psychoanalytic theory, Mulvey and subsequent feminist theorists, put forward insightful arguments regarding the representation of women as sexual objects in film media. At the core, these arguments purport that films are sites that present

> […] a voyeuristic emphasis on looking at women from a male point of view, in a way that only made sense in the context of heterosexual male desire for the object of the gaze as presented. The emphasis on looking in these films presented a sexualized gaze that could be explained through the Freudian ideas of voyeurism and fetishization (Cuklanz 2016: 7).

In chapter three of this thesis, I offer a more elaborate engagement with the concepts of voyeurism and fetishism. At a basic level, the term voyeurism is used to describe a particular way of actively looking at a physically distanced object, while (sexually) objectifying said object from a distance and ensuring that the viewed object is unaware of this gaze (Rose 2001). This gaze is said to possess a certain control that may even be sadistic in its motif. Fetishism, on the other hand, refers to a process whereby a viewing subject displaces their (sexual) energy, 'urges', and desires onto another object outside said viewing subject (Hall 2013: 256). This, from a psychoanalytic perspective, is done to (sub)consciously confront laden fantasies that the spectator may find themselves 'faced with' on a psychological level. Because desire-driven fantasy is an intangible aspect of human psychology, individuals physicalise their desires and urges by using another physical object to represent those urges and desires (Hall 2013: 256).

The idea of the 'male gaze' in psychoanalytic feminist theory has undergirded many a study that aimed to analyse women's sexual objectification in various popular media forms. In her earlier analyses, Mulvey (1975; 1989) makes a case for how the 'gaze' functions in film media. She argued for the conflation of three distinct angles of view during the depiction of women:

> These three points of view, the camera angle, the gaze of the male character within the film, and the gaze of the audience member, were effectively collapsed into one point of view. This maneuver, according to Mulvey, rendered the female character a sexualized object for the enjoyment of male viewers, and simultaneously addressed a heterosexual male audience (Cuklanz 2016: 7).

Since this initial argument was advanced by Mulvey, many theorists have contributed further explications to extend on the subtleties of the idea of a 'masculinised gaze'. Throughout these expansive scholarly pursuits around the 'male gaze', the basic sexualised and gendered relationship among audiences and female protagonists in film, has remained relevant (Cuklanz 2016). However, despite the intellectually influential effect of Mulvey's main arguments in that initial essay, her approach to critiquing women's representation and spectatorship in narrative film, is subjected to various criticisms.

The primary criticism, notes Beschara Karam (2013), has stemmed from the fact that Mulvey appears to assume that *all* spectators are heterosexual. As such, many feminist and queer theorists have critiqued Mulvey's emphasis on a rather binary conception of gender, one that overlooks non-heterosexualities. These bodies of critical analysis argue that gender is much more fluid than being a fixed identity (Karam 2013), and that Mulvey's evident avoidance of this complexity, should be questioned:

> Patricia White (1998), for example, points out one of the problems associated with assuming that all spectators are heterosexual: heterosexual women cannot enjoy their own image as an object of sexual desire. However, this does not account for lesbian spectators whose voyeuristic pleasure derives from watching women as objects of desire. Similarly, authors Gaylin Studlar (1985) and Mary Anne Doane (1982) argue that Mulvey does not consider the female spectator's scopophilic pleasure (Karam 2013: 34).

In the 1980s, Mulvey's work was briefly deployed in the examinations of televisual texts but was found to not easily apply to the small screen as compared to mainstream narrative cinema (Cuklanz 2016). As such, the application of the psychoanalytic theory, in its feminist iterations, to television, lost relative traction and was largely abandoned. Even so, the value in Mulvey's arguments remains widely acknowledged, and "[i]n spite of the limited applicability of feminist psychoanalytic theory per se to non-film texts, sexual objectification of women and female bodies is found in many media forms other than Hollywood films" (Cuklanz 2016: 8).

This thesis will demonstrate how sexual objectification of women operates in the visual discourses captured in a corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study. I partly rely on Mulvey's propositions to make a case for how, in these African popular cultural texts – produced in a context notably different from when Mulvey initially made her arguments – gendered relations of looking are intricately imbedded in culturally diverse practices that variously express the dominance of a (heterosexual) black African male point of view within these analysed music video texts. Said black African male points of views, I will show, are implicated in the constructions of particular kinds of black African femininities.

These black African femininities variously constructed in these popular cultural texts are implicated in larger sociocultural, socioemotional and sociopsychological conditions that may foster their continued oppression in a heteropatriarchal culture. This is a heteropatriarchal culture that is, more likely than not, subtly (or otherwise) "misogynoiristic" toward black women (Bailey and Trudi 2018: 767). 'Misogynoir' is an important conception by Moya Bailey (2010) – which gained noteworthy traction through womanist blogger, Trudi's (2013; 2014),

further theorisations of the concept. The concept broadly speaks to the anti-black racist misogyny experienced by black women, specifically. To a significant extent, the concept also concerns itself with "…the unique ways in which Black women are pathologized in popular culture" (Webber 2017: 9, citing Moya Bailey). 'Misogynoir' thus captures how "…anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world" (Webber 2017: 9).

Bailey partly coined the term to aid herself "[…] to find a way to talk about the racial visual violence I was seeing in popular culture throughout history" (Bailey and Trudy 2018: 762). Herself a queer black woman, Bailey had concerns with respect to the manners in which cisgendered and transgendered black women are represented in contemporary media:

> I was troubled by the way straight Black men talked about Black women online and in music. It seemed that straight Black men were always instructing Black women about what to do with their bodies. So much of what was presented as the ways Black men and women relate to each other was an assumed heterosexual cis desire, and about how Black women were failing at being desirable. For me, naming misogynoir was about noting both an historical anti-Black misogyny and a problematic intraracial gender dynamic that had wider implications in popular culture (Bailey and Trudy 2018: 762).

The ways in which the culturally diverse black African men that are prominent in the multimodal representations within the Afrobeats musical genre gaze upon and lyrically address black African women, are indeed not immune to aligning to a misogynoiristic sensibility because "[m]isogynoir can come from Black men, white men and women, and even other Black women" (Bailey and Trudy 2018: 762).

2.3.3. Postfeminist media cultures, gender and media representation

During the proliferation of what was largely characterised as 'third wave feminism', ideas of female 'dis-empowerment' in popular culture increasingly took on a different tone. The key assumption in third wave feminism – as it relates to the plight of gender-relational justice and women's just treatment – is that "…feminism has been at least somewhat successful, and therefore that feminist media products are available for the consumption and enjoyment of consumers who identify themselves as feminist, or as proponents of gender justice" (Cuklanz 2016: 9). This view is noted to be partly responsible for the blurring of the 'boundaries' between feminists and non-feminists, fostering the belief that feminism and feminist ideas no longer have an oppositional charge. They have, instead, become part of many people's common sense (Storey 2018). Here, we can see the feminist plight being implicated in notably contradictory principles that situate feminism almost as something of the past: no longer significant or required (McRobbie 2004a). Thus, the term 'postfeminism' as an indication of a

shift beyond feminism which, over time, has been variously injected into analyses of contemporary popular culture (Storey 2018).

What postfeminist-inspired 'worldviews' do, in the context of popular culture, is that they variously undermine the feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s, argues Angela McRobbie (2004a). McRobbie, as Storey (2018: 176) summarises, makes no secret of her low optimism about the presumed 'success' of feminism:

> What has really happened, she argues, is that much contemporary popular culture actively undermines the feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s. However, this should not be understood as a straightforward 'backlash' against feminism. Rather its undermining of feminism works by acknowledging feminism while at the same time suggesting that it is no longer necessary in a world where women have the freedom to shape their own individual life courses. In post-feminist popular culture feminism features as history: aged, uncool and redundant. The acknowledging of feminism, therefore, is only to demonstrate that it is no longer relevant.

It is through this advancement of a view that feminism is no longer relevant that, in contemporary popular culture, we are bombarded with multitudes of discourses (be they visual or otherwise) that actively position women as empowered, agentic, and self-determining among other things. These 'empowering' descriptors are a result of what Rosalind Gill (2007; 2008) calls a postfeminist sensibility which, she argues, is deeply entrenched in a neoliberal worldview that persistently calls for the celebration of individuality and choice said to be unrestrictedly afforded to women globally (Dosekun 2015). As such, there is an unapologetic focus "on the individual and her choices from among a newly diverse range of options. It is less contingent upon political or organized activism than the feminist of the past" (Cuklanz 2016: 9). As it relates to expressions of sexuality, more specifically, women are believed – and increasingly represented in contemporary popular media forms – as enjoying sexual freedom and free expression of sexuality (Gill 2007; Gill 2008; Genz 2009; Butler 2013; Cuklanz 2016; Ligaga 2020).

In popular media forms such as advertising, popular music, and film, among others, this sensibility manifests in various ways that are characterised by "the projection of a constant availability and interest in sex, the construction of a self-image that is "hot," a willingness to perform this sexual readiness through clothing style, posture, and activities (such as pole dancing) inspired by pornographic imagery" (Cuklanz 2016: 10-11). Gill (2008) has partly theorised this as the development of a "midriff" sensibility borne out of a broader postfeminist sensibility.

Theorised as knowingly using her body, appearance, and sexuality to more assertively exercise her (sexual) agency, the 'midriff' female figure is described as unapologetic about her sexual power and ability to (freely) use her body as a means to socioculturally, and otherwise, advance or benefit herself. So notes Gill (2008: 41):

> The midriffs might be thought of as a generation of girls and young women in their teens and 20s in the 1990s, but midriff also refers to a *sensibility* characterized by a specific constellation of attitudes towards the body, sexual expression and gender relations.

Tracing a midriff sensibility in advertising media, Gill (2008) notes four central themes characterising this cultural sensibility. These four themes, she suggests, are "an emphasis upon the body, a shift from objectification to sexual subjectification, a pronounced discourse of choice and autonomy, and an emphasis upon empowerment" (2008: 41). With respect to its emphasis on the body, the midriff sensibility places considerable value on women's bodies as their key sociocultural capital. In contemporary media cultures, "it is now possession of a 'sexy body' that is presented as women's key source of identity" (Gill 2008: 42). Her success and attractiveness are deemed viable when she convincingly self-manages her body to maintain it in a suitably toned, waxed, scented and dressed (or perhaps under-dressed) condition (Gill 2008; Bordo 1993). Noticeable here, then, is an evident shift from earlier – equally problematic – conceptions of womanhood and femininity as linked to non-physical aspects of 'caring', 'mothering' and 'nurturing', among others (Gill 2008). In a growing hyper-surveillant media and popular culture, "[w]omen's [physical] bodies are evaluated, scrutinized and dissected by women as well as men, and are always at risk of 'failing'" (Gill 2007: 149).

'Failing' may manifest in several ways. One of the main ways is if a woman fails to live up to hegemonic ideals around feminine beauty and sexual expression. As such, celebrity and non-celebrity women alike, are subjected to constant scrutiny of their bodies and elements of their physical appearance. Gill (2008: 44) makes note of how exclusionary the midriff sensibility is, due to how its 'empowerment' discourse side-lines women who do not "live up to increasingly narrow standards of female beauty and sex appeal that are normatively required". In its strikingly heteronormative address to women, the midriff cultural sensibility shuts out multitudes of women across diverse cultural contexts, more especially women of colour, because of how this sensibility is also

> […] profoundly racialized, and it is striking to note how white the figure of the midriff is. Black women's bodies are presented sexually in advertising, to be sure, but in ways

> that differ sharply from the figure of the active, knowing, desiring sexual subject [pervasive in contemporary advertising].

At play here, then, is an exclusionary culture wherein empowering 'sexual subjecthood' seems to not be afforded to women whose self-fashioning pursuits are deemed outside of the white-washed, narrow, arguably Eurocentric, ideals of female beauty. This, in turn, engenders deeply toxic inter- and intra-racial relations among women as well as men who actively subscribe to these restrictive normative ideals about feminine beauty, sexual expression and sex appeal. On the part of (heterosexual) men, it is in their fostering of particularly exclusionary 'patterns of desire' (hooks 2003) as it relates to their 'preferences' in women, that certain feminine beauty aesthetics are celebrated much more than others. Considering skin colour, for instance, rather complex psychosocial relations have been noted to prevail among subjectivities of the same racial identity, implicated in their diverse social relations based on culturally diverse values and ideologies.

Pilane and Iqani (2016, drawing from Ajani ya Azibo 2011; Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka-Gwegweni, Grobler & Hift 2014; and Thomas 2009, among others) have noted in relation to black subjectivities, that the prioritisation of a 'white' aesthetic ideal (with regard to skin colour and hair, for instance) in the globalised mediascapes, bears a complex physical and psychological impact on black women as consumers. In contexts characterised by a predominantly black racial composition, such as the African continent, we have witnessed an upsurge in skin bleaching beauty regimes. These upsurges have, at times, prevailed despite increasing warnings from medical practitioners about the dangers thereof in regions such as Southern and East Africa (Thomas 2020; 2009) as more and more women (and some men) attempt to access the symbolic capital engendered in light-skin-ness/whiteness that can in turn be converted into tangible benefits such as economic capital and other forms of 'empowerment' (Hunter 2002; Thomas 2009; Phoenix 2014; Iqani 2016). These observations have variously been theorised in line with discourses about colourism.

Known to have been coined by Alice Walker in the 1980s, the term colourism is generally deployed to refer to the preferential or prejudicial treatment of people based on the varying degrees of their skin colour (Mbatha 2017). While notably inter-racial in its prejudicial formations, colourism is most typically exacerbated on an intra-racial level where same-race peoples' sociocultural relations favour light-skinned individuals over dark-skinned ones (Maddox and Chase 2004; Mbatha 2017). Several bodies of critical studies have empirically demonstrated that colourism's social pervasiveness has continuously privileged people of

colour with light skin complexion over those of a dark(er) skin tone across various domains. Some of those areas have included, for instance, income, education, the romance, intimacy and marriage markets (Hunter 2007).

Important to note, is that while given a specific 'name' in the 1980s, discriminatory expressions based on skin complexion have a deep-rooted global history linked to centuries of racist colonial regimes that have – in contextually diverse fashions – thrived through complex promotions of white supremacy, external racism perpetuated by white people, the hegemonising of Eurocentric beauty standards that pedestal Caucasian phenotypic aesthetics, as well as unyielding conceptions of masculinity and femininity in their relation to race and skin tone (Walker 1983; Kelly 2004; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin and Kelly 2006).

It is argued that this legacy of discrimination based on skin colour has informed varying levels of internalised racism with respect to people of colour which implicitly exacerbates an inferiority complex that plays out through social expressions indicative of negative stereotyping, rejection, and/or oppression of one's own racial or ethnic group as a person of colour. When individuals from historically marginalised racial groups (such as black people) accept the negative and symbolically violent beliefs and stereotypes associated with themselves, they may be said to display internalised racism (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). Therewith comes an active (at times, subconscious) dissociation from people who present the very phenotypic aesthetics you hate about yourself because of how racist regimes have negatively stereotyped them, so as to uphold white supremacy.

In contemporary, postfeminist-aligned popular cultural formations, the intricately toxic subtleties of racism and colourism still prevail. This sustains exclusionary cultural sensibilities that indirectly tell older, differently-abled, 'fat', dark(er) skinned (black) women that they simply aren't fit to embody the 'power femininity' found in a midriff cultural sensibility that emphasises sexual freedom and sexual pleasure and agency (Gill 2008). Given that the Afrobeats musical genre notably embodies a strikingly black, African feminine subjecthood in its visual discourses, it will be interesting to examine in what ways notions of feminine beauty prevail within this musical genre's visual culture, captured in the corpus of music videos analysed in this study.

Furthermore, the ways in which women's bodies are represented in (often semi-erotic texts) in popular media forms, had also experienced a notable shift within a global midriff cultural sensibility. "Where once sexualized representations of women in the media presented them as

passive, mute objects of an assumed male gaze, today women are presented as active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their (implicitly 'liberated') interests to do so" (Gill 2008: 42). Crucial to these two cultural shifts as they relate to women and their bodies, is an explicit linkage thereof to notions of freedom and choice on the part of women. Herein, women in popular media forms are presented as knowingly negating men's approval and instead doing things to please and benefit themselves, "and, in so doing, they 'just happen to win men's admiration'" (Gill 2008: 42; Gill 2007). Or, at times, even fall victim to atrocious and violent treatments from (heteropatriarchal) men expressing their disapproval of these women's perceived sexual freedom (Ligaga 2014; 2020). In the African context, these kinds of 'liberated', sexually expressive women have been partly theorised as 'good time girls' (Ligaga 2014; 2020). In music circles during the Sophiatown/Drum era, these women were often referred to as 'nice time girls' (Samuelson 2008)

In many ways, the African 'good time girl' holds similarities to Gill's (2007; 2008) conception of the midriff woman. Dina Ligaga offers a descriptive summary of this figure in the African context, describing her as: "young, educated, beautiful, fun loving, wild, likes to 'party', is 'up for anything' and is willing to trade her body for money" (2014: 250). The good time girl is imagined and described in mainstream and other media texts, as sexually rampant and wayward. We could also link the 'good time girl' to earlier formations (1910s - 1930s) of the African 'modern girl' as written about by Lynn Thomas (2006; 2020) and 'the Modern Girl research group'. The (black) African 'modern girl' is identified by her cosmopolitan self-styling, her explicit eroticism and use of specific commodities. She also "…reject[s] the roles of dutiful daughter, wife and mother through [her] engagement of international commodity cultures, mass media and political discourses" (Thomas 2006: 462). As such, she is constantly implicated in moral discourses about acceptable/unacceptable African womanhood (Thomas 2020). In striking contrast to the celebratory tone associated with constructions of midriff-aligned femininities pervasive in the Global North; the African good time girl is often used as a cautionary tale of African moral standards. These women are hypervisiblised by the media to emphasise to young women the moral lessons to be drawn from the 'dangers' of copying the behaviours of these 'wayward' women. In addition, these women are framed in media discourses as 'tricksters' towards whom young men need to be vigilant so as not to fall victim of their cunning ways (Ligaga 2014).

In African popular cultural texts and media discourses, the good time girl has also been depicted as materially-driven and willing to 'misuse' her sexuality and beauty to accrue material wealth (Newell 2002). Her sexually self-determining nature and agentic approach to her sexuality are, more often than not, also the reasons why she is subjected to 'punishment' for digressing from the ideological "public scripts" about morality in relation to womanhood. Essentially, according to these moral-driven public scripts, a 'good' African woman is one that submissively adheres to the heteropatriarchal role of obedient wife/daughter/girlfriend who dares not to publicly assert her individualism by aligning with 'unorthodox' choices of dress and expression of sexuality if she wishes not to bear the brunt of public shame (Ligaga 2020). In Africa, occurrences of public shaming of women, have manifested in various ways. Kopano Ratele draws on media and governmental reports to paint a picture of some gruesome events during which women in African contexts had been subjected to public 'disciplining' and violence from men, based on these women's choice of dress:

> In Manzini, Swaziland, for example, a young woman supposedly angered bus conductors so much by wearing a miniskirt that they stripped and gang-raped her at the bus terminus while spectators cheered them on […]. Similarly, in nearby South Africa the media reported that a young woman was attacked by male taxi industry workers at a taxi rank in Johannesburg city for wearing a miniskirt […]. Her clothes were ripped off her body, others went for her underwear, and even though she held on tightly to her panties which were torn in the process, some of the people (whose sex was unspecified in the news-report) inserted their fingers in her vagina (2008: 515-516).

This current thesis is interested in partly advancing an argument around the ways in which moralistic African public scripts about acceptable womanhood are implicated in the multimodal discourses circulating in the Afrobeats music video texts analysed in this study. Said popular cultural texts are significantly produced from within the African context and are arguably implicated in the maintenance – or perhaps disruption – of moralistic African public scripts about gender-performative expectations.

Finally, also central to a globalised midriff cultural sensibility – alongside notions of agentic choice and pleasing of the self on the part of women – is the discursive thematic of women's empowerment. Gill (2008) demonstrates how a discourse of feminine empowerment prevails in how advertising targeted at women creatively "sell" the promise of self-esteem and confidence. Women are interpellated in contemporary advertising, aligned along a midriff sensibility, as powerful in their sexualised femininities. Power in their sexualised femininities means that women who internalise – and meet the restrictive aesthetic expectations of – a midriff sensibility, are encouraged to recognise their sexual power "to bring men to their knees"

(Gill 2008: 43). There is a particular 'power femininity' that thrives within postfeminist cultural formations that reassures women that "feminist struggles have ended", and complete equality for all women is an achieved reality; therefore, women can 'have it all', should they so choose (Gill 2008; Gill 2007; Lazar 2006).

'Having it all', then, encompasses several things, including an emphasis on a particularly oversexualised subjectification. That is, an active participation in what Ariel Levy (2005) calls "raunch culture". Raunch culture, at a basic level, refers to a global cultural sensibility wherein women's sexuality, public(ised) nudity and engagement in overtly sexualised behaviour, become publicly acceptable (Levy 2005; Lutwama-Rukundo 2016). Scantily clad, hypersexualised and publicly pervasive female bodies are even expected in the media in contemporary popular culture. As such, popular cultural texts such as music videos carry rife mediations of "slutty" stereotypes of female sexuality; to a point where we no longer even think about it, but we merely expect to see women flashing and stripping, or even groaning wherever we look (Levy 2005). The 'raunch' cultural sensibility, notes Lutwama-Rukundo (2016: 58), has pervasively infiltrated African popular cultural domains, including music, as "most contemporary African music performance[s] [are] marked by skimpy fashion and explicit representations of female sexuality, from the lyrics of songs to the wiggling female bodies in bikinis, underwear and hot pants". As I have highlighted earlier in this chapter, in Africa, such performances of hypersexualised feminine sexuality are not immune to public scrutiny as they are often linked to moralistic public scripts about respectability and femininity. As such, it is a partial task of this thesis to explore how the (mostly black African) women's bodies are portrayed across the corpus of Afrobeats music videos constructed for this study, and how viewers of the said music videos perceive these depictions through an analysis of the comments made on these music videos on YouTube.

2.2. Africa's representation in popular imaginaries: considering luxury and lavishness

There exist extensive bodies of research concerned with the representation of Africa in western (UK and US) news media (Hawk 1992; Jaroz 1993; Mazrui 2005; Nyamnjoh 2010; Mody 2012; Scott 2017; Nothias 2018). Global-North-inspired discourses underpinned by the idea of Africa as 'the dark continent' that is conflict and poverty-ridden have been shown to notably prevail due to how (news) media across these terrains frame their reporting about the continent of Africa (Nothias 2018). Martin Scott (2017), nevertheless, makes a strong argument

classifying some research findings within this canon of literature as partly undergirded by myth. Scott's main argument, in this regard, is that existing research on Africa's representation in western media has a significantly narrow focus on a rather limited number of countries, events, media and texts. As such, it is Scott's (2017: 192) view that,

> […] current assessments of existing research are unable to assess adequately the extent to which these assumptions are valid. Narrative literature reviews, which are the most common means of evaluating the available evidence, do not conform to any systematic or transparent procedures for ensuring that all relevant information is considered and taken into account. As a result, they cannot offer a comprehensive or objective account of what we know [about Africa's representation in global media].

Even so, the contributions from these studies are pivotal in motivating broader awareness about the influential role mainstream media representations play in shaping harmful and/or positive perceptions about the African continent.

Scholarly attempts at 'disrupting' the ways in which Global South regions – such as Africa – have been reflected on in global media discourses, are emerging from this very territory. Take, for instance, a contribution made by Mehita Iqani (2016:7) who purports that:

> […] the global south is a place not only of poverty but also of middle-class and elite wealth, and a huge variety of cultural expressions organized around ideas of aspiration, social mobility, luxury and leisure that, although not cancelling out narratives of poverty, deserve to be considered alongside them.

More ground-breaking, contemporary works are emerging from the Global South that situate Africa within global scholarship of critical luxury studies (Dosekun and Iqani 2019). Such scholarly contributions call for a more nuanced approach to reflecting on Global South territories such as the African continent, by looking beyond luxury consumption and expressions of lavishness in this territory as mere symptoms of a perceived western cultural imperialism. There is something symbolically violent about linking forms of luxury consumption in Africa to discourses of western mimicry because, what results from an alignment to such ideological views, is that "…even when Africans are being represented and interpellated as partakers of luxury – the terms of our inclusion and belonging may remain qualified, and a western supremacist narrative of African aspiration as a step in the road to 'development' may be reinscribed" (Dosekun and Iqani 2019: 12). Many of the scholarly contributions from the chapters in Dosekun and Iqani's (eds, 2019) publication, variously remind us that 'African luxury' or luxury in Africa have deeply historical roots that evidence the prevalence thereof across the continent, outside of western 'influence'.

There have also been non-academic pursuits from 'ordinary' Africans towards advocating for a shift in the representation of the African continent and her people (Mkono 2019). One case in point is the 2015 social media drive that developed through a hashtag-led effort called **#TheAfricaTheMediaNeverShowsYou**. The campaign – ran mostly on Twitter and Instagram – was aimed at "showing that there is more to Africa than what Western media shares" (Parrotte 2015). At odds with the observation that the African continent has been portrayed as a territory ravaged by civil war, poverty and disease, 17-year-old Ghanaian – Rachel Markham – and 22-year-old Somali, Diana Salah, took to Twitter and Instagram to challenge what they regarded as limited, stereotypical representations of Africa by western media (Parrotte 2015; Caldwell 2015; Stipinovich 2016).

It should be highlighted that these harmful depictions about Africa have been noted as undergoing positive shifts over time, carrying the potential for 'Afro-optimistic' ideological reframings that do justice to Africa's global image (Nothias 2014). Evidently, much of the existing research has focused on African narratives in mainstream media in the UK and US. As such, this thesis aims to examine African narratives embedded in popular-culture-driven constructions of the lived experiences of Africans, *by* Africans *to* the global audiences. The Afrobeats music video text makes for a valuable site of representation to analyse, so as to examine the ways in which Nigerian and Ghanaian youth – producing these texts – are visually representing their African lived experiences, as implicated as they are in notably gendered sociocultural imaginaries.

2.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has foregrounded key scholarly literature relevant to the intellectual framing and positioning of Afrobeats music videos within broader scholarship on cultural studies and popular culture. The chapter, in its critical reviewing of existing literature, manages to demonstrate in what ways this thesis contributes to existing bodies of work on gender studies and popular culture. As far as possible, linkages of these discussions to an African context – from which this thesis draws its objects of focus – are sustained. That way, the study does not undermine the contextual relevance of this thesis's empirical object as it relates to its forthcoming findings and arguments. The chapter following this one is offered so as to grant a comprehensive account of the theoretical and conceptual framework undergirding this thesis.

3. MEDIA, SOCIETY AND GENDER RELATIONS: A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter outlines the key theoretical and conceptual considerations anchoring this study. The conceptual propositions stemming from five theoretical traditions encapsulate this study's theoretical framework. Firstly, this thesis develops within the theoretical pillars of the notion of representation, with a specific focus on three critical approaches to the study of representation as proposed by Hall (1997; 2013). These critical approaches being: the reflective, the intentional and the constructionist approaches. Secondly, the thesis relies on the theoretical propositions underpinning the social constructionism theory. The theory of gender performativity as advanced by Judith Butler, forms the third pillar upon which this study develops. Another theoretical pillar anchoring this study is the psychoanalytic theory particularly in its feminist iterations, with a reliance on the following concepts stemming from this body of work: scopophilia (as pleasure in looking), the 'Gaze' in its gendered conceptualisations, as well as the psychoanalytic propositions of fetishism and voyeurism as deployed to approach regimes of visuality in popular culture. Lastly, this thesis is developed from the analytical postulations made by scholars deploying critical visual analysis: the theorisation of 'ways of seeing' as constructed by, in, and through visual material, is of specific importance to this study.

3.1. Representation

This study is situated within the scholarly parameters of cultural studies. 'Cultural studies' is an umbrella term deployed to refer to a multi- and interdisciplinary field of teaching and research largely preoccupied with investigating the manners in which individual experiences, social, power, and everyday-life relations are constructed, maintained and transformed by culture (Storey 2018; Storey 1996; During 2004). Culture, to reiterate the definition offered in chapter two, refers to a set of non-fixed, continuously changing human practices and efforts directed at (re)producing various kinds of meanings about the world through the practices and 'works' of, more especially, artistic, intellectual, and 'ordinary' subjectivities (Storey 2018). In other words, culture can be seen as the construction, maintenance and reproduction of shared meanings and values among groups of people with common interests and a collective consciousness about the world they live in (Hall 2013). Culture, then, relies on the people meaningfully interpreting what is happening around them, and essentially making sense – in largely similar ways – of the world around them (Hall 2013: xix). Therefore, studying culture

means also partly studying the ways in which groups of people make meaning of the world. Significantly facilitating the process of meaning-making is the practice of representation.

'Representation', Hall suggests, makes reference to the use of language to meaningfully convey something about, or to represent the world, in meaningful ways to other people (2013: 1). Language, it should be noted, is used here to refer not only to the spoken and written system of a particular language as communicative tool, but also, to follow Hall (2013: 4), the visual images, "whether produced by hand, mechanically, electronically, digitally or some other means; when they are used to express meaning." Furthermore, 'language' may well also include other non-linguistic aspects such as gesturing, facial expressions, or perhaps even the 'languages' of material artefacts including fashion and other forms of 'decoration'. Even music, then, may be included as a complexly layered form of language used to express meaning through the use of different sounds and chords (Hall 2013).

People may, thus, rely on one or all these expressive modes to aid in their efforts to meaningfully convey/represent their thoughts, ideas, emotions and feelings, among other things, to other people, especially in a shared culture. This process is complex, but in simplifying it, Hall (2013: 1) offers this summary:

> Representation *is* an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It *does* involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things.

It can be summed up, then, that any sound, word, image or object which functions as a sign, and is organised with other signs into a system that carries and expresses meaning is, from this point of view, 'a language' (Hall 1997; 2013). We use the term 'sign' to refer to sounds, words, images, among other things, which are value-laden and carry meaning. These 'signs' are essential to the meaning-making or meaning-sharing pursuits in cultures because they are used to "stand for or represent the concepts and the conceptual relations between them which we carry around in our heads and together they make up the meaning-system of our culture" (Hall 2013: 4).

We have established that language is an essential part of representation. Language, with its multi-layered signs, is crucial in the meaning-making pursuits of a peoples because for meaning to be effectively exchanged among people, said people have to share and understand the signs of a language in broadly the same way in order to make broadly similar interpretations of the world (Hall 2013). This current study focuses particularly on music videos – accepted as multi-

layered languages of representation – used to convey experiences lived, experiences imagined, and experiences aspired towards by the individuals producing these texts.

That said, it is important to acknowledge that the process of representation – as an essential conduit of meaning creation and expression – has been approached through various critical routes by scholars of cultural studies. Three common such approaches, in this regard, are the reflective approach, the intentional approach, as well as the constructionist approach. The reflective approach to explaining representation asserts, broadly, that meaning lies in the idea, object, event or person in the actual world, and that language carries the functionality of a mirror in that it merely 'reflects' the true meaning of things just as they already exist in the world (Hall 2013: 10). Here, meaning-making is regarded in rather passive terms, suggesting that people in a culture, as social agents in society, have little influence on what things mean in the worlds they live in. They use language only as a means to reflect already-existing ideas about the actual world to others.

The intentional approach to explaining representation argues that, through language, the author or speaker imposes her or his distinct meaning on the world. This means that words spoken or written mean exactly what the speaker or author intends they should mean (Hall 2013). While valuable, this approach is flawed in that it strips language of its social nature in a sense that if an individual, for instance, expresses themselves in a uniquely-private language, they may not be understood if said language is outside the shared linguistic conventions and shared codes. As such, this may result in a missed opportunity to effectively communicate within a culture.

The third broad approach towards critically exploring representation is the constructionist approach which vastly acknowledges that language is a social and public practice. The constructionist approach recognises that "neither things in themselves nor the individual users of language are able to fix meaning within language" (Hall 2013: 11). Essentially, as Hall asserts, things do not mean; instead, we engage in the construction of meaning by using representational systems such as language (with its signs and concepts). According to this approach:

> …we must not confuse the material world, where things and people exist, and the symbolic practices and processes through which representation, meaning and language operate. Constructivists do not deny the existence of the material world. However, it is not the material world which conveys meaning: it is the language system or whatever system we are using to represent our concepts. It is social actors who use the conceptual systems of their culture and the linguistic and other representational systems to

> construct meaning, to make the world meaningful and to communicate about that world meaningfully to others.

While the material world, which undeniably exists, is essential in our social relations, it is not the material world in and of itself that conveys meaning. It is the language systems deployed by people in a culture to symbolically convey meaning by using linguistic signs or codes to stand for, symbolise or represent a concept in their material world (Hall 1997; 2013).

This thesis aligns with the constructionist approach to critically exploring representation. The decision is motivated by this approach's core line of argumentation: the material world does not mean in and of itself, but we as social actors construct meaning by strategically deploying language – as an oral, written, and visual system – to represent the world in particular ways. By so doing, we are able to convey particular meanings of the world to other people about our experiences lived, experiences imagined, and experiences aspired towards.

This thesis specifically focuses on Afrobeats music videos as multidimensional texts loaded with representational messages/expressions of the lived experiences of the individuals producing these texts. The active construction of such systems of representation do not operate in a vacuum, social actors are constantly involved in these processes/regimes of representation either as meaning-creators or meaning-interpreters. This considered, it is crucial to acknowledge that these meaning-sharing pursuits are not void of intricate power-relations (Hall 1997; 2013).

Theory aside, Afrobeats music is a widely enjoyed form of entertainment emerging from the African continent. This music's lyrical and visual contents, to be sure, sustain particular power relations in that its producers (artists, song-writers, music video directors) engage in the social construction of ideological regimes that beneficially position certain identities at the expense of others. These symbolically sustained unequal social positionings of people are often unconsciously imbibed as 'truthful' by consumers of these texts. This means, in simpler terms, that creators of this music assume – or perhaps make consumers of this music assume – that this is mere entertainment while, in fact, these texts encourage a particular way of thinking about and seeing the featured contexts and people. This study is particularly interested in interrogating the socio-ideological iterations regarding gender relations, sexual difference and sexuality in Africa through this increasingly-transnationalised African musical genre's multimodally-sustained visual culture.

As such, it is crucial to also anchor this study in a theory that acknowledges that systems of representation bear varying influences on human subjectivities, their sexual and gendered

identities, among other facets. For this study, the gender performativity and psychoanalytic theories are deemed relevant as shall be discussed later. But first, in tandem with representation theory as deployed by this study, a theory of equal value to this thesis is that of social constructionism.

3.2. Social Constructionism

Social constructivism/constructionism is a theory of knowledge that is concerned with, and critically engages, the development of jointly-constructed understandings of the world. This theory is largely developed within the fields of sociology and areas of communication. Social constructionism theory argues that the jointly-constructed understandings of the world are underpinned by shared human assumptions about reality (Edley 2001; Andrews 2012). Essentially, scholars deploying a social constructionist approach interrogate what is defined by humans and society to be reality.

As social agents in society, humans construct meaning through interaction between one another. It is through this process that a particular social order is established along particular rules and agreements pertaining to what is 'right' and/or 'wrong', acceptable and/or unacceptable, 'normal' and/or 'abnormal', resulting, thereby, in the construction of a taken-for-granted notion of reality (Andrews 2012). As Rose (2001) notes, in our interactions with members of our own and other cultures, humans constantly engage in interactive processes leading to the social construction of meanings which, as social constructionist scholars argue, become influential in advancing a particular social order. This social order, over time, develops into regimes of disciplining social behaviour. The construction of these meanings, Rose explains:

> … may be explicit or implicit, conscious or unconscious. They may be felt as truth or as fantasy, science or common sense; and they may be conveyed through everyday speech, elaborate rhetoric, high art, tv soap operas, dreams, movies or muzak; and different groups in a society will make sense of the world in different ways. Whatever form they take, these made meanings structure the way people behave – the way you and I behave – in our everyday lives (2001: 6).

These rules and agreements are in constant flux, rendering our understanding of the world prone to continuous change depending on the dominant culture and socio-political, sociocultural, socio-psychological conditions. Our understanding of the world – influenced by our socially-constructed perceptions of reality in relation to objects and other people – is not fixed. Instead, our perceptions of the world and how it works (including our place in it), is reliant on the dominantly-accepted, constantly-changing social constructions which include

identity and behavioural cues among others (Rose 2001). Among the socially constructed behavioural cues are the construction and maintenance of gendered behavioural cues, often accepted as 'normal', resulting in said gendered behavioural cues going largely unchallenged.

Our understandings of the world as socially constructed, accepted, and largely maintained, influence how we express our sense of individual and collective identity in a culture. As a popular (African) cultural site of meaning production and expression, the Afrobeats music video text is a value-laden site carrying the socially constructed, widely perpetuated understandings of what is 'acceptable' gendered behaviour according to the subjectivities creating this music. As a result, a specific interest of this study is the social constructions of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' in the multimodal discourses of this musical genre within a contemporary African popular cultural context. These considerations of gender constructions will be significantly guided by the theory of gender performativity.

3.3. Gender Performativity

Feminist philosopher Judith Butler proposed the idea of gender performativity, purporting that gender is a ritualised performance across diverse human societies. Butler (1988) argues that gender identities are socially constructed notions that affect our self-perceptions about who we believe we are as subjectivities of a particular biological sex. For Butler (1988; 1990), the distinction between biological sex and gender is crucial in demonstrating her argument that genders – unlike sex – are socioculturally constructed and performed as opposed to being physiobiological facts determined by the possession of particular reproductive genitalia. Butler's constructionist view of gender identity underscores her argument in this regard. Essentially, this view argues that in accordance with political, historical and social values and ideas, gender is actively and, to an extent, unwittingly, constructed by human subjectivities who learn and cling to particular behavioural cues that are relied upon to craft what we come to widely accept as women's and men's behaviours (Butler 1988).

These learnt behaviours, in turn, are inextricably linked to notions of femininity and masculinity as themselves co-constructed along psychosocial influences of what it means to be born in possession of a particular genital organ. With regards to gender, so argues Butler (1988:522):

> Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender ex-presses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires; because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender creates the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis.

It is by acknowledging the distinction between gender and sex that we can observe the constructionist implications of gender in its performative guise. Gender identities are, thus, in constant flux and states of 'becoming' as soon as one is born into this world. Commenting on how 'real' or factual our gender identities are, Butler (1988: 527) reminds us that "[g]ender reality is performative which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed." The influences of diverse societies' social, political, cultural and historical ideological regimes on the kinds of 'acts' associated with 'manhood' and 'womanhood' in said societies, perpetuate various kinds of acts that are widely interpreted as being expressive of a gender identity. These acts are normalised as inherently linked to biological sex, and conformity to said acts is implicitly celebrated as 'natural'.

What this does is it enforces "sedimented expectations of gendered existence" (Butler 1988: 524). Inspired by parts of Simone de Beauvoir's theoretical contributions, Butler's influential body of work on gender performativity problematises these sedimented expectations of gendered existence by exposing how the body becomes

> …its gender through a series of acts which are renewed, revised, and consolidated through time. From a feminist point of view, one might try to reconceive the gendered body as the legacy of sedimented acts rather than a predetermined or foreclosed structure, essence or fact, whether natural, cultural, or linguistic.

Genders, as socially constructed notions, Butler argues, can then be perceived as neither true nor false, neither real nor apparent; but ever-evolving performative regimes that variously compel us to 'act' in certain ways depending on our possession of either a penis or vagina.

This current study relies significantly on this body of work on gender as a performative social construction. The thesis closely links these theoretical insights to its critical approach to the project's empirical object of focus. These music videos, as sites of gender representation, expose us to creatively crafted, active constructions and performances of gender. That is to say, the processes of gender identity construction are salient in these music videos due to how these texts deploy multimodal devices to establish, maintain, contest and/or problematise gender norms. Creators of these music videos are actively involved in narrating and, thereby, idealising particular gender performances to foreground various points of views about what it means to be a woman or a man across the richly diverse African and diasporic contexts captured in this musical genre's multimodal discourses. The narration and idealising of particular kinds of gender performances in the music videos analysed in this thesis will also be scrutinised on a psychoanalytical level to probe the power dynamics implicated therein.

3.4. Psychoanalytic Feminist Theory

In its ambition to critically explore the role that regimes of representation play on subjectivity, sexuality, and the gendered identity experiences of 'interpreters' of said representational regimes in a culture, this study deploys the psychoanalytic theoretical approach. More precisely, the study relies on particular conceptual propositions conceived within psychoanalysis, as opposed to applying the theory in its complete form. The concepts central to this study's conceptual framework from a psychoanalytic perspective are Scopophilia – as pleasure in looking; the concept of the Gaze in its gendered conceptualisations within feminist scholarship; and, the psychoanalytic concepts of Fetishism and Voyeurism as deployed to approach the visual.

These theoretical concepts are pivotal in helping this study frame its focus on the visual culture of the African popular cultural text: the Afrobeats music video. Psychoanalytic theory is valuable in addressing the power of the visual on the consumers of visual culture, and the impact of representation on individuals (Nixon 2013: 314). Of particular interest to this study, is how visuality (forms of making visible) encourage specific ways of looking that foster the construction of "particular spectating positions that are differently sexualised and empowered" (Rose 2001: 100).

Psychoanalysis – a theoretical approach within the field of psychology – carries various theories dealing most significantly with human subjectivity, sexuality and the unconscious (Rose 2000). Key proponents of the various conceptualisations underpinning this theory are Sigmund Freud (1856-1939) as well as Jacques Lacan (1901-1981) who both inspired later theorists and writers who went on to revise and rework these postulations into large and diverse bodies of works (Rose 2001: 100). At the core, psychoanalytic theory is concerned with how (sexualised) human subjectivities and personalities are formed through a consistent tension-ridden interaction between the individual's internal biological drives (the unconscious) and external social expectations born into (McLeod 2019).

The theory develops an argument for the psychological development of sexual difference in humans and the impactful role of the unconscious mind in this process (Rose 2001). The unconscious – filled with many repressed and suppressed urges, desires, and instincts – is in constant conflict with the sub-conscious and conscious mind of the individual because said urges, instincts and desires are often subjected to the disciplining of strict cultural values and rules (Rose 2001: 103). Personality and, in extension, sexuality and sexual difference, are said

to either healthily or unhealthily develop as a result of this continuous negotiation between biological drives (nature) and cultural expectations (nurture).

While admittedly much more complex than outlined above, psychoanalytic theory centralises visual stimuli as critical in this process of the development of human subjectivities and sexual difference. It is as a result of this postulation that psychoanalytic theory's founding proponents emphasised that the visual plays a defining role in the psychosexual development of human subjectivities (Nixon 2013; Rose 2001). The theoretical proposition supporting this argument is conceptualised as Scopophilia.

Scopophilia, as Freud postulated, refers to the pleasure derived from looking/seeing which is argued to be one of the key drives with which all children (seeing children, to be specific) are born (Rose 2001). This postulation, further developed by Lacan, suggests that "certain moments of seeing, and particular visualities, are central to how subjectivities and sexualities are formed" (Rose 2001: 100). For this reason – which this study also aligns with – it is noted that the work of Jacques Lacan as inspired by Sigmund Freud, has become prominent in some approaches to visual culture.

For this current study, an important consideration is that visual cultures can encourage particular subjectivised spectators in relation to the specific 'ways of seeing' that are anchored by the representational systems in these visual cultures. Focussing particularly on the increasingly-transnsationalised visual cultures and multimodal discourses of Afrobeats music through sites of visualisation such as YouTube, this study is able to interrogate these multimodal discourses in two ways. Firstly, the ways in which sexual difference and sexuality are visually articulated and, on the other hand, how such visual representations of sexuality and sexual difference are interpreted and commented on by spectators.

Essentially, this study is interested in closely analysing the "three kinds of look(ing)" that visual cultures may promote: the look stemming from the camera to the event/scene; the look stemming from the spectator to the 'action' on screen; as well as the look existing between the characters portrayed through the action in, for the purpose of this study, the music videos (Nixon 2013: 314). Explorations of these three forms of looking are pivotal in addressing this thesis's proposed aims and research questions.

Given its notable concern with the visual, the theoretical concepts underpinning a substantial part of this study, as highlighted earlier, are the psychoanalytic concepts of 'scopophilia', the concept of the 'gaze'; as well as the conceptual propositions around fetishism and voyeurism

in the context of the visual, particularly approached via the three 'ways of looking' highlighted above. To summarise, scopophilia is the term used to refer to the moments during which human subjectivities derive (sexual) pleasure from engaging in the act of looking at/gazing on bodies/objects other than their own (Rose 2001; Manlove 2007; Hall 2013). Emerging from seminal bodies of work by Freud and Lacan, the psychoanalytic concept of scopophilia has found its way into bodies of works beyond the field of psychology.

One particular field in which the notion of scopophilia has had tremendous influence is the field of media and cultural studies particularly film studies. It was Laura Mulvey who initially borrowed from the works of psychoanalytic theorist, Sigmund Freud, in a 1975 essay on narrative cinema and Hollywood. Mulvey (1975; 1989) found value in deploying the notion of scopophilia as argued by Freud as well as Lacan, but slightly stretched the concept to develop an argument for 'pleasure in looking' being particularly gendered (Manlove 2007). For Mulvey, basically, narrative cinema and its representational tropes engage in the perpetuation of 'ways of looking' which encourage an active/dominant male gaze in relation to a passive/subdued female body (Rose 2001; Manlove 2007; Hall 2013; Nixon 2013).

Mulvey deployed scopophilia as the pleasure that comes with looking at other people's bodies as objects of erotic desire while themselves (the 'lookers') not being seen by the objectified individuals or by fellow 'lookers' in the cinema due to the cinema's viewing conditions (1975). This, according to Mulvey, encourages a particularly active/powerful gaze which she associates mainly with males. Thus, she suggests that narrative cinema facilitates an active gaze on the part of the viewer. This is a gaze that Mulvey (1975; 1989) argues is carried by (heterosexual) men in a patriarchal social order that condones the voyeuristic objectification of female bodies for the (erotic) pleasure and satisfaction of men's sexual drives (Hall 2013; Rose 2001; Storey 2018).

The Gaze – or acts of looking – are, thus, theorised as powerful and value-laden. As such, the notion of 'the Gaze' is itself weaved into the theoretical and conceptual framework of this current study. Gazing or looking is, in psychoanalytic terms, a key aspect involved in the creation of particular subjectivities and their sexual and gender identity formations. This gaze, to follow Mulvey (1975; 1989), takes on power-related manifestations through fetishism and voyeurism. Fetishism, from a psychoanalytic perspective in the context of representation, essentially refers to a process whereby a viewing subject displaces their (sexual) energy, 'urges', and desires on to another object outside said viewing subject (Hall 2013:256). This is done to consciously or subconsciously confront laden (often suppressed) fantasies that the

viewing subject may be 'faced with' on a psychological level. Given desire-driven fantasy's intangible nature, an individual physicalises their desires, curiousity, urges, by using another physical object to represent those desires, curiosities and urges (Hall 2013: 256).

The 'object' that eventually becomes the replacement of the looker's unseen, intangible desires and fantasies, is gazed upon as a reassuring, non-threatening, passive object of display, strategically positioned as a spectacle "in an intimate relation to the spectator" (Rose 2001:111). In the context of film, as an example, creators deploy certain filmic techniques to encourage a fetishistic gaze. These include, among others, the use of camera angles: framing through close-up shots, medium-shots, wide-shots and deliberately-timed shots that often exclude everything from the viewer's gaze except the body, or parts of the body (buttocks, bosom, thigs, face etc) of the female characters. The use of camera movements and lighting techniques are also often relied upon in the perpetuation of a fetishised scopophilic gaze (Rose 2001).

Voyeurism, as simplified by Rose (2001; drawing from Mulvey 1989), refers to a way of actively looking at a distanced object that is objectified by the looker, at a distance ensuring that the viewed object is not aware of this gaze. This gaze possesses a certain control that may, at times, even be sadistic in its motif (Rose 2001). In film, this is a look often exclusively given to (heterosexual) men, whether as characters in the film or as audience member viewing the film (Rose 2001:110). Laura Mulvey's early postulations (1975; 1989) argued that voyeurism is produced by the visio-spatial organisation of a film, relying on particular tools of compositional interpretation (Rose 2001:110). Such tools of compositional interpretation include, and are not limited to, the placing of (physical) distance between the male and female protagonists of a movie/film/music video; as well as placing (physical) distance between the female protagonist of a movie/film/music video and the audience (Rose 2001: 110). As unpacked in chapter two of this thesis, Mulvey's ground-breaking contributions have, over time, been increasingly critiqued by scholars of gender who have variously shown what they partly argue to be an essentialist, heteronormative sensibility underpinning this work. Remaining aware of these critiques, this thesis still finds value in integrating Mulvey's considerations to advance contemporary arguments about the implications of particular 'ways of seeing' performances of gender and sexuality on broader gendered power relations. 'Ways of seeing', for this thesis, are also a crucial theoretical consideration.

3.5. Critical Visual Methodology: 'Ways of seeing' theorised

Cultural studies scholars have, over the past few decades, addressed the issue of the role of culture in meaning-making pursuits and paid close attention to the centrality of the visual in rendering the world in visual terms to people. These scholars "have argued that the visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary […] societies. It is now often suggested that much of social life is conveyed by visual images" (Rose 2001: 6). These forms of visualisation, however, are not to be taken for granted (Rose 2001). Donna Haraway (1991), for example, has argued that modern and postmodern forms of visualisation of the world are not innocent. For Haraway (1991), there are social power relations articulated through everyday pursuits of visualising the world. She argues, Rose (2001: 9) notes, that:

> […] what this visuality does is to produce specific visions of social difference – of hierarchies of class, `race', gender, sexuality, and so on – while itself claiming not to be part of that hierarchy and thus to be universal.

A noteworthy motivation behind Haraway's analytical pursuits has been to closely interrogate how certain institutions mobilise particular forms of visuality used to see, as well as to inevitably order the world (Rose 2001: 9). The issue with these dominant, oft unchallenged visualities, it is argued, is that they deny the value/validity of other ways of visualising social difference. But critical visual studies scholars, including Haraway, insist that there are indeed other 'ways of seeing' the world. Ways that may challenge hegemonic visualities – entrenched by "the oppressions and tyrannies of capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy and so on" (Rose 2001: 9). Such alternative 'ways of seeing' would ideally visualise the world and social difference in non-hierarchical ways.

Accepting, then, that there are different ways of seeing the world, we acknowledge that particular forms of representation (as produced within particular regimes of visible making) need to be examined and understood mainly because they are bound, in very intimate ways, to social power relations (Rose 2001). Social power relations are not to be underestimated as they are largely responsible for the continuous oppression, misrepresentation, and subordination of specific groups of people by other dominant groups in society.

This study, thus, aligns with such scholarly considerations and particularly frames part of its theoretical orientation in alignment with such lines of argumentation. To borrow from Haraway (1991), this study advocates for the necessity "of understanding what social relations produce, and are produced by, what forms of visuality" (Rose 2001: 9). This is also why it is particularly important to this thesis to explore the discursive expressions brought on by the specific ways

of seeing perpetuated within the multimodal discourses of the Afrobeats musical genre. This is to be achieved through approaching YouTube as a site of visual expression and ring-fencing the comments section on the platform as a site of social relations between social subjectivities (or cultural citizens) collectively interpellated to engage the 'ways of seeing' the world as promoted by the visual culture emphasised in the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this thesis. It may be argued that, at the core, the proposed theoretical approaches are variously Eurocentric in their theorisations, this study finds value in the arguments advanced by these theoretical approaches and, thus, wishes to apply them, very critically, to a global south context in a manner that centralises African cultural productions as themselves transnationalised in a globalised world.

3.6. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided an outline of the main theoretical framework underpinning this study. There are five broad conceptual contributions underscoring said theoretical framework. Firstly, this study is largely situated within the theoretical pillars of the notion of representation, with a specific focus on representation as a reflective, intentional and constructionist communicative pursuit (Hall 1997; 2013). Secondly, the study relies on the theoretical propositions underpinning the social constructionism ontological approach, which argues that jointly-constructed understandings of the world are underpinned by shared human assumptions about reality (Edley 2001; Andrews 2012). Essentially, scholars deploying a social constructionist approach interrogate what is defined by humans and society to be reality.

The theory of gender performativity as advanced by Judith Butler, forms the third pillar upon which this study develops. This theory helps to problematise gender identity so as to demonstrate in what ways notions of 'womanhood' and 'manhood' are performed along normative behavioural cues. Furthermore, this study also relies on psychoanalytic theory particularly in its feminist iterations, with a specific reliance on the following concepts stemming from this theoretical body of work: scopophilia (as pleasure in looking), the Gaze in its gendered conceptualisations, as well as the psychoanalytic propositions of fetishism and voyeurism as deployed to approach regimes of visuality. Lastly, this study is developed upon the analytical postulations made by scholars deploying critical visual analysis. In this regard, the theorisation of 'ways of seeing' as constructed by, in, and through visual material, is of importance to this study. Chapter four follows, with a specific focus on this study's methodological orientation.

4. SCRUTINISING AFROBEATS MUSIC VIDEOS: METHODOLOGY

This chapter reports on the methodological considerations that guided the construction and analysis of the corpus of data collected for this study. To tackle all aspects of the project's aims, a carefully planned data-collection and analysis procedure was followed. The data collection process took on a two-pronged procedure: collection of key data in the form of 25 Afrobeats music videos on YouTube, as well as the collection of a second data corpus in the form of viewer comments from the music videos collected as key data. An additional step included the downloading of song lyrics for all the collected music videos.

The study relied on a two-fold data-analysis approach to aid in responding to the research questions posed in chapter one. Firstly, an important pursuit was to grapple with the two data corpuses by performing a quantitative content analysis of the music videos, as well as an inductive qualitative content analysis of the YouTube comments to expound the dominant representational patterns and thematic content categories prioritised within these data sets, particularly as they related to performances of gender, sexuality and Africanness. The findings from these content analyses are critically engaged in chapter five. Secondly, guided by these findings as evidentiary points of departure, the thesis engages a multimodal critical discourse analysis of both data sets to develop and present two analytical chapters – chapters six and seven – engaging the gendered representations prioritised in the constructed corpus of data.

4.1. Collection of first data set: 25 Afrobeats music videos and song lyrics

Phase one of the data collection process involved the construction of a corpus of Afrobeats music videos, downloaded from the YouTube platform. YouTube, as a social media platform, continues to be the focus of cross-disciplinary scholarly studies into understanding the platform as a site for brand and marketing communication (e.g, Waters and Jones 2011; Xiao, Wang, and Chan-Olmsted 2018; Febriyantoro 2020; Duffett 2020), health communication and awareness (e.g, Yoo and Kim 2012; Briones, Nan, Madden, and Waks 2012; Allgaier 2020), as well as participatory, cultural and creative expression (e.g, Arthurs, Drakopoulou, and Gadini 2018; Burgess and Green 2018), among other functions. This current thesis joins the growing body of scholarly output that draw their data sets from the platform of YouTube. Reportedly founded in February 2005, YouTube "continues to rapidly expand" and has become one of the most viewed websites in the world (Arthurs et.al 2018: 3). The platform is the world's largest online video digital platform, attracting "more than 2 billion users, and over a

billion hours of [YouTube] videos are viewed every day, particularly among young consumers" (Duffett 2020: 1). Afrobeats music videos that are uploaded to YouTube enjoy a notable portion of the more than one billion hours of daily views, given the hundreds of millions of views these music videos attract (see the 25 video titles listed Table 1). As such, Afrobeats musicians are afforded an opportunity to widely disseminate the messages entrenched in their musical lyrics and visual discourses.

To gain a helpful grasp of the multimodal discourses characterising the constructed corpus of Afrobeats music videos, this phase of data collection was pivotal. Its importance rested in how it aided this study to carve an understanding of this musical genre so as to make inferences about the visual tropes variously prioritised in music videos from this genre. In so doing, this study was able to tackle its primary aim of exploring the representational tropes pertaining to gender, sexuality and constructions of Africanness, as prioritised in the analysed texts.

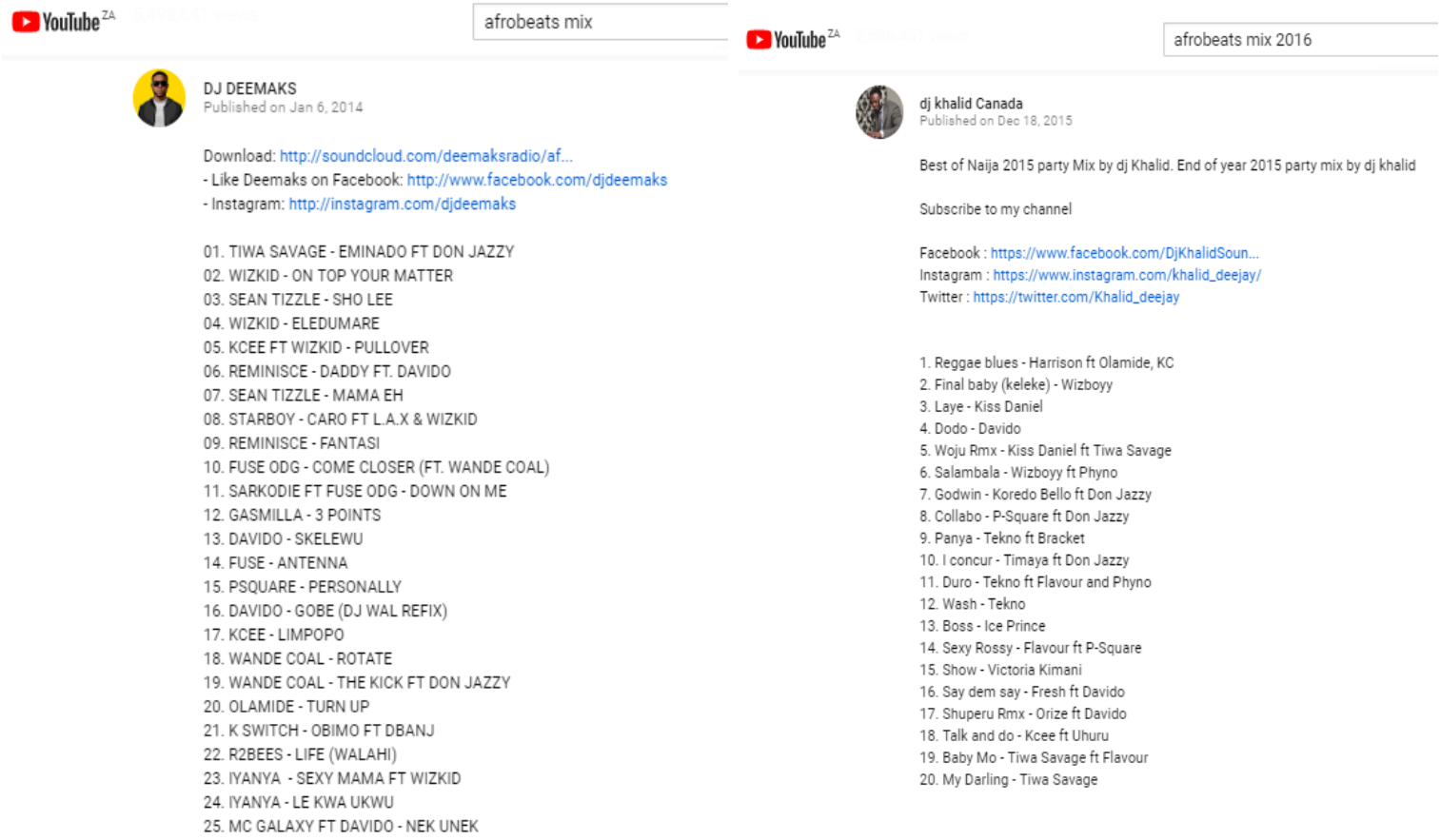
Music videos have been studied across many interdisciplinary studies exploring the role and impact of the music video text – and its sociocultural and ideological contents – on young people's social and gender identity constructions, among other things. For many of these studies, the content analysis method – both in its quant- and qualitative iterations – is a key approach (e.g, Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis 1993; Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Banning 2007; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Zhang, Dixon, and Conrad 2009; Zhang, Dixon, and Conrad 2010; Wallis 2011). Music video analyses have carried out varying objectives. For instance, to explore the "influence of sexual music videos on adolescents' misogynistic beliefs" (Van Oosten, Peter, and Valkenburg 2015: 986), the "contributions of music video exposure to Black adolescents' gender and sexual schemas" (Ward, Hansbrough, and Walker 2005: 143), as well as the "effects of gender and music video imagery on sexual attitudes" (Kalof 1999: 378). For this study, it is the multimodally expressed messages concerning gender performance, expressions of sexuality, and constructions of Africanness as encapsulated in the Afrobeats music video text, that are to be placed under the spotlight. Below, I render a detailed discussion of how phase one of the data collection process was carefully completed to access the music videos that form the study's key empirical objects of focus.

4.1.1. Downloading and archiving the music videos

On Sunday, 18 November 2018, between 18h30 and 19h30 CAT (Central African Time), I carried out the first phase of data-collection during which I downloaded and archived a sample of 25 highly-viewed Afrobeats music videos on YouTube. Earlier on that same Sunday evening, I searched for Afrobeats playlists/mixes compiled and disseminated on YouTube by

club DJs, music producers, and music fans. My search for these playlists offered hundreds of Afrobeats song titles and artists. From these playlist compilations, I spent several hours searching for each of the songs (with available music videos) on YouTube and compared their viewership figures to arrive at the desired total of 25. This is a total figure I deemed large enough to carry out a multimodal critical discourse analysis on, as it accounted for a total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysable visual data. Below (Figure 1) are images showing two examples of said YouTube playlists/mixes of Afrobeats music.

Figure 1: Screenshots from YouTube showing examples of Afrobeats playlists on this platform



The 25 music videos were downloaded using an online program called OVC v3.0. This is a freely accessible online video converting software that allows users to download YouTube videos and store them in .mp4 format on a personal computer or any external storage device. What was imperative during this process, was that the selected music videos met two basic requirements: (i) have an *actual* music video created by the singer as opposed to an 'audio video' usually created by someone else using the song's audio file behind a rotating loop of still images not related to the song, and (ii) the video had to be open to viewer commentary by having the comments section accessible to viewers, instead of restricting viewer comments by disabling the comments section of the video.

I also only considered Afrobeats music videos from songs produced as of the beginning of the year 2012 up until the time of actual collection of these texts (that is, 2012-2018). My choice of time frame was motivated by one particular event that, as Hancox (2012) highlights, ensured a kind of international 'certification' of the Afrobeats genre into the mainstream U.K music scene beyond the diaspora; an occurrence this study considers as one of the earlier signs of broader transnationalisation of this music. This 'event' is the playing of Nigerian Afrobeats artist, D'Banj's, 'Oliver Twist' song by a DJ at a 2011 New Year's Eve party held at the Thames (London) to usher in the 2012 Olympics year. Some music journalists and followers of Afrobeats describe this 'moment' as symbolic of the successful penetration of this genre into the global mainstream music scene (Hancox 2012).

Once the 25 music videos were successfully downloaded from YouTube and stored on an external hard drive, copies of these were saved in a back-up USB flash drive to avoid unforeseen circumstances that might result in the loss of the contents on the external hard drive. Below is a list of the 25 most-viewed Afrobeats music videos (produced between 2012 and 2018) as at 18 November 2018, between 18h30 and 19h30 Central African Time (CAT). Column three of this table is key in reiterating the sheer popularity of this musical genre. These Afrobeats music videos amass significant viewership figures, evidently supporting a supposition that the genre is accessed and consumed by millions of Internet-connected people globally.

Table 1: List of 25 highest-viewed Afrobeats music videos (as at 18/11/2018 between 18:30 & 19:30 CAT)

Artist(s) and gender	**Song title and video storyline synopsis**	**Viewership at time of download (*rounded up to the nearest million*)**	**Brief biographical description of artist**
Yemi Alade (female)	**'Johnny'** This music video revolves around an unfaithful man, named Johnny, who is in romantic relationships with multiple women from the same village. Johnny is eventually caught out and publicly taught a lesson by all the women he is involved with.	97 million views	Yemi Eberechi Alade, popularly known as Yemi Alade, is a Nigerian singer, songwriter, actress and activist born in Abia State (in the South-eastern region of Nigeria). Her 2013 acclaimed single, "Johnny", significantly inspired her rise to her current transnational fame. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Johnny' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C_XkTKoDI18**
Davido (male)	**'Fall'** The music video revolves around a man who is in a romantic relationship with a woman who seemingly is always	95 million views	David Adedeji Adeleke, better known as Davido, is an American-born Nigerian singer, songwriter and record producer. It was Davido's second single, "Dami Duro", from his debut studio album, that earned him widespread international popularity.

	complaining/shouting at him. He eventually gets fed-up with her behaviour and starts actively fantasising about being in a romantic relationship with another woman.		**Any screenshot taken from the 'Fall' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Iyuym-Gci0
PSquare (male)	**'Personally'** The song, based on the lyrics, is about two men expressing how they'd like to personally, sexually, romantically 'deal' with their female love interests. The narrative progression of the music video revolves around the two protagonist men being surrounded by multiple women 'sexily' dancing for the men against a studio backdrop. The video also features several group choreography scenes.	86 million views	Prior to their split over alleged disagreements, P-Square was an Afrobeats music duo made up of identical twins, Paul and Peter Okoye. The twins, who were born and bred in Anambra State, Nigeria; continue to enjoy widespread popularity as solo artists. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Personally' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ttdU19Kwce8
Tekno (male)	**'Pana'** The music video storyline is crafted around a man and woman in a romantic relationship. The two figures feature throughout the music video in various scenes that suggest sexual relations have, are, and will take place between the two. The man consistently serenades the woman with affirming lyrics about his love for her.	84 million views	Augustine Miles Kelechi, popularly known as Tekno, is an Afrobeats musician who hails from Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Tekno is widely known for several hit singles such as 'Pana', 'Duro' and 'Diana' which were featured on award-winning albums released by the musician. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Pana' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8YhAFBOSk1U
Korede Bello (male)	**'Do like that'** This music video's storyline depicts a young man in a night club, actively chasing after/romantically pursuing a young woman who appears to be playing hard to get before eventually 'giving in' to the man's advances and allowing him physical/intimate access to her in scenes wherein they appear to dance very intimately.	75 million views	Korede Bello is a Nigerian singer and songwriter born in Lagos State. He is signed under Mavin Records and is widely known for his hit single "Godwin", a semi-gospel and pop song that topped several music charts across Nigeria. Bello has released several Afrobeats songs since his rise to popularity. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Do Like That' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJBi780qFas

Davido (male)	**'If'** In this music video, a man who is in a romantic relationship with a woman, seemingly arrives late for their date in a restaurant and this angers the woman, who then proceeds to storm out of the restaurant. The rest of the narrative progression involves the man having to convince the woman to forgive him. A goal he eventually achieves.	71 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 2. **Any screenshot taken from the 'If' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=helEv0kGHd4**
Wizkid ft Drake (males)	**'Come Closer'** This music video takes place entirely in a studio setting. The central character, played by Wizkid, sings about a woman whom he pleads with to 'come closer'. In most of the depicted scenes, Wizkid is sharing the screen with a woman who dances with/for him in sexually suggestive ways.	66 million views	Ayodeji Ibrahim Balogun, popularly known as Wizkid, is a Nigerian singer and songwriter from Surulere in Lagos State. He began recording music at the age of 11, but shot to fame after releasing "Holla at Your Body", the lead single from his debut studio album, *Superstar*. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Come Closer' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vqW18C4plZ8**
PSquare ft Don Jazzy (males)	**'Collabo'** The music video portrays three men who seemingly work for the same company and all fall in love with the company's female boss. Throughout the video, the men engage in various, at times humiliating, behaviours to catch this woman's attention. All three men variously fantasise about this woman until she eventually tricks them all into doing her work for her.	64 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Collabo' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tUvF7yj531A**
PSquare (males)	**'Shekini'** This music video is predominantly just based on depictions of group choreographies against the backdrop of celebratory communal interactions among young men and women.	62 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Shekini' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCcuzqRRTHQ**

Sarkodie (male) ft Castro (male)	**'Adonai'** This music video centres two men, depicted by the two musicians to which the song is credited. The men, who sing about gratitude to God for the blessings in their lives, express this gratitude in various scenes wherein they show off their material possessions, help the unfortunate people they come across on the street, and joining members of a church congregation to join in their expression of gratitude towards God.	59 million views	Michael Owusu Addo, famously known as Sarkodie, is a Ghanaian rapper and entrepreneur from Tema in Ghana. He is known for his distinct rap flavour that creatively mixes Twi and Pidgin English lyrics. Sarkodie has earned numerous accolades for his contribution to the Ghanaian music scene, and continues to flourish internationally. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Adonai' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ipZvlG-wwWk**
Maleek Berry (male)	**'Kontrol'** Maleek Berry, to which the song is credited, is depicted in various scenes wherein he is surrounded by several women in skimpy clothing who are dancing in sexually suggestive ways for his enjoyment. He is the only male body in the space throughout the entire music video, shot entirely in a studio setting.	58 million views	British-Nigerian record producer and recording artist, Maleek Shoyebi (stage name, Maleek Berry), has been active in the music scene since 2007. He shot to greater prominence in 2012 and started working with other prominent Afrobeats musicians such as Wizkid and Davido. He has, to date, produced and released several songs for himself and fellow Afrobeats musicians. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Kontrol' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Si0ZHJdlu9M**
PSquare (males)	**'Bank alert'** In this music video, a young Nigerian man – depicted by one of the members of the PSquare ensemble – convinces his girlfriend to wait for him as he pursues opportunities for a better life overseas. He eventually returns to Nigeria, visibly wealthy, and asks for this woman's hand in marriage.	57 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Bank Alert' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** **https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZWSYCp-46h8**
Davido (male)	**'FIA'** In this music video, a visibly distraught woman in a wedding gown is depicted as though stranded in the middle of nowhere and crying over what appears to be the loss	55 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 2.

	of someone – seemingly her husband. Scenes of this woman are interchanged with scenes of people dancing a semi-dark room with several TV screens.		**Any screenshot taken from the 'FIA' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ORvJcpe2Oc
Tekno (male)	**'Duro'** This music video depicts a young couple in love. The pair are portrayed throughout the music video as happily living together, in constant romantic embrace, and sharing in outdoor adventures among other things.	53 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 4. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Duro' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TlJ33-6tPTE
Davido (male)	**'Aye'** This music video tells the tale of a lowly farm labourer (portrayed by Davido) who falls in love with a well-off princess who, at the time of noticing this farm labourer, is already romantically involved with a wealthy prince. The woman eventually gives in to the farm labourer's romantic advances and they sustain a secret romantic relationship.	51 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 2. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Aye' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uZ-_HIoEBE8
D'Banj (male)	**'Oliver Twist'** This music video is largely based on various scenes of group choreography by women in what generally appears to be a studio setting. The rest of the scenes depict D'Banj posing with world-famous American musicians such as Kanye West.	46 million views	Oladapo Daniel Oyebanjo, popularly known by his stage name, D'banj, is a Nigerian musician, singer-songwriter, rapper, entrepreneur and television personality hailing from Ogun State. His 2012 Afrobeats hit song, "Oliver Twist", is still widely credited as having played a key role in transnationalising the Afrobeats sound beyond the African continent and global diaspora. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Oliver Twist' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQP-etYU1ps
Mr Eazi (male)	**'Leg Over'** This music video significantly centres a group of scantily clad young women dancing in what appears to be a dance studio setting. This dancing is mostly witnessed by an audience consisting of one man: Mr Eazi, the man to which the	42 million views	Real name, Oluwatosin Ajibade, Mr Eazi is a Nigerian singer, songwriter, and entrepreneur from Port Harcourt. Mr Eazi spent a significant part of his teenage and adult life in Kumasi, Ghana. He is credited as a pioneer of Banku music (a sound he describes as a mixture of Ghanaian highlife and Nigerian chord progressions and patterns). He has also written and produced several Afrobeats songs.

	song is credited. Mr Eazi is voyeuristically treated to private dancing from especially one skimpily dressed woman.		**Any screenshot taken from the 'Leg Over' *(Vibez Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v15sS1sL_S4
Bracket (males)	**'Mama Africa'** The central theme running across this music video's narrative progression is that of a party experience against the backdrop of a lavish property with several people depicted in scenes wherein they are consuming champagne and communally dancing.	38 million views	Bracket is a famous Nigerian duo of singers, songwriters, and models from Enugu State in the south eastern part of Nigeria. Real names, Obumneme Smash Ali and Nwachukwu Vast Ozioko, the pair are widely known for their hit Afrobeats song, "Mama Africa". **Any screenshot taken from the 'Mama Africa' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=paDINb3Rksw
P.Square (males)	**'Alingo'** This song mainly speaks about women who seem to have such a strong emotional effect on the two men making up the PSquare ensemble, to an extent where said women make these men resort to dancing 'alingo' because of these women. The music video thus largely portrays a group of men engaging in group choreography.	37 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Alingo' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_vg2AG5sEdw
Flavour ft PSquare (males)	**'Sexy Rosey'** This music video centres three men (Flavour and the two men that make up PSquare) who are variously depicted as surrounded by multiple women across different settings, including the beachfront, a house party setting, a street bash setting, among others. These women are dancing with, and for, the attention of three men.	36 million views	Chinedu Okoli, best known by his stage name, Flavour N'abania or simply Flavour, is a Nigerian singer, songwriter and multi-instrumentalist from Enugu State. He is best known for his hit Afrobeats song, "Nwa Baby" which played a key role in his transnational popularity. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Sexy Rosey' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-6ZRNag3Zd0
PSquare (males)	**'Taste the money'** The central storyline of this music video revolves around the two men from the PSquare ensemble. The men are depicted as notably wealthy through portrayals of them as owners of big, luxury	36 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3.

	properties and cars. Through various party scenes, the men are also depicted as having unrestricted access to multiple women who 'fill up' their lavish properties during parties.		**Any screenshot taken from the 'Taste The Money' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LFBZkWA4dTE
PSquare ft Akon (males)	**'Chop my money'** The storyline for this music video largely revolves around several men's pursuits of the same woman. In pursuit of this woman, the four men are portrayed as engaging in explicit forms of wealth expending on this woman until they eventually discover that this woman has been 'playing' them all just to enjoy the material commodities they constantly showered her with.	36 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 3. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Chop My Money' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=17vC8qZILJE
Patoranking ft Sarkodie (males)	**'No kissing Baby'** This music video's plot revolves around a young heterosexual couple in love. The male protagonist, played by Patoranking, and his romantic partner are quite evidently in what seems to be a loving relationship throughout the music video even though the woman constantly makes it clear that she doesn't want to be kissed or touched by her romantic partner.	35 million views	Patoranking, who was born Patrick Nnaemeka Okorie, in Ijegun-Egba, Alimosho, Lagos State, is a Nigerian reggae-dancehall and Afrobeats singer and songwriter. His 2014 hit song, "Girlie O", is credited as the single that put him in the limelight. He currently still produces and performs Afrobeats music as part of his repertoire. **Any screenshot taken from the 'No Kissing Baby' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8T-GeoXlEBg
Tekno (male)	**'Where'** The central storyline for this music video revolves around a young couple in love. They are variously depicted in scenes suggesting that they live happily together and spend a lot of time in each other's company, both in- and outdoors.	35 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 4. **Any screenshot taken from the 'Where' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ooFAF18L5wQ
Flavour (male)	**'Ada Ada'**	34 million views	Artist bio provided under column 4, list entry number 20.

	The music video for this song centres around a young Nigerian couple who are preparing to get married. When the wedding day eventually arrives, the couple are depicted in various scenes mediating a wedding ceremony attended by several people joining the happy couple on their special day.		**Any screenshot taken from the 'Ada Ada' *(Official Music Video)* were sourced from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2lUFM8yTtUc**

4.1.2. Downloading and archiving the song lyrics

I also downloaded the song lyrics for each of the 25 music videos collected for this study. A Google search of the song lyrics to these music videos, was relied on. By searching for each song title's lyrics on Google, I landed on several websites offering full lyrics to these songs. These were archived as Microsoft Word documents in a separate folder on my external hard drive. While the lyrics to all the songs were mostly in English and West African Pidgin English, 'Adonai' by Sarkodie (2014) largely contains lyrics in Ghana's Twi language. For this song, an English translation of the lyrics was sought and archived. I was also not oblivious to the fact that the lyrics collected from the various websites may potentially not be 100% correctly expressed as per the musicians' originally composed lyrics. This is because the websites from which these lyrics were sought, may not directly have received the lyrical contents from the artists/producers of the songs. However, a level of diligence was performed in that I compared the song lyrics for the same song across multiple websites to ensure that I collected the most accurate lyrical content. After this phase was done, I moved on to collect the second data set for this thesis.

4.2. Collection of second data set: 2,500 viewer comments from the downloaded music videos

As a second data collection phase, and in line with this study's secondary aim to explore the discursive tropes stemming from viewer reaction-driven comments on the most viewed Afrobeats music videos, I constructed of a corpus of 2,500 YouTube comments. These comments were drawn specifically from the 25 music videos collected during data collection phase one. That is, the top 100 comments for each music video. The YouTube platform allows users various ways to actively engage the (music) videos they stream. Users can, for instance, "rat[e] the video or a comment as good or bad, [or] post[…] a video response, or […] post[…]

a comment about the video to the video page" (Thelwall, Sud, and Vis 2011: 617). These user comments are often value-laden as they capture these users' "reactions to important issues" (Thelwall et. al 2011: 616) or perceptions about the mediated content. As such, this data corpus of textual comments was helpful in aiding this study to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of some consumers of these Afrobeats videos in relation to the audio-visual simulacra therein. This data, thereby, contributes to this study's responses to one of the sub-questions put forward in this thesis, ensuring that all proposed research questions were tackled. Below, I render a detailed discussion of how this second phase was completed.

4.2.1. Downloading and archiving the YouTube comments

On that same evening of the 18th of November 2018, I used the list (Table 1) of the top 25 most viewed Afrobeats music videos to download the viewer comments using an online platform called 'YouTube Comments Scraper'. I downloaded and archived all the YouTube comments made on each of the 25 videos. The collection of this data happened almost concurrently with the collection of the 25 music videos as explicated above; although with the use of a different Internet software. YouTube Comments Scraper is a free online software that allows users to download an extensive CSV file displaying the usernames of 'commenters', time reference of comment, actual comments (verbatim), number of 'likes' and 'dislikes' given to each comment by other viewers, as well as all replies to a comment. In most cases, the music videos sampled for this study contained several thousands of viewer comments, which I had to organise into a more manageable corpus. To achieve this, I converted the CSV files with the downloaded comments into Excel sheets wherein I could rank all the downloaded comments based on the most-reacted on comments (i.e., most liked/disliked by other viewers/commenters).

To ensure that an extensive corpus of data was collected during this process, I considered a large corpus of the top 100 comments from each of the 25 music videos downloaded during this data collection process. This resulted in a corpus of two thousand five hundred (2,500) comments for analysis purposes. To help determine the top 100 comments on each music video in a less subjective way, I considered the number of likes (denoted by a 'thumbs up' symbol on YouTube) and dislikes (denoted by a 'thumbs down' symbol) that each comment received from other viewers. This was done with the assumption that comments about the contents of the video being watched receiving a significant number of likes, are popularly endorsed by, or resonate more with, fellow viewers who display their endorsement or 'agreement' with the comment by liking it (Thelwall et.al 2011). Of course, the opposite was also considered; comments receiving a significant number of dislikes presumably denoted high 'disagreement'

with the comment by fellow viewers. On the downloaded CSV file (converted into Excel) containing all comments, the column carrying the figure showing comment likes and dislikes was arranged in descending order so as to extract the top 100 most-reacted-on comments from each of the 25 videos downloaded for analysis.

The effort taken to source, view and engage with music videos by posting a comment or continuing a conversation on another person's original comment to encourage a thread, justifies an assumption that the comments on these music videos are mostly made by individuals with a general interest in, or curiosity about this music. It is the discursive themes emanating from these virtual 'conversations' that this study explored alongside the multimodal representational tropes embedded in these music videos. I should note that the corpus of YouTube comments, much like the song lyrics, comprised largely of 'standard' English and some Pidgin English. This allowed much easier engagement with the data on my part as researcher with strong grasp of English and functional grasp of Pidgin English. Although the two "types" of downloaded texts (music videos and textual viewer comments) were analysed as separate texts, these analyses were integrated given that these two types of texts are significantly interrelated in their constructions of topical, multimodal discourses of representation (Colliver and Coyle 2020; Thelwall 2011; Siersdorfer, Chelaru, Nejdl, and San Pedro 2010). With all data sets prepared and archived, I was able to subject the data to critical analyses as discussed below.

4.3. Analysis of visual data: Content analysis and multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) of the music videos and song lyrics

The first corpus of data was critically evaluated to glean insights regarding the dominant visual representational tropes emerging from these music videos with respect to gender, sexuality and Africanness. As stated earlier, this was a valuable pursuit towards tackling the study's primary aim of evaluating the portrayal of everyday gendered experiences of Africans in and around the African continent, particularly as expressed through music videos as sites of (gender) representation. To initially grapple with the music videos, a quantitative content analysis was carried out to examine the dominant representational patterns as they related to gender, sexuality, and articulations of Africanness. Guided by this study's aims and research questions, the content categories eventually developed as codes for the content analysis were deliberately premised on ideas of gender performance, sexuality expression, and articulations of Africanness as shall be evidenced in the discussion below.

4.3.1. Quantitative content analysis of the videos

This section explicates the procedure deployed to perform a quantitative content analysis of the study's corpus of 25 Afrobeats music videos, all ranging between 3 and 6 minutes in duration. The quantitative content analysis method is widely deployed by researchers interested in understanding and theorising trends and patterns in the content of media and communication texts and their messages (Riffe, Lacy, Fico, and Watson 2019). The method is defined as a "research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from data to their context" (Krippendorff 1989: 403). Content analyses are helpful to aid in the describing of communication content, to test hypotheses about the characteristics of messages, as well as to compare media content to the real world (Wimmer and Dominick 2011). Furthermore, should researchers be interested in assessing the sociocultural 'image' and positioning of certain societal groups over others in order to initiate an evidentiary point of departure into deeper analyses of media effects, the content analysis method is noted to be suitable (Wimmer and Dominick 2011). As such, this current study partly relies on this technique to advance its thesis.

With regard to screen time, this study's corpus of music videos accounted for a combined total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds (1 hour, 43 minutes and 30 seconds) of visual data that was subjected to analysis. Considering the length and format of the music videos: fast-moving visual frames per second, a frame-by-frame analysis was not feasible due to its implications on the time that the content analyst would need to spend on each music video. Therefore, to approach the data in a more manageable manner, each music video was analysed across intervals of 30 seconds at a time, during the coding process (Sommers-Flanagan et. al 1993; Wallis 2011).

This means that each 30-seconds segment was considered as an independent visual segment (or visual frame) wherein each content category was coded for only once. For instance, when coding for screen time devoted to women's or men's sexual objectification through camera positioning, the presence of this theme was only counted once for every 30-seconds segment throughout the music video; irrespective of the number of times it occurred during each individual 30-seconds segment it was observed in. I, in a sense, treated each 30-seconds segment as if it were a static visual frame to be coded only once for each of the content categories considered. This approach is inspired by a music video content analysis approach deployed by scholars such as Cara Wallis (2011) and Sommers-Flanagan, et al (1993: 748) who were – similar to this current study – interested in "quantify[ing] the occurrence of actions described in the designated [content] categories." Therefore, "rather than counting actual

occurrences, since each could be of very short or very long duration, categorical behaviors were coded [once] every 30 seconds" (Sommers-Flanagan, et. al 1993: 748).

For music videos with a tail-end segment of less than 15 seconds, the segment was not considered. However, if the video's final segment was between 15 and 30 seconds, the segment was considered and coded as if it was a full 30-seconds segment. Following this process, I ended up with a total of 207 visual segments (30-seconds intervals) across which to perform the coding process (n=207). While significantly relying on this approach, there were some content categories wherein the rating was done per overall music video. This was particularly the case for categories such as 'skin complexion' as pertaining to the music video's "leading" women characters. Because the "leading" women characters in the depicted storylines remained the same, coding was done only once for the entire music video as opposed to the segmented approach explained above. In those instances, the rating was done out of a total of 25 music video texts (n=25). The same rationale was applied to the four content categories of 'celebration and community', 'public forms of violent/aggressive gender-relational interactions', 'wealth and consumerism' as well as 'multimodal expressions of Africanness'. Coding was done only once for the presence of these themes across all the music videos.

The quantification of these action-based occurrences (or 'categorical behaviours') was done to arrive at descriptive statistics about the prevalence of said categorical behaviours within the analysed visual data, so as to trace dominant representational patterns/trends to aid this study's qualitative assessments towards advancing its contributions to knowledge. It should be emphasised that the resulting descriptive statistics about the categorical behaviours across the visual data speak to the spread of screen time devoted to said categorical behaviours. Crucial to note, at this point, is that the presence of a particular categorical behaviour in a single 30-seconds segment, was upweighted/generalised to be representative of the entire 30-seconds segment, irrespective of how long or short the action was in duration. In other words, when the coder identified the presence of 'women's sexual objectification through the camera's positioning' in a 30-seconds segment, this occurrence was read as accounting for 30 seconds of screen time involving 'women's sexual objectification through camera positioning'. Therefore, like many statistical analyses of voluminous data, this coding procedure is not an exact science, able to offer a precise, second-to-second count of the presence of each proposed thematic code. For the almost 104 minutes (i.e., 6 240 seconds) of visual data analysed in this study, a second-to-second coding procedure across all the thematic categories would have been a mammoth task, significantly delaying the study.

As stated earlier, informed by the study's aims and research questions, the development of content categories of categorical behaviours was deliberately focused on gendered portrayals in relation to sexuality and multimodal articulations of Africanness. There was, however, the inclusion of what can be viewed as general categories related to a more sociocultural contextual level: 'celebration and community', 'wealth and consumerism', and 'public forms of violent/aggressive gender-relational interactions'. The rationale behind these three categories was that gender relations do not take place in a vacuum. Women and men always interconnect against a sociocultural backdrop that shapes their everyday realities based on the activities they engage in as gendered social creatures (Butler 1990). More importantly, these everyday realities are always classed in particular ways. As a result, the content categories eventually decided on, are outlined in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Content categories used for data coding in relation to gender, sexuality and Africanness

	CONTENT CATEGORIES AND THEMES CODED ACROSS VIDEO SEGMENTS (n=207)	
	WOMEN	**MEN**
CONTENT CATGORIES	**Main artist(s) is a woman:** the gender of the main artist or artists to which the song and music video is credited**.**	**Main artist(s) is man:** the gender of the main artist or artists to which the song and music video is credited.
	Sexual objectification via camera angles: instances in which the camera explicitly renders body parts on display by focusing in on an isolated body part (or a cluster of body parts) of a featured woman instead of her body as a whole. Said body parts being the chest (cleavage), stomach, lips, buttocks, thighs, pelvis, genital area, etc. The body parts displayed are either fully exposed or very minimally covered with clothes.	**Sexual objectification via camera angles**: instances in which the camera renders body parts on display by focusing in on an isolated body part (or a cluster of body parts) of a featured man instead of his body as a whole. Said body parts being the chest, stomach, lips, buttocks, thighs, pelvis, genital area etc. The body parts displayed are either fully exposed or very minimally covered with clothes.
	Implicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression: instances in which sexual impulses and innuendo are portrayed. These include scenes wherein characters who are women suggest or seem to elicit sexual appeal, arousal, desire through eroticised behaviours (e.g, hip/pelvic thrusts; gyration of buttocks; long/slow-motioned or emphasised lip licking/biting. These may all be implicit but strongly suggestive of sex and sexuality.	**Implicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression**: instances in which sexual impulses and innuendo are portrayed. These include scenes wherein characters who are men suggest or seem to elicit sexual appeal, arousal, desire through eroticised behaviours (e.g, hip/pelvic thrusts; gyration of buttocks; long/slow-motioned or emphasised lip licking/biting. These may all be implicit but strongly suggestive of sex and sexuality.
	Explicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression: instances in which sexual actions/occurrences are portrayed. These include scenes wherein featured characters who are women explicitly engage in the stroking/grabbing of breasts, genitalia, buttocks, thighs and moving in ways suggestive of sexual intercourse (including physical grinding of bodies against	**Explicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression**: instances in which sexual actions/occurrences are portrayed. These include scenes wherein featured characters who are men explicitly engage in the stroking/grabbing of their genitalia, chest/nipples, buttocks, and moving in ways suggestive of sexual intercourse (including physical grinding of bodies against

	each other); actual kissing on screen, or being sexually alluring in explicit ways.	each other); actual kissing on screen, or being sexually alluring in explicit ways.
	Homoerotic expressions/acts indicative of same-sex desire: instances in which sexual action/occurrences are portrayed as specifically occurring between same-sexed bodies (two or more women, in this case). These include scenes depicting implicit and explicit actions of a sexualised nature: moving in ways suggestive of sexual intercourse (including physical grinding of bodies against each other); actual kissing on screen; visual cues of same-sex, non-heterosexual romantic intimacy.	**Homoerotic expressions/acts indicative of same-sex desire:** instances in which sexual action/occurrences are portrayed as specifically occurring between same-sexed bodies (two or more men, in this case). These include scenes depicting implicit and explicit actions of a sexualised nature: moving in ways suggestive of sexual intercourse (including physical grinding of bodies against each other); actual kissing on screen; visual cues of same-sex, non-heterosexual romantic intimacy.
	Women as bearers of the active desiring gaze: instances in which women featured in the music videos enact an active gaze upon men. These include scenes wherein women are portrayed as actively staring/fawning over men's bodies in ways suggestive of desire, curiosity, interest, or judgement. Thereby somewhat relegating men's bodies to status of objects to be looked at.	**Men as bearers of the active desiring gaze**: instances in which men featured in the videos enact an active gaze upon women. These include scenes wherein men are portrayed as actively staring/fawning over women's bodies in ways suggestive of desire, curiosity, interest, or judgement. Thereby somewhat relegating women's bodies to status of objects to be looked at.
	Women as instrumental in their role in the video's plot/narrative progression: instances wherein characters who are women are portrayed as more valuable than just their looks but for what they offer/contribute to the music video (i.e. portrayed as non-sexualised central protagonist in the video; fully dressed [unprovocative attire]; featured by the main artist as vocalist on the song; *is* the main artist herself; drives the action in the plot of the narrative by having the storyline revolve around her)	**Men as instrumental in their role in the video's plot/narrative progression**: instances wherein characters who are men are portrayed as more valuable than just their looks but for what they offer/contribute to the music video (i.e. portrayed as non-sexualised central protagonist in the video; fully dressed [unprovocative attire]; featured by the main artist as vocalist on the song; *is* the main artist himself; drives the action in the plot of the narrative by having the storyline revolve around him)
	Women as decorative/background subjects in their role in the video's plots/narrative progression: instances wherein women are portrayed as mere decorative, unimportant 'objects' only there to 'flank' the main artist(s) in the video (i.e. background dancers, models; dressed in provocative, revealing attire to merely 'show-off' their looks and enhance the sexual and/or aesthetic bravado of the main artist).	**Men as decorative/background subjects in their role in the video's plots/narrative progression**: instances wherein men are portrayed as mere decorative, unimportant 'objects' only there to 'flank' the main artist(s) in the video (i.e. background dancers, models; dressed in provocative, revealing attire to merely 'show-off' their looks and enhance the sexual and/or aesthetic bravado of the main artist
	Body type of featured women: the dominant body types of the featured women in the music video (either as leading or background characters) to elucidate whether they are predominantly: • lean, athletic, visibly curvy or • plus-sized, full-figured, large	**Body type of featured men**: the dominant body types of the featured men in the music video (either as leading or background characters) to elucidate whether they are predominantly: • lean, athletic, muscled or • plus-sized, full-figured, large
	Skin tone of 'leading' woman/main artist's love/romantic interest:	**Skin tone of 'leading' man/main artist's love/romantic interest:**

	elucidate whether they are predominantly: • light skinned • dark-skinned	elucidate whether they are predominantly: • light skinned • dark-skinned
	CONTENT CATEGORIES CODED BASED ON OVERALL MUSIC VIDEO (n=25)	
	Hairstyle of 'leading' woman/main male artist's love/romantic interest or the main artist herself (if female)** to elucidate whether they are predominantly: • wearing a weave/hair extensions/wig; relaxed/straightened hair; natural Caucasian hair (in instances where leading woman is Caucasian) or • are 'leading' women wearing natural (unstraightened) hair in the form of afros, cornrows, dreadlocks, short-styled (fade cut, brush cut, bald head etc)	
	Celebration and community:** the mediation of communal happiness, pleasure, cheerfulness, excitement and celebration through festive occasions (weddings; parties). These include scenes wherein characters are engaging in communal dancing (grouped choreography of more than 5 people), communal enjoyment of food and beverages, communal engagement in cultural activity etc.	
	Public forms of violent/aggressive gender-relational interactions:** the mediation of forms of violence or aggressive behaviour performed as public acts to instigate pain on a person/people in the depicted community.	
	Wealth and consumerism:** the portrayal of affluence through the mediation of material objects (luxurious cars, opulent properties, designer clothing and jewellery). These include scenes wherein the camera renders close-up, wide and lingering shots of said material objects (without any human bodies in the frame, in some instances). Additionally, the mediation of conspicuous consumption of luxurious products such as expensive champagne and extravagant cuisines.	
	Multimodal expressions of 'Africanness':** This content category is largely inspired by the work of Marleen De Witte (2014; De Witte & Meyer 2012) which helpfully outlines several widely deployed self-styling, aesthetic and choreographic markers that urban youth of African descent (often in the diaspora) have come to associate with Africanness within the framework of entertainment media. These include: • **Visual references of Africanness**: colourful/multicoloured kente and wax print fabric clothing and headwraps; multicoloured dashiki-style attire; Masai beadwork; Fulani gold earpieces; bare-chested males in loose fitting trousers with string beads diagonally across chest; large beaded neckpieces on women; raffia-like or feathered ankle, head and calf bands'; differing forms of '"African tribal make-up" of patterned white/black dots and stripes on the face" (De Witte 2014: 273) and upper-body. • **Mediation of "traditional African dance"** (De Witte 2014: 275): 'traditional'/neo-traditional dance choreographies widely associated with claims of 'premodern', culturally-significant African gendered articulations of dance-based body movement (eg, repeated feet stamping; striding/shaking of shoulder/thorax/torso; circular gliding of waist area; side-to-side movement of buttocks in slight crouch position) with a typical incorporation of djembe, bata and similar hand drumming forms. • **Linguistic expressions of Africanness:** use of African language(s) besides English or Pidgin English in lyrics by main and/or featured artists which linguistically situates the music in a particular Afrocentric collective imaginary.	

****These content categories were rated only once for the entire music video (n=25) and not on a 30-second interval basis (n=207).**

Due to cost and time constraints, the data coding procedure – to arrive at the descriptive statistics presented in this study – was performed solely by myself as author of this thesis to gain a bird's eye view of the dominant representational patterns characterised across the corpus of visual data in relation to gender, sexuality and Africanness. As such, inter-coder reliability could not be offered. In order to ensure a balanced level of reliability, I relied on a process of

repetition with regard to carrying out the quantitative coding sessions. Besides the very first practice round, I carried out four separate sessions of quantitative coding of the music videos – at different parts of the day – over a period of two days. The first day of coding involved a morning and an afternoon session of coding the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time. The separate sessions on day one yielded similar results in comparison. This was followed by another two sessions – during the following day – wherein the same 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual data were subjected to quantitative coding. By once again yielding comparatively similar results on day two, I could vouch that the repetition technique affirmed the overall reliability of the descriptive statistics stemming from this process.

4.3.2. Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) of the videos and song lyrics

Following the quantitative content analysis of the music videos, a critical multimodal discourse analysis was particularly useful in rendering much deeper, qualitative insights to assist the study in advancing its thesis with respect to the representations of gender, sexuality and Africanness in its corpus of Afrobeats music videos. There was a significant reliance on a multi-pronged conceptual framework anchored by scholarship on feminist psychoanalytic theory, representation, social constructivism, as well as gender performativity theory when approaching the texts through a critical multimodal discourse analytic prism. This analytical framework added to the richness of the study's findings, pertaining to the representation of African gendered lived experiences and ideals in Afrobeats music's multimodal discourses captured by the corpus of analysed music videos.

Multimodal critical discourse analysis is a growing methodological approach to analysing communication texts and their entrenched discourses (Van Leeuwen 2012; 2014). The methodology invokes a merging of the methods of critical discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen 2015) and multimodal discourse analysis (O'Halloran 2011). Critical multimodal discourse analysis can broadly be described as an analytical technique of analysis deployed to closely observe the combination of semiotic forms in texts (such as photographs, magazines, advertisements, etc.) and evaluate the manners in which discourse is disseminated, legitimised and naturalised to variously create specific meanings (Machin 2013; Van Leeuwen 2012; 2014). That is to say, this technique focuses its attention on forms of communication which rely on multiple modes to convey ideas. Critical multimodal discourse analyses are effective when applied in ways that rigorously dissect a text to look at the strategic use of colour (as an effective *and* affective tool), music and sound (as affective tools), iconography (within the visual representation), typography (font styles, sizes, colours, positioning in the visual text),

and the social actors being represented (considering their sex, gendered appearances, race, class, etc.), among other facets (Machin 2013; Van Leeuwen 2012; 2014; Machin and Mayr 2012).

This cross-disciplinary technique is more focused on depth. Meaning that the method calls for a deep, critical engagement with the empirical object of focus in a study. As such, it is helpful to keep the units of analysis manageably small, especially when the study is carried out within a limited time period (Machin and Mayr 2012). Given its focus on depth as opposed to breadth, a combination of this method with another one is arguably very useful, more especially should a study aim to evaluate factors such as patterns and trends with respect to a specific communication text stemming from a particular genre or context. In the case of this current study, representational patterns and trends in Afrobeats music videos (as they relate to gender, sexuality and Africanness) were pivotal in tackling the research questions of this project. As such, a content analysis (as explicated in section 4.3.1) was important to carry out so as to aid the deeper discourse analysis that was carried out on the corpus of visual data.

Media texts carry a notable sense of polysemy, and this renders them open to both critical debate and open-ended interpretation. Therefore, a critical multimodal discourse analysis of music videos provided an insightful approach to analyse the various possibilities of meaning by which media consumers are simultaneously addressed, constructed and, more often than not, persuaded to think in certain ways about what is being orally, visually, textually (multimodally) communicated to them. In this case, the gendered visual and lyrical expressions were of priority for this study. Throughout these analyses, this study remained consistent in situating its observations within the broader cultural contexts from which these texts emerge and are engaged with (Van Leeuwen 2015; Rose 2016).

Schroeder (2006: 2) notes that "by connecting images to the cultural context of consumption, researchers gain a more thorough – yet never complete – understanding of how images embody and express cultural values and contradictions." The multimodal critical discourse analysis of the corpus of music videos undertaken in this study, was carefully approached with an awareness of the sociocultural dynamics embedded within the meanings of these collected texts. This allowed for a further depth to the findings. It was important, as far as possible, to broadly ground interpretations of these visual materials in careful examinations of the social circumstances in which these videos are embedded (Rose 2016: xxi) by drawing on existing literature and theoretical insights about the influence of the sociocultural context on the contents of media texts. In analysing the song lyrics to the music videos collected for this study,

I subjected these lyrics – as written texts on a document – to the same critical discourse analysis that the music videos were approach with. The lyrics of the songs are obviously a key mode of expression closely tied to the visual modes of the song in the form of a video. Below, I unpack the analytical framework that the second corpus of data (YouTube viewer comments) was subjected to.

4.4. Analysis of textual data: Viewer comments from corpus of music videos

To analyse the second corpus of data, I continued to rely on a critical discourse analytic framework. However, to initially grapple with the thousands of YouTube comments, my approach to this data was largely shaped by what Gee (2014: 8-10) explains to be a 'descriptive' approach to discourse/content analysis. I was interested in qualitatively exploring the 'content' of the language used within the posted comments from viewers of these music videos. I interrogated the data by highlighting dominant thematic patterns regarding the viewer 'discussions' (comments) about their feelings, thoughts and emotions towards the visual imagery expressed to them during their varying moments of viewing. Given the sheer number of YouTube comments considered, an initial inductive content analysis (Stemler 2000) of all 2,500 YouTube comments was crucial to grapple with the dominant discursive themes emanating from this data set.

4.4.1. Qualitative content analysis of YouTube comments

This section discusses the procedures deployed to engage an inductive qualitative content analysis of the top 100 most-reacted-on YouTube comments drawn from each of the 25 highest viewed Afrobeats music videos collected for this study. As mentioned in an earlier section of this chapter, the top 100 comments were determined through a process of arranging the comments in a descending order based on the number of likes/dislikes attained, resulting in a corpus of 2,500 individual YouTube comments in total. Figure 2 is a visual indication of said arrangement of comments. The top three comments from one of the music videos – Davido's (2014) 'Aye' – are indicated below.

User	Comment/Text	Likes	HasReplies	NumberOf Replies
Adora Me	Whos proud to be an african? I'm from Angola 😊	2150	TRUE	
DMW HQ	HKN appreciates Google Africa and all our fans around the world.	1667	TRUE	169
BelleFille94	Proud to be African 🤍🤍🤍	1460	TRUE	17

Arranged based on number of likes received.

Figure 2: Visual illustration of top 3 most-liked YouTube comments on Davido's 'Aye' music video as at 18/11/2020

The content analysis was pursued through an inductive open coding approach during which I assessed and indexed the comments. I evaluated the 2,500 comments with the aim of thematically indexing each comment into a qualitative content category based on the latent and manifest message. My assessment of these comments was done with the goal of elucidating the overarching topical themes emerging from the comments under scrutiny. This approach is closely aligned to a qualitative content analysis technique to establishing content categories, known as emergent coding (Stemler 2000; 2015). Emergent coding is predominantly carried out after a preliminary examination of the data corpus has been done. This approach is ideal in allowing the researcher an opportunity to inductively determine the common, dominantly-occurring factors or themes emerging from the data set, in order to establish the categorisation of open-ended data (Stemler 2000; 2015). Due to said open-endedness of these YouTube comments, the categorisation of individual comments was flexible in that some of the comments (deemed intersectional) were deliberately considered under more than one category.

This means that some of the comments encompassed multiple sentences which, when individually considered, related to more than just one thematic category. Following three cycles of closely reading through the corpus of comments, I was able to note a number of content categories based on the most recurring thematic undertones with regard to the subject matter of each YouTube comment. From the noted content categories, six overarching subject matter (or thematic) categories were established.

In approaching the YouTube comments as an additonal data set, the unit of analysis for the qualitative content analysis was not necessarily the comments in their entirety. I considered partial sentences, single sentences, as well as multiple sentences that make up longer paragraphs or passages posted within the comment section under the music videos. This way,

the coding process resulted in the consideration of comments based on the subject matter encompassed either in partial, single or multiple sentences within a longer comment. Below (Table 3), I provide a tabulated overview of the coding framework inspired by the three rounds of closely reading through the entire data set. This coding framework guided the content analysis, eventually resulting in the six main thematic categories determined through the inductive coding process (Stemler 2000) I adopted.

Table 3: Overarching content categories developed from content analysis of YouTube comments

UNIT OF ANALYSIS	SUBJECT-MATTER CODES/THEMES	OVERARCHING THEMATIC CATEGORY
Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to the women and men featured in the music videos. These include comments about 'womanhood' and 'manhood' as mediated in the music videos. Also included are comments pertaining to femininity; masculinity; women's and men's physical appearance (physique, hairstyles, skin tone, clothing, body features, etc.) and the performative prowess – or lack thereof – of the gendered bodies featured in the music videos as it relates to dancing and singing. Comments in this category also relate to gender relations; social desires expressed in relation to the gendered bodies (aspirations towards marriage, romance, romantic relationships); potential for financial stability/comfort based on gender.	**GENDER**
Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to the perceived racial identities of the people featured in the music videos in relation to their skin tones. These include comments about 'blackness', 'whiteness', light-skin-ness and expressions of pride in relation to these aspects. Comments about white/light-skin visibility in the music videos, dark-skin lack of visibility, colourism, issues of discrimination and prejudice based on skin colour also form part of this content theme.	**COLOURISM, BLACKNESS AND SKIN TONE**

Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to Africa as a continent, African people, Africanness (as generally perceived by these commenters). These include comments about African pride, being proudly African, being proud *of* Africa, African unity, a united Africa, connection to African 'roots', Africa flourishing in pop culture, Africa 'rising', wealthy Africa, and beautiful Africa. There were also comments from explicitly emphasised non-African identities about being proud of Africa, yearning African ancestry, acknowledging African ancestry/lineage/heritage/roots. Also noted, are comments reflecting on Africa as the 'motherland'; appreciating African music; appreciating the geographical imagery visually expressed in the music videos; appreciation of the cultural expressions, the people, the dancing, and the fashion.	**UTOPIAN, PATRIOTIC APPRECIATION OF AFRICA/AFRICANS/AFRICANNESS**
Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to Africa as a continent, African people, Africanness, particularly from a critique-driven, partly dystopian point of view regarding 'Africanness' versus 'Americanness'/'Europeanness', Africans being too 'western' or Eurocentric, among other perceptions, Northern and Arabic Africans and Sub-Saharan Africans being divisive in their considerations of one another.	**CRITIQUE-DRIVEN, PARTLY DYSTOPIAN EXPRESSIONS ABOUT AFRICA/AFRICANS/AFRICANNESS**
Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Encompasses viewers' written expressions wherein commenters are promoting other songs/products/services unrelated to the music video itself. Here, the comment section is used as somewhat of a promotional tool. Also considered here are comments in which commenters ask fellow viewers to react on their comments for greater exposure of the comment within the thread of thousands of comments (YouTube comments with many likes and replies are usually kept at the top of the threads of thousands of comments).	**PROMOTION OF SELF AND CONTENT UNRELATED TO THE MUSIC VIDEO**
Partial, single or multiple sentences (within a comment)	Some of the thematic undertones with regard to subject matter for this category includes comments wherein viewers appear to be 'checking in' with date reference as if to alert other viewers about their presence in the comment section; there's also confession-like commentary about having repeated the music video multiple times.	**OTHER**

4.4.2. Multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) of YouTube comments

Following the thematic categorisation of this data – wherein the YouTube comments were subjected to a qualitative content analysis in line with an inductive open coding procedure of emergent coding (Stemler 2000; 2005) – the data was further engaged on a more critical level. That is, a critical multimodal discourse analysis (Van Leeuwen 2012; 2014) was relied on where this study located textual and visual language usage within sociocultural frameworks related to how the commenters carved an understanding of the subject matter multimodally relayed through the contents of these music videos**.**

Visual culture scholars, as Rose (2001: 11) notes, "are concerned not only with how images look, but how they are looked at". Said visual culture researchers argue, thus, that what is value-laden and of importance in a picture surpasses the actual image itself because, of equal importance, is how the image is seen/looked at by spectators gazing in specific ways (Rose 2001: 11-12). It is for this reason why this study found value in taking its analysis beyond the images themselves (depicted in the music videos) and interrogating the contents of the reaction-driven written expressions from presumably transnational spectators virtually consuming these visual materials. These multimodally expressed written reactions, thoughts, views and opinions (through text and emojis [e.g., " 💔" " 😓"]) carry insights on the ways in which – in the case of this study – music audiences respond to the 'ways of seeing' (Rose 2001) called for by the creators of the images depicted in the analysed Afrobeats music videos.

That producers of Afrobeats music claim to advocate for particular 'ways of seeing' Africa, Africans and 'Africanness' through their multimodal production and global dissemination of this music (Scher 2015; Carvalho 2018; Finney 2018; Ward 2019), calls for an analysis of the effects of said pursuits on globally-dispersed audiences interpellated by these ways of seeing. This is particularly crucial as the ways of seeing perpetuated by the image "are crucial in the production and reproduction of visions of social difference" (Rose 2001: 15) because, as viewing audiences, we bring with us historical, geographical, social, and cultural tools to aid our ways of seeing.

John Berger's (1972; 1990) and Donna Haraway's (1991) postulations around the work of images in inviting particular ways of seeing were helpful in qualifying this study's preoccupation with the expressions from audiences/viewers of the analysed Afrobeats music videos. If we accept that the visual embodies and advocates for particular ways of seeing, we can deduce, then, that such ways of seeing may be accepted or challenged by the 'seer' due to

clashes with said 'seer's' own ways of seeing mobilised by their sociocultural, socioeconomic, sociohistorical positioning in the world. Essentially, "what [they already] know or what [they] believe" (Berger 1972: 8).

This study does not take for granted Rose's (2001:15) suggestion that "[t]he seeing of an image […] always takes place in a particular social context that mediates its impact. It also always takes place in a specific location with its own particular practices". Given that one of the main conduits through which the seeing of the visual stimuli offered to Afrobeats music video viewers is YouTube – a digital platform allowing access to dispersedly-located eyes (Arthurs et.al 2018) – the localities of these viewers may range in unknowable ways. These locations could include a bedroom, a sitting-room, a form of public transport (bus, train, aeroplane), lecture halls or classrooms among many other locations. All of which bear an influence on the meanings derived by these viewers with regard to the visual portrayals (of gender, sexuality, and 'Africanness') prioritised in the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study.

4.5. Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined the methodological approach that was deployed in this thesis. The chapter explicated the carefully constructed data-collection approaches followed by this study in order to construct its two data sets. This chapter granted an account of this study's approach to critically exploring the multimodal discourses of Afrobeats as captured in the corpus of 25 music videos collected for this study. The corpuses of data comprised of 25 Afrobeats music videos downloaded from YouTube using a software called OVC v3.0, as well as 2,500 viewer comments from YouTube, downloaded through a software called YouTube Comment Scraper. These two crucial data sets were subjected to a quantitative content analysis (of the music videos) and an inductive qualitative content analysis (of the YouTube comments) to expound dominant representational patterns and thematic content categories pertaining viewer perceptions about the analysed music videos. Further to that, both data sets were more deeply evaluated through a multimodal critical discourse analysis. In chapter five, the findings from the content analyses are critically engaged.

5. PATTERNS IN GENDER, SEXUALITY AND AFRICANNESS: RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE VIDEOS

This chapter reports on the results from the quantitative content analysis of the collected music videos, and the inductive qualitative content analysis performed on the corpus of YouTube comments. The chapter's key purpose is to offer a comprehensive discussion of the dominant representational patterns observed in the visual data set, as well as the dominant themes emanating from the analysed YouTube viewer comments in relation to the depictions stemming from the visual material. As such, descriptive statistics undergirding the quantitative content analysis – in relation to the prioritisation of screen time on gendered categorical behaviours – are put in conversation with the dominant discursive themes emanating from the YouTube comments. This is done to offer a broad overview of the visual conventions that are seemingly prioritised in this musical genre's multimodal discourses within the limited purview of the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual data analysed in this thesis. As mentioned, viewer perceptions of said multimodal offerings are explored by putting them in conversation with these dominant visual representational conventions.

The content analysis findings reported in this chapter are pivotal in providing an evidence-based foundation upon which the argumentative pillars of the rest of the analyses shall rest. These findings are crucial in partly aiding the multimodal critical discourse analyses that shall undergird chapters six and seven in their advancements of this study's scholarly contributions. As such, the arguments developed in chapters six and seven will variously draw from the findings presented in this chapter. While quantitative in terms of descriptive statistics, the findings presented in this chapter are qualitatively reflected on to aid the reader with a coherent grip of the dominant thematic patterns within the discourses emerging from both these data sets. Structurally, the chapter is divided into various sub-sections each rendering a key aspect of the evidence emerging from the content analyses.

The findings highlight how sex, sexuality and sexual expression are gendered in particular ways across the corpus of analysed screen time within the collected music videos. Furthermore, it is apparent in the findings that gender performances, as multimodally depicted in these music videos, are anchored by forms of power relations that quite evidently render men as domineering and women as subservient, sexually-alluring, 'decorative objects' at the service of (heterosexual) men and their evident self-aggrandizing masculine expressions. Another key pattern in the findings is the consistent centring of a very narrow feminine beauty aesthetic

with regard to the physical appearance (body type, skin complexion, hairstyle) of the mostly black female bodies featuring as key characters in these Afrobeats music videos. With regard to the mediation of gender relations in relation to physical space and context, the findings show that the contextual backdrops against which these gender relations occur, are predominantly characterised by an affluence and wealth-driven trope embedded in ideas of luxury and luxurious material consumption.

Concerning the corpus of YouTube comments, the findings from the inductive content analysis highlight how viewer perceptions about physical appearance and performance ability, for instance, are gendered in ways that more prevalently place women's bodies under scrutiny. While the visually mediated bodies of men are sporadically commented on by viewers, it is the women's bodies that are more consistently subjected to the attitudes, opinions, and assessments of viewers of these music videos. The contents of these attitudes, opinions and assessments are underpinned by a tendency to scrutinise the physical appearances and performance abilities of the visually mediated women's bodies in ways that explicitly differentiate them from their fellow women in the world on the basis of blackness, skin complexion and notions of how Africanness is embodied by these women.

5.1. Patterns of representation in Afrobeats music videos: Content analyses of music videos and YouTube comments

As discussed in chapter four, this study partially relied on two phases of content analysis across the data corpuses of 25 music videos and 2,500 YouTube comments, respectively. Presented in Tables 4a and 4b (see Appendix A), are the results from the frequency counts stemming from the quantitative content analysis of the music videos. In addition to presenting the total frequency count figure as it relates to a particular categorical behaviour, the Tables also render the rate of occurrence of that categorical behaviour in the form of percentages (descriptive statistics) of screen time devoted to said categorical behaviour, as well as a screen time figure (in minutes) based on the overall screen time (103 minutes, 30 seconds) of analysed visual material. These descriptive statistics are pertinent in rendering the study with an analytical point of departure towards making a more nuanced sense of the dominant patterns of representation in the visual culture of this musical genre, captured by the corpus of analysed music videos.

Table 4a presents the results from the coding procedure applied across each of the 30-seconds music video segments (n = 207), while Table 4b carries the results from the coding procedure

applied to each of the music videos as a single unit (n = 25). All the 30-seconds music video segments combined, account for 100% of the visual data analysed. 100% of the analysed visual data accounts for a combined total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time. Therefore, to offer an indication of the screen time as it relates to each content category coded for, the total rate of occurrence is converted into screen time. In that vein, should the frequency count report a 50% rate of occurrence of, say, implicit acts of sexual expression on the part of women's bodies featured in the music videos, this is taken to account for 50% of the total combined screen time of 103 minutes and 30 seconds. This means, across a combined total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds (100%) of screen time, 51 minutes and 45 seconds (50%) thereof incorporated instances of implicit acts of sexual expression on the part of the featured women's bodies.

With regard to the qualitative content analysis of the corpus of YouTube comments, insights about the dominant viewer perceptions about this musical genre's multimodal offerings were gleaned. An inductive open coding procedure to extract prevalent themes from the data, led to the observation of six overarching themes presented below. The 2,500 YouTube comments account for 100% of this data corpus. Comments were individually considered and inductively coded so as to be categorised under the overarching themes eventually developed. Emergent coding (Stemler 2000) of the data aided this study in this regard. The six overarching thematic categories observed are, "*Gender*", "*Colourism, blackness and skin tone*", "*Utopian, patriotic appreciation of Africa, Africans and Africanness"*, "*Critique-driven, partly dystopian expressions about Africa, Africans and Africanness*", "*Promotion of self and content unrelated to the music video*", as well as "*Other*".

The content analysis of the corpus of YouTube comments revealed that the content category of "Utopian, patriotic appreciation about Africa, Africans and Africanness" contained the most individual YouTube comments with a total of 870 comments indexed under this category. This thematic category is, thus, **35%** prevalent with 870 out of 2,500 YouTube comments. Evident here, is a notable discourse of African pride and unity stemming from the data. This content category is followed by commentary under the category labelled "Gender" (**27%**), with a total of 672 YouTube comments indexed. The prevalence of comments under this theme is indicative of the influence of mediated gender relations on people in a culture. That 672 of the comments were related to issues about the gendered bodies featured in these music videos, is an observation not taken for granted in this study. It arguably points to the fact that

conversations about gender relations continue to prevail in an ever-evolving, globalised cultural milieu.

There was a total of 431 YouTube comments indexed under the content category of "Promotion of self and content unrelated to the music video" (**17%** of total corpus). This content category captures a trend in the analysed YouTube comments wherein commenters appear to utilize the video's comments section as somewhat of a promotional platform to either re-direct fellow viewers to a different video using a hyperlink, or to encourage other viewers to react by liking or adding a reply to a posted comment. Commenters give various reasons to encourage a reaction to their posted comment, so as to earn likes on their comment from fellow viewers. A typical comment to exemplify this trend is captured in this quoted comment: "*can I get 50likes? it's my birthday today*" (username: 'gift Lawrence'). While there is no monetary value to be derived from one's comment attracting many likes (Kokoski 2020), the most liked YouTube comments do enjoy high visibility in that they usually appear towards the very top of the comments section, regardless of when they were posted. This allows for greater visibility and engagement with said comment by other viewers and increases the chances of the owner of the uploaded video to see the comment amidst the clutter.

The thematic category of "Colourism, blackness and skin tone" follows fourth with a total of 213 YouTube comments (**9%**). Here, commenters variously express opinions about a perceived high visibility of especially black women who are light skinned, compared to dark-skinned black women. Fifth to prevail, are comments under the thematic category of "Critique-driven, partly dystopian expressions about Africa, Africans and Africanness" tallying a total of 168 comments (**7%** of overall corpus). Here, commenters deploy a critique-driven undertone to reflect on the contents of the music videos. Take, for instance, this comment posted by a viewer with username, 'Snow', on one of the analysed music videos: "*here's a #tip dnt try to pull of the cliche American thing where the guy sings and the girl just stand, look good then push herself on him in the end. African culture is becoming a thing of modernity, the cultural African dance would have been perfect for this song nd have given u millions in days but no yall rappers so badly wanna be cliché […]*" This viewer essentially asserts that the Afrobeats musician to whom the video is credited, is negating their perceived 'Africanness' by 'copying' what this viewer perceives to be a "cliché American [trope]" in their music video. Lastly, the thematic category labelled "Other" encompassed a total number of 146 comments (**6%** of overall corpus). An example of a comment categorised hereunder is: " 😳*2018 anyone* 😳*??I know am not alone?!* 🤪 *Wheres my #2018MusicSquad* 😍*"* (username: 'Hot Fresh New

Music'). The subject matter undergirding these kinds of comments are generally characterised by what appears to be a marking of a register based on specific time periods (e.g., 'checking in' annually). Diagram 1 visually demonstrates an arrangement of the six categories based on total comments indexed.

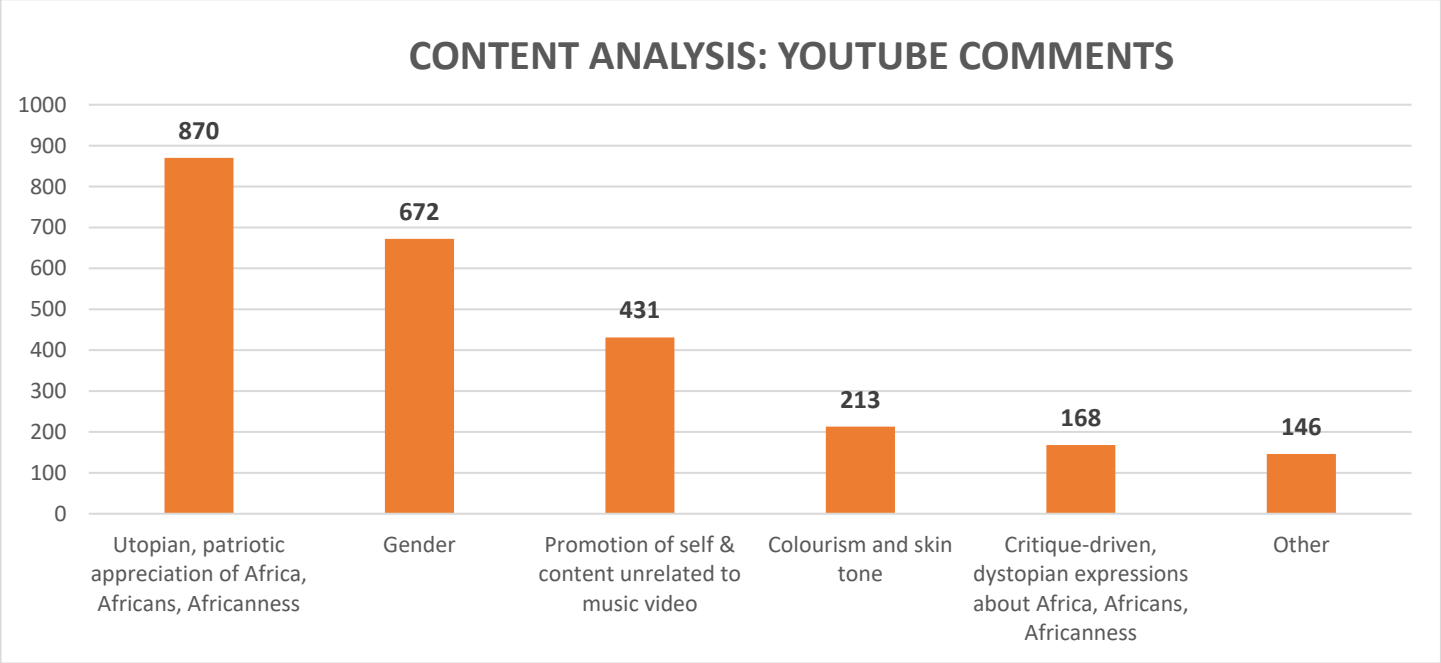


Diagram 1: Number of YouTube comments as categorised under the content categories developed from the content analysis

To more closely grapple with the findings stemming from this content analysis, I engage the dominant themes in a manner which frames them in a way that highlights their relevance to this study, considering the study's aims and research questions. The four themes from the six overarching themes that I found most related to the focus of this study are the themes of 'gender', the theme of 'colourism, blackness and skin tone', the theme of 'utopian, patriotic appreciation of Africa, Africans and Africanness, as well as that of critique-driven, partly dystopian expressions about Africa, Africans and Africanness. It is YouTube comments under these four themes that are most prevalently drawn on to advance the arguments made in this chapter, as well as chapters six and seven.

The content theme labelled 'gender', encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to the women and men featured in the music videos. This theme includes comments about 'womenhood' and 'manhood' as mediated in the music videos. Also included are comments variously pertaining to notions of femininity, masculinity, women's and men's physical appearances (physique, hairstyles, clothing, body features, etc.) and the performative prowess – or lack thereof – of the gendered bodies featured in the music videos as it relates to dancing

and singing. Comments in this category also relate to gender relations; social and romantic desires expressed in relation to the gendered bodies (for instance, aspirations towards marriage, romance, romantic relationships); and also potential for financial stability/comfort based on being a woman or man.

The content theme labelled 'colourism, blackness and skin tone', encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to the perceived racial and ethnic identities of the people featured in the music videos in relation to their skin complexions. These include comments about 'blackness', 'whiteness', light-skin-ness and expressions of pride and/or disappointment in relation to these aspects. Comments about white/light-skin visibility in the music videos, dark-skin lack of visibility, colourism, discrimination and prejudice based on skin colour, broadly form part of this content theme.

The theme of 'utopian, patriotic appreciation of Africa, Africans and Africanness encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to Africa as a continent, African people, Africanness (as generally perceived by these commenters). These include comments about African pride, being proudly African, being proud *of* Africa, African unity, a united Africa, connection to African 'roots', Africa flourishing in popular culture, Africa 'rising', wealthy Africa, and beautiful Africa. There were also comments from explicitly emphasised non-African identities about being proud of Africa, yearning African ancestry, acknowledging African ancestry/lineage/heritage/roots. Lastly, the theme of critique-driven, partly dystopian expressions about Africa, Africans and Africanness encompasses viewers' written expressions relating to Africa as a continent, African people, Africanness, particularly from a critique-driven, partly dystopian point of view regarding 'Africanness' versus 'Americanness'/'Europeanness', Africans being too 'western' or Eurocentric, among other perceptions. Also captured herein are comments about North- and Arabic Africans and Sub-Saharan Africans being divisive in their considerations of one another.

I now move on to section 5.2 wherein I critically engage the results from the content analyses to highlight key patterns in the data with regard to the representation of gender, sexuality and Africanness in the corpus of music videos, with an interlinking of these patterns with viewer perceptions as expressed in the analysed YouTube comments.

5.2. Scrutinising the findings: closely reading dominant representational patterns of gender, sexuality and Africanness

In this section, I will demonstrate how the visual discourses captured in the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study prioritise a representational trope that emphasises the (sexual) objectification of women's bodies. Women's sexuality expressions are variously relied upon in the visual culture evident in the analysed music video texts. It is this overt emphasis on women's bodies through the visual (that is, screen time usage) and lyrical expressions of the main artists from this musical genre that encourages a pattern in viewer comments where commentary is significantly biased towards the women featured in these music videos, compared to the men. Furthermore, surveillance-driven discourses undergird both the song lyrics as well as the YouTube comments about women's bodies, with an emphasis on specific parts of said bodies: hips, buttocks, breasts and thighs, among others. These discourses expand to aspects of feminine beauty, and women's performative prowess as black African subjectivities.

Linked closely with the aspect of gender are discourses about blackness, skin colour and colourism that are also prevalent in the data corpus. The visual data demonstrate a prioritisation of light-skinned black women at the centre of the hyperreal social relations to which significant screen time is devoted in these texts. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the textual data (YouTube comments) demonstrate a preoccupation with this prioritisation of light-skinned black women. Yet again, it is the featured women's bodies that are subjected to surveillance-driven commentary about the beauty in their blackness in relation to 'whiteness' or light-skin-ness. The data shows tension-charged discourses wherein black African women's bodies are the main subject of criticism from viewers of these music videos. This criticism is also notably undergirded by a consistent calling out of the main musicians and creators of these music videos who are said to be perpetuating a culture of colourism that leads to the prejudicial treatment of darker skinned black women especially in the domains of romantic relationships, sexual expression/sexiness and love.

In relation to the men's bodies prevalently featured in these music videos, a consistent representational pattern observed in the content analysis was the positioning of these African men – from their richly diverse sociocultural backgrounds – as ideal romantic partners. Herewith comes a persistent depiction of said African men as ideal sexual partners who possess spectacular sexual prowess to be able to sexually satisfy women, thereby aiding these featured men with notable symbolic power as it relates to the gender relations depicted in these hyperreal

contexts. The self-aggrandizing nature of the featured men's performances of their manhood sees women being statistically more denigrated to mere objects of sexual objectification and as background 'objects' when given screen time, to boost the sexual and masculine bravado of the featured men.

5.2.1. Sex sells: A look into women's sexual objectification

In consideration of the visual portrayals of gendered bodies depicted across the almost 104 minutes of screen time analysed, it is evident that women's bodies are more sexually objectified compared to those of men with whom they share the screen. This is evident (see Diagram 2) in that 39% of the analysed screen time (i.e., 40 minutes, 21 seconds) featured instances wherein women's bodies (for instance, cleavage, buttocks, thighs and hips) were subjected to objectifying camera close-up shots, compared to 4% of screen time (4 minutes, 8 seconds) devoted to men's bodies (for instance, bare chest area, buttocks, groin area) being subjected to close-up camera shots. These statistics refer specifically to the sexual objectification stemming from the camera lens on to the featured bodies to encourage viewer attention to be placed on said sexualised body parts. Further to that, the sexual objectification of women's bodies as characterised through the mediation of active, desiring male visual points of views over sexualised bodies of women, is also a notable representational pattern observed across the corpus of analysed screen time. Men featured in these music videos are statistically more likely to be depicted as bearing a sexually-charged, desiring gaze over the featured women's bodies which aids in visually positioning said women's bodies as objects of men's sexual desire within these music videos. As demonstrated in Diagram 3, significant screen time (66% - 68 minutes, 18 seconds) is devoted to scenes wherein men variously exert a sexually-charged, desiring gaze upon sexualised women's bodies in the analysed music videos.

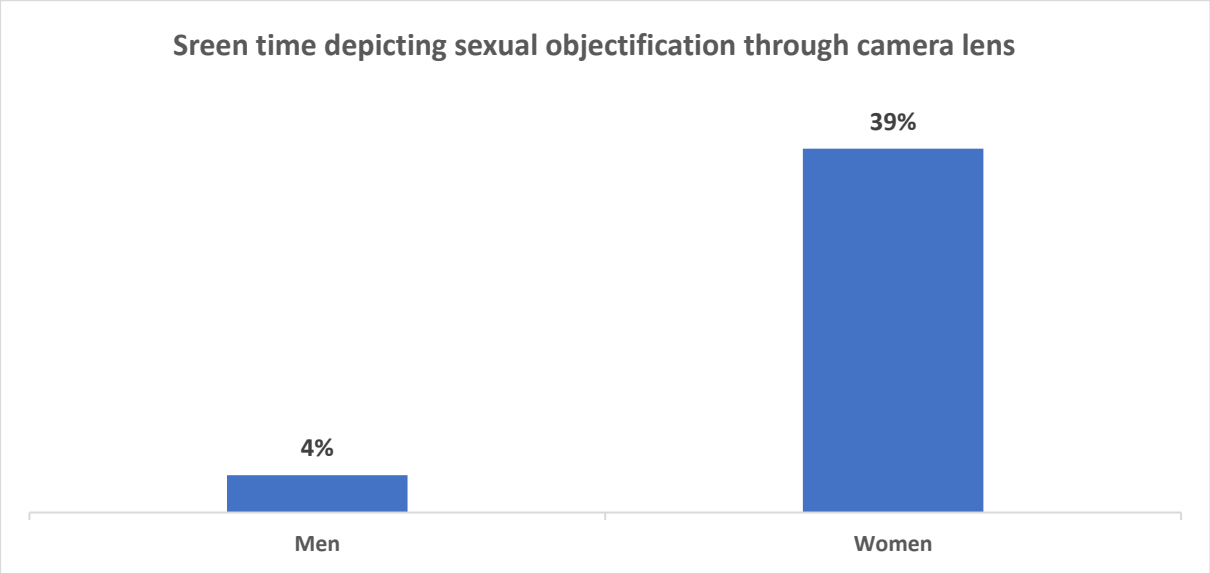


Diagram 2: In terms of screen time, women are statistically more sexually objectified by the camera lens

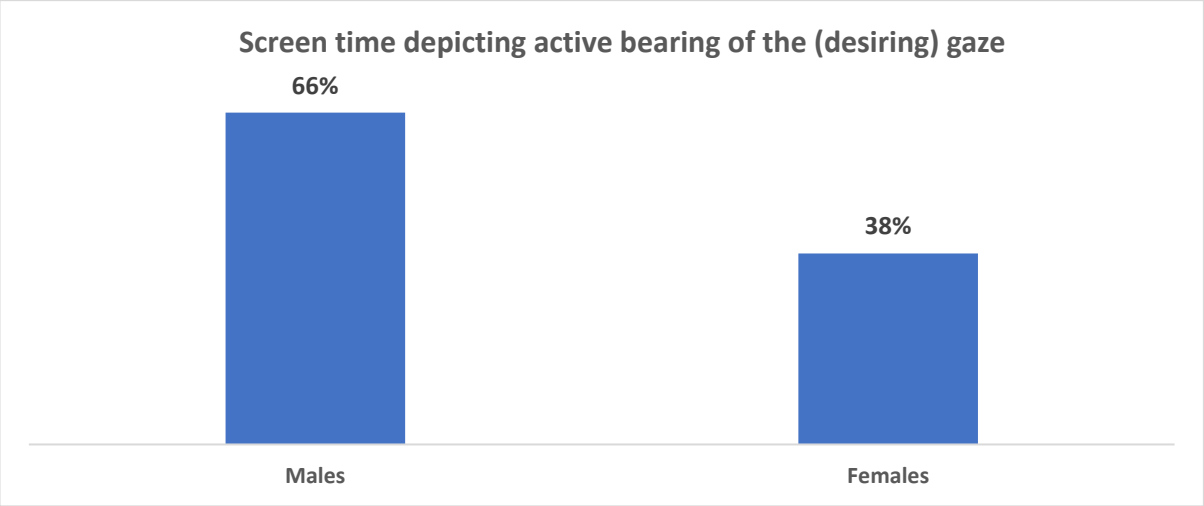


Diagram 3: In terms of screen time, men are more likely to be portrayed as bearing an active, desiring gaze over sexualised women's bodies

Screen time featuring women engaging in implicit acts of sexuality or sexual expression to render themselves sexually alluring, was also nearly twice as much (51% of overall screen time: 52 minutes, 47 seconds) than the screen time devoted to men expressing such implicit acts of sexuality and sexual expression (28% of overall screen time: 28 minutes, 58 seconds). Scenes in the music videos demonstrating this visual pattern are evident in instances wherein sexual innuendo is portrayed. These include scenes wherein featured characters appear to elicit sexual appeal, arousal, and desire through eroticised behaviours ranging from the thrusting of the hip/pelvic area to the gyration of the buttocks area; stroking of breasts, buttocks, thighs; and long/slow-motioned lip licking, among other categorical behaviours. This representational pattern – explicitly biased towards women's bodies – evidences that feminine sexuality, sex

appeal, and the oversexualisation of female subjectivities is central to this musical genre's visual culture.

Feminist readings of popular cultural texts such as rap and hip-hop music videos have emphasised this representational pattern as one that characterises many male-dominated musical genres and their visual cultures (e.g., Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto 1995; Henry 2002; Baker 2005; Marshall 2006; Rose 2008; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Pieterse 2010). Interestingly, the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this thesis, notably perpetuate this representational pattern as it relates to screen time devoted to the depiction of women's bodies. In the analysed music videos, women's bodies are also significantly more likely to be subjected to screen time (55% - 56 minutes, 55 seconds) during which they are relegated to a status of hyper-sexualised, decorative, background 'objects' dressed in provocatively revealing attire to merely enhance the sexual and aesthetic bravado of the main artist (most often men) in the music video. Such findings not only spark assumptions about the intended or imagined target consumer of this musical genre on the part of the creators of said music videos; these kinds of representational tropes also highlight, arguably, a commercialisation of women's sexuality as a profiteering pursuit. It is perhaps unsurprising that this current study, based on the results from the content analysis, partly affirms observations made in recent studies on Afrobeats in the African context. Samson Eze's (2020) recent study focusing on Afrobeats artist, Wizkid's music, similarly demonstrates that a recurring thematic strain in this music involves the misogynistic objectification of women as sex symbols. This is done, Eze argues, "…as a means of boosting an ostensibly masculinist status, as they impact commercial viability in the Nigerian [Afrobeats] music industry" (Onanuga and Akingbe 2020: 4). In other words, women's sexualised bodies are used in these music videos to boost and sustain the (transnational) commercial viability of the Afrobeats genre. Furthermore, it can be argued that this representational approach also serves as a 'generic' marker to link Afrobeats more explicitly to the borader hip-hop/rap family while staying true to a perceived African contextual aesthetic. This allows the visuals to domesticate the music without stepping too far away from the 'family tree' in terms of undergirding representational approach and sensibility.

Underscoring the visual are the lyrical contents that these music videos are comprised of. The theme of sexual objectification notably emerges in the lyrical contents of the songs that were analysed, thus sustaining the representational pattern that is observed in the visual data. The lyrically articulated sexual objectification instances are, to a large extent, targeted towards the bodies of women featured in these music videos. This would be expected, as the data indicates

that 96% of the main artists comprising this study's corpus of the most viewed music videos, are men. In terms of lyrical contents, artists such as Maleek Berry, Davido, P-Square, and Flavour, to name a few, sing about women's bodies or specific parts of their bodies in sexual ways. Consider these lyrics, for instance:

She gimme African waist like Tiwa (aah)
She wan gimme that work like Rihanna (yeah)
Se ri bo se rotate e be like a tyre
She dey make man stand ovation
Her baka don cause inflation, for the nation

In this extract from a verse in Maleek Berry's (2016) song entitled 'Kontrol', he engages a creative play on words to sexually objectify the woman who is the subject of the lyrics. Berry, in this verse, focuses specifically on the woman's waist and buttocks. The woman is said to offer Maleek her African waist by 'working'/gyrating it in ways similar to popular female musicians such as Tiwa Savage (Nigerian Afrobeats singer) and Rihanna (American pop singer). The woman in question is described as having the ability to rotate her waist area in ways likened to a spinning tyre and it is with this kind of sexualised body movement that, according to Berry, "She dey make man stand ovation". This Pidgin English phrase translates to mean that she leads men into performing a standing ovation for her waist movement. On a figurative level, the standing ovation may be in reference to the 'standing' (being erect) of the penis as a result of this woman's sexually objectified waist movement. In addition to her sexually alluring waist, this woman is described as having a backside (buttocks) so alluring that it may cause national economic havoc in the form of inflation. The word 'inflation' figuratively also signifies erection, in keeping with the theme of sexual stimulation brought on by this woman's waist movements on men. This is how Maleek expresses this: "Her baka (West African slang for buttocks) don' cause inflation, for the nation."

Another example of instances of sexual objectification of women's bodies in the lyrics from the analysed music videos can be seen in the following extract from a verse in the song entitled 'Sexy Rosey' by Flavour featuring P-Square:

You're too fine
Baby you're too fine ohh
You're too sweet ohh
I go ask to my Lord
Anything for you baby
Your waist is 34
Your hips 44
You're 24
Ooh I love my baby

Addressing a woman by the name Rosey (considering the title of the song), Flavour (2015) and P-Square emphasise how 'fine' or attractive she is in their eyes. This woman is not only good-looking but is also said to be a sweet person, and these men claim they will ask the Lord for anything to romantically secure and please this woman. As the verse continues, it becomes apparent that Rosey's attractiveness is seemingly centred on her young age of 24 and two body parts, as opposed to her body as a whole. These two body parts are her waist and her hips. Rosey's 34 waist size and 44 hips size, alongside her young age of 24, are objectified as the things that make her stand out and worthy of the 'love' from the (male) musicians singing about her – evidencing in this way an exoticising and fetishising of young women.

When it comes to explicit acts of sexual expression, which include scenes of overtly eroticised behaviours such as deliberate stroking of genitalia, breasts, buttocks, as well as on-screen acts of physically 'making out' (kissing, grinding bodies together in motions suggestive of intercourse), screen time (58% of the overall screen time) devoted to such scenes was notably prevalent across the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysed visual data. This descriptive statistic includes both genders. Observed separately, women and men are almost equally depicted as engaging in explicit sexual expressions in the corpus of analysed music videos (see Diagram 4). Although, characters who are women are more inclined (31% of overall screen time: 32 minutes, 5 seconds) to be sexually explicit than characters who are men (27% of overall screen time: 27 minutes, 56 seconds) across the analysed music videos. It is evident that sex and sexuality are relied upon in the visual and aesthetic arrangement of the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study, thus feeding into popularised mantras in media and advertising cultures that 'sex sells' (Reichert and Lambiase 2013).

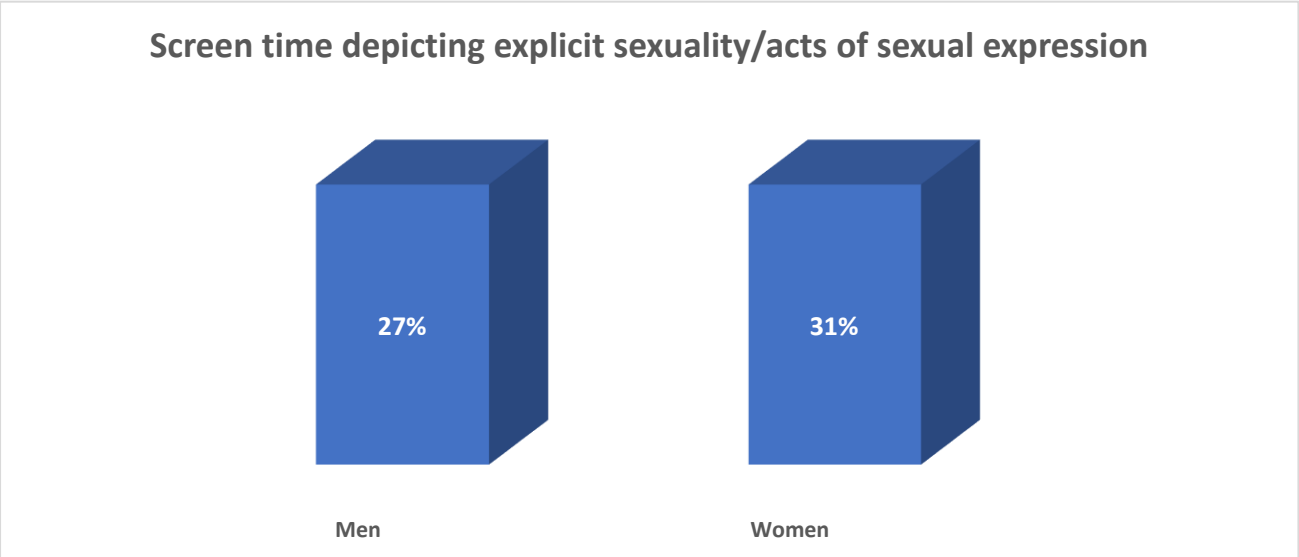


Diagram 4: While men and women are almost equally depicted as engaging in explicit sexual expressions, women are statistically more inclined to be subjected to more screen time in this regard

It should be noted that these portrayals of implicit and explicit sexuality and acts of sexual expression are saliently heterosexual. Nowhere across all the 207 analysed visual segments were there instances of same-sex, homoerotic acts of sexual expression indicative of homosexual desire either between two or more men or two or more women. This finding suggests that this musical genre's visual culture is underpinned by a heteronormative worldview which undergirds this evident erasure of queer, sexualities across the almost 104 minutes of visual content analysed.

Through their lyrical content – as an interlinked mode of expression alongside the visual – these musicians (who are predominantly men) incorporate narrative themes indicative of this noted implicit and explicit idealisation of a heteronormative sexual expression. Lyrics about heterosexual sexual activities are prevalent in both literal and figurative language use. Take, for instance, these lyrics from the song by P-Square (2015) featuring Don Jazzy, entitled Collabo:

She say she want some collabo...collabo
She need am badly be like tornado....tornado
She talk say I dey play like Ronaldo....ronaldo
The thing dey sweet her like Don jazzy eminado....eminado
[…]
We come go monaco
I rock her body give am molato
She just dey halla, she dey scream obrigado
As I dey fire I dey call her molato, my molato

The composer(s) of the song use the word 'collabo' (which is short for collaboration) to denotatively refer to the act of two or more people partnering to execute the same activity at the same time. In the context of this song, on a connotative level, the act of collaborating is referenced in sexual terms where the implicit context is that two people are partnering on, or jointly engaging in, the act of a (heterosexual) sexually-driven relationship.

This musician uses this verse to express, through creative word play, his sexual prowess, control over a woman's sexuality, and ability to successfully execute this 'collaboration' between himself and the 'molato' (light-skinned woman, in this context) that is the subject of the verse. The woman is lyrically depicted as being in desperate need of sexual activity with a man. She so 'badly' wants to have sexual intercourse with this man, that the intensity of her desire and her sexual expressiveness are described as tumultuous as a tornado. The singer goes on to exert his sexual prowess by gloating about his performance during this 'collaboration'. He associates his ability to sexually satisfy this woman with Christiano Ronaldo's (world-

famous soccer player) football playing capabilities, and claims to rock (in this context, intensely satisfy) this woman's body to a point where she unrestrainedly exclaims 'obrigado' (Portuguese for 'thank you'). It is through such examples from the lyrical contents of the analysed music videos that *this* observation may be reiterated: heterosexual sex and sexuality are notably relied upon. Not only in the visual and aesthetic arrangements of the analysed Afrobeats music videos, but also the lyrical expressions.

In interrogating such gendered portrayals through the lens of dominance and subservience, the men featured in the analysed Afrobeats music videos enjoy evident sexual dominance over the women featured alongside them. As such, we find that the lyrical contents position men as actively performing sex *on* women, instead of with women by, for instance, 'rocking' women's bodies until said women exclaim gratitude towards these men for ensuring their (sexual) satisfaction. On a connotative level, this then comes across as though these men are paid 'service providers' performing the service of sexual intercourse on women as 'clients'.

The perpetuation of women's subservience and men's dominance across the analysed corpus of music videos is further sustained through visual portrayals that depict women as submissively 'flanking' the main artist/s (who are predominantly men) who are depicted as instrumental in carrying the narratives. While 67% of screen time (69 minutes, 20 seconds) depict women as valuable for more than just their physical appearances but for what they offer to the narrative of the music video (i.e., portrayed as non-sexualised central characters in the video, fully dressed in unprovocative attire), it is men who are more significantly afforded screen time (97% of overall screen time: 100 minutes, 23 seconds) characterised by an emphasis on portrayals of them as central characters driving the action of the plot in the narrative. Driving the action of the plot in the narrative entails being the key reason behind the shifting moments captured in the storyline across the scenes of the music video. For instance, instigating reactions out of other central characters by, say, publicly proposing marriage and gifting the in-laws to create a sense of happiness throughout the music video, or by surprising a love interest with a large gift such as an expensive car to affect the overall mood over the rest of the screen time. Men being predominantly portrayed as the key drivers of the action in the music videos variously construct them as domineering in the analysed music videos.

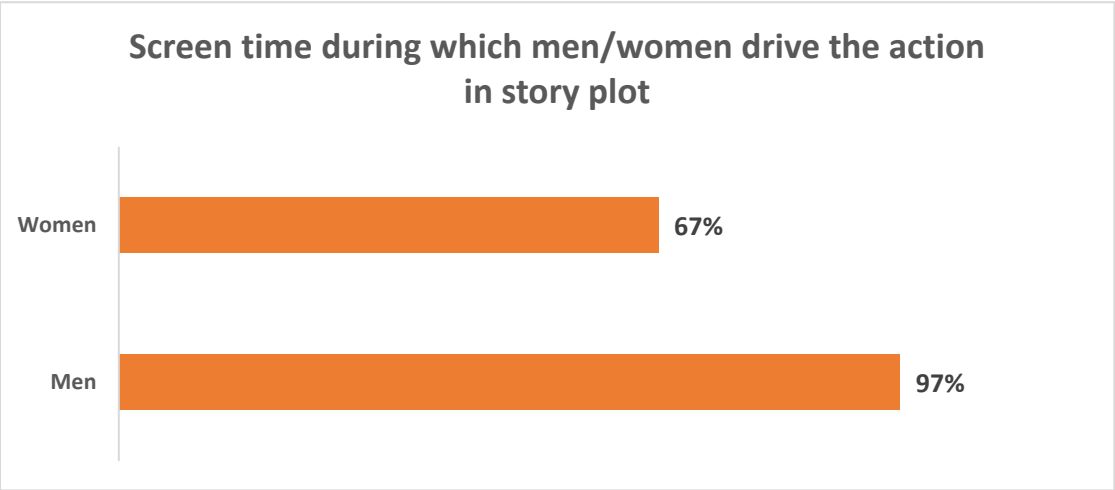


Diagram 5: Men are statistically more likely to be depicted as driving the actions/activities in the narrative progression of the storylines depicted in the analysed music videos

5.2.2. Afrobeats music videos: Black, 'beautiful' and proudly African

Variously linked to the gender-related findings presented in the sub-section above, are racialised sentiments of pride stemming from the corpus of viewer comments analysed in this thesis. The physical appearances and performance-based prowess of the gendered bodies featured in the analysed music videos, are also notably racialised by these commenting individuals. An explicit lauding of the dancing abilities and musical expressions of the black bodies featured in these music videos, is apparent. There emerges a discursive trend wherein the perceived Africanness of these gendered bodies is (in)advertently linked to their blackness, in ways that almost always express Africanness as non-whiteness irrespective of the white bodies that sporadically feature in the music videos. To be sure, this is a trend in the data that was to be expected, considering that the racial make-up of the majority of the men and women featuring in the analysed music videos is saliently black. Also, with this musical genre's region of origin being the African continent, a linkage of Africanness to blackness can be expected, especially if we consider the dominant discourse related to the 'idea' of Africanness (Mudimbe 1988; Said 1979).

This discourse – significantly influenced by a deep history of racist, imperialist, and colonialist systems of oppression based on hierarchies of racial identity – constructs Africanness as blackness (Ngwenya 2018). It is a blackness linked to discourses of "reductive sameness" that have fostered the toxic debasing of people with a similar epidermal characteristic ('black' skin) (Ngwenya 2018: 2; Wiss 1994). Following the dismantling of many such oppressive systems, these discursive constructions of the notions of Africans and Africanness have been reshaped

to partly evoke 'unifying' identitarian narratives of affirmation, inclusion, and collective pride within peoples of a similar phenotypic make-up (black skin), linked to a heritage from a specific geographical reality (African continent), that have collectively 'overcome' historical 'victimisation' by the West (Ouzgane & Morrell 2005). In so doing, Africans/Africanness remains synonymous with the loaded racial marker of blackness as it is often used – by Africans and non-Africans – in line with a conception of Africa that is "…biocentrically coded black to mark a prehistoric zone of pathological racial difference and to excise North Africa or 'Arab Africa' from a classification which stands not so much for a geographical territory as for a racialised biology" (Ngwenya 2018: 7).

The gendered rhetoric emphasising the beauty of African women, as emerging from the YouTube comments, quite evidently links this beauty to being black. Let us consider some comments extracted from the corpus of YouTube comments. In expressing admiration towards the beauty of the women featured in Afrobeats music videos, many viewers relate this beauty to the women's race. A viewer by the username, 'maybbxo', confesses:

> "*Nahh man, if only there was a button to switch your race, I'd happily set it to black. Black woman are stunning, I can't express how beautiful they are. Not to mention their bodies <3 I see white people dissing black people in the comment section and tbh I feel ashamed. You guy acc have the BALLS to diss their culture on their own video? Damn.. You didn't HAVE to click the video and yet you do, only to hate on it. That's just shameful. I'm not saying that all my race is bad, but the people who just started shit over this video is. Grow up and accept other cultures for once."*

This loaded comment demonstrates a sense of admiration towards black women and their bodies. This is an appreciation so strong, that this viewer expresses a desire to want to 'switch' from being white to being black, were it possible. This desire to want to switch races from white to black is seemingly driven by this commenter's perception of black women's beauty compared to the viewer's own, presumably non-black physical appearance. The viewer goes on to shame "my [the viewer's] race" (presumably white) for 'dissing' or negatively judging the physical appearances and cultural expressions of the black women featured in the music video in question. It is the audacity – or "the BALLS", according to this viewer, who capitalises the entire word 'balls' to capture her/his utter disappointment at the level of boldness possessed by, presumably white, negative criticisers of the black people in the music video – that is explicitly shamed by this viewer. This commenter appears to be claiming that said negative criticisers are shamefully blinded to the beauty of these black women. It is not lost on me that this comment – presumably from a white man – treads the toxic line of exoticising and

fetishising black women's bodies based, arguably, *just* on the shallow characteristic of physical appearance.

Another comment similarly expresses this sense of admiration towards blackness and black people, to a point where the viewer confesses – like 'maybbxo' in the extract above – a desire to wanting to neglect their whiteness and becoming black in terms of race. The viewer, username 'Arbenita Rex', says this in their comment:

> *I am albanian and I LOVE this type of music. Don't have any clue which race, which skincolour or what ethnicity the musicians have. Maleek Berry, Mr. Eazi, Dj Juls, Wizkid and more my favourite musicians and favourite kind of music. I just know ONE thing. I wish I was black 😂 don't care if african, jamaican, carribean... black people are talented in SO many ways and things. Music, Dance, they could rule the industry... white people keep copying so much, or YOU just inspire. love goes out to everyone... 💔 music should connect and not tear appart.*

This viewer makes it clear that one of their main wishes is to have been of the black race because, according to this viewer, African, Jamaican and Caribbean black people are very talented in their musical and dance expressions. The incorporation of the 'laugh-till-I-cry' emoji (😂) highlights the light-hearted sentiment behind this confessed "wish" to switch racial identity. The musical and dance talents seen in the Afrobeats music video in question, are said to be of such good standard that white people draw inspiration or "…keep copying so much" of it. This viewer's expression of admiration towards black people is a rhetoric that consistently emerges from the corpus of YouTube comments analysed for this study. Read beyond face value, this comment also invokes a problematic discourse of 'reductive sameness' (Ngwenya 2018) with a racially stereotypic undertone that homogenises black people as a non-diverse mass of bodies all inherently more musical and able to dance better than people from other racial groups across their various contexts.

These expressions of 'love' and appreciation are also notably targeted more at the black bodies of women featured in these music videos, as compared to the men. Comments indicative of this pattern in the data include those contributed by viewers such as 'd_won1' who comments on black women's physical appearance by posing the question, "*Why are Black women just so gorgeous? #melaninpoppin."* Other such comments include those by viewers such as 'Lei Shay', 'Daniel Shamu', and 'Barwaago Aden' who, similarly, pass commentary that directly speak to the perceived beauty of black women:

> *"omg, black girls are so beautiful" (*username, 'Lei Shay'*)*
>
> *"Black women are beautiful fam damn"* (username, 'Daniel Shamu')

> *"too much beauty in one video 😍💔😩. black sisters are slaying 🔥."* (username, 'Barwaaqo Aden')

These comments, as noted earlier, explicitly link these viewers' perceptions of beauty to the black women's bodies featured in these music videos. The black women in the music videos are described in ways that not only emphasises their physical appearance, but at times also places them on a symbolic pedestal that linguistically portrays them as the epitome of beauty to a point where they are described as magical and perfect 'creations'. See, for instance, the extracted comments from viewers below:

> *"The girls in this video are all GOALS! Black women, we're a gift to the world!"* (username, 'Simply Shanice')

> *"Black women are one of God's most perfect creations 😍 #blackgirlmagic"* (username, 'being sashyka')

> *"those ladies killed the dance.....incredible....black ladies are fireeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee"* (username, 'Rehema Maginga')

Viewers are expressive about their admiration for the featured black women and their perceived beauty, dancing abilities, and musicality. At play here, one may argue, is that in their consistent foregrounding of black African subjectivities, the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study are variously used as emotional catalysts to augment a sense of 'black pride' in the minds of the viewers consuming these popular cultural texts. The music videos are partly used as symbolic currencies and as 'evidence' to declare to the world the beauty and talent of the black African peoples in a globalised media culture, which often centres and celebrates whiteness as the universal standard. Even so, it is interesting how this sense of pride is significantly based on a shallow sense of value: being beautiful and spotting a 'sexy' body. A focus on *just* these characteristics when celebrating black womanhood, I would argue, may do more harm than good in that black African women's bodies will increasingly be exoticised and fetishised in ways that strip them of their personality-based, intellectual, and aspiration-driven nuances and diversities as active citizens across their diverse contexts.

5.2.3. Which 'black' is beautiful? Prejudicial notions 'black beauty'

In addition to the noted gender-specific dynamics observed in the analysed corpus of music videos, are descriptive statistics in relation to the physical appearances of the featured gendered subjectivities. Considering body type, specifically, men and women appear to be equally held to strict bodily appearance standards in this musical genre where, across all of the analysed video segments (accounting for 100% of screen time: 103 minutes, 30 seconds), men with

visibly abled, lean, athletic and/or muscled body types were granted screen time by being focused on by the camera. And across 93% (96 minutes, 15 seconds) of the evaluated screen time, were women with abled, lean, visibly curvy and/or athletic physiques, who were seen to enjoy notable screen time. When occasionally featured in scenes alongside these predominantly muscular, lean/toned, visibly curvy bodies, women (across a mere total of 22% of screen time: 22 minutes, 46 seconds) and men (across a mere total of 22% of screen time) with plus-sized, much larger and fuller-figured body types, were often just background characters or centralised in humorous depictions for comic relief. It is through the predominant centring of visibly muscular, lean/toned and abled body types, that this musical genre – based on the limited purview offered by the analysed corpus of visual texts – appears particularly biased against visually centring larger/fuller-figured physiques, disabled or minimally-abled bodies, among others; characters with said body types statistically do not enjoy equal representation in the corpus of music videos analysed for this study (see Diagram 6).

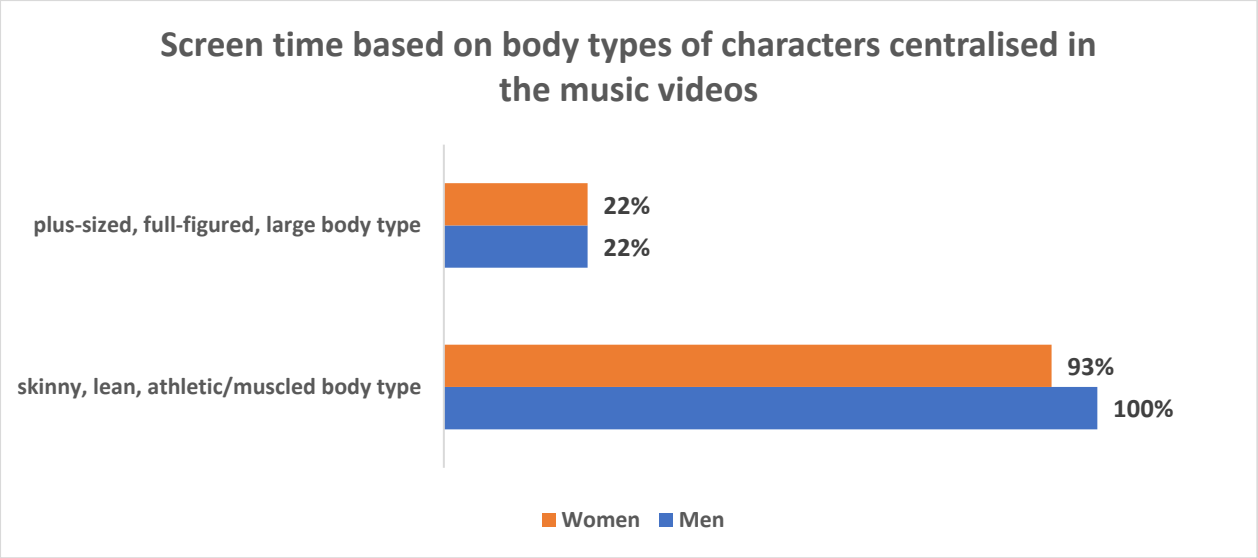


Diagram 6: Body types of the characters centred by being given significant screen time in scenes across the analysed music videos

Evident here, is a favouring – in the visual culture captured in the corpus of analysed music videos – of a physical appearance aesthetic that is restrictive in its over-emphasis on, and celebration of, an abled, lean/toned, athletic and muscled body type. In the analysed music videos, the storylines – many revolving around the heteronormative pursuit and celebration of romantic love and sexual relations – are quite obviously led by men and women with body types as those described above. This, it can be argued, feeds into patronising media cultures that thrive on the vilifying of, especially women's, physical appearances perceived to be 'unattractive'. As Gill (2008: 44) aptly reminds us:

> Indeed, the figure of the 'unattractive' woman who seeks a sexual partner remains one of the most vilified in popular culture – as evidenced by the repeated circulation and apparent enduring appeal of comedy routines and 'jokes' that take as their object of ridicule sexually 'desperate' 'ugly' women.

In terms of racial profile, this musical genre is black-centric as all the artists comprising the corpus of music videos collected for this study (introduced in chapter 4) are black individuals. Predominantly black, the women cast as "leading" characters in the music videos – identified by their consistent proximity to, and relationships with, the protagonists in the depicted storylines – were more likely to be light skinned (evident across 68% of the analysed music videos: 17 of the 25 videos) as opposed to being dark skinned (only witnessed across 32% of the analysed corpus: 8 of the 25 videos). These descriptive statistics point specifically to the women cast as the main love interest or sexual conquest of the central male protagonists in each of the 25 analysed music videos. These women are usually depicted as being actively pursued by the men embodying the protagonist roles; as such, they enjoy significant screen time alongside said men.

Herewith also was a prevalence of a particular hairstyle in that 74% of the screen time (76 minutes, 35 seconds) depicted the "leading" women characters styled in a weave/hair-extensions/wig, relaxed/straightened hair, compared to only 26% of screen time (24 minutes, 50 seconds) wherein said "leading" women appear in their natural, unstraightened hair in the form of afros, cornrows, dreadlocks, short-styled (fade cut, brush cut, bald head). Considering the extensive screen time that the "leading" women in these music videos enjoy, an argument can be made that this choice of aesthetic representation perpetuates a particular kind of black feminine beauty tied intricately to dominant discourses of commercially viable feminine beauty. This is a feminine beauty linked to prejudicial and limiting beauty standards that favour black women with light-skinned complexions, straightened and weave-inclusive hairstyles as the ideal (Pilane and Iqani 2016; Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka-Gwegweni, Grobler & Hift 2014; Hunter 2002; Phoenix 2014).

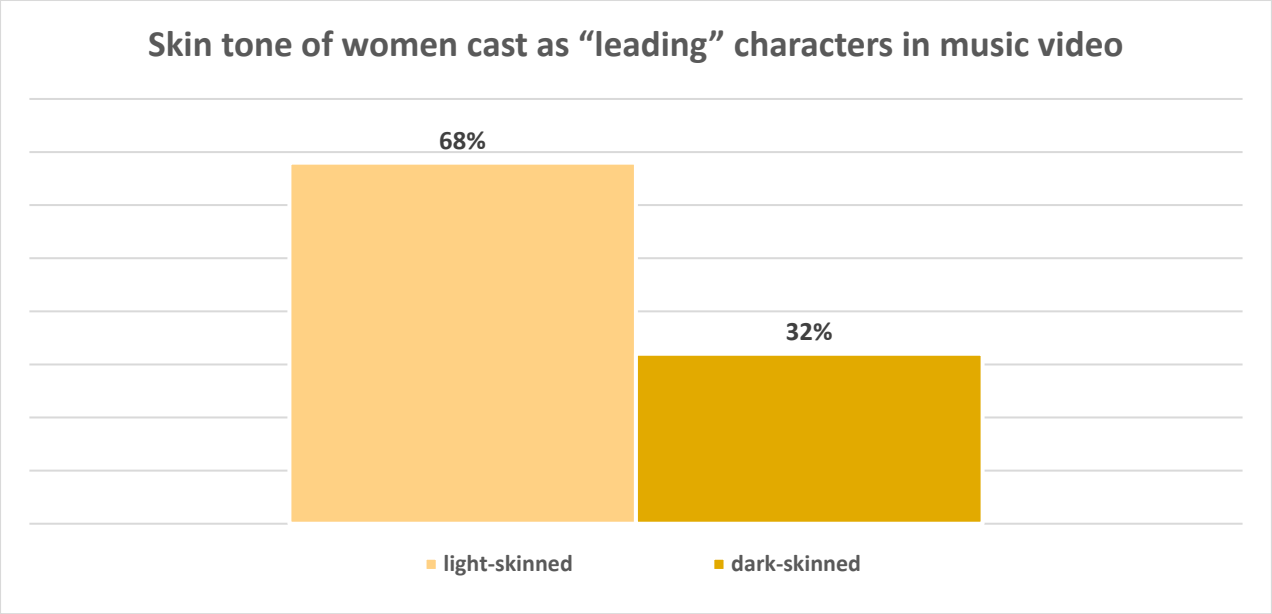


Diagram 7: Descriptive statistics with respect to skin complexion of women cast as leading characters or love interest alongside leading protagonists (predominantly men)

Noted in the content analysis of the corpus of YouTube comments were a multiplicity of conversational subject matter from viewers, capturing their perceptions about the gendered bodies featured in the music videos. Women’s and men’s physical appearances come under scrutiny among viewers who express their opinions regarding the physiques, skin complexions, hairstyles, clothing, among other things, of the individuals featured in the hyperreal contexts in these music videos.

Much of the commentary, interestingly, is indicative of positive and complimentary sentiments regarding the physical and performance-related traits of the women and men depicted in these Afrobeats music videos. One viewer, by the username of ‘Coogie246’, positively highlights the women’s performative capabilities and physical appearances in the following comment on one of the music videos analysed in this study:

> *Its a shame young Nigerian women in the U.S don't dance like the women in this video any more. A lot (Not all) come to the U.S and try to act too posh, they try and rid themselves of the things that make them unique to the rest of the world....shame. Nigerian women are some of the most gorgeous women on the planet*.

In comparing Nigerian women to those in the United States, this viewer both compliments and partly shames Nigerian women. The viewer compliments them for their ‘unique’ dancing abilities while shaming those who choose to dissociate from said dancing styles once leaving Nigeria or, in extension, Africa, for America. Seen here, is an attempt to link women’s perceived ‘Africanness’ with their performative prowess in terms of dance-specific bodily

expression, where ideal African womanhood is partially associated with being able to move or shake one's body in a certain way.

African (in this case, Nigerian) women's physical appearances are also endearingly emphasised in that this viewer claims they are "some the most gorgeous women on the planet". This discourse around the gorgeousness of African women is reiterated consistently by viewers from the corpus of YouTube comments from these Afrobeats music videos. A viewer by the username of 'TheMelaninEffect', praises Afrobeats artists for embracing and valuing the beauty of African women: "*I love to see these artists embrace beautiful African women as the leading ladies/love interests in their videos. Beautiful song and video*." This viewer is appreciative of the fact that 'beautiful African women' are recognised by Afrobeats artists to a point where a romantic or love interest is shown towards said African women compared, presumably, to non-African women.

Also referencing a woman's dance-related performative prowess is a comment from 'Baraka Andrew' who shares: "*That lady really causes emergency... Damn! she can move her assets...*" The lady referred to in this comment is praised for her ability to 'move her assets', in other words, she is commended for manoeuvring her body in a specific way. A viewer by the username of 'Olivia Boyd' is equally as impressed by the women's performative capabilities and mentions that *"[t]hose girls better have gotten paid well. They were dancing their asses off*." Similarly, the depicted women's performative prowess and physical appearances are the subject of another viewer's comment who expresses that "*[e]very single one of those girls was fine, and the choreography was dope*" (username: 'jabrown1978'). Not only is the choreography (dance routine) by the women in the music video considered 'dope' (a term often informally used to describe something as being very good) by this viewer; they also make mention of how 'fine' the girls are. The use of the word 'fine', in this context, makes reference to a state of being beautiful or attractive, as is conventionally used in casual conversation among young people.

Comments further reiterating the beauty rhetoric stemming from viewer/listener reaction-driven written expressions in relation to African women, include the following:

> "*I´m just so happy to be in the same continent as these beautiful women! Love from Somalia*" (username: 'sofia')
>
> "*I think African girls are so hot! omg this shapes! Obsessed from afrobeats too. Love from Russia*!" (username: 'Snake Duck')
>
> "*The women in this video are so beautiful* 🤩" (username: 'Tayia Redd')

The women (largely assumed by viewers to be African) featuring in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, are explicitly lauded for their physical appearances and dance-related performative prowess. As another viewer emphasises by asking, "*[w]ho can dance better than African and Caribbean women! ;)*". These women's perceived Africanness is, evidently, discursively linked to their abilities to dance, almost as a way of distinguishing them – beyond geographical consideration – from perceived non-Africanness.

Given the descriptive statistics as they relate to the dominant physical appearances of the black women centred in these music videos, one can assume that this celebratory, positive viewer commentary about the physical beauty and performance prowess of African women, is directed at these idealised constructions of black feminine beauty that largely exclude women with physical appearances considered outside of this light-skinned complexion, lean or visibly curvy bodied, and often weave-adorning ideal. This marginalising of said non-conforming types of feminine beauties, implicitly renders them as less attractive in the eyes of the creators of these music videos whose visual outputs engender an influential effect on the black African young women who, as young adults, are entangled in media cultures that partly aid them in their self-identity constructions.

This is why, beyond the physical appearances and performative competences of the women's bodies in the analysed music videos, viewer comments also revolved around the skin complexions of the women featured in these music videos. The content analysis of viewer comments illustrated that the viewers share commentary that explicitly highlights their thoughts regarding the hypervisibility of particular skin complexions over others in these music videos. An observable rhetoric in this regard revolves around the dominant visibility of light skinned black women as compared to dark-skinned ones.

Commentary along this line of thought invokes conversation around the marginalisation of dark-skinned black women in these music videos, and an appreciation is extended to artists who subvert this representational convention noted in the visual culture captured in the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos. A viewer by the username, 'Goldniz', has this to say about the lack of visibility of dark-skinned women in music videos such as these Afrobeats music videos:

> "*If you wonder why dark skinned women bleach their skin now you know why. Because they are never in the front. Misrepresented. Black male singers would rather put a white girls with messed up hair who can't dance than put a dark skinned girl who can actually dance*."

Through their own consumption of, and engagement with music videos by black men – Afrobeats artists comprising a significant part of said black men who are musicians in the global music scene – this viewer finds that light-skinned women are visually centred much more and, at times, at the expense of the perceived performance standard and quality of the music video. This, according to this viewer, is part of the reason why dark-skinned women engage in skin lightening regimes. According to this viewer, a turn to skin lightening/'bleaching' efforts by some dark skinned women is motivated by a plight to want to be included as opposed to being marginalised by, in this context, black male singers and creators of this music.

Continuing in this line of reasoning around skin complexion, a viewer by the username of 'Ishtar Oshun', claims that light-skinned black women have it easy with regard to passing off as acceptable, attractive or desirable: "*I don't care if I sound bitter this goes to show light skinned women get a pass even if they look like dry...the lyrics say "waist 34 hips 44" ogbenny where is ur own shape ..one of them even dared to grab their back but there was nothing there to grab. Pitiful. Spits*". Highlighting a perceived misfit between the lyrics and the actual women appearing in this particular music video, this viewer is seemingly disappointed (arguably disgusted: "*Pitiful. Spits"*) in that the lyrics describe a woman with a 34 sized waist and 44 sized hips; yet the actual women depicted do not fit this description. It is their light skin complexion that is said to have had them 'pass' as good enough to appear as central characters in this music video.

"*I agree with most comments here. It's pathetic a lot african/black music videos nowadays features white (or near white) women in the forefront. It's sending the messages only these types of women are worthy to be praised and serenaded, not the dark skinned ones (sigh)... this need to change!!!*" expresses a viewer by the username, 'Pondu11'. This observation is echoed in the following comment by a viewer with the username, 'Temi Abimbola': "*Been waiting for the music video & it's looking CLEEEAAANNN 🔥🔥 But it would have been A* if he had a cute dark skin dancer in it as well. Dark skin would contrast very well with the colours. Nonetheless this banged!*"

Indirectly expressing a sense of disappointment in the absence of 'a cute dark skin dancer' in this particular music video, this viewer claims to withhold an urge to rate this video an 'A'. It is presumably not worthy of an 'A' score due to its lack of inclusion of dark-skinned women.

Amidst the written expressions of disappointment and shame towards this representational convention that marginalises dark-skinned black women, sporadic but evident appreciation is

extended to Afrobeats artists who are noted to disrupt this music video convention by featuring and centring dark-skinned black women in their music videos. Said appreciative viewer comments include a range of statements such as those presented below:

> "*Forget Drake. Can we appreciate the people actually in this video..... The sexy beautiful brown/dark skinned girls who we never get to see in music videos these days*" (username: 'Mikki M')
>
> "*[…] let's talk about these beautiful dark skins represented! I haven't seen many artists add darkskin women in their videos, you mostly only see light skinned foreign girls and you can't deny it. ALL DARKSKINS ARE BEAUTIFUL, BIG OR SMALL, WIDE NOSE OR NARROW NOSE, 4C HAIR OR BRAZILLIAN, WE OUT HERE!*" (username: 'Melanated Chi')

Such viewer comments demonstrate an attempt at celebrating the inclusion of dark-skinned women in music videos such as these Afrobeats music videos because "we never get to see [them] in music videos these days," as 'Mikki M' expresses in their comment. It is believed that mostly light-skinned black women are added to feature as central characters in the music videos these quoted viewers consume. Viewers of these Afrobeats music videos seem to be aware of the prejudicial nature of said representational conventions.

Viewer comments regarding the portrayed black African women's perceived beauty and performance prowess are extended – although not as consistently – to the men's bodies featured in these music videos. Take, for instance, this comment from a viewer by the username of 'haque5818': "*I want a Nigerian or African husband... So we can dance everyday.* 😊😊😊.." This viewer's interest in marrying a Nigerian or African husband is seemingly motivated by them being attracted to said potential African husband's dancing abilities which they would be engaging in daily should this desired marriage happen. It is seemingly his perceived dance-related performative prowess that renders him attractive to the quoted viewer who adds three 'smiling' emojis to her comment, connoting feelings of cheerfulness.

Remarking on the performative competence of the artist, Flavour, in the music video for the song 'Sexy Rosey' (Flavour 2015), this viewer says "*Uhh I hope those "dancers" didn't get paid. He* [referring to Flavour] *was whining better than them*". According to this viewer, the dancers featured in this music video (majority of whom are women) were not impressive in comparison to Flavour who was 'whining' (gyrating) his body better than them all. Thereby appreciating this man's ability to perform his dance moves.

Men's physical appearances are sporadically subjected to viewer scrutiny as seen in the quoted comments below. Remarks are made with regard to the physical appearances of the men in

these Afrobeats music videos. Comments aligned with this observation from the content analysis include the following:

> "*Sarkodie now got cheeks lol!! Mans eating now*" (username: 'Nia Love')
>
> "*i'm i the only one who thinks Don Jazzy is cute?* (sic) *I know I know. but I fine him very playful and cute* (sic). *and he is a good business man, I think... .u di feel me but u di form say u no know...hahaha* [you feel/agree with me but you will pretend like you don't know]. (username: 'nikki Nikki').
>
> "*i am not nigerian nor igbo but there is just something too sexy about igbo men. I love em. The anambra ones make my knee weak. And i cant rule out the "042's"*" (username: 'Missy Kay').

It is evident that the bodies of men featuring in these music videos are not spared from being closely observed and scrutinised in ways partly indicative of objectification. Given the visual nature of the music video text, this type of viewer commentary is perhaps unsurprising. However, considering the nature of the objectification of these men's bodies by some viewers, there is a less sexualised undertone in that these men's "assets" (buttocks, thighs, chest etc), for instance, are not particularly focused on. They are, instead, appreciated based on their bodies as a whole which see them being desired for non-physical traits such as being 'good businessmen', 'playful', Igbo, for instance. That said, it would be naïve to disregard the possibility that these men's perceived 'sexiness' by these commenters is also partly linked to how these men move to the beat of the songs. These are body movements that are variously suggestive of the act of sex (for instance, sexualised rotation of the waist area to draw attention to the crotch area).

What is evident is that the conversational patterns prevalent in the viewer commentary around the gendered bodies portrayed in these music videos, are significantly linked to the physical appearances (skin tone, standards of beauty, body type and structure), performative prowess (dancing abilities), gender expressions (ability to physically exude 'womanhood'/'manhood' in the eyes of the viewer) of the featured bodies. Furthermore, these viewer commentaries are more overtly directed at the bodies of women appearing in these music videos. Men's bodies are not as significantly subjected to viewer scrutiny. This observation, when considering findings from the quantitative content analysis of the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time, is thought-provoking in that more often than not, it is men who are more prevalently portrayed as central to the movement of the narratives as they are more likely – at a combined screen time total of 97% (i.e., 100 minutes and 23 seconds) – to be depicted as driving the action of the plot in the narrative. Interestingly, this hypervisibility of men's bodies as key characters in these music videos does not seem to warrant higher instances of viewer scrutiny

when considering the corpus of YouTube comments that was analysed. Such an observation reaffirms existing scholarly arguments that globally, women's bodies are subjected to surveillance and policing and "[i]t is by no means only in Africa that women's embodied appearances are overburdened with meaning and widely considered other people's business, hence in need of scrutiny, comment and control" (Dosekun 2016: 1). Women's bodies, as also evident in the corpus of YouTube comments analysed in this study, are not spared from scrutiny. These surveillance-driven viewer sentiments demonstrate an awareness of the restrictive beauty aesthetic in these music videos, as it relates to black African women.

5.2.4. Subverting the 'poverty' myth? Mediating affluence and luxury

Results from the content analysis of the music videos were also helpful to capture the contextual backdrops against which gender relations occur in these music videos. As such, inferences could be made about the sociocultural landscapes wherein these gendered subjectivities interact, as mediated in the analysed music videos. The scenes across many of the analysed music videos visualise a sense of unity among women and men evidently engaging in communal enjoyment of food and beverages, communal engagement in celebratory cultural ceremonies and dancing: against backdrops often evident of lavishness and consumption of 'luxurious' products such as champagne and extravagant cuisines in opulent properties (see Figure 3, for instance, taken from the 'Mama Africa' (Bracket 2014) music video). Several of the depicted scenes in the 'Mama Africa' music video are characterised by lavish partying involving elegantly dressed young individuals, communally enjoying champagne in lush properties flanked by opulent furniture.

The content analysis revealed that the analysed music videos variously rely on the mediation of a context of community and 'togetherness' whereby 64% (i.e., 16 from the total corpus of 25) music videos incorporated the mediation of communal happiness, pleasure, excitement and celebration through festive occasions such as weddings, parties, clubbing sessions. The portrayal of affluence and wealth through the mediation of – and visual emphasis on – material objects (luxurious cars, opulent properties, designer clothing and jewellery), was also noted to be prevalent in 64% of the total corpus of analysed music videos. We can at least partially read this, I will argue, as (in)advertent efforts at subverting – thus, 'rebranding' Africanness and popular imaginaries of the African everyday experience, in opposition to – hegemonic (read negative) portrayals of Africa as characterised by poverty, war, disease and corruption (Ebo 1992; Hawk 1992; Jaroz 1993; Mazrui 2005; Botes 2010; Nyamnjoh 2010; Mody 2012).



Figure 3: Mediation of the party experience against backdrop of opulent property, lavish clothing and consumption of champagne in 'Mama Africa' music video

These mediations of lavishness and luxury are value-laden in that they do significant work with regard to showing us how the featured African subjectivities in these music videos wish to present themselves. Dosekun and Iqani aptly note that, "[…] luxury is a crucial site through which the psycho-social processes of desiring, dreaming and (self-)imagining occur and are expressed" (2019: 12). Therefore, it can be argued that a significant visual emphasis on symbols of luxury – characterising many of the analysed music videos – has the potential to sensitise viewers of these music videos to the certainty of an African everyday experience that is *not* characterised by ideas of lack or poverty. Lyrically, several of the Afrobeats artists whose music videos are analysed in this thesis, reiterate this observation in how they express their material wealth. Consider, for instance, the following lyrics extracted from a song by P-Square (2014), entitled 'Taste the Money (Testimony)'. The lyrics from one of the verses make it clear that the accumulation and sustenance of wealth is important to these artists. One half of the P-Square duo, in this verse, says the following:

My guy I'm allergic to poverty (you say wetin)
So I'm using my sense to dey gather the properties ay, (okay nau)
No time o
Like the statue of liberty
Nobody knows tomorrow
So I'll be holding my destiny ay

In this verse, the singer – who addresses the listener as 'my guy' – attempts to dissociate from any form of financial struggle by claiming that he is allergic to poverty. It is this claimed 'allergy' to being poor that seemingly enables this artist to use his 'senses' in order to invest in, and gather wealth through, property accumulation. The artist exclaims that time is of the

essence when one aims to be wealthy because nobody knows what tomorrow may look like. He, thus, claims to have a hold of his destiny by knowing how to escape poverty. Said destiny is evidently linked to material wealth and affluence. Such lyrical contents reiterate this noted attempt at actively (indeed also, unwittingly) shifting the contested narratives about Africa and African subjectivities.

Emerging from the corpus of YouTube comments regarding Africa, Africans and Africanness, viewer perceptions of a subverting of Africa's representation in global media are apparent. Contributions along this line of discussion are evident in comments that celebrate a rebellion against hegemonic, often negative, visual framings of Africa and Africanness – real or imagined. A viewer by the username of 'CoolKid679' has this to say:

> *Everybody thinks Africa is a bunch of dirt and hungry children, but Africa is beautiful. This video was recorded in Africa. Wherever you go in Africa, there is going to be city area. The city area looks really nice, very similar to America. But just like in every country, Africa has it's own countryside. The African homes most people see is our countryside. Most Africans are not hungry. Most don't need help. We are pretty rich too, just have pretty horrible rulers over our countries.*

According to this viewer, brand Africa's image is positively expressed in the music video referred to by this viewer. Depictions of Africa as poverty-stricken, for instance, lead to "everybody" internalising said portrayals as a single reality about Africa. 'Everybody', one can assume, refers most especially to non-African and non-diasporic subjectivities who rely on the mass media for information and entertainment from, and about Africa. Consider this comment from a viewer geographically based outside of Africa and presumably consuming Afrobeats music videos, given their effort to leave commentary on YouTube about this music:

> *"I hate the fact that they don't teach us in America about the beauty of Africa. They only show us the poor children and families and tear stained faces."* (username: 'Jessica Jones')

'Jessica Jones', with this comment, expresses what seems to be frustration towards the dominant, negatively underscored, depictions or teachings captured in 'American' media about Africa. This viewer feels that Africa's beauty (as perceived by this viewer) is underrepresented. It is, seemingly, thanks to the Afrobeats music video contents consumed by this viewer, that s/he is aware of the beauty of Africa.

It is here where I wish to rehash the words of Afrobeats artist, Davido, as I've discussed in the introduction to this thesis. In conversation with journalist Priscilla Ward, reflecting on what the global success of Afrobeats music means for Africa, Davido is quoted as having said that,

> [i]t's a great time for Africa, it's a great time for African music. The whole culture as a whole. Growing up it wasn't cool to be from Africa, but now everyone wants to be involved in the culture. What you are taught about […] Africa is not really 100 percent of what it really is, because everywhere has its good parts and its bad parts. They don't show you the good parts, the beautiful parts of Africa. The music is being accepted, […] even the clothing, and the food, everything is just coming together (Ward 2019).

There is also a notable pride about Africa and its perceived beauty. Viewer commentary in relation to these noted depictions of luxury, wealth and lavishness, among other sensibilities, involve several discursive framings about Africa, Africans and Africanness which are predominantly bright-sided. This bright-sided tone is evident in the many comments that, to a great extent, express sentiments of pride while advocating for a united Africa that should collaboratively subvert the global 'negative' image of the continent, presumably in the eyes of non-Africans. The 'African pride' discourse is prevalent in the corpus of data analysed for this study, and variously demonstrate inflections of 'Afro-optimism' (Mkono 2019; Grant, Djomo, and Krause 2016). Consider, for example, the following viewer comments:

> *"#IAMPROUDAFRICAN shout out to my African brothers and sisters . one love to Africa i love you all from Somalia."* (username: 'Barwaaqo Aden')

> *"i'll never stop saying that you're the best of Africans musicians and i'm so happy,proud and glad to be African like you even if we're not from the same country guy God go continue giving you his blessing all your life* 👑👍👍👌💚💔💛*"*(username: 'Anny Matilda')

> *"proud African. I don't even go close to any American music because my African brothers and sisters got me covered!..one love to our great artists in Africa!"* (username: 'Florence Onyera').

It is apparent, when considering the quoted YouTube comments, that the audio-visual materials consumed by these viewers invoke feelings of pride about Africa, Africans and their perceived expressions of their Africanness. These viewers, from various regions of the African continent, unreservedly express their feelings of pride in what their African 'brothers and sisters' are achieving through this musical genre.

This sentiment of 'kinship', among viewers that evidently identify as African, prevails prominently in the analysed YouTube comments where viewers seem to use language which forges a sense of unity, optimism, and oneness among Africans.

> *"I'm South African is there a problem when we work together and unite as Africans?.... by the way I love this song"* (username: 'Asiphe Anita')

> *"Proud Haitian here and reading some of these comments makes me happy to see. We are children of Africa, I love Africa and I love all my POC [people of colour]. love that this music can bring us together!!!"* (username: 'Lisha St fort')
>
> *"An Egyptian here. Wish we could all unite as Africans and repel the wrath of colonialism together. We are closer to each other than we think."* (username: 'ThePharaoh92')

The very evident deployment of a "we" rhetoric in these quoted comments, points to this observation that the musical genre of Afrobeats is perceived by these viewers as a potential unifying agent among Africans.

5.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has reported on the findings from the content analyses carried out on the data collected for this study. This chapter's key purpose was to offer a comprehensive discussion of the dominant representational patterns observed in the music videos analysed in this thesis. These dominant representational patterns were put in conversation with the discursive themes emanating from the corpus of viewer comments from the collected Afrobeats music videos. The chapter has demonstrated how sex, sexuality and sexual expression are gendered in ways that substantially objectify women's bodies more than those of men. Salient forms of power relations prevail, and almost always render the featured men as domineering and the women as submissive, sexually-alluring, 'decorative objects' that are at the service of (heterosexual) men and their self-aggrandizing masculine expressions. It was also established that women's sexuality and their gender performances, as portrayed in the music videos, come under significant scrutiny from viewers of these music videos, thus demonstrating that women's sexuality is significantly policed more than that of men.

Furthermore, the chapter argued that a prejudicial bias exists in the corpus of analysed music videos, and it favours a black feminine beauty aesthetic that centres young, lean and visibly curvy, abled-bodied, light-skinned black women whose heads are most often styled in the form of weaves, wigs, or hair extensions. Viewer comments, in this regard, demonstrate a notable sentiment of despondency. This sentiment is driven by these commenters' perceptions of the implications that such a biased favouring of a narrow standard of black feminine beauty may have on black women across their diverse African contexts. This sense of despondency is variously linked, by these commenters, to discourses of skin bleaching and the argued rifeness thereof across various African contexts. Concerning the visual depictions of the diverse African contexts against which these gender relations and performances play out, the chapter has demonstrated a framing of Africanness (alongside the unsurprising discursive framings of

Africanness as blackness) that appears to emphasise ideas of wealth and affluence. Africanness is, thus, variously constructed through contextual indicators of luxury and lavishness that appear to visually promote notions of Africanness that are divorced from ideas of poverty and socioeconomic struggle, among others. The chapter following this one, uses some of the key findings presented in this chapter as evidentiary points of departure into making deeper arguments pertaining to the representation of gender, sexuality and Africanness in the collected Afrobeats music videos. The chapter will focus specifically on constructions of gender, sexuality and Africanness in relation to men and masculinity.

6. MEN AND MASCULINITIES: MISOGYNY, SEXISM, AND ROMANCE ENTANGLED

In chapter five, results from a quantitative and qualitative content analysis of a corpus of Afrobeats music videos and YouTube comments thereof, were presented. The chapter offered a helpful overview of the dominant patterns of representation in the analysed visual corpus, as they relate to gender, sexuality and notions of Africanness in the musical genre of Afrobeats. The findings highlight an unequal power distribution between men and women, where women's bodies are significantly subjected to being dominated over by men. Women's bodies are also significantly sexually objectified in the service of (heterosexual) men's desires across the hyperreal contexts depicted in the analysed data corpus. These findings will again become pertinent in chapter seven of this thesis. That said, we can see, from these findings, that men and women, their expressions of masculinity and femininity, are socially constructed in very different ways in these music videos, and a closer reading of these dynamics is valuable for this thesis to contribute a fresh perspective with respect to the implications of these socially constructed images of masculinity and femininity, particularly as they relate to the African context and popular imaginaries from this context.

As such, this present chapter provides a nuanced reflection on the dominant constructions of masculinities as performed, sexualised and Africanised within the corpus of analysed texts. Chapter seven, then, will carry out the same goal, although with a focus on performed, sexualised and Africanised femininities. Both chapters six and seven build on the findings discussed in chapter five with respect to gender performativity, sexuality and Africanness as depicted in the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos. For the current chapter, this goal is carried out within the theoretical bounds of gender performativity theory, social constructionism, feminist, as well as representation theory as analytic frameworks. As noted in chapter two, masculinity and femininity, in this thesis, are used to broadly refer to the embodiment of anatomical 'maleness' and/or 'femaleness' by human species and how this physio-biological embodiment of femaleness and/or maleness is internalised, transcends into, and facilitates the construction and performance of gender identity (Williams 1995).

As such, in this chapter, I embark on a feminist critical multimodal discourse analysis of the salient as well as the implicit depictions of masculinities as performed in the collected Afrobeats music videos. In so doing, I go about decoding and critically engaging the overt, presumably intentional, as well as the covert meanings of the depictions of men's bodies behaving and taking up physical space in particular ways. Said depictions constitute the

multifaceted attempts by the producers of these texts to mobilise particular 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972) the visualised men's bodies (presumed to be predominantly African identifying) and spaces (occupied by Africans, and predominantly spanning the diverse regions of the African continent) prioritised in this study's corpus of music videos.

This is an important analytical pursuit, as scholars from across the multidisciplinary field of gender studies have variously noted. It is important because, as part of the broad repertoire of media texts available to, more especially, young people, the music video text notably contributes to the media's role in gender socialisation. These processes of gender socialisation are partly evident in how "[…] the media provide acceptable notions and models of masculinity and femininity…" (Wallis 2011: 161) which are easily observed, pondered over and imitated (Morgan 1987; Gamson, Croteau, Hoynes, & Sasson 1992; Aubrey, Harrison, Kramer, & Yellin 2003; Ward 2003). This is precisely why this thesis deems it valuable to also consider, critically, viewer expressions of opinions and perceptions about these 'ways of seeing' men and women in Africa, and their hyperreal expressions of sexuality and performances of Africanness.

This chapter is structurally divided into several sub-sections aimed at critically engaging the predominant constructions of masculinities as depicted in the analysed music videos. Section 6.1 – in its critical reading of male performativities – renders a discussion of the predominantly emphasised forms of masculinities in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. Presented here are four narratives that emphasise performances of 'heteropatriarchal masculinities', 'breadwinner masculinities', 'sexualised masculinities', and 'romance-oriented masculinities'. These noted masculine performances are argued to be the dominant, multimodally emphasised forms of manhood evident in the visual culture articulated through the analysed music videos.

Building on these four narratives of masculinity, the chapter advances a new concept – 'misogyrom' – to show how the masculinities pervasive across the hyperreal contexts captured in the analysed music videos, are variously implicated in the perpetuation of gender-relational conditions which conceal misogyny through the overdramatisation of romance discourses (in the song lyrics) and acts of romanticism (in the narrative progressions of the music video storylines). 'Misogyrom', as such, is proposed to capture a cultural sensibility wherein the sociocultural dominance of men over women is successfully sustained through the masking of heteropatriarchal misogyny and sexism with men's acts of overt romanticism towards women. Taken at face value, I argue, the misogyrom sensibility perpetuates the naive absolving of patriarchy from its toxic nature in relation to the just and empowering sociocultural treatment

of women across various domains, most especially the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. Section 6.3, renders a concluding discussion summarising this chapter's main arguments.

6.1. Reading male performativities and masculinities

The depiction of gendered bodies (and their visually articulated social relations) across the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study, portrays interesting socially constructed masculinities in relation to femininities. Through this data corpus's visual and lyrical contents, manhood is constructed and embodied in ways that, as shall be evidenced in this section, perpetuate four dominant 'ways of seeing' (Berger 1972; 1990) men's bodies and how their iterated performative attributes contribute to the representation of their social relations with women and other men. I argue in this section, that the multimodal discourses evident in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, prioritise explicitly heteropatriarchal masculinities. This is achieved through the visual and lyrics-driven emphasis on a queer exclusionary, exclusively heteronormative, African manhood that upholds the status quo in relation to gender and sexuality expression across many of the regions in the African context. I suggest that this is, to an extent, a result of the continent's well-documented anti-gay worldview evident in judicial, political and religious framings about homosexuality and other forms of queer gender expression. Problematically, I further suggest, this will continue to inspire and legitimise the vilifying, under- and heteronormatively-biased representations of non-normative, queer masculinities within mainstream African popular media and cultural productions.

Secondly, through analysing the corpus of music videos, this thesis finds that in their persistent and overt mediation of a materialist culture, the analysed texts evidence a materialistic masculine sensibility that strongly aligns with ideals that can be termed 'breadwinnerism'. I borrow the term from sociological studies that have used it to capture the normative expectation on men – in a dominant patriarchal cultural formation – to be financial and material providers (Alliyu and Adedeji 2016; Akanle, Adebayo, and Busari 2014). On the basis of gender relations among men and women – as articulated in the corpus of analysed music video texts – there is an evident multimodal construction of a (heterosexual) masculinity embedded in ideals of economic/material provision (breadwinnerism) by men towards women. This, I argue in alignment with existing literature, is key in aiding men in their preservation of cultural power (real or perceived) over women through economic superiority (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005).

Such gender relations – mediated by men-owned money and material commodities – perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies and structures often responsible for the subordination of women.

Third, I advance an argument that the corpus of music videos analysed in this thesis demonstrates an interesting perpetuation, by creators of this music, of a notably sexualised black (African) masculinity. At play here, I argue, are overt instances within this musical genre (dominated by men) wherein a black, 'alpha' African male sex symbol who is palatable and commodifiable, is variously iterated. The hyper-visibility of said sexualised masculinities engender partly-misogynistic perpetuations of men's dominance over women through discourses of sexual power and potency characterising much of the hyperreal gender-relational conditions captured in the analysed corpus of music videos. Women's sexualities and sexual expressions, as a result, are variously depicted in the analysed music videos as controlled by, and/or reliant on, the sexually domineering men.

Lastly, in ways that notably bolster audiences' positive regard of these heteropatriarchal, breadwinner-aligning, 'sexy' masculinities evident in the analysed music videos, these expressions of manhood are convincingly articulated as hyper-romantic, full of love and emotionally invested in the 'well-being' of the women with whom the screen is shared. The African men depicted in these music videos are largely portrayed as commitment-driven, family-oriented, loyal and capable of offering infinite romantic love to the women they get romantically involved with across the hyperreal contexts depicted in the analysed music videos. Considered through a feminist critique of popular music, such depictions of what I label 'romance-oriented' masculinities, are key in demonstrating a noteworthy dissociation – by performers of this musical genre – from notions of violence variously associated with black-centric musical genres dominated by men, such as rap and hip-hop, in existing studies. This important finding notwithstanding, such depictions – if taken at face value, I argue – may be internalised without noticing how complexly engrained they are in a culture of benevolent sexism wherein men's prosocial behaviours towards women are romanticised more than they are called out for their regressive, sexist undertones. The sub-sections below expansively engage my arguments as briefly presented above.

6.1.1. Towing the heteronorm-conforming line? Masculinities and compulsory heterosexuality

A close examination of the corpus of Afrobeats music videos in relation to gender performativity reveals that a heteronormative worldview underscores the multimodal patterns of representation in these texts. On the part of the diverse men featured in the analysed music videos, gender performativity and gender relations are saliently heterosexual. For a brief exemplification of this observation, consider the visual depictions in Figures 4 and 5 where an explicit heterosexual romantic orientation is sustained through the denotative depictions of romantic love and intimacy via non-verbal gestures such as kissing, romantic caressing and other forms of intimate physical touch. Evident here, is a striking visual trope wherein the predominant expressions of sexuality are overtly aligned along normative ideals that celebrate heterosexuality.



Figure 4: Visual displays of heterosexual romantic relations in Tekno's 'Where' music video

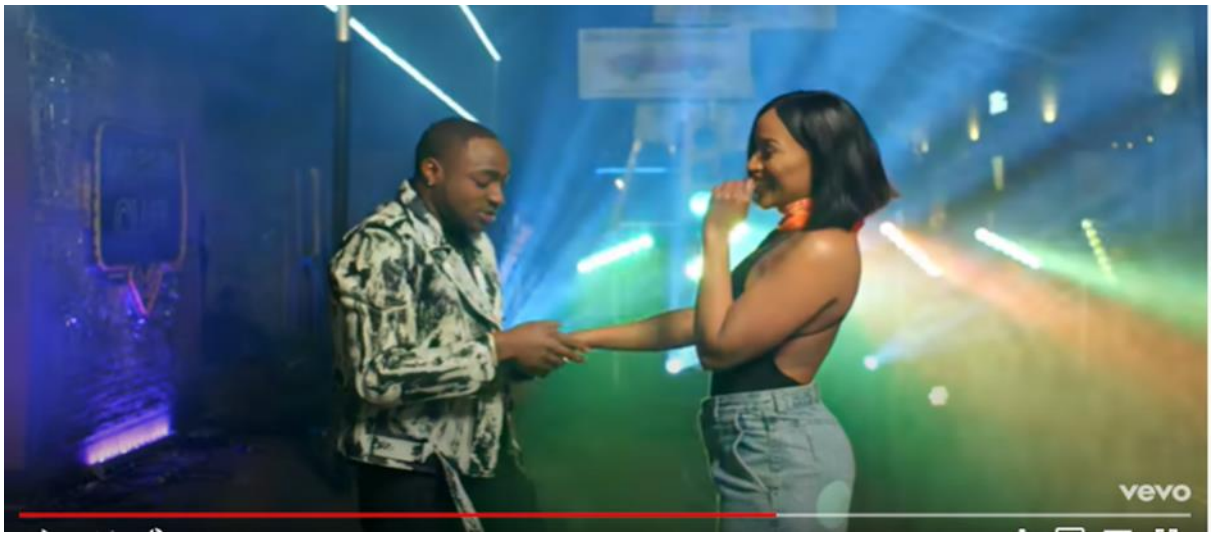


Figure 5: Visual displays of heterosexual romantic relations in Davido's 'If' music video

Let us consider, for instance, Tekno's (2016) music video for the song, 'Where,' from which Figure 4 is captured. The central plot revolves around a heterosexual couple in love, and this love is emphasised through several scenes such as the one depicted here. This brightly lit scene captures Tekno and his love interest sharing a kiss while in romantic embrace with one another. The kiss is shared in what appears to be a domestic setting of a kitchen (given typical kitchen furniture in clear view), suggesting that the couple happily live together. The brightness of this scene suggests that the act depicted therein is something to be illuminated, foregrounded, and not hidden in the dark. In that vein, it is suggested that romantic heterosexual expressions of sexuality are to be lauded and aspired to, thus sustaining the hegemonic dominance that heteronormativity enjoys across contemporary (African) societies. This visual trope feeds into the continuous marginalisation, under- and heteronormatively-skewed representation – in media texts produced across diverse African contexts – of non-heteronorm-conforming sexual identities (e.g., Shaw 2009; Shaw 2012; Stardust 2014; Milani & Wolff 2015). These are sexual identities existing as politically, socially, and economically active citizens across the more than 50 countries in the African continent: a continent for which this musical genre and its highly consumed music videos (in)advertently act as popular cultural 'brand ambassadors', by virtue of the genre's region of origin.

It was noted in the findings from the content analysis of the music videos that, across all the analysed screen time of almost 104 minutes, instances of homoerotic acts of sexual expression indicating homosexual and/or sexually fluid desire between two or more men, were not portrayed at any point. There was, in other words, not a single second of screen time depicting non-heteronorm-conforming expressions of relationships across the visual content analysed. Instead, screen time is predominantly enjoyed by limited normative framings of sexuality as heteronormative. As suggested in chapter five, this finding shores up a plausible argument that this musical genre's visual culture – evident in the analysed music videos – is underscored by a heteronormative worldview which delegitimises the known existence of diverse non-heteronorm-conforming male identities across the African continent, thus erasing said non-heteronorm-conforming men's sexualities and their non-normative gender expressions.

Beyond the visual, this observation is also sustained in the lyrical content of the music videos analysed for this study. Performances of manhood are heteronorm-conforming in the lyrical content as the men in these music videos openly express their interest in, love and appreciation for, women/girls specifically. See, for instance, extracts of lyrics from some of these highly viewed music videos sampled for this study:

[…]
Cause e want e my love o
She no want designer
She no want Ferrari
She say na my love o
You belong to me
And I belong to her o
Uh baby…

Davido (2014), in this song, tells us about his 'baby' who is not into materialistic things and loves him not for any of the materialistic things such as designer clothing or Ferrari luxury vehicles. Referred to in an infantilising tone, "she" (Davido's 'baby') is obviously a woman. Another extract is drawn from one of the songs in the data corpus:

'Say love is a beautiful thing
Girl you dey cool my temper
Love is a wonderful tender feeling
[…]
All the beauty in your eyes dey give me life oh-ooh

In the extract, Tekno (2016), addresses a love interest who is a woman, as can be seen in his use of the word 'girl' in his expression of romantic love towards her. This girl makes him claim that love is a beautiful and tender feeling which she seemingly manages to ignite in him. It is these kinds of lyrical content, albeit infantilising towards the women directed at, that sustain this heteronormative foundation upon, and within which, this musical genre seems to thrive.

The representations of romantic love and intimacy, as embodied by these men in the Afrobeats scene that the collected corpus of data captures – through their non-verbal behaviour and verbalised expressions towards the women depicted as love interests in their music videos – are key in sustaining symbolic constructions of masculinities (from diverse African contexts) as particularly heteronormative and only legitimate when aligned with hegemonic ideals of manhood as 'straightness,' among other ideals. This renders expressions of manhood perceived to not align with these ideals as deviant and impermissible in the hegemonic system. It also positions non-heteronorm-conforming expressions of manhood – especially through a religio-political African discourse which deems them 'sinful' (Tamale 2014a) – as undeserving of creative mediation and widespread dissemination and consumption (i.e., reaching mainstream status in popular culture). I borrow from Morrell (1998: 608) to drive this point home:

> […] hegemonic masculinity silences or subordinates other masculinities, positioning these in relation to itself such that the values expressed by these other masculinities are not those that have currency or legitimacy.

The noted visual and lyrics-driven centring of exclusively heteronorm-conforming masculinities in the analysed Afrobeats music videos demonstrates just how the notion of hegemonic masculinity encompasses, among its various defining features, elements of homophobia and compulsory heterosexuality (Ghaill 1994).

Considering this musical genre's linkage to and predominant production from within diverse regions across the geographic terrain of the African continent, it is valuable to consider the sociocultural contexts that influence this musical genre's visual culture, which in itself is not immune to external structural influence. As Rose (2016: xxi) suggests, it is helpful to broadly ground our interpretations of visual materials in careful examination of the social circumstances in which such materials are embedded. As, indeed, even popular cultural constructions of masculinities should significantly "be understood within a social context and as something which is constantly produced and contested" (Morrell 1998: 609).

If we accept that states and several other socio-political, sociocultural and socioeconomic structures of society are influential catalysts in shaping interactional human behaviour and, to an extent, the constructions and expressions of gendered identities, then a consideration of said structures in the African context is vital in aiding a nuanced understanding of why the contents in the analysed Afrobeats music videos are consistently presenting masculine identities in undeniably heteronorm-conforming ways. While some may argue that depictions in these music video texts are not to be taken as real life social relations, Iqani (2016: 200) reminds us that "…media representations are not in fact removed from social reality but are one important mode in which it is constituted."

The social realities informing gendered ideals around sexual citizenship across the more than 50 states in the African continent remain largely pro-heterosexuality and anti-homosexuality. This is evident in that, at the time of writing this thesis, less than a dozen African countries are known to have officially decriminalised consensual same-sex sexual relations between citizens, as opposed to more than 30 others that still actively criminalise homosexuality as punishable by law (Hairsine 2019; Yuhas 2019). Acts of same-sex, homoerotic desire and intimacy are actively repressed through influential discourses from law enforcement, policy making, political and religious structures that advocate for the sustenance of hyper-conservative worldviews against homosexuality (Adamczyk 2017; Hairsine 2019; Yuhas 2019; Buckle 2019). Through the judicial structures and law-enforcement frameworks in the contexts of the more than 30 uniquely diverse African countries that actively criminalise homosexuality, the citizenries are subjected to laws that deem any non-heteronorm-conforming expressions of

sexuality as socially deviant (Tamale 2014a); rendering "…the African continent a difficult place for homosexuals" (Hairsine 2019).

Still widely prevailing across a multiplicity of African contexts are colonial-era 'anti-sodomy' laws, religious beliefs, and a popularised discourse – sustained through socio-political leadership – of homosexuality as an "un-African" western import, foreign to the African continent (Tamale 2014a; Tamale 2014b; Hairsine 2019). Such structurally maintained and legitimised discourses, it can be argued, filter down into sub-structures and industries such as the media and cultural industries, which results in the production of educational and entertainment media content that reflect the dominantly enforced and widely internalised ideals with respect to gender relations, sexuality and sexual expression. As such, expressions of masculinities in African popular media texts such as music videos, unwittingly mirror these dominantly enforced anti-gay and homophobic ideals, given the dangers engendered in any form of deviance from these ideals. This is an observation that is unsurprising, as state-controlled surveillance over citizens' sexualities in many African regions advance beyond the routine arresting of individuals found to engage in homosexual relations, into various acts of physical harassment and even murder in regions such as Uganda (Van Klinken 2013). Such state-driven pursuits of citizen serveillence render it dangerous, in these African regions, to present same-sex desire and love in mainstream media texts.

I argue, then, that these explicitly heteronormative expressions of masculinities evident in this study's analysed Afrobeats music videos, are, in part, as a result of the still-prevailing and actively enforced anti-gay laws, policies and socio-religious discourses across the majority of countries in the African continent. I include religious structures herein because it has been noted that African people – in their rich diversity – are among the most religious people in the world, with "[a]round 93% of sub-Saharan Africans [being] either Christian (63%) or Muslim (30%), making the continent one of the most religious in the world" (Hairsine 2019). These institutions are powerful in their constructions and maintenance of gender regimes that form the foundation of society-wide gender orders; that is, "…the arrangement of gender relations which distributes power unequally and of which hegemonic masculinity is an integral part" (Morrell 1998: 609). Religious fraternities have had major influences on people's attitudes towards homosexuality, the heteronormative institution of marriage, and ideas about reproduction, and have sustained anti-gay beliefs that continue to influence ordinary citizens in their pluralistic social relations (Tamale 2014a). As such, heterosexuality, marriage, and sexual relations for the purpose of reproduction, are notably valued across the African context.

An example of the influence of dominant societal structures on people's attitudes towards homosexuality and the heteronormative institution of marriage can be witnessed in the following YouTube comment from the analysed corpus that was made on a music video by Flavour (2013) which is premised on the (heteronorm-conforming) institution of marriage:

> "It is this our great cultural institution of marriage that involves family, friends, associates and the wider communities in Nigeria that Obama and the decadent West wants us to forgo and embrace homosexuality. Tufia!!!" (username: 'Aframaco')

Evidently latching onto the 'homosexuality is unAfrican' discourse, this viewer criticises former US president, Barack Obama, and the "West" by labelling them as 'decadent' (that is, corrupt or debauched) promoters of homosexuality. This viewer, it seems, is of the opinion that homosexuality directly threatens the 'great cultural institution of marriage' and should, therefore, not be allowed or celebrated in Africa (or Nigeria, in this instance). Emphasising their evident disapproval of homosexuality, this viewer uses the Igbo phrase, 'Tuffia' (short for 'Tuffiakwa', which means 'God forbid'), followed by three exclamation points – passionately exclaiming how they believe God must/should/does forbid homosexuality. This evidences, thus, how "Africans engaged in same-sex sexual practices are viewed as undeserving aping sinners" (Tamale 2014a: 165).

It is not surprising, then, that for the men (currently dominating this musical genre) producing Afrobeats songs and music videos – such as the 24 out of 25 music videos analysed in this study – their visual and lyrical expressions of masculinities demonstrate no sign of deviating from heteronorm-conforming ideals of manhood. That is to say, none of the men made visible in the corpus of analysed music videos engage in "non-traditional desires", as Ratele (2013: 140) describes. This is, plausibly, as a result of *all* these men's genuine heterosexual sexual identities or, arguably, as a result of a fear, by some of them, of potential vilification and widespread condemnation from fans and consumers of this musical genre, such as 'Aframaco', should they incorporate visual elements of same-sex, or gender non-conforming desire in their music lyrics and music video storylines. This potential for widespread condemnation and vilification – should they deviate from hegemonic expressions of masculinities – presents various political-economic and potentially life-threatening implications for these artists.

The implications to potentially emerge from any attempts at queering their expressions of manhood may engender possibilities of career suicide for these Afrobeats artists considered by this thesis. This is irrespective of the conceivable possibility of some of them possessing – and perhaps even privately acting on – psychosexual drives of same-sex desire and intimacy aligned

with diverse forms of fluid sexual practices and expressions of sexuality. This career suicide can occur through the loss of a significant segment of their African fanbase, as well as a transnational fanbase in the diaspora subscribing to hyper-conservative, anti-gay worldviews. This will have economic implications that may threaten the livelihood of said artists. As Wallis (2011: 169) notes:

> If it is true that gender-deviant behavior is punished […], then in such a highly commercialized realm as the music industry, when deviance could possibly mean the loss of a career, perhaps it is no wonder highly gendered [heteronormative] behavior is consistently observed. Certainly there are artists going against the grain of gender stereotypes, but …they are in the minority.

As was the case in the findings of this US-based study carried out by Cara Wallis, it is perhaps even truer for the African context. In the case of musicians who are men that actively go against the grain of heteronorm-conforming gender stereotypes about manhood, they are in the minority and notably practice within musical genres such as 'indie[4]' or 'alternative', allowing them some room to variously challenge the status quo (Grootboom 2020). Given that this study's corpus of empirical data presents an undeniably heteronorm-conforming sensibility as it relates to gender expression, it is unsurprising that I could not find an Afrobeats-based example to advance my next point. As such, I briefly move from my constructed corpus of focus, to draw an example from an African musician who is not in the Afrobeats music scene. I do this merely to demonstrate how broader sociocultural, socio-political and socio-religious structures variously shape creative outputs by actively punishing gender-deviant identity constructions through at times life-threatening, normative, celebrations of heteronormativity.

There is one openly gay-identifying South African artist by the name of Nakhane, who – after several years of operating within the 'indie'/'alternative' space – has broken into a section of the mainstream music scene in Africa irrespective of a largely conservative, anti-gay African audience base (Magadla 2018; Holgate 2019). Nakhane explicitly sings about same-sex love, passion and desire and has produced music videos wherein he overtly engages in same-sex sexualised relations (see, for instance, music videos for 'In the Dark Room' (JustMusicSA 2014) and 'Clairvoyant' (Nakhane 2017)).

[4] "Indie" (or 'Independent') music refers to music that is independently produced outside of commercial record labels or their subsidiaries. Key here, is an autonomous, 'do-it-yourself' approach to music recording and publishing (Dale 2008). Beyond how the music has been produced, 'Indie' also references a musical genre characterised by various inflections of Punk music.

It should be noted, nonetheless, that Nakhane's decision to openly assert his preference for same-sex romantic love through his artistic offerings was perhaps partly encouraged by his birth country's liberal constitution. South Africa, since 1998, had decriminalised homosexuality and provides for legal same-sex marriage (effective from 2006); homophobia and other anti-homosexual violent behaviours are, as a result, officially unlawful (Yuhas 2019). Even so, this artist is still subjected to hate-speech and homophobia from religio-political and cultural factions across (South) African societies which, as journalist Red Mosiane (2019) speculates, may have partly contributed to Nakhane's decision to move out of Africa to Europe in 2018. The move, it can be claimed, was important for Nakhane's socioeconomic security and career growth prospect, as he continues to actively dissent, through his artistic expression, from inherently homophobic, anti-queer structures characterising majority of the African continent.

It is evident, thus, that an active rebellion against widely-shared, heteronorm-conforming African ideals of manhood as *only* legitimate when heterosexually-inclined may result in unfavourable economic, health, safety and career-based implications. This is among the chief reasons why, arguably, the exclusively heterosexual masculinities pervasive in the sample of Afrobeats music videos analysed for this study, will continue to implicitly suggest an allegiance to sociocultural, socio-political and socio-religious structures that consider any expressions of manhood, which do not align with heteronormative ideals, as deviant and undeserving of mass mediation, mainstream status, and wide dissemination and consumption.

Therefore, I suggest that this study's finding, from the content analysis, of a 0% appearance/incorporation of expressions of sexuality indicative of queer or same-sex desire and intimacy across all the almost 104 minutes of coded data, is in part linked to the broader social contexts wherein these artistic materials are produced, consumed and embedded. The visual and lyrics-driven prevalence of exclusively heteronorm-conforming African masculinities in the analysed Afrobeats music videos – that uphold the status quo across the majority of diverse regions on the continent in relation to gender and sexuality expression – is as a result of the continent's well-documented anti-gay worldview evident in judicial, political and religious framings about homosexuality and other forms of queer expression.

As Mary Evans (2014: xix), in her introduction to *The SAGE Handbook of Feminist Theory*, reminds us:

> In all societies there is what is described as either a normative order or dominant knowledge, ontologies which carry with them the expectation of social obedience and compliance. Dissent from these assumptions can carry penalties from mortal danger to various forms of more, or less, significant exclusion.

In complying and remaining socially obedient to the status quo of gender performativity in their culturally and religiously diverse African contexts, the musicians and other men featured in the Afrobeats music videos analysed, are complicit in the continued social construction, performance and creative packaging of heteronorm-conforming ideals of manhood that are inherently homophobic. Such constructions and performances of manhood, judging from the hundreds of millions of YouTube views these music videos attract, are rewarded by audience adulation. Problematically, to *still* be continuously witnessed, shall be the marginalisation, under- and heteronormatively-biased representations of non-heteronorm-conforming masculinities across mainstream African popular cultures and popular cultural productions. This will result in the on-going perpetuation of queer masculinities' widespread exclusion from opportunities for commercial success.

6.1.2. 'Hey, big spender!': sustaining misogyny through men's 'breadwinnerism' and upward mobility

Another representational pattern evident in this musical genre, based on the corpus of music videos analysed in this thesis, is the multimodal construction of masculinities underscored by what some scholars of gender refer to as the 'breadwinner ideal' (Groes-Green 2009a: 289). The breadwinner ideal – when considered as a form of performative masculinity – is related to the social process through which (heterosexual) men accrue and maintain sociocultural and socio-psychological authority by economically providing for their female partners and families. Studies on masculinities across several socioculturally diverse African contexts have reported on this form of income-based masculinity where notions of 'manhood' are partly constructed and expressed through men's ability to financially provide for their female counterparts and families (see, for instance, Silberschmidt 2001; Hunter 2005; Cornwall 2003; Ouzgane & Morrell 2005; Ratele 2008). In very pervasive ways – as shall be evidenced in this sub-section – the diverse, yet collectively heteronorm-conforming men featured in the analysed music videos, similarly perform manhood through various materialistic foundations of spending largely as a means to emphasise supremacy in their manhood.

A study conducted in Mozambique, in southern Africa, found that with the increasing class and income gaps between middle-class and working-class men in the city of Maputo, one of several young men participating in said study expressed a sentiment that a 'moneyless' man is a

worthless man in the eyes of women (Groes-Green 2009: 289). The motivation behind this view stemmed from a noted socio-cultural, heteronormative perception that by virtue of being unable to financially provide for his girlfriend/wife, a man may be regarded as 'unmanly' in society's eye (Groes-Green 2009). Other earlier studies conducted in Africa have reported similar findings. Consider, for instance, the work done by Mills and Ssewakiryanga (2005) with young university-going participants in Uganda. The study demonstrates the relationship between money (and other material commodities) and collective imaginaries of manhood as it was evident in responses from many of the men who participated that "money was the single most significant symbol through which they imagined, practiced and understood their sexual relationships with women" (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005: 91).

Musicians featured in the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos creatively sustain performances of manhood that situate their varying masculine expressions within a breadwinner-based framework (Akanle et. al 2014; Alliyu et. al 2016). Let us consider, for example, lyrics from some of the songs analysed for this study. The extract of lyrical content below is taken from the song entitled 'Chop My Money' by P-Square (2012) (of Nigerian descent), on which they feature Akon (of Senegalese descent) and May-D (of Nigerian descent):

First of all, you are the type of woman that stays on my mind
[…]
Even though I make real dough [money]*, you're the reason there'll be more yeah*
[…]
Even though I got much more, I don't mind if you
Chop my money, chop my money
Chop my money, cause I don't care
[…]
Cause I get am plenty
I don't care (don't care) [x3]
The girls they love me

This extract, taken from the verse sung by Akon, basically emphasises that he earns, and continues to accrue, a lot of money. This accrual of wealth is claimed to be motivated by a woman – the type of woman Akon claims he always thinks about. This is evident in the choice of words deployed: "… *you are the type of woman that stays on my mind".* He expresses that his financial worth is so significant that he does not care if the girls – who he claims love him – 'chop' (excessively spend) this wealth. He, in fact, encourages the girls to spend his money because he "…get am plenty"; meaning he gets plentiful money which is why he is not fazed by the 'chopping' or excessive spending thereof. In further highlighting the accrual of

significant wealth, one of the artists featured on the same song repeatedly expresses that he earns plenty of money in two different currencies (Nigerian Nairas as well as Dollars (presumably, US dollars):

I got plenty dollars in my name
Plenty Naira in my name
Plenty dollars in my name
In my name, In my name

The lyrics presented above – which are repeated on a loop until the song eventually fades out – evidence these men's self-aggrandising efforts through their communication of financial agency and wealth accrual, which sustain masculinities submerged in consumerism for the impressing of, and assurance to, women, that these men are the ideal provider. These men perform their manhood based partly on the notion of the breadwinner ideal said to be socio-culturally negotiated as one of the dominant frameworks within which masculinities – in their rich cultural diversity – are negotiated within the African context (Groes-Green 2009).

Visually, depictions of such breadwinner-aligned forms of masculinities are pervasive in the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study. In Figures 6 and 7, for instance, it is evident how money and luxurious material commodities (Dosekun and Iqani 2019) engender a mediating power in the relationships portrayed in the music video storylines. Male artists are visually portrayed as actively 'providing' for their female love interests. These provisions are denoted through the mediation of the purchasing of luxurious cars and unlimited shopping sprees, among other things.

Figure 6: Man carries girlfriend's shopping, paid for by him in 'Chop My Money' music video



Figure 7: Man surprises woman with new, luxury car in 'Chop My Money' music video



Figures 6 and 7 are taken from scenes in one of the analysed music videos (P-Square 2012). The storyline that this music video is premised on, is based on a woman who is a central character throughout the music video. She enters into materialistically beneficial relationships with four different men (portrayed by the four artists featured on the song). The men, who are all depicted – especially through the lyrical content of their individual verses – as wealthy; engage in various forms of 'big spending' and money 'chopping' on material commodities as a means to 'buy' this woman's attention and perhaps eventually gain sexual access to her.

In this pursuit, we are shown how one of the men (Figure 7) surprises the woman with a luxury vehicle and the other (Figure 6) has paid for, and publicly carries, multiple paper bags presumably containing material commodities such as clothing, for the same woman. She accumulates all these luxurious material commodities in the space of one day, given that in both these scenes she is wearing the exact same black and white outfit. Her attention and affection, it is suggested, are secured through material commodities which put the men in rather egotistical competition with one another. This communicates, partly, that men are able to assert their perceptions of ideal manhood and secure access to women of their choice by expressing their worth, status and authority through consumerist pursuits of material consumption. What this progression in the video's narrative does, then, is implicitly suggest that this woman's self-worth is reliant on wealthy men, and that her social positioning and respectability is also largely dependent on a man's economic intervention in her life. As such, suggesting that she would have otherwise been incapable of accessing such luxurious material commodities had it not been for the desire she sparks in the men (read 'providers') chasing after her.

In the song 'If' by Davido (2017), a similarly consumerist, breadwinner-underpinned, performance of manhood is sustained through the lyrical content, wherein he pledges to his love interest in the song that he will take care of her financially by giving her money and by adorning her body with expensive, luxurious clothing brands such as Versace and Gucci. Davido says:

If I tell you say I love you o
My money my body na your own o baby
Thirty billion for the account o
Versace and Gucci for your body o baby

Here, Davido broadly expresses that, in declaring his love for this woman, she must know that his money and body are hers. He assures her of his wealth status by emphasising that his bank account will have as much as 30 billion, from which this woman should expect to be spoiled with luxury fashion brands such as Versace and Gucci. Similarly, as I have begun to argue above, an implicit suggestion is advanced which positions the woman, in the mind of the viewer, as being incapable of securing her own financial means to access the luxurious commodities she is lured with by the man. This incapability is brought on by many reasons, including but not limited to, a sexist heteronorm-conforming belief pertaining to gender roles: that women (in their limited capacities as 'wives' and 'homemakers') are not expected to partake in the active accrual of wealth as this role is reserved for the male figure who shall act as main provider/breadwinner (Cuklanz 2016). Herein, I argue, we can see misogyny rearing its head.

Persisting in the maintenance of consumerist masculinities – through the multimodal articulations evident in the analysed Afrobeats music videos – is a lyrical and visual over-emphasis on men's wealth and "material symbols and commodities," as Groes-Green (2009: 293) puts it. This results in a representational pattern, noted in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, where brief and, at times, extended screen time is given to men's material possessions such as luxurious vehicles against the backdrop of large, luxurious properties, expensive pieces of jewellery and watches adorned by men, and at times even actual piles of cash. These iconographic symbols are central in the construction of implicitly misogynistic masculinities maintaining cultural power through economic superiority (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005). Embodied in these iconographic symbols of material wealth are signs of aspiration towards upward mobility because, to reiterate Dosekun and Iqani's (2019: 12) claim, "[…] luxury is a crucial site through which the psycho-social processes of desiring, dreaming and (self-) imagining occur and are expressed." In some ways, this can also be read through the lens of

the ‘big man’ figure theorised in some Africanist scholarship (Mbebe 2001; Bayart 1993). The African ‘big man’ exercises and maintains political and cultural power through his overdramatised material splendour and acts of patronage, often towards those less materially and financially empowered (Mbebe 2001). The men in the analysed Afrobeats music videos variously perform inflections of the ‘big man’ figure in ways that cast women as the targets of their self-absorbed ‘patronage’ (spending largely on women) in order to position these men as superior.

The multifaceted gender expressions from the diverse masculinities depicted in the analysed music videos, can also be read as hyperreal expressions of aspiration towards upward mobility by the men dominating this musical genre. Scholarship on the visual culture and constructions of masculinities within the similarly (black) male-dominated, hip-hop and rap musical genres, have reported on the prevalence of ‘crass materialism’ and consumerism as dominant representational symbolic markers of manhood in these genres. A number of studies on hip-hop and rap music discourses have reported on the prevalence of explicit consumerism through the mediation of visible consumption engendered by the visual and lyrical contents produced by artists prominent in the mainstream hip-hop and rap music scenes (e.g., Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto 1995; Henry 2002; Baker 2005; Marshall 2006; Rose 2008; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Pieterse 2010). Such theorisations have contributed noteworthy insights on how consumerist, socioeconomically conscious masculinities are reproduced within popular music and depicted as actively ‘overcoming’ restrictive economic conditions which render them subpar and marginalised when viewed against the multifaceted frameworks of hegemonic masculinities.

Arguably also at play here is a visual and lyrics-driven discourse wherein artists and creators of the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study, articulate similar aspiration-based expressions of masculinities through crafting depictions of men (in their diverse expressions of African identities) as upwardly mobile and economically empowered. This is achieved through the consistent visualising of hyper-consumerist behaviour as markers of banal everyday life for African men in Nigeria, or Ghana, South Africa, or elsewhere in the diaspora (depending on where the music video is shot). Such efforts are pursued, I have proposed, to present these African men as ideal breadwinners, husbands and/or economic providers to their women and families. This is a pursuit that is seemingly successful in steering perceptions about African men on the part of some viewers of these Afrobeats music videos:

> “Am very serious I need a Nigerian husband” (username: ‘Lornah pumpum’)

> "because of this ada song i wnt a nigerian man ...even thou i dont understand the song i feel it...so romantic...proudafrican" (username: 'Esther Mumbi muchina')
>
> "Wish men here in the USA can sing how much they love us!!!" (username: 'Biaunca Brock').

These YouTube comments, extracted from the comments section of the music videos analysed in this study, all speak to an appreciation of Nigerian men, seemingly as adulated symbols of 'good husbands' who possess the kind of romantic love sought by these presumably female commenters. 'Lornah pumpum' does not mince her words in expressing her 'serious need' for a Nigerian husband, as Nigerian men are perceived – thanks to their portrayals in the Afrobeats music videos analysed – as "…so romantic" in that they are able to – unlike "men…in the USA…" – artistically and, arguably, also materialistically, express how much they love and appreciate their women.

From these observations, it is apparent that affluence and financial freedom on the part of the male artists featured in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, form the basis for the expression of superior social status that maintain upwardly mobile African masculinities. These upwardly mobile masculinities are socially constructed as materialistically beneficial to women, who are portrayed as directly benefitting from them. Thus, these expressions allow these men to favourably position themselves in comparison to other men across their diverse contexts because, as Iqani (2016: 199) aptly notes:

> What people do with their money (or how they narrate a desire to do things with money) sends a strong message about how they see themselves and how they believe they fit into society.

These are observations that re-emphasise previous studies on dominant constructions of masculinities by African men. Sociosexual, sociocultural and sociopsychological self-assurance in many African men's performances of masculinities have been noted to have significantly been determined along the status that money brings (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005; Groes-Green 2009; Langa 2020).

Considered on a broader sociocultural level, these socially constructed upwardly mobile masculinities perpetuate social power relations that carry implications on gender relations, both in the context of men-to-men and men-to-women gender relations. On the basis of gender relations among men, the idealising of (heterosexual) masculinities embedded in hegemonic ideals of consumerism and material provision (breadwinnerism) by men towards women, encourages tension-filled relations among men in their self-identifying pursuits.

This tension emerges, in part, due to the unavoidable class differences among men globally. The multifaceted socioeconomic climates across the African continent, specifically, have rendered countless men economically vulnerable due to lack of access to employment or other capital accrual opportunities within their diverse contexts. It is this lack of access that partly, yet notably, influences the maintenance of hierarchised social structures of masculinities that sustain discourses of 'worthlessness' among men in their negotiation of masculinities. This means, in other words, expressions of manhood that fall short of living up to hegemonic 'breadwinner' ideals, are rendered illegitimate among men who subscribe to, and benefit from, these hegemonic ideals – an illegitimacy that may, furthermore, mean 'of low standard' and 'ranking' on the hierarchy of masculinities and thus casting the men who fail to live up to this ideal at risk of being marginalised.

On the part of African men who consume these music videos to, in part, see themselves represented, the pervasiveness – in the Afrobeats videos analysed in this thesis – of masculinities thriving on upward mobility and breadwinnerism is, arguably, key in instigating feelings of self-worth and affirmation of said African men's perceptions of their masculinities. This sense of worth is psychologically enhanced as said imagery of men-owned wealth and material commodities highlight the class-based gaps between men and thus affirm to middle- and upper-class men viewing these music videos that they are the epitome of manhood compared to their working class and poorer counterparts. Such notions of superiority, I argue, fuel misogynistic masculinities as such perceptions about superiority over 'weaker' men, by upwardly mobile men, play themselves out in ways that centre women as the battlegrounds on which points can be proven among men. Groes-Green (2009: 289) observes in her work on masculinities in a southern African context how discourses of worthlessness that implicate women, prevail among men deemed 'unmanly' because of how their socioeconomic conditions restrict their opportunities for upward mobility, as:

> […] some of the poorest young men told me, they were constantly reminded that, 'without money you are nobody, you are worthless in the eyes of women'. The feeling of being 'a worthless man', informants told me, was related to girlfriends' or lovers' complaints that they did not provide gifts and financial support. Others explained how, faced with the impossibility of getting a job, they felt 'unmanly' when they realized that their family expected them to one day become husbands and heads of households.

It is the upwardly mobile men in the context of Groes-Green's quoted participant that, arguably, successfully escape any potential 'complaints' from girlfriends or lovers about material and financial provision. This means their potential to become 'household heads' is not threatened.

Being household head, then, means securing the heteropatriarchal licenses to subordinate the women they end up living with.

Thus, on the basis of gender relations among men and women, the construction and idealising of upwardly mobile and breadwinner-driven masculinities, play a role in aiding men in their preservation of cultural power over women through economic superiority (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005). Such gender relations – mediated by men-owned money and material commodities – perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies and structures often responsible for the subordination of women. Patriarchy, as Stone (1977) defines, is the controlling, tyrannical authority engendered by the gender identities of 'husband' and 'father', which casts men – in their embodiment of these roles – as superior to women and beneficiaries of unequal gendered power relations. As such, I argue, this musical genre's visual culture – if the corpus of critically analysed music videos is anything to go by – poses as problematic and regressive in its idealised portrayal of male gender roles. The portrayal of gendered lived experience as prioritised in the analysed music videos aids in sustaining what feminist-aligned critiques to gender representations in popular media theorise as promoting imbalanced power relations which see the structural, socioeconomic and sociocultural marginalisation of women (Cuklanz 2016). As a result, I suggest, this aids in the social construction and maintenance of misogynistic masculinities capable of negatively prejudicing women into positions of very little, to no sociocultural power and autonomy. This is a sociocultural gendered power imbalance that variously also moves into the domains of sexual relations and intimacy among men and women, which sees men dominating over women in the domains of sexual expression and intimacy, as I discuss in the sub-section below.

6.1.3. African 'sex gods'? Men's dominance through hyper-sexualised masculinity

Alongside the multimodal perpetuations of heteropatriarchal, implicitly misogynistic masculinities as argued in the preceding sub-section, the visual culture noted in the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos, also sustains what are theorised as 'sexualised masculinities' (Groes-Green 2009). While not necessarily what scholars of masculinities would categorise as "hegemonic masculinities" (for instance, Connell 1995; Carrigan, Connell, & Lee, 1985; Connell & Messerschmidt 2005), sexualised masculinities are socially constructed notions of manhood where men's authority and power (in relation to women, but also other men) is anchored on sexual performance and perceived sexual prowess. Essentially, women's multifaceted subordination by men, is (often non-coercively) partly attained through this form of performativity of manhood (Groes-Green 2009). Men, deploying heteronorm-conforming

sexuality cues, assert their dominance over women by relying on their physique and physical power, sex appeal and phallus as attributes of potency and superiority.

Sexualised masculinities, in the analysed Afrobeats music video texts' multimodal conventions, are sustained through interesting representational patterns in the corpus of texts examined in this thesis. Let us consider, for instance, excerpts from the lyrical content of some Afrobeats songs analysed in this study. In the song 'Aye' by Davido (2014), he positions himself as possessing somewhat spectacular love and physical touch that nobody else (presumably other men) can offer to a woman. Davido, in this verse, deploys a self-aggrandising tone to assert his dominance over the woman to whom the lyrics are directed, as well as egotistically setting himself apart from other men he implicitly regards as less desirable than him. He refers to himself as this woman's favourite artist while, in an objectifying fashion, emphasises that he is impressed with what is presented before him (referring to this woman's body on display for his pleasure):

Her favourite artist na David-O
[…]
And I like what I see
I like what I see
Baby girl just come dobale for me
Come dobale for me
[…]
Cause nobody can love you like I do
Nobody can touch e you like I do
[…]

Deducible from an analysis of these lyrics is Davido's self-aggrandising effort to present himself as the ideal candidate to emotionally (through love) and physically (through touch) – presumably in a sexual manner – satisfy the woman he is proclaiming this to. He somewhat over-emphasises the quality of his love and sexual touch to this woman whom he instructs to "dobale" for him. This is a Yoruba term used to refer to the act of prostration. The woman is thus instructed to prostrate for Davido, that is, to kneel/bow or lay herself flat on the ground in a facedown manner, especially in reverence or submission for Davido. This request, one may argue, aids in perpetuating a partly misogynistic gender-relational perception that a woman's presence is to be subordinated to that of a man. That being said, his lyrics-based promotion of a distinct and extraordinary love and physical touch, is testament to a kind of sexualised masculine expression being sustained.

Another Afrobeats artists, Tekno (2016), similarly engages in the promotion of a particularly sexualised masculine performativity. The lyrical contents from his song 'Pana' are largely about sex and love (The Biafran 2016). Consider this excerpt from the song:

[…]
Baby, Pana
Anywhere that you go
I go follow you dey go
Baby, Pana
They say you like cassava
I getti big cassava
Baby, Pana
My love for you will never die, will never die

Herein, Tekno deploys an infantilising tone – prominent in much of the lyrical content analysed in this study – to endearingly address the woman he refers to as 'Pana' in the song. He goes on to assure the woman that anywhere she goes, he will follow her before he admits that it has come to his attention that this woman enjoys consuming cassava (a cassava is an elongated, cone-shaped, brown root vegetable usually of notable length and girth). It is with this knowledge about her apparent like for cassava, that Tekno informs her that he is in possession of a big cassava, and then finally proclaims his undying love for this woman.

This artist also engages in the promotion of a sexualised masculine expression that is sustained through lyrics portraying him as a man who is in state of loving and sexually satisfying his woman. Here, Tekno deploys a food item as a metaphor to make it known that he has a large penis, seemingly attempting to convince the woman that he makes for an ideal sexual partner. Herewith, Tekno – similar to Davido (2014) – demonstrates a representational trope within the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos that emphasises and maintains particularly sexualised masculinities expressed by men from socioculturally diverse African backgrounds in the service of their supremacy.

This kind of creative language use to indicate sexual prowess on the part of the men in the corpus of music videos analysed in this thesis, is not lost on consumers of this music. As evidenced in the corpus of YouTube comments analysed alongside the music videos, viewers reproduce these discourses in the comments section; legitimising and elevating the sexualised masculinities perpetuated in these music videos.

> "Looks like Tekno has given Cassava a whole new meaning. Lol. Loving this song so far." (username: 'Maka Velli')

> "828 niggas who can't provide big cassava for their bebs ['babes'] dislike this life saving song😂 Y'all should pana, Tekno gat big cassava for y'all bebs ['babes']." (username: 'RElindid Ayuk')
>
> "Only guys with big Cassava like this comment !" (username: 'PassyPom Official')
>
> "am totally looking for someone with a big cassava not a carrot please help me out" (username: 'Carol C')

Here, we can see how men are either superiorised or inferiorised based on perceptions of penis size – which is directly linked to sexual satisfaction. 'Maka Velli' – who humorously (given the use of the acronym 'LOL', meaning 'laughing out loud') shares – that s/he loves this song, makes us aware that the artist has repurposed the meaning of the word cassava. As suggested above, Tekno's use of the word in this song, has been sexualised; thus, dissociating it from its intended food-related, literal meaning.

Accepted, by viewers of this music video, as a symbol of a man's sexual organ, the cassava is used by 'RElindid Ayuk' to ridicule men who are perceived to be unable to live up to the size expectations linked to the penis in relation to women (or 'babes', as this viewer refers to them). According to this viewer, when they were writing this comment on YouTube, there were "828 niggas [in some black youth cultures, the term 'nigga' is sometimes casually used to refer to men]" who disliked the music video because they are unable to present a large enough penis to their lovers/women, risking the chance of losing said women to the likes of men such as Tekno who claim to have large penises. It is through this kind of reasoning that hierarchised forms of masculinities are sustained in the minds of consumers of these music videos; perpetuating, as a result, divisive comments which celebrate a particular kind of superiority of men over others. In this case, it is suggested that the most desirable man is "…someone with a big cassava [large penis] not a carrot [smaller penis]…", as 'Carol C' expressly shares.

It should be highlighted, at this point, that the physical embodiments of these sexualised performances of manhood within the analysed music videos, are notably muscular, slim and/or athletic in terms of body type, and visibly able-bodied. The men centralised in the analysed music videos are predominantly toned, athletic, or muscular and able-bodied, maintaining particular kinds of sexualised masculinities thriving not only on misogynistic heteronormativity and economic superiority, but also on physical power and sexual allure visually expressed through camera shots that highlight and sexualises said muscular abled bodies (Figures 8 and 9, for instance).

In both the scenes depicted here, strategic medium shots are used to render the semi-naked, visibly muscular bodies of these artists as the focal points in the frame. The backgrounds in both these scenes are visibly blurred to emphasise their non-importance so that viewers are not distracted from appreciating and possibly desiring the clearly-lit bodies in the foreground of the frame. The act of looking is multifaceted. Therefore, by offering these men's bodies up to be looked at, the 'looker' is invited to desire said bodies because "[g]azing upon a body opens up a channel through which desire can be shaped and experienced" (Iqani 2012: 132). Both artists are somewhat disidentified in that they are not making any eye contact with the viewer; thereby, they eliminate any threat to the viewer's inevitable (sexualised) gaze on the men depicted. By not challenging the viewer's gaze – through returning it via directly gazing into the camera lens – these shots permit a voyeuristic look on the part of the viewer, allowing them to comfortably appreciate these men's pectoral muscles.

It is through such depictions of the men's bodies that rather narrow, yet widely idealised, visual discourses of masculine sexiness are cultivated in media cultures. A sub-section in a chapter in Mehita Iqani's (2012) book on the visual culture of the media genre of magazine covers – entitled 'Sexy masculinity' – offers useful arguments to demonstrate how, in contemporary media depictions, masculine sexiness is partly constructed and emphasised through the eroticised mediation of semi-naked muscular male physiques. Linking said idealised depictions to popular historic Greek sculpturing, Iqani (2012: 125) suggests:

> Male models that appear semi-naked this way, showing off each and every defined muscle and impossibly rippled six-packs, are arguably the contemporary versions of the idealized male physique first aesthetically celebrated by Greek sculpture.

At play here, then, through the visual portrayals prioritised in several scenes in the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this thesis, is a construction of 'ideal' (African) male sex symbols: culturally diverse, unquestionably heteronorm-conforming, physically fit, and somewhat non-threatening symbols of sexiness to be desired. The men in the analysed music videos, are arguably engaging in multimodal constructions of themselves as desirable 'eye candies', centralised to encourage adulation from consumers of their music videos, as celebrated gendered representatives (or prototypes) of the continent or the specific regions, cultures/ethnic groups in the continent from which they originate.

Evident in the analysed corpus of YouTube comments is that these artists are successful in their hyperreal constructions of themselves as these types of non-coercively domineering (I will further expand on this later), hyper-muscular African (or Nigerian, or Ghanaian, or Igbo etc)

‘eye candies’. Comments about ‘Nigerian men’ – as inspired by the men depicted in some of the analysed Afrobeats music videos – indicate their explicit pedestalling as symbols of African manhood. Some comments to demonstrate this:

> “Nigerian men are so sexy to me, those full lips and beautiful skin, swag and intelligence. Mmmm.. yummy.😆” – (username: ‘Always Dee’)
>
> “Why NAIJA BOYS ARE SO CUTE I just like them 😘😍😁🤗” – (username: ‘FARXYO BELLO’)

Viewer, ‘Always Dee’, lists several physical features to help put across her/his point that s/he finds Nigerian men ‘so sexy’. This is a Nigerian masculine sexiness also appreciated by ‘FARXYO BELLO’ who admits to liking ‘Naija boys’ (Nigerian men) because they are ‘so cute’ – this viewer capitalises this part of the sentence: “… NAIJA BOYS ARE SO CUTE…” which is a textual technique in the mode of writing to, at times, indicate shouting, or emphasised exclaiming. This illustrates this viewer’s aim to loudly exclaim how ‘cute’ Nigerian men are, and the use of the ‘kiss’, ‘in love’, ‘grinning’ and ‘hugging’ emojis accompanying the comment, are instrumental in communicating to the reader that this viewer experiences a mixture of love-related emotions when they perceive Nigerian men. One is aware, also, of how naively homogenising the tone in such comments can be with regard to their reference to men across the richly diverse country of Nigeria.

Several such comments about the sexiness, cuteness etc. of Nigerian men are evident in the comment threads to the Afrobeats music videos considered by this thesis, to a point where viewers such as ‘slim j’ jokingly (denoted by the ‘Laugh out loud’ [Lol] at the end of the comment) point *this* out: “All girls in the comment section are thirsty for nigerian men. Lol”. Here, ‘slim j’ accuses the ‘girls’ in the comments section of a music video by Flavour, of being ‘thirsty for Nigerian men’. The thirst connoted in this commenter’s sentence, arguably refers to a sexual yearning or ‘dryness’ – on the part of said ‘girls’ in the comment section – only to be quenched through sexual activity with a Nigerian man. Similarly acknowledging an evident consistent appreciation of the sexiness and cuteness of ‘Nigerian men’ by women in the comments section, viewer ‘Sciby bisso’ is of the opinion that “[n]ow every woman want our Nigerian men 😂😂😂😂 wait until you get one. Hi no easy like video di show we ho [Nigerian men are not as ‘easy’ (to handle/ deal with) as the music video is showing them to be]. But they are cute though no doubt…”.

Figure 8: Articulation of manhood as muscular/athletic-built and able-bodied in P-Square's 'Alingo' music video



Figure 9: Articulation of manhood as muscular/athletic-built and able-bodied in Flavour's 'Ada Ada' music video



Sexualised masculinities essentially thrive on the heterosexual man's "ability to perform sexually, give erotic pleasure and become respected due to his sexual satisfaction of the female partner" (Groes-Green 2009: 290). This form of expression of manhood, in the African context, is noted to have gained sociocultural prominence due to the challenging socio-economic conditions (unemployment, for instance) faced by African men of diverse backgrounds. In response to an inability to live up to the widely accepted social constructions and ideologies

around manhood being based on economic-oriented ideals of wealth and material commodities, some African men have been finding alternative ways of gaining and maintaining their masculinities and the sociocultural and socio-psychological benefits attached therewith. This means, in failing to live up to the hegemonic ideals of manhood by being unable to perform the breadwinner ideal, some African men rely on their bodies to earn them some form of power over women and, to an extent, other men.

Interestingly, and in notable contrast to some studies on masculinities in Africa, – such as Groes-Green's (2009) – for the African men portrayed in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, their deployments of sexualised masculine expressions are not as a result of a desperate, *alternative* attempt to safeguard their masculinities in the face of poverty and economic-immobility (factors that may destabilise their masculinities). Instead, the adoption of this form of masculine expression by these men occurs as an *additional* conduit through which men's authority is upheld alongside the grand narrative (or dominant) masculinities such as the heteropatriarchal, implicitly misogynistic, breadwinnerist masculinities prevalent in the visual discourses of the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this thesis. As such, many of the depicted men's masculine expressions often iterate a simultaneous performance of various forms of masculinity (for instance, breadwinner-aligned *and* hypersexual *and* misogynistic). Hypersexualised breadwinners with inflections of misogyny are thus pervasive across the analysed visual data. These men are not *just* breadwinners, or *just* sexually domineering, but embody all these aspects to assert their superiority. This makes for a counter-stereotypical finding worth highlighting due to its implicit 'myth-debunking' effect. Myth-debunking is used here in a sense that it encourages a re-imagining of African masculine sexual expressions as predominantly violent attempts at asserting superiority over women, as a 'last resort' when attempts at breadwinnerism fail (Groes-Green 2009). Along that vein of an association of violence with the (black) African man's body, is a striking pattern of representation noted in the data corpus which challenges our perceptions about black, African men and their sociocultural and socioemotional relations with African women in popular cultural texts (Eze 2020; Onanuga & Onanuga 2020). The following sub-section engages this observation more closely.

6.1.4. Romance: Disrupting notions of violent black masculinities

I have argued thus far, that the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study, socially construct implicitly homophobic, misogynistic, and heteropatriarchal masculinities that thrive on 'breadwinnerism' and sexual success with women. There also prevails, as shall be evidenced

in this sub-section, what this study suggests are 'romance-oriented' masculinities. These expressions of heterosexual manhood involve the lyrics-driven and visual representations of African men – in their diversity – as particularly romantic and expressively committed to the women in their lives, as per the hyperreal contexts captured in the music videos. These expressions of romance, while expectedly very closely aligned with breadwinnerism, often also transcend into more emotionally vulnerable, non-tangible expressions of love. These romance-oriented masculinities are, arguably, successful in somewhat subverting their inherent misogynistic undertones and, when taken at face value, may naively be perceived as justifications to absolve patriarchy from its toxic nature.

In the song 'Duro' – a Yoruba word which means wait; Tekno (2015) pledges romantic love, marriage and infinite commitment to his lover. The lyrics heteronormatively portray him to be family-oriented, trustworthy and committed to loyal heterosexual love. In this excerpt from the chorus of 'Duro', Tekno uses a slang term often used by Yoruba and Hausa speakers, 'Kpalanga', to refer to a slim-bodied woman. He claims that he will love this woman in ways she has never seen or experienced before, and essentially confesses infinite romantic love.

Baby kpalanga
I will show you love that you never seen
Kpalanga
And you the mother of my two baby
Baby kpalanga
And if we like we make them three baby
Baby kpalanga
I will love you forever
Oh nana, duro, duro
Baby duro, duro

In this song, Tekno seems to portray himself as a commitment-driven, family-oriented man who values marriage and long-term commitment. His pledge of infinite love to this woman (seemingly, the mother of his two children) aids in demonstrating this observation. He offers what, across various heteronormative romance discourses, may be considered a romantic gesture where he promises to show this woman a kind of unending love that she has never experienced or seen before. This kind of love, presumably, is a committed, loyal, romantic love.

Acts of romantic love and commitment – in their variously heteronorm-conforming iterations – are consistently depicted in the Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study. To exemplify this, let us consider the narrative progression of the song 'Bank Alert' by P-Square (2016). The

music video predominantly makes use of three modes of representation to communicate a romantic love story between a boyfriend (played by a member of P-Square) and his supposed girlfriend. These modes are visual, textual and oral.

Visually – in the opening scene of the music video (Figures 10 and 11 below) – the couple are depicted as underprivileged Nigerian youngsters having a conversation against the backdrop of what appears to be a property that still requires renovation as the plastering on the walls appears to be patchy and unfinished (communicating financial/economic struggle). The filmic technique of a black-and-white visual filter adds to emphasise this sense of underprivilege or poverty. In this briefly-mediated oral conversation, the man is informing the woman that he needs to go abroad for a year so as to go and better his life. He then makes a promise to the woman that he will be back in one year's time especially for her, and then reassures her of his love for her. The almost inaudible background music layered beneath the visuals in this scene, includes lyrics such as "I belong to you, you belong to me…And I'll be missing you, missing you, yeah…". The amalgamation of these various modes gives the scene a slight air of innocent love and romance.



Figures 10 & 11: Opening scenes to the music video for 'Bank Alert' by P-Square

To communicate a time lapse in the narrative, written text is used over the image-based visuals of what appears to be moving clouds to inform the viewer that about five years have passed since that conversation between the two young lovers had unfolded. This time, a colour-based visual filter is used by the editors of this music video to signify recency in terms of time period and, to an extent, a change in the narrative.

What happens next in the narrative – supported by the lyrical content of the song – is indicative of a portrayal of a romance-oriented masculine expression on the part of the man portraying the central protagonist in the music video. Although not within the time range promised, the man eventually *does* return to Nigeria and is adamant to ask for his girlfriend's hand in marriage to demonstrate his undying love for her. He is now visibly affluent (denoted by scenes of him travelling back in a private jet). And thus, pledges his love for her while promising to financially take care of this woman (true to form to the kinds of breadwinner-based masculinities prevalent in the analysed corpus of music videos) should she say yes to his marriage proposal. Affluence, it seems, is deployed here as a tangible catalytic mode to express romanticism. Below, I closely consider the following excerpt of lyrics in Pidgin English from this song:

Today na today eh,
and when I finish you go no say na me
As you dey they delay eh, to proof my love, you must to chop my money eeh

Across several of the diverse cultures in Nigeria, when a couple are set to get married, a date is set for when the fiancé – with his family and friends – are expected to conspicuously expend money and gifts to his parents-in-law-to-be while the bride-to-be watches on at a distance (see Figures 12a, 12b and 12c, from this music video). Through the lyrics presented above, Paul (who portrays the protagonist role) boasts about his excitement for that day. It is on that day that his fiancé would acknowledge the vastness of his accrued wealth and socio-economic prowess as a man. This will, one may argue, further enhance her love for him. Furthermore, in his effort to prove his loyalty and devoted love to her, he affirms that he shall lavishly spoil her or let her 'chop' his money. This promise is also made in appreciation of her patience over the past five years, during which she obviously rejected all her wooers while she patiently awaited his return. So continues the verse:

Because my bank alert na gbagaun, my cheque he no dey bounce
My mansion all na badam, baby take a look around
[…]

Here, Paul goes on to speak about his financial standing and materialistic possessions to assure this woman of his socio-economic condition being more than stable to sustain them throughout their marriage. The word ‘gbagaun’ is a colloquially-used word in Nigerian slang to refer to making an error in speech or writing, while ‘badam’ is also a colloquial term used to refer to something that is very well done or exceptionally good (Powell 2017).

In closely analysing the following lyrics: “*Because my bank alert na gbagaun, my cheque he no dey bounce. My mansion all na badam, baby take a look around*”, the singer, here, is emphasising the value of his bank account. He is claiming that the bank alert (or statement) would seemingly be mistaken (‘na gbaguan’) should it not correctly display his wealth, and that his cheques never bounce. He goes on to claim, in quite a self-aggrandising manner, that *"[m]y mansion all na badam* (meaning that said mansion is all very well done and lavish) *baby take a look around* (and that his ‘baby’ [love interest] must go ahead and take a look around the mansion).

Figure 12a: Central protagonist in ‘Bank Alert’ music video arrives at the future in-laws’ house



Figure 12b: Central protagonist in 'Bank Alert' music video presents future mother-in-law with gifts



Figure 12c: Male protagonist in 'Bank Alert' music video publicly proposes marriage to his girlfriend



Commenters on this music video are evidently taken by the love and wealth-underpinned romanticism articulated in the text. The comments offered below, are but two of several such articulations from viewers in the comments section of the analysed YouTube videos:

> "You guys did our culture justice in this video! This should be a lesson to all the young men who make a success of their lives! Come back home and get your chocolate bride!!!!!!! LOVE YOU ALL FOR THIS VIDEO!!!!!!" (username: 'Kwini Souleimane')

> "While African singers are singing love and much more for the black woman, our bother and sis in the US OF A are denigrating black woman...." (username: 'PHONE master')

In their comment, 'Kwini Souleimane', expresses what appears to be an appreciation towards P-Square for 'doing justice' to their culture (presumably, Igbo culture – given that the men making up the musical ensemble of P-Square are ethnically of Igbo descent). This viewer goes

on to suggest that the contents of this music video capture a lesson that "all young men who make a success of their lives" should learn. The lesson being, that "all young men" who embark on greener pasture pursuits away from home, should return – once financially secure – and 'get' their bride. While evidently heteropatriarchal and misogynistic in its suggestion that women are objects that men should 'get' and lead into the heteronormative institution of marriage, this viewer's comment makes us aware that they find such kinds of gestures from men to be romantic. Such romantic gestures by the Igbo, or Yoruba, or African men in the music videos analysed in this thesis, are lauded because they show that "[w]hile African singers are singing love and much more for the black woman, our bother [*sic*] and sis in the US OF A are denigrating black woman", shares another viewer. What this does, is it places 'African men', in the minds of viewers of these Afrobeats music videos, in a favourable position as being non-violent towards women, romantic and full of love. This, it should be noted, rather naively strips the complexity and heterogeneity of men in Africa by the nature of its homogenising overtone.

It is evident, when considering the analysis above, how – through strategic multimodal representational patterns – the visual culture evident in the analysed corpus of Afrobeats music videos, socially constructs and sustains romance-oriented masculinities that thrive on manhood being expressed through grand romantic gestures towards women. The diverse African men depicted in these music videos are largely portrayed as commitment-driven, family-oriented, loyal and capable of offering infinite romantic love to the women they get romantically involved with, across the hyperreal contexts of these music videos. This motivates viewer perceptions of them as romantic. I deliberately call them 'romance-oriented' instead of 'romantic', as a political decision by this thesis to not fall into the uncritical absolving of these men's prosocial behaviours as completely unproblematic towards the just treatment of women.

A striking dissent from forms of violence or aggression towards women (or other men) characterises these emphasised masculinities prevalent in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. This is a pertinent observation as it demonstrates an apparent disruption, from artists in the musical genre of Afrobeats, to dissociate from a widely reported convention in popular media such as music: the consistent mediation and normalising of implicit and explicit forms of aggressive behaviour or violence especially towards women through lyrical and visual expressions (Sommers-Flanagan, Sommers-Flanagan & Davis 1993; Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Banning 2007). The Afrobeats music videos and lyrics analysed in this study steer clear of implicit and explicit portrayals of violence suggestive of aggression, threat or the infliction of

pain and injury. As noted in this sub-section, instances of grand romantic gestures prevail. Similarly, what can be suggested here is another form of active 'myth-busting' through a counter-stereotypical imagining of (black) men's bodies through the hyperreal depictions assessed in this sub-section.

Another viewer, username: 'Bangtan Sonyeodan', contributes a comment that is helpful in sustaining this study's observation in this regard. This viewer writes:

> I love love Nigerian music like this, beautiful love songs that doesn't resort to calling women horrible nasty names. I can't even listen to most american music without seeing the women verbally abused. I hope Nigerian musicians keep doing their thing and not be influenced by trash hiphop culture from the US.

Expressing their appreciation for the perceived non-abusive nature of the 'Nigerian music' they have consumed, this commenter draws an explicit comparison between American hip-hop (a black-centric genre dominated by men) and the Afrobeats music video under which the comment was posted. It is through this comparison that this viewer emphasises how, unlike "the trash hiphop culture from the US", Afrobeats musicians deserve to be lauded for lovingly respecting women by not "resort[ing] to calling women horrible nasty names" indicative of violence and abusiveness. We know, however, from recent studies into Nigerian popular music (including Afrobeats), that hip-hop culture still variously influences these African musical genres, in relation to misogyny and sexism, for instance (eg, Eze 2020). I will argue that 'Bangtan Sonyeodan's' comment above, 'fell victim' to the overdramatisation of romanticism in many of these Afrobeats videos which, evidently, succeed in concealing traces of misogyny and sexism variously undergirding the music videos considered in this study.

These articulations of romanticism across the analysed music videos, are entwined in misogynistic underpinnings in that the enactments thereof are implicated in a heteropatriarchal, sexist worldview that perpetuates problematic heteronormative ideals about courtship and gender stereotypes. These problematic, stereotypical gender roles see women through the lens of domesticated, non-agentic, recipient of men's economic provision, love, adoration and marriage. This normalises an ideological position that women should strive for men's affection and the institution of marriage in order to secure their socioeconomic positioning. Therefore, while positively showering the women with love, adoration, endless material commodities and promises of fidelity, the masculinities emphasised within the music videos analysed in this thesis are equally overt about their pursuits towards socioeconomic, psychosexual and sociocultural dominance over women.

Seemingly, the women adored and serenaded by the men in this musical genre are 'positively regarded' when they are deemed to successfully conform to conventional gender roles which allow men's dominance over them (Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison 2003). Thus, at play here, I suggest, are traces of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske 1997; 2001; Viki, Abrams, & Hutchison 2003) partly characterising the genre's visual culture, considering the corpus of music videos analysed in this study. This is especially evident in how multimodal articulations of romance, love and intimacy are mediated by patriarchal subtexts that reproduce men as dominant and women as subservient beneficiaries of men's provision, protection and rescue out of economic constraint, among other things. It is with these arguments as evidentiary backdrops that I now move on to conceptualise a new a new analytical term: 'misogyrom'. The theorisation of 'misogyrom', as I highlighted in the introduction to this chapter, is one of this thesis's original contributions to knowledge.

6.2. Romance as the dark side of misogyny: 'Misogyrom' as cultural sensibility

In this section, I advance an original conceptual contribution to the scholarly area of feminist media studies by arguing for the reading of gender performativities in these music videos through a gender-relational cultural sensibility that this thesis coins 'misogyrom'. This concept brings together the four forms of masculinity reported in section 6.1 into a theoretical analysis in this section. This term combines the concepts of 'misogyny' and 'romanticism' – as cultural sensibilities – to argue for the reading of gender relations that present a concealing of misogynistic expressions of 'manhood' with overdramatised forms of romanticism. I propose the term as a conceptual lens through which to consider men's (and by extension, women's) performativities that are at once implicated in the perpetuation of misogynistic imbalanced gender power relations and undeniable hyper-romanticism and compassion from (heterosexual) men towards women. As such, I theorise misogyrom as a gender-relational cultural sensibility as well as an analytical lens through which scholars of gender can read gendered power relations in popular cultural texts and beyond.

I have argued, in this chapter, that in reading men and manhood on screen through the corpus of Afrobeats music videos considered in this thesis, certain dominant forms of masculine expression are evident in the visual culture observed herein. These multifaceted expressions of masculinity demonstrate a notable maintenance of broader gender relations which thrive on the unequal division of power among men and women. This, as feminist scholars have argued, is largely responsible for the social constructions of womanhood through limiting and

undermining stereotypical roles of subservience and at the mercy of (heterosexual) men's superiority (see Cuklanz 2016 and Storey 2018's summaries). The masculinities pervasive in the analysed music videos, I have shown in this chapter, are implicitly queer exclusionary and reproduce compulsory heterosexuality in their erasure of non-heteronorm-conforming gender expressions. In their outright alignment to a heteronorm-conforming gender performativity that places heterosexual sexuality as the ideal, the subjectivities in these music videos maintain a single narrative of romantic love in the multifaceted contexts mediated through these texts. It is through these culturally diverse, yet heteronormatively-skewed depictions that viewers are allowed to imagine gender relations and their situatedness within heterogeneous African contexts.

The men centralised in the analysed music videos through significant screen time, are depicted as unquestionably wealthy and ideal 'breadwinners' who assert their dominance over women by 'parading' their wealth through overt consumerist depictions of themselves. In very pervasive fashions, the men featured in the analysed music videos, variously perform manhood through materialistic, provision-driven foundations of spending largely as a means to emphasise powerful maleness. By so doing, the depicted men partly maintain misogynistically-mediated gender relations that aid men in their preservation of cultural power over women through economic superiority (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005). Such gender relations – mediated by men-owned money and material commodities – perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies and structures responsible for the subordination of women across various sociocultural domains, including the domains of (heterosexual) sexuality/sexual expression, intimate and romantic relationships.

Further to that, men's dominance over women is also partly sustained through hyper-sexualised expressions – in quite empowering ways – of manhood in the analysed music videos. These sexualised masculinities are socially constructed in ways that encourage men's authority and power (in relation to women) by anchoring powerful manhood on notions of sexual performance and perceived sexual prowess. An interesting finding, in this regard, is that these hyperreal constructions of heterosexual masculine sexualities are void of salient forms of violence typically associated with masculinities in diverse contexts across Africa (Groes-Green 2009; Silberschmidt 2001; Silberschmidt 2004; Barker 2005b; Langa 2020). The Afrobeats artists featured in this study (predominantly men), creatively use their lyrical content to position themselves – in rather self-aggrandising ways – as ideal sexual partners for female suitors through creative language use about their penis size and potency, for instance. Such pursuits,

this study maintains, uphold masculine superiority and a misogynistic undermining of women as merely passive receivers of men's (sexual) provision and pleasure when considered through the domain of sexual expression and intimate relationships. Essentially, women's sexualities and sexual expressions, are variously depicted in the analysed music videos as controlled by, and/or reliant on, the sexually domineering men.

Very strikingly, however – and in notable dissent to existing literature on masculinities in popular (black) male-dominated musical genres such as rap and hip-hop (Johnson, Jackson, & Gatto 1995; Henry 2002; Baker 2005; Marshall 2006; Rose 2008; Conrad, Dixon, & Zhang 2009; Pieterse 2010; Eze 2020) the multi-faceted expressions of masculinities evident in the music videos analysed for this study, engender an overt romanticism that is intricately implicated in further counter-stereotypical work, and which fosters a myth-debunking potential. This romanticism is mediated by a particularly gentle and non-violent overtone that renders these masculinities physically non-threatening to the femininities with which the screen is shared. Therefore, in spite of their implicit misogynistic behaviours, the observed masculinities appear to notably value genuine romantic love built on foundations of commitment and fidelity.

This, to an extent, communicates that the African men in these music videos demonstrate an endearing regard for women as more than just objects of their sexual desires. The visual culture evident in the Afrobeats music videos analysed herein, socially constructs and sustains such romance-oriented masculinities that thrive on manhood being expressed through grand romantic gestures towards women. The culturally and linguistically diverse African men depicted in these music videos are largely portrayed (especially through the song lyrics) as commitment-driven, family-oriented, loyal and capable of offering infinite romantic love to the women they get romantically involved with, as long as these women successfully conform to conventional gender roles which variously allow men's dominance over them. Seemingly at play here, then, are striking forms of benevolently sexist and implicitly misogynistic advances of men's superiority that are partly veiled by, and mediated through, discourses and acts of romanticism. As a result, we can witness a gender-relational cultural sensibility wherein men's prosocial behaviours towards women are romanticised more than they are called out for their regressive, sexist undertones.

It is against this backdrop, that I argue for the consideration of what I have coined 'misogyrom', as a gender-relational sensibility and conceptual lens through which to consider men's (and also women's) performativities that are at once implicated in the perpetuation of

heteropatriarchal, misogynistic imbalanced gender power relations and undisputable non-violence and hyper-romanticism towards women. Once we apply the idea of misogyrom in the contexts of the music videos analysed in this study, it is apparent that idealised (heterosexual) expressions of manhood are sustained along inherently sexist and misogynistic expressions of male superiority and dominance. This happens alongside an (in)advertent encouraging of the egalitarian treatment of women by valuing women as more than mere objects of men's sexual satisfaction, but romantic partners with value more than that which the patriarchal male gaze had historically often relegated to *just* physical appearance. This, I argue, presents the social construction of masculinities implicated in a misogyrom sensibility.

The misogyrom masculinities prominent across the analysed music videos, present a striking dialectic which, when closely analysed, is more regressive than beneficial to the feminist plight towards gender equality, in the domains of, but not limited to, sexuality and intimacy. The two sides to this dialectic involve extreme romanticism on the one hand, and notable misogyny on the other. In their active overdramatisation of romanticism through their endearing lyrics and storylines, symbolising genuine emotional connectedness to women beyond superficial goals to score sexual favours, the masculinities in these music videos garner adulation from consumers of these texts. These YouTube comments of adulation laud these men as the epitomes of exemplary African manhood while being oblivious to the ways in which these masculine expressions maintain patriarchy and misogyny. It is precisely the overdramatisations of romanticism in these music videos that conceal the 'darker sides' of the dialectic of misogyrom, as gender-relational cultural sensibility. As a result, what partly prevails is an effective distraction from the misogyny these masculinities equally embody which, when left unchallenged, may perpetuate the naive absolving of patriarchy from its toxic nature in relation to the just and empowering sociocultural treatment of women across various domains, most especially the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. In the chapter following this one, I critically examine the social implications of the cultural sensibility of misogyrom on the social constructions of femininities as is evident in the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed for this study.

6.3. Chapter summary

This chapter has provided a discussion of the dominant constructions of masculinities as performed, sexualised and Africanised within the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this thesis. This was carried out within the broad theoretical bounds of gender performativity theory, social constructionism, feminist, as well as representation theory as analytic frameworks. The chapter has shown how four main forms of masculinities are evident in the visual culture – framed by the analysed music videos – sustained in this musical genre. These are conceptualised as 'heteropatriarchal masculinities'; 'breadwinner masculinities'; 'sexualised masculinities'; as well as 'romance-oriented masculinities'.

Through the emphasis on said forms of masculine performativity, as mediated in the music videos analysed, this chapter argues that, at play in these music videos, is the construction of a (hetero)sexualised, romantic (yet benevolently sexist), wealthy African masculine symbol who is 'sold' to consumers of this music as the epitome of black, African manhood. In so doing, this narrowly-framed, heteropatriarchal image of an ideal (African) man, fosters fertile grounds for the continued power imbalances characterising gender relations, which see the constant subordination of women (and some men) by men. It is through the consistent consumption, and potential internalisation – on the part of avid consumers of these music videos – that such queer-exclusionary, heteropatriarchal and normative gender performances may prevail beyond the screens on which these music videos are consumed.

Further to this, this chapter has also made an argument to advance part of this thesis's original contribution to knowledge through the theorisation of a new concept: misogyrom. I propose misogyrom as both a cultural gender-relational sensibility and a conceptual lens through which men's (and also women's) performances of gender can be read as being at once implicated in the perpetuation of heteropatriarchal, misogynistic imbalanced gender power relations and hyper-romanticism from (heterosexual) men towards women. I argue that it is the overdramatisations of romanticism in these music videos that conceal the dark side of the dialectic of misogyrom. In this active concealing of misogyny through romance and romanticism, the misogyrom cultural sensibility perpetuates the naive absolving of patriarchy from its toxic nature in relation to the just and empowering sociocultural treatment of women across the domains sexuality and intimate relations, especially.

7. WOMEN AND FEMININITIES: PROBLEMATISING BLACK AFRICAN FEMININE BEAUTY, SEXINESS AND AGENCY

In the chapter preceding this one, the focus was on men's gendered performativities and the multimodal constructions of masculinities as they are sexualised and Africanised in the analysed corpus of music videos. This was done to more critically grapple with the kinds of gender-relational power distributions at play, as they relate to men and masculinities in the analysed music videos. It is in said chapter that I variously demonstrate, and argue, that the gender relations captured in the hyperreal contexts across the analysed videos, are underscored by a cultural sensibility I have coined misogyrom. I propose this concept to describe gender relations and gender performances characterised by the (in)advertent concealing of heteropatriarchal misogyny and sexism with overdramaticised romanticism on the part of (heterosexual) men towards women. As a significant aspect of this thesis's original contribution to knowledge, I theorise misogyrom as a gender-relational cultural sensibility as well as an analytical lens through which scholars of gender can read gendered power relations in popular cultural texts and beyond.

In the present chapter, I shift the focus so as to offer a close reading of women's gendered performativities and multimodal constructions of femininities as depicted in the analysed music videos. This will partly be done with an injection of the notion of misogyrom, as proposed in chapter six, as key mediator of the forms of feminine expressions constructed in the analysed texts. By so doing, this thesis is able to theorise feminine performativities as 'sexssertive'. This new concept – constituting another significant aspect of this thesis's original contribution to knowledge – weds the notions of sex/sexuality with the personality trait of assertiveness; to offer a novel way to describe women's perceived assertiveness and agency in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. My readings of women's performances as 'sexssertive', in relation to the hyperreal contexts crafted in the corpus of analysed music videos, are embedded in broader postfeminist discourses of women's empowerment, agency and self-determination in the domain of sexual expression. Scholarship on the postfeminist-aligned sensibilities of the 'midriff' woman (Gill 2007; 2008) and the African 'good time girl' (Ligaga 2014; 2020) form a key framework in which my theorising develops. It will be shown, in this chapter, how a misogyrom cultural sensibility – undergirding the music videos analysed in this thesis – fosters sexssertive femininities in these analysed music videos. As was the case with chapter six, the arguments presented in *this* chapter are also partly reliant on the findings stemming from the

content analysis performed in chapter five. The descriptive statistics and my analyses thereof in chapter five, are variously injected into the current chapter to build on my analyses of women in the corpus of videos. I take this analytical pursuit further, though, by basing a significant part of the analyses in the current chapter within psychoanalytic feminist theory by focusing on the role of desire, sexuality, and visual pleasure within the mediated texts to expose implicit and explicit gendered power imbalances at play within the contexts crafted across the corpus of visual material.

Section 7.1 offers a critical reading of performances of womanhood and femininities in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. This section contains five sub-sections that collectively foreground more evidence of both sides of the complex dialectic of misogyrom. In other words, I further emphasise the ways in which this musical genre's multimodal discourses are misogynistic, while also demonstrating the pervasive traces of romanticism which can variously be read as signs of egalitarian treatment towards women across the analysed music videos. It is in this section where I shore up evidence of women's sexssertive expressions of sexuality and femininity to demonstrate in what ways women are depicted as somewhat (sexually) empowered. Central to this section's argument is evidence of how a narrow, discriminatory standard of feminine beauty characterises the physical appearances of the black African women centralised within these music videos. As such, notions of sexssertiveness are variously attributed to women who conform to this limited, arguably whitewashed, standard of feminine beauty emphasised in the corpus of analysed Afrobeats music videos. This is a representational pattern in the analysed corpus of videos which I have started to outline in chapter five, with the intention of critically extending said observations in this chapter. What this representational pattern does, is it symbolically excludes black African women whose self-fashioning and physical body structures are perceived to not conform to said discriminatory standards.

Section 7.2 follows, and takes an argumentative stance with regard to the depictions of sexssertive, empowered women in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. In this section, I advance an argument that possibilities of women's empowerment and sexssertiveness – as evident through the gender relations mediated in these analysed texts – are no more than sociocultural façades. Instead, the actual cultural power remains firmly in the hands of the heteropatriarchal men centred in these music videos, particularly when it comes to the domains of sex, sexuality, and intimate relationships. Men variously maintain sexual and cultural dominance over women in these music videos. This dominance is successfully veiled by an

emphasis on romanticism which distracts us from calling out the implicit misogyny entangled in such gender relations.

7.1. Reading women's gendered performativities and femininities

This section will highlight in what ways this musical genre – based on the limited purview presented by the corpus of music videos examined – can be read as inherently misogynistic in its multimodal constructions of femininities in relation to masculinities. This will be demonstrated through a close reading of performances of womanhood and femininities in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. To aid in this analytical pursuit, I base a significant part of this discussion in psychoanalytic feminist theory (Mulvey 1975; 2000) by focusing on the role of desire, sexuality, and visual pleasure within mediated texts in order to expose implicit and explicit gendered power imbalances at play within the contexts crafted by the corpus of visual material analysed in this study.

As an analytical point of departure into grappling with the kinds of feminine expressions constructed in these music videos, I more closely examine the physical appearances of the women most prominently centralised by being offered significant screen time as "leading" women in the hyperreal narratives depicted in these music videos. The descriptive statistics stemming from the content analysis in chapter five aid me with a helpful point of departure into this pursuit. This allows me to demonstrate how, in their insistence on centring a very restricted and, arguably Eurocentric, ideal of feminine beauty, these Afrobeats music videos are implicated in discriminatory, colourist formations of feminine representations that perpetuate a violent hegemonic 'norm' of feminine beauty. This restricted ideal is largely preoccupied with youth, light-skin-ness, lean- and curvy-figured-ness and the adorning of hair extensions/weaves as choice of hairstyle on the part of the black women elevated in these texts.

Next, by examining the value-laden (black) male visual perspectives through a feminist psychoanalytical reading of the positioning of women's bodies in relation to men's in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, I advance an argument on how misogyny variously prevails as an undercurrent of the visual culture captured in the corpus of analysed music videos. It is here that I demonstrate, by partly drawing on the findings reported in chapter five, that a salient representational pattern characterises these visual texts: the persistent sexual objectification of women's bodies. This is a pattern of representation that engenders a disempowering effect on the part of the featured women, due to how women's bodies are implicitly encouraged to be

treated by themselves, but more so by the desiring heterosexual male 'lookers' on and off screen.

Having tackled this aspect of the discussion, I go on to explore the ways in which we can read women as empowered and agentic in relation to their sexualities, to come to grips with whether or not we can confidently claim that the picture is all bleak for the feminist agenda towards the just and equal treatment of women. Through a plot/storyline analysis of a select few music videos from the larger corpus, I partially concede that, on a superficial level, there appears to be hope for the possibility of reading 'women's empowerment' in these African popular cultural texts. This is particularly possible through the evident constructions of what this study coins sexssertive femininities who embody a particularly empowering assertiveness as it relates to their expressions of sexuality, desire and desirability. However, it is precisely the overdramatised, surface-based nature of these depictions of potentially empowered women, that I argue has to be examined more critically. This is a recommendation I take up in section 7.2.

7.1.1. Preference or prejudice? Problematising a restrictive feminine beauty aesthetic

I have observed, in chapter six, that the masculinities centralised in the analysed music videos, engage in salient forms of overly dramatised romanticism towards the women featured in these texts. As such, it is valuable to examine how said women are shown to construct their femininities in these hyperreal scenarios, and what it is about these feminine expressions that 'capture' what I suggest are masculinities entangled in a misogyrom cultural sensibility. The socially constructed masculinities across the multimodal discourses sustained in the Afrobeats music videos explored in this thesis, are maintained alongside a multiplicity of socially constructed femininities that partly portray (heterosexual) 'womanhood' along dominant physical bodily indicators of skin colour, physique, as well as style of hair. When closely engaging the Afrobeats music videos collected for this study, an argument can be made about what aesthetics of feminine beauty and femininity are consistently emphasised by the creators of these texts within this musical genre. That way, it can be demonstrated just how limited the repertoire of choice promoted by this idealised aesthetic is, and how this limited feminine beauty aesthetic engenders discriminatory implications with regard to diverse African women's expressions of their femininities.

If we consider skin complexion, for instance, the women predominantly featuring in the Afrobeats music videos analysed – especially as leading characters within the narratives – are often light-skinned. I wish to remind the reader, at this point, that this musical genre – based

on the corpus of music videos analysed – is undeniably black-centric, in addition to being dominated by musicians who are men. The dominant racial make-up of the subjectivities featured in these music videos is black African. It is not lost on me that said black subjectivities may, on an individual level, not actively identify with the racial label I am imposing on them by my mere reliance on phenotypic indicators associated with the socially-constructed, historically-charged racial identity of black. I am aware of the problematic "reductive sameness" (Ngwenya 2018: 1) engendered in such a homogenising tone towards describing this musical genre. To aid in developing my arguments, however, this blunt racial labelling of the individuals featured in the corpus of analysed Afrobeats music videos is important.

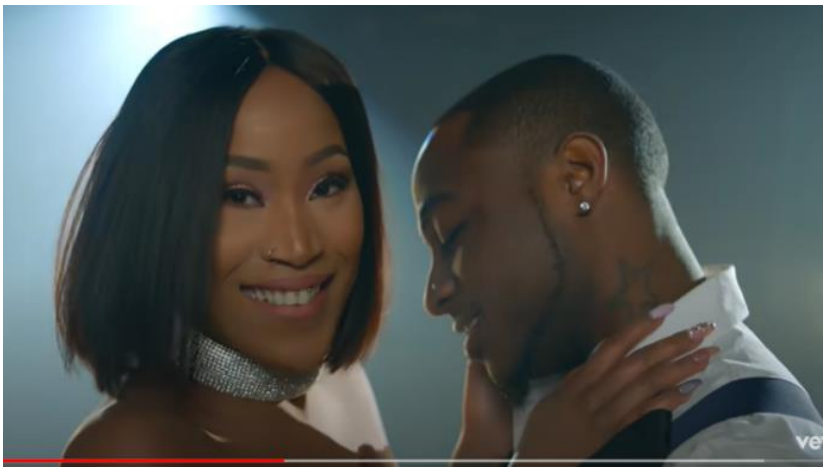
Chapter five's content analysis of the almost 104 minutes of visual content demonstrated that women of a light skin complexion, enjoy more screen time as they are more prevalently cast in leading roles within these music videos. Women acting as leading characters in these music videos are recognised by their proximity to the leading men (most often the Afrobeats musicians themselves) who portray the central protagonists in the narratives underpinning the storylines throughout the analysed music videos. These women's physical proximity to the protagonists in these music videos (more especially, in their capacity as love interests), sees them enjoying almost equally as significant screen time as these male protagonists. This results in the hypervisibility of said women which, from a viewer's perspective, situates these 'leading' women as *just* as 'important' as the men to whom these songs are credited.

Diagram 7 in chapter 5 (see page xxx) demonstrates the statistical representation (in quantified screen time) with regard to skin complexion in relation to the (predominantly black) women cast as central characters, positioned as pertinent to the storylines depicted in the analysed music videos. We can see here that light-skinned women are significantly more likely to be cast in leading roles within these music videos, as compared to their dark-skinned counterparts. This highlights a key pattern in the findings, where there's a consistent centring of a particular (black) feminine beauty aesthetic with regard to the physical appearances of women in these analysed Afrobeats music videos. This feminine beauty aesthetic partly revolves around light-skin complexion as an ideal which, when viewed through the lens of representation, engenders rather marginalising implications among black femininities from their diverse African and diasporic backgrounds. These tensions are mediated by discourses of colourism that see the preferential bias towards certain femininities over others within mainstream mediascapes both nationally and transnationally. In Table 5 below, I offer a visual depiction of this observation, briefly demonstrating how songs about love, romance and intimacy predominantly centre a

similar femine aesthetic in terms of skin complexion. This Table presents screenshots of the women cast as the love interests to the male Afrobeats artists dominating this genre.

Table 5: Visual depiction of women cast as "leading" characters to demonstrate a skin complexion bias in the analysed Afrobeats music videos

Afrobeats song and name of artist(s)	**Women cast as love or sexual interest to the protagonist men**
'Duro' – by Tekno (2015)	
'Collabo' – by P-Square ft Don Jazzy (2015)	
'Do like that' – by Korede Bello (2016)	

'If' – by Davido (2017)	
'Come Closer' – by Wizkid ft Drake (2017)	

The images above are captured from but five of several songs in the study's corpus of music videos that are – based on lyrical content and storylines – about the men's romantic and/or sexual pursuits of women. Evidenced herewith are examples of a notable bias towards light-skinned models in the visual culture captured in the Afrobeats music videos analysed. In their roles as central characters in the analysed music videos, these light-skinned women are portrayed as successfully commanding the protagonist men's desiring gazes. As a result, scenes involving these women overtly elevate them in relation to the other women present in the music videos. These women's positions of superiority over the other featured women (especially in scenes carrying several women), are partly sustained through overdramatised romanticism in the form of constant serenading and confessions of love directed at these women by the diverse men, who are constructed as powerful masculinities in these music videos. Implicitly, then, it is suggested through such depictions, that the powerful masculinities centralised in these music videos significantly value women of a light skin complexion and will actively invest emotional labour into securing romantic and/or sexual access to light-skinned women.

Known to have been coined by Alice Walker in the 1980s, the term colourism is generally deployed to make reference to the preferential or prejudicial treatment of people based on the varying degrees of their skin tone (Mbatha 2017). While especially inter-racial in its prejudicial formations, colourism is most typically exacerbated on an intra-racial level where same-race peoples' sociocultural relations favour light-skinned individuals over dark-skinned ones (Maddox and Chase 2004; Mbatha 2017). Burgeoning bodies of literature have demonstrated that colourism's social pervasiveness has continuously privileged people of colour with light skin complexion over those of a dark skin tone across various areas. Some of those areas have included, for instance, income, education, the romance, intimacy and marriage markets (Hunter 2007).

Important to note is that while given a specific 'name' in the 1980s, discriminatory expressions based on skin complexion have a deep-rooted global history linked to centuries of racist colonial regimes that have – in contextually diverse fashions – thrived through complex promotions of white supremacy, external racism perpetuated by white people, the hegemonising of Eurocentric beauty standards that elevate/privilege caucasian phenotypic aesthetics, as well as unyielding conceptions of masculinity and femininity in their relation to race and skin tone (Walker 1983; Kelly 2004; Franklin, Boyd-Franklin and Kelly 2006).

It is argued that this legacy of discrimination based on skin colour has informed varying levels of internalised racism with respect to people of colour, which implicitly exacerbates an inferiority complex that plays out through social expressions tantamount to negative stereotyping, rejection, and/or oppression of one's own racial or ethnic group as a person of colour. Studies suggest that when individuals from historically marginalised racial groups (such as black people) accept the negative and symbolically violent beliefs and stereotypes associated with themselves, they may be said to display internalised racism (Williams and Williams-Morris 2000). Therewith comes an active (at times, subconscious) dissociation from people who present the very phenotypic aesthetics you hate about yourself because of how racist regimes have negatively stereotyped them, so as to uphold white supremacy.

Viewers of the music videos analysed in this thesis are seemingly aware of this noted skin complexion bias as it relates to the femininities centralised in these music videos. A close analysis of the comment threads analysed in this study demonstrates how the discursive expressions of these viewers are underscored by an awareness of colourism, and the discriminatory nature thereof.

> "It's so sad. Now i see why majority of Nigerian women bleach their skin. Even African artists are putting non dark skin girls in their videos. Black is beautiful. I will not watch this video again" – (username: 'Tate Mam')
>
> "I agree with most comments here. It's pathetic a lot african/black music videos nowadays features white (or near white) women in the forefront. It's sending the messages only these types of women are worthy to be praised and serenaded, not the dark skinned ones (sigh)... this need to change!!!" – (username: 'Pondu11')

Claiming, in their comment, that they will not watch this music video again, 'Tate Mam' expresses what appears to be disappointment in the 'African artists' whose music videos they have watched. This disappointment stems from this viewer's observation that said African artists are prioritising "non dark skin girls" in their music videos which – the viewer goes on to suggest – encourages women (in Nigeria) to bleach their skins because the music videos s/he has observed are suggesting to these women that black is not beautiful. 'Black', it should be noted, is seeminglydeployed by this commenter to refer to dark skin complexion, although in a manner that is notably insensitive to history and context. For 'Pondu11', it is this "pathetic" tendency by a lot of music videos by black African artists of centring "white (or near white) women" that is symbolically violent in its "sending [of]… messages [that] only these types of women are worthy to be praised and serenaded, not the dark skinned ones". For these commenters (and several others in agreement with their sentiment around light-skin privilege in the music videos they have consumed), there seems to be an awareness that creators of these music videos are implicitly in collusion with the discriminatory culture of colourism.

As another viewer ('cleodontina1') asks: "What are psquare and Flavour saying to women with their own complexion by leaving them out of the video? Why is there a discrepancy between their [referring to P-Square and Flavour] skin tone and all the women in the video?". Noticing the irony evident in the discrepancy between the mentioned Afrobeats artists' *own* skin complexions (dark-skinned) compared to the women they have cast as leading characters in their music video (light-skinned), 'cleodontina1's' question points to how internalised racism on the part of the black artists referred to here, potentially characterises this irony. As stated earlier, internalised racism is partly characterised by an active (at times, subconscious) dissociation from people who present the very phenotypic aesthetics you dislike about yourself because of how racist regimes have, for centuries, negatively stereotyped said phenotypic aesthetics about your racial group. It is plausible, then, to argue that partly at play here are implicit instances of internalised racism from the diverse black masculinities centralised in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. This sees them perpetuate a visual culture that maintains colourist biases in the service of the construction of femininities that are consistently fashioning

in ways indicative of them 'striving' towards hegemonic Eurocentric standards of beauty sold by powerful institutions as the 'norm'.

As was established from the content analysis carried out in chapter five, a particular feminine beauty aesthetic is pervasive across the analysed music videos. Alongside a clear preferential bias for light-skinned women is a predominant hairstyle aesthetic underscored by a hairstyling choice privileging the wearing of a weave/hair extensions/wig, or relaxed/straightened hair. Based on the descriptive statistics drawn from the results of the content analysis in relation to the hairstyle choices of the women featured as central characters, across the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysed screen time, instances of the wearing of a weave/hair extensions/wig or relaxed/straightened hair by the "leading" women, enjoyed 74% screen time (76 minutes, 35 seconds of overall screen time) as compared to a 24% screen time prevalence (24 minutes, 50 seconds of overall screen time) of the portrayal of "leading" women wearing natural (unstraightened) hair in the form of afros, cornrows, dreadlocks, short-styled (fade cut, brush cut, bald head etc). Further to that, when considering physique, the femininities most significantly centralised in the analysed music videos are all young, able-bodied, lean and visibly curvy-figured. This is evident in that instances wherein young, lean, athletic, curvy built women are afforded screen time, were noted across 93% (96 minutes, 15 seconds) of the total screen time analysed, compared to 22% (22 minutes, 46 seconds) of screen time centring older, plus-sized, full-figured, large women in scenes.

These light-skinned, weave-adorning, lean and curvy-figured young women in the analysed music videos, across their diverse African and diasporic contexts, are instrumental in an implicit promoting of an aesthetically homogenised (black) feminine expression of physical beauty as it relates to skin tone, hairstyle and physique. This limitation in the repertoire of options of what black feminine beauty can be has implications in marginalising dark-skinned, full- and large-figured black women (and those preferring not to adorn hair extensions) to positions of inadequacy so as to appear as not up to par when judged against the socially constructed, arguably Eurocentric, and hegemonised standards of beauty which favour light-skin-ness or whiteness. Essentially, the consistent centring of these light-skinned femininities in the analysed music videos aids in sustaining social and cultural ideological regimes that deem black femininities as "valuable only in terms of their proximity to a white ideal" (Pilane and Iqani 2016:126).

That the hyperreal gendered social relations constructed in these analysed music videos depict the majority of the male Afrobeats artists as preferring the light-skinned, lean- and curvy-

figured, weave-adorning women, is telling. It aids in relegating dark-skinned, differently-abled, full-figured black women to the margins with regard to socio-cultural and socioeconomic capital as themselves social beings in the heteropatriarchal African social landscapes depicted in the analysed music videos. As the 'beauty queue' (Hunter 2005) dictates, women who most significantly get to enjoy societal rewards and perks in black communities, are those of lighter skin complexions. Therefore, we see the light-skinned women centralised in these music videos more significantly depicted as recipients of the overdramatised grand romantic gestures performed by the masculinities in these music videos.

We can see how issues of colourism in these music videos intersect with the misogyrom sensibility that underscores the gender relations depicted in these texts, towards the disempowerment of (black) women. The heteropatriarchal 'patterns of desire' (hooks 2003) sustained in the analysed music videos are implicated in a masking of misogynistic, colourist expressions of gendered desire as mere 'preference' on the part of the men. The visually represented suggestions of these men's 'choices' of romantic partner in these music videos, perpetuate colourism and implicitly pins (heterosexual) black women against one another by feeding into violent hierarchised models of feminine beauty, 'sexiness' and desirability. While Iqani (2016: 169) reminds us that, "[f]or centuries, women of colour in both western and southern settings have suffered the violence of white supremacist ideas of beauty and desirability", it is particularly disappointing that, at the time of writing this thesis in 2021 – considering the multiplicity of feminist-driven pursuits at encouraging women's fair and just treatment across sociocultural and sociosexual contexts – popular cultural discourses *still* treat women unfairly. This unfairness, in this regard, stems from the coercive socialising – through these music videos for example – of diverse young women into complying to a singular narrative of feminine beauty.

As Pilane and Iqani (2016, drawing from Ajani ya Azibo 2011; Dlova, Hamed, Tsoka-Gwegweni, Grobler & Hift 2014 and Thomas, 2009, for instance) note, the prioritisation of a 'white' aesthetic ideal (with regard to skin colour and hair) in the globalised mediascapes, bears a complex physical and psychological impact on black female consumers. It is a physical and psychological impact that influences, for instance, a continuous upsurge in skin bleaching beauty regimes as more and more women attempt to access the symbolic capital engendered in light-skin-ness that can in turn be converted into tangible benefits such as economic capital (Hunter 2002; Phoenix 2014; Iqani 2016; Thomas 2020).

Black (particularly dark-skinned) female consumers of popular cultural texts such as Afrobeats music videos may feel psycho-socially challenged by their lack of visibility in these music videos which are prominent sites of transnational representation aided by the Internet and satellite television. This symbolic erasure of dark-skinned African femininities in these music videos problematically communicates that such femininities are unworthy of the attention and appreciation of not only the hyper-romantic masculinities constructed in these music videos, but also that of the global audiences actively consuming these hyperreal expressions as figments to portray real-life. The impact hereof on the self-esteem of said dark-skinned African women (who take pride in this highly appreciated cultural export from their continent), is disheartening. It serves as motivation for saddening queries (given the use of two 'sad' emojis) such as this one from a viewer of one of the music videos analysed in this thesis: "Why don't they [referring to creators of these music videos] put dark skinned women 😟😟 we are beautiful too" (username: 'Lilian Williams').

7.1.2. Sustaining misogyny: Men's desires and women's oversexualised bodies

This subsection furthers the thesis's argument – stemming from chapters five and six – that misogyny variously prevails as an undercurrent of the visual culture captured in the corpus of music videos analysed in this study. It achieves this by examining the value-laden black male visual points-of-view through a feminist reading of the physical, symbolic and linguistic positioning of women's bodies in relation to men's in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. We know from the content analysis results that this music is significantly heteronormative, and it is against this heteronorm-conforming purview that the gender relations depicted in the corpus of analysed music videos play out. In coding for instances of implicit and explicit homo-erotic relations throughout the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual data, it was found that no instances of homo-erotic expressions/acts indicative of same-sex desire were depicted. As such, the politics of gendered interaction and looking that are evoked in the music videos analysed for this thesis, are limited within a heteronormative framework. The desiring gazes of the diverse African subjectivities depicted in the analysed music videos are quite obviously directed at the opposite sex. As such, the feminine expressions pervasive across the analysed music videos, are constructed as being performed explicitly for men.

This sub-section of the chapter further emphasises the consistent sexual objectification of women's bodies in these music videos, for voyeuristic (black) male gazes, through very deliberate camera angles. It is through this visual trope that a sociocultural power imbalance between men and women – where women in the analysed music videos are relegated to forms

of subservient, oversexualised, and ready-to-be-looked-at subjectivities – is maintained. Women's bodies are objectified by being spatially positioned to satisfy the gaze from the camera, as well as from the men who share the screen with these women in the analysed Afrobeats music videos.

I will argue, then, that through performing explicitly and implicitly sexualised forms of femininity, the women featured in the corpus of analysed music videos become key sites of men-driven misogyny in that their value is diminished to mere sexual object. In comparing the prevalence of sexualised behaviour in the analysed music videos, I carried out a gender-comparative coding of implicit and explicit acts of sexual expression. I, furthermore, assessed which gender most prevalently (in terms of screen time) – among the men and women featured in the videos – was bearing the gaze which mediated these performances of sexuality. The results are captured in Diagram 8 below.

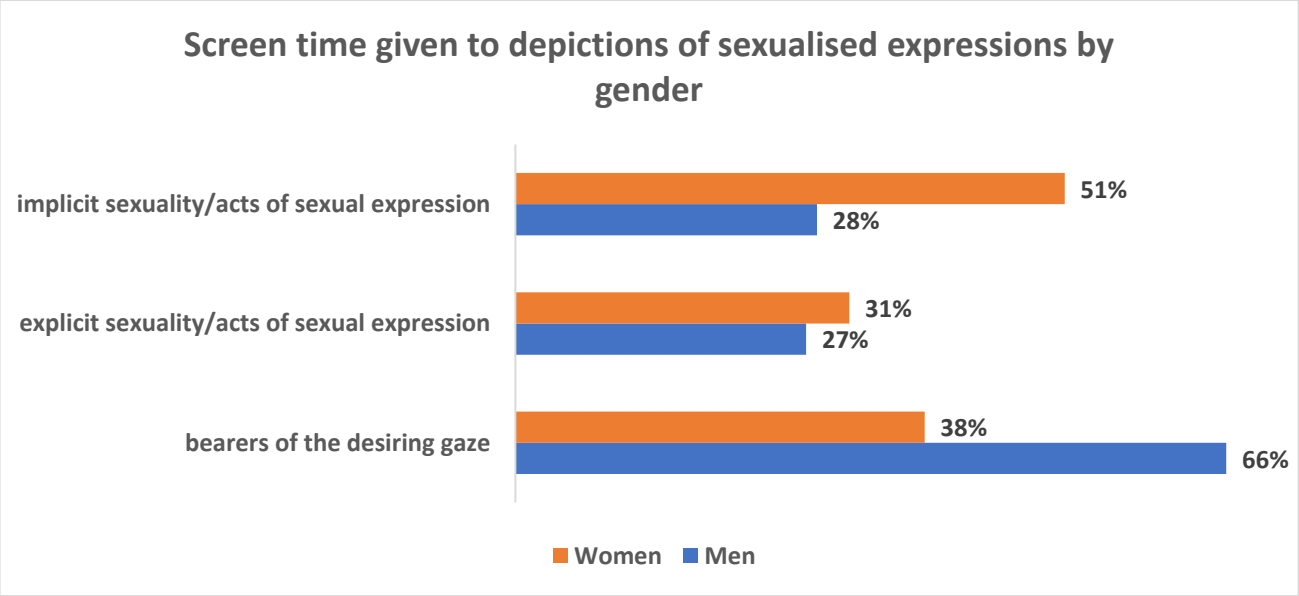


Diagram 8: Descriptive statistics with respect to screen time depicting implicit/explicit sexual expression and the embodiment of the desiring gaze in the analysed music videos

Femininities, as evidenced above, are more prevalently sexualised in the visual discourses of this genre, as captured by the corpus of analysed music videos. It is women who are most prevalently – at a 51% total of screen (52 minutes, 47 seconds) – depicted in scenes wherein they suggest or seem to elicit sexual appeal, arousal, desire through eroticised behaviours (e.g, hip/pelvic thrusts; gyration of buttocks; stroking/grabbing of breasts, buttocks, thighs; long/slow-motioned lip licking). These may at times be implicit but strongly suggestive of sex and sexuality, or sometimes very explicit: wherein featured women explicitly engage in the touching of their breasts, genitalia, buttocks and moving in ways saliently suggestive of sexual intercourse, or being sexually alluring in explicit ways. These sexualised femininities are quite

often depicted as being at the receiving end of overtly desiring black male gazes that explicitly objectify said femininities. At a 66% duration of screen time, women's bodies are depicted as objects of the male gaze stemming from men with which the screen is shared. This means that for over 68 minutes and 18 seconds of the total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual content analysed, instances wherein women's bodies are subjected to a sexualised male gaze, are depicted. It is these findings that aid in revealing a representational pattern: women in these music videos are overtly and consistently sexually objectified by the black male onlookers featured in these music videos alongside them.

Further to that, sexual objectification occurrences were also coded as instances in the music videos when the camera explicitly renders body parts on display by focusing in on an isolated body part (or a cluster of body parts) of a featured character instead of their body as a whole. Said body parts being the chest (cleavage), stomach, lips, buttocks, thighs, pelvis, genital area, and so forth. The body parts displayed are either fully exposed or very minimally covered with clothes. Figure 13 captures one of several such instances of sexual objectification on the part of the camera. In this regard, the content analysis reported a 39% total screen time duration (40 minutes, 21 seconds) of occurrences depicting the overt sexual objectification of women by the camera lens, compared to a 4% screen time duration (4 minutes, 8 seconds) of instances of men's sexual objectification by the camera.



Figure 13: A close-up camera shot of a woman's buttocks, exposed thighs and legs in 'Sexy Rosey' music video.

In grappling with these observations, I deploy the three 'kinds of look(ing)' that visual texts promote: (i) the look stemming from the camera to the event/scene; (ii) the look existing between the characters portrayed through the action in, for the purpose of this study, the music videos; (iii) as well as the look stemming from the spectator to the 'action' on screen (Nixon 2013: 314). It is through this lens that I speak to the broader sociocultural implications that said gendered 'kinds of looking' have on the social construction of particular expressions of 'femaleness' as a gender performance (Butler 1990).

Scenes from songs such as 'If' (Davido 2017), 'Mama Africa' (Bracket 2014), 'Leg Over' (Mr Eazi 2017), 'Sexy Rosey' (Flavour 2015), and 'Aye' (Davido 2014), as some examples, portray recurrent moments of emphasised expressions of desire indicated by a sexually objectifying gaze held by heterosexual men over women's bodies present in the spaces depicted in the analysed music videos. Evident in such scenes, is a suggestive sense of 'possession' over an evidently obliging female body by male characters (usually the Afrobeats male artists themselves). Said symbolic forms of 'possession' over women's bodies, as I have partly argued in chapter six, are at once misogynistic and romance oriented.

These symbolic forms of 'possession' that the depicted men have over the featured women's bodies are misogynistic in that such pursuits of possession over women's bodies are partly underscored by an implicit exercising of sexual and economic dominance (attempts at asserting male superiority). At the same time, there is a romance-oriented relational element in that such pursuits of possession over women's bodies by the featured men are mediated by very overt forms of non-aggressive, affection-driven acts of emotional labour that conceal the sexist nature of these men's pursuals of women. Such visual portrayals, I suggest, perpetuate the socio-ideological construction of a hetero-erotic backdrop against which women are shown to variously self-fashion their femininities in these music videos. As such, femininity – to build on results from the content analysis in chapter five – is shown to be greatly valued for its sexual attributes, above all else.



Figure 14: image from scene in 'Mama Africa' music video by Bracket (2014)

As evidenced in Figure 14 above, the analysed Afrobeats music videos incorporate overt depictions of women's bodies being actively gazed on by (black) men who physically position themselves in ways that render these women's bodies as objects of their (erotic) desires. The image shown here demonstrates how the use of camera angles in this scene depicts a medium shot of a woman walking across a room wherein two men are seated on lounge chairs. In the music video, this scene is sustained for a few seconds. This medium camera shot completely disidentifies the woman's body by not showing her face but her hips, thighs and buttocks instead. Identified, however, is the man in the frame who is shown with his face clearly exposed to capture his emotive expression in reaction to the women's body on display for his satisfaction. What this does, is it suggests that the featured woman's body is of more importance than her face in that scene. This suggestion signifies, then, that her value (according to the bearer of the gaze) is not in her body as a whole but her buttocks, thighs and hips. The camera goes on to apply a blurring effect on the woman's body (at this point, positioned in the centre of the frame) to shift the viewer's attention to the face (and the reaction-driven expressions) of the man positioned at the back of the frame, overtly staring at the woman's mid-section in what appears to be a look of sexual desire. The viewer, in this instance, is invited to share in this desire (towards the woman's body) with the man in the frame.

A visual framing of this nature encourages a focus on the facial reactions of the man in this scene, communicating noticeable erotic desire towards the woman's body as object of men's fantasy-driven pleasure. These kinds of reaction-driven facial and bodily expressions implying sexual desire by male onlookers towards women's bodies in the analysed corpus of music

videos, include overt fawning over women, and drawn-out moments of obvious staring by men at women's bodies (often focused particularly on the buttocks, hips and thighs). There is also the depiction of other facial reactions from the featured men, such as an agape mouth (symbolising a sense of pleasurable amazement over what is being stared at), and hand over mouth area with widened eyes – these are particularly evident in scenes captured in figures 15 and 16, for instance. Such depictions of the social relations between these men and women across their diverse African and diasporic contexts, although hyperreal, aid in reaffirming feminist scholarly arguments that the female body is socio-culturally quite consistently subjected to surveillance and domination by male 'surveyors' (e.g, Gill 2008; Gill 2007; Berger 2003; Mulvey 1975).

It is evident, thus, that when the frame is shared by both men and women in the Afrobeats music videos analysed, a deliberate focus on the women's bodies as desirable objects for an eroticised black male gaze, is strategically emphasised. As such, it is variously connoted that women are "ancillary sexual objects" with little else to contribute in the public sphere (Cuklanz 2016: 4). Given the statistical prominence of black women's bodies in the analysed music videos, we can see how, indeed, during such culturally stereotyping depictions of black female bodies as hypersexual "spectacles" (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013), these depicted black women are stripped of other more important layers of their identities by being deliberately objectified for their sexualities and bodily physiques (Noble 2013).



Figure 15: A group of men depicted as overtly fawning over a barely-covered women's body in 'If' music video by Davido (2017)



Figure 16: Afrobeats artist, Maleek Berry, depicted as pleasurably intrigued at the buttocks of a woman positioned directly in the direction of his desiring gaze.

This visual representational convention speaks to seminal and burgeoning feminist psychoanalytic research that has argued for how misogyny partly mediates the social constructions of gender relations in popular media. One such seminal text is from Laura Mulvey (1975; re-printed in 2000) who deploys concepts from the field of psychoanalysis to problematise what may naively be regarded as innocent depictions of gendered bodies in mainstream film/cinema. Beschara Karam's summary of Mulvey's main argument is borrowed here to provide a conceptual foundation upon which to base the representational pattern observed in the analysed Afrobeats music videos. Karam (2013: 30) notes:

> Laura Mulvey, a feminist author, psychoanalyst and film maker — borrows concepts and ideas from the fields of psychoanalysis and structuralism and argues that classical and mainstream Hollywood films represent women as the passive recipients of the 'male gaze'. In this seminal work, she argues that male characters are 'bearers of the look' which is aimed, most predominantly at physically desirable, sexually passive and submissive female characters. Not only that, but also that we, the audience, watch cinema through the eyes of these dominant male protagonists and are implicitly addressed as though we, too, are desiring of these heterosexual, heteronormative pleasures.

It is this argument by Mulvey (1975; 2000) that captures precisely what is partly at play within the visual culture captured in the Afrobeats music videos analysed for this study, 45 years after Mulvey initially advanced said argument in a very different context, having a particular kind of male (mostly white and Western) in mind. While originally based on work about films in Hollywood, this seminal research contribution is proven relevant when applied to the corpus of music videos sampled for this study. Interestingly, a striking similarity in the sexually-motivated, female disempowering, male gaze – that transcends time, context, and media form – can be observed. This study's empirical object of focus is showing that the African (black) male gaze is notably similar to the Western male gaze of Mulvey's consideration and context

at the time of her analyses. Similarly, the featured women across their diverse African and diasporic contexts, are visually framed as physically and sexually desirable and constantly submissive (disempowered) by men's sexual advances. The masculinities centralised in these music videos are also significantly depicted as enacting an active, often unchallenged and domineering gaze as characters within the storylines characterising these music videos. By positioning women at the receiving end of this active male gaze in the music videos, women's physical appearances are subjected to continued surveillance and scrutiny from these men, as well as audiences who "watch [these music videos] through the eyes of these dominant male protagonists and are implicitly addressed as though [they], too, are desiring of these heterosexual, heteronormative pleasures" (Karam 2013: 30).

Beyond the visual mode, lyrical contents from some of these music videos further evidence a misogynistic, yet non-coercive control on the part of men over women's bodies. The following lyrical contents are taken form Davido's (2014) second verse in the song, 'Aye':

The baddest!
Baby girl you the baddest
Oya shakee your asset
Make e man no go forget

Referring to her as 'baby girl' in an infantilising tone that is quite prominent across several of the analysed music videos, Davido appeals to the woman to 'shakee your asset'; using colloquial English to instruct the lady that she must gyrate her 'assets'. The word 'asset', in this context, refers to the woman's posterior/buttocks. For doing what is asked of her, the woman is hailed as 'the baddest'. Her 'badness' is emphasised in an empowering manner, expressing warranted badness that is encouraged by Davido who claims that by being 'the baddest', the woman will be unforgettable to men, specifically. She is unforgettably good in her expression of 'badness' to a point where, by shaking her buttocks as requested by a man, she will be able to "[m]ake e man no go forget" – this pidgin English phrase can be translated as an affirmation to the woman that her movement of her 'assets' will render her memorable or unforgettable to a man – in this case, Davido. This woman's expression of her femininity is at once hypersexualised and controlled by a male other who, by getting her to oblige to his misogynistic instructions, exercises dominance over her. Relegating her to a position of servitude in her femininity. This is a position of servitude that unlocks several perks and benefits for the complying woman. Most significant of all, is the social capital attached to mere proximity to the masculinities in these music videos, constructed as undeniably wealthy,

sexually potent, and emotionally transparent about their undying love for the women they pursue.

On a broader sociocultural level, the pervasiveness of these forms of sexually explicit, subservient feminine expressions in the analysed corpus of music videos, engender a potentiality to implicitly socialise young and impressionable female viewers thereof to internalise the desiring, dominant gaze of the empowered black masculinities in these music videos as primary points of views about their physical selves (Frederickson and Roberts 1997). That way, heterosexual-identifying women viewing these music videos may internalise the kinds of feminine physical aesthetics emphasised in these texts as the ideal to strive towards in order to command attention and adoration from heterosexual masculinities in their constant pursuit of women as romantic or 'sexual conquests' (Martino, Collins, Elliott, Strachman, Kanouse, and Berry 2006: 438). Take this comment from a viewer of one of the analysed videos, for instance:

> "Goals after watching this video:
> Lose weight
> Get a boyfriend
> Learn to sexy dance for bae" (username: 'Oyinade Ekuola')

'Oyinade Ekuola' shares three 'goals' that were inspired by her consumption of the music video on which this comment was posted. This commenter's first goal is to lose weight. This implies that her current weight is not at an acceptable level, compared to the bodies she has witnessed in the music video. This is stopping her from moving on to her second goal of securing a boyfriend so that she may inevitably reach her final goal of "sexy danc[ing] for her bae ('bae' used to informally refer to this future boyfriend). Here, we can see the kind of body monitoring that causes women to regard their worth in terms of their physical appearance which then leads them to feed the heteropatriarchal system's derogatory machinery which misogynistically treats women as no more than sex objects. We can see here how this corpus of visual material implicates this musical genre in ways that affirm feminist contentions that in various media texts,

> [w]omen's roles and contributions are diminished through coverage following these [symbolically violent] patterns, as they continue to be valued more for their bodies than for their ideas or real contributions to their [diverse societies] (Cuklanz 2016:4).

At their core, such patterns of representation are variously disempowering to women. As such, the following sub-section makes further arguments for the ways in which this disempowerment of women prevails.

7.1.3. Power, hetero-erotic voyeurism, and women's bodies

I have shown, thus far, how moments of significant screen-time given to hypersexualised, scantily-clad women's body parts or clusters of their body parts in the analysed music videos, maintain a disempowering representational pattern. Said pattern of representation observed in the corpus of analysed music videos is the sexual objectification of women's bodies, which denigrates women's value by inextricably linking it to a mere superficial aspect of physique. I will now briefly demonstrate, to expand the arguments in the sub-section above, how – through the persistent sexual objectification of the featured femininities – the analysed music videos encourage a fetishized gaze over these women's bodies, promoting hetero-erotic voyeurism on the part of the men co-featured in these music videos. This applies tor the consuming audiences of these music videos as well. These voyeuristic gazes are not innocent because they are complicit in sustaining misogynistic heteropatriarchal framings of womanhood as palatable or socially laudable largely when successfully embodying servitude, subordination, and obedience. Additionally, such voyeuristic visual perspectives over women's bodies symbolically strip them of their privacy and communicates that women's bodies are public property whose value and security are hardly self-determined.

From a psychoanalytic perspective in the context of representation, fetishism, essentially refers to a process whereby a viewing subject displaces their (sexual) 'urges' and desires on to another object outside said viewing subject (Hall 2013: 256). This is done to consciously or subconsciously confront latent fantasies that the viewing subject may be 'faced with' on a psychological level. Due to the intangible nature of desire-driven fantasy, an individual physicalises their desires, curiosities and urges, by using another physical object to represent those desires, curiosities and urges (Hall 2013: 256). The 'object' that eventually becomes the physical replacement of the looker's unseen, intangible desires and fantasies, is gazed upon as a reassuring, non-threatening, passive object of display; strategically positioned as a spectacle "in an intimate relation to the spectator" (Rose 2001: 111).

Across the corpus of analysed music videos in this thesis, the camera – which persistently assumes the position of the gazer/spectator arguably imagined to be a heterosexual man – is able to derive visual and erotic pleasure from fetishising parts of the women's bodies hypervisiblein these music videos. By strategically focusing on, and directing viewer attention to focus predominantly on, specific body parts of the women, the analysed Afrobeats music video directors and editors sustain this fetishising culture because "[the] substitution of a *part*

for the *whole,* of a thing – an object, an organ, a portion of the body – for a *subject*, is the effect of a very important representational practice – *fetishism*" (Hall 2013:256).

Women's buttocks (figures 13 and 16, for instance), their lower body parts: hips, thighs/legs and inguinal/groin area (figure 14**,** for instance) and breast area are subjected to close-up shots that overtly drive viewer attention to these body parts that are socioculturally understood and accepted as sexual body parts. By so doing, spectators of this visual simulacra are afforded the opportunity to take part in this fetishistic culture that sexually objectifies the woman's body for the satisfaction of the (heterosexual) male gaze. This way, viewers may arguably be invited to glean erotic satisfaction, among other things, through their engagement with these Afrobeats music videos.

This process of fetishistic objectification as an expression of internal (sexual) desires emerges dominantly in the Afrobeats music videos analysed for this study. This fetishistic gaze bestowed particularly upon bodies of women is sustained through the encouragement of a voyeuristic way of looking at the women's bodies featured in these music videos. The Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study highlight very active black African male viewing perspectives that objectify women's bodies by actively distancing themselves from the (oft black) women's bodies being looked at.

Consider figure 17, from the music video for the song 'Fall' by Davido (2017). The woman featured in the video – wearing only a black bodysuit and ankle socks – is subjected to a voyeuristic (male) gaze that actively situates Davido (the gazing subject) at a distance which allows him to enjoy a pleasure in seeing. That pleasure is derived, firstly, from being able to see and potentially fetishize what is being seen. Secondly, pleasure is derived from the fact that the person being gazed upon is unaware of this gaze and may not threaten the gazer by returning the gaze. In the video, Davido is physically distancing himself from the woman and in sheer voyeuristic fashion, he is 'hidden' in the darkness of the evening while the woman being looked at is illuminated by the light in the dance studio she is inside of.

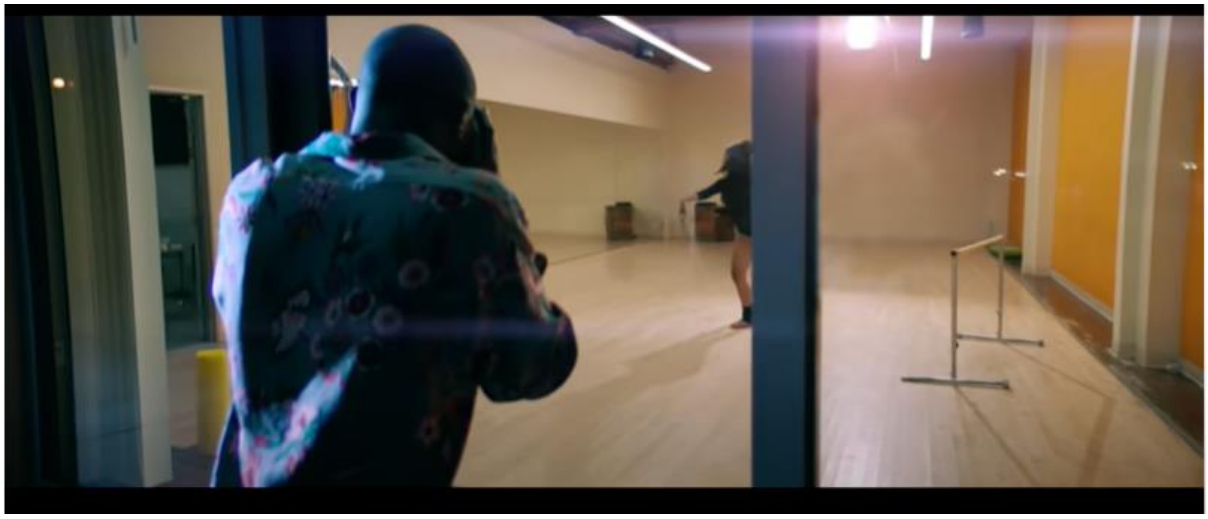


Figure 17: Afrobeats artist, Davido, depicted as voyeuristically watching a woman dancing in a well-lit dance studio

Voyeurism, as explained by Rose (2001; drawing from Mulvey 1989), is a way of actively looking at a distanced object that is objectified by the observer at a distance, ensuring that the viewed object is not aware of this gaze. This gaze is said to possess a certain control that may, at times, even be sadistic in its motive (Rose 2001). In film, this is a look often exclusively given to (heterosexual) men, whether as characters in the film or as audience members viewing the film (Rose 2001: 110). Laura Mulvey's early postulations (1975; 1989) argued that voyeurism is produced by the visio-spatial organisation of a film, relying on particular tools of compositional interpretation (Rose 2001: 110).

Similarly, in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, a voyeuristic gaze is encouraged even on the part of the viewing audience. As a viewer of these music videos, an individual is positioned (through how the camera is angled) to figuratively occupy the position of the actively gazing men featured in these music videos. The "filmic technique" (Rose 2001: 110) that helps construct and sustain this voyeuristic gaze on the part of the viewing audience, includes the creation of physical distance between the women's bodies on screen and the audience. The audience is symbolically placed in the shoes of the male protagonist through strategic camera angles that allow said viewer to see what the protagonist man sees, and thereby earning the privilege of maintaining a fetishistic gaze that voyeuristically objectifies the depicted women's bodies in hetero-erotic ways.

Through these visio-spatial organisations of films or, in this case, Afrobeats music videos as short filmic narratives, particular relational ties between men (masculinities) and women (femininities) are constructed and sustained. One significant relational ideology sustained here, is that women's right to privacy is less valued, and thus exposes them to situations of being

more prone to violation in their unjust position as ancillary sexual objects. This is a very disempowering position for the woman.

Having psychoanalytically grappled with these visual portrayals, it is apparent, I wish to argue, that the representational patterns in the visual culture captured by the analysed Afrobeats music videos, indeed sustain partly-misogynistic gender relations that thrive on the hetero-erotic objectification, subordination and fetishisation of women's bodies specifically for a voyeuristic black male gaze. These gender relations are implicated in particularly disempowering effects to women. It is more so disempowering to women in that, the women's bodies depicted, are significantly positioned as lacking in terms of being multifaceted and able to embody leadership as opposed to servitude. Having considered all of these critical observations, one wonders if the picture is really that bleak when it comes to women's representations in Afrobeats music videos.

7.1.4. Is the picture really that bleak? Possibilities of women's sexual empowerment

I have thus far demonstrated how, in various fashions, the femininities featured in the analysed music videos are disempowered and relegated to mere objects of men's sexual pleasure. In this section, I explore the possibilities of empowered femininities in the corpus of music videos analysed for this thesis. I particularly seek to trace possibilities of empowerment as they relate to the sociocultural domains of women's sexuality and their intimate (heterosexual) relationships with men. I do this by embarking on a plot analysis of some of the analysed music videos from the larger corpus to demonstrate how some of the portrayals of women can be read as partly tantamount to traces of agentic, self-determining femininities. This agency and self-determination engender what this thesis refers to as 'sexssertiveness' on the part of the women featured as central characters in the analysed music videos. As part of another significant theoretical contribution from this thesis, I propose the idea of women's sexual expressions as 'sexssertive', which aids them in being agentic about their bodies and sexualities.

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, this new concept marries the notions of sex/sexuality with the personality trait of assertiveness. This theorisation is done so as to offer a novel way to describe women's perceived assertiveness and agency in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations, rather than only as victims. My readings of 'sexssertive' feminine performances, as they relate to the hyperreal contexts crafted in the corpus of analysed music videos, are carefully embedded in broader (post)feminist discourses of women's empowerment, agency, and self-determination in the domain of sexual expression. Transnational feminist theorisations of sexually agentic and empowered femininities as

'midriff'-aligned (as argued by Gill (2007; 2008) in looking at advertising media texts); or as indicative of a "good time girl" sensibility (as highlighted by Ligaga (2020; 2014) who focuses on social media platforms and news media among other texts), aid this current thesis to theorise said agentic and empowered femininities as 'sexssertive' specifically within the media form of the music video.

Feminist plights – in their diverse iterations over time and context – towards the just treatment of women, have variously been implicated in rather contradictory principles that seem to situate feminism almost as something of the past: a plight/sensibility no longer required (McRobbie 2004a). This discourse has had an influential role in the pervasiveness of a sensibility called 'postfeminism' (McRobbie 2004a; Gill 2007; Gill 2008). What postfeminist-aligned 'worldviews' do, in the context of popular culture, is that they variously undermine the feminist gains of the 1970s and 80s, argues Angela McRobbie (2004a). McRobbie, as Storey (2018: 176) summarises, makes no secret of her low optimism about the presumed 'success' of feminism:

> What has really happened, she argues, is that much contemporary popular culture actively undermines the feminist gains of the 1970s and 1980s. However, this should not be understood as a straightforward 'backlash' against feminism. Rather its undermining of feminism works by acknowledging feminism while at the same time suggesting that it is no longer necessary in a world where women have the freedom to shape their own individual life courses. In post-feminist popular culture feminism features as history: aged, uncool and redundant. The acknowledging of feminism, therefore, is only to demonstrate that it is no longer relevant.

It is through this advancement of a perception that feminism is no longer relevant that, in contemporary popular culture, we are bombarded with countless discourses (visual or otherwise) that actively position women as empowered, agentic, and self-determining among other things. A postfeminist sensibility is deeply entrenched in a neoliberal worldview that calls for the celebration of individuality and choice said to be unrestrictedly afforded to women globally (Gill 2007; 2008; Dosekun 2015b). This sensibility "…is less contingent upon political or organized activism than the feminist of the past" (Cuklanz 2016: 9), and in relation to expressions of sexuality, more specifically, women are believed – and increasingly represented in contemporary popular media forms – as enjoying sexual freedom and free expression of sexuality (Gill 2007; Gill 2008; Genz 2009; Butler 2013; Cuklanz 2016).

From such discursive formations about women's sexual freedom and free expression of sexuality as indicative of a postfeminist consciousness, emerged critical womanist scholarship that have theorised women as 'midriff' (Gill 2007; 2008) to conceptualise women's witting use

of their bodies, appearances, and sexualities to more insistently exercise their sexual agency. Midriff women are described as unapologetic about their sexual power and ability to (freely) use their bodies as means to socioculturally, and otherwise, advance or benefit themselves (Gill 2007; Gill 2008). In Africanist scholarship, postfeminist-aligned theorisations of sexually 'free' and expressive women have conceptualised them as 'good time girls' (Ligaga 2014; 2020; Newell 2002) who are "young, educated, beautiful, fun loving, wild, likes to 'party', is 'up for anything' and is willing to trade her body for money" (Ligaga 2014: 250). These theorisations can even be linked to ideas about the African 'modern girl' (Thomas 2006; 2020) who is noted to "…reject the roles of dutiful daughter, wife and mother through [her] engagement of international commodity cultures, mass media and political discourses" (Thomas 2006: 462). The cosmopolitan 'midriff' woman, the African 'good time' and 'modern' girl have many things in common. And what strongly undergirds their performances of their sexualities, is a sense of 'power femininity' (Gill 2008; Gill 2007; Lazar 2006) assuring them that they can 'have it all', should they so choose.

This thesis follows Simidele Dosekun (2015) in her proposition that postfeminist sensibilities – though western-borne – are variously transnational. As such, in alignment with Dosekun (2015), this thesis finds value in reading the African women's feminine expressions in these music videos through a postfeminist lens. Below, I offer a discussion engaging a storyline summary of five songs from the corpus of music videos analysed in this study. These are but five of several music videos in the corpus that, when closely read, depict feminine expressions one may deem tantamount to a postfeminist sensibility.

Considering Davido's (2014) 'Aye' music video. This music video tells the tale of a lowly farm labourer (portrayed by Davido) who falls in love with a well-off princess who, at the time of noticing this farm labourer, is already romantically involved with a wealthy prince. The wealthy prince seemingly owns the farmland on which Davido's character is a labourer. Realising she is also attracted to the farm labourer – who has started sending signals of interest towards her – the princess quite agentically pursues this love interest with this man from a much lower socio-economic class bracket as hers, in spite of the potential societal backlash this may instigate among the community members under her current partner's royal leadership. She is portrayed as self-determining in how she is depicted as intently going after what she wants in the way that *she* wants.

This woman, in essence, manages to agentically negate what Ligaga (2020) describes as 'moral narratives' which typically inform the cultural ideologies that construct ideas of womanhood

across various African contexts along very restrictive and binary narratives of 'good' and 'bad' woman, wife, daughter, etcetera – especially in the domains of sexual expression. The woman in question manages this active countering of the "public scripts" (Ligaga 2020: 2) of 'noble' femininity by behaving as agentically as she does. Essentially, according to these moral-driven public scripts, a 'good' African woman is one that submissively adheres to the heteropatriarchal role of obedient, sexually submissive wife/daughter/girlfriend who dares not to publicly assert her individualism and 'unorthodox' choices if she wishes not to bear the brunt of public shame. In this case, the woman in this music video actively exercises her agency in ways that may be read as socioculturally empowering.

Another music video considered is that of the song 'Collabo' (P-Square 2015). The central plot around which the narrative in this music video develops, is that of an infatuation-driven pursuit – by three men (portraying the three protagonists) – of the same woman who appears to be their superior at their depicted workplace. This woman is portrayed in a multifaceted manner where she is depicted as a powerful professional, managing the company for which these men work. She is, for instance, depicted in boardroom scenes that indicate a sense of influence and superiority embodied through how she 'leads' the meetings in said boardroom scenes. Even so, she is still sexually objectified through several camera shots that frame an explicit focus on her buttocks, thighs and cleavage area as the music video progresses.

The three protagonist men engage in several attempts at catching this woman's attention to their advances without any form of intimidating coercion. As such, she may be read as not directly undermined or stripped of her agency to actively reject these men's advances – communicating, implicitly, a sense of non-hostility from the men who are evidently behaving in ways that may be deemed emasculating depending on which lens of hegemonic masculinity you view it through. The woman remains in control of her sexuality and status of power, and eventually uses the very sexual advances made by all three men to lure them into doing some of her work-based tasks that seem to have piled up, given her presumed senior position in the portrayed company. She is depicted, then, as quite powerful and self-determining in her reliance on her physical and sexual attractiveness – regarded in midriff-aligned feminine performances as social capital (Gill 2008) – to benefit her in her professional progression.

Let us now consider P-Square's (2012) 'Chop My Money' music video, featuring two other musicians. Quite similar to the storyline depicted in the 'Collabo' music video summarised above, the plot line for the 'Chop My Money' music video also partly revolves around several men's pursuits of the same woman. The artists featured on the song – Paul, Peter, Akon and

May-D – portray the protagonist men in romantic pursuit of the same woman, although without each other's knowledge. In pursuit of this woman, the four men are portrayed as engaging in quite explicit forms of romanticism often mediated by various forms of 'breadwinnerism' and wealth expending. The woman portraying the central character is, as a result, the recipient of unrestricted luxurious material commodities (luxury cars, expensive shopping sprees and access to premium credit cards) from each of these men in their attempts to secure her romantic interest.

In a very self-determining fashion, this woman is depicted as agentic in her eventual decision to outright reject all four of the men pursuing her, without any hostile consequences that may expose her to any form of harm from any of the men involved. The men respectfully accept their fates because, upon finding out that this woman 'played' all of them by not giving into any of their advances while enjoying all the materialistic 'perks' and eventually choosing to be with a different man altogether, they collectively acknowledge their misfortune, and thus leave the woman be. At the end of this music video, many a viewer would agree that the protagonist woman character in this music video managed to successfully "…bring [those] men to their knees" (Gill 2008: 43). Her agency and control over her body, thus, are not threatened, one may argue. This thereby positions her, in the minds of the viewer, as empowered and confident enough to use her sexual power as a means to 'have it all' (Gill 2008).

Patoranking's (2016) 'No Kissing' music video demonstrates further 'empowered femininity' in the narrative progression for the music video, featuring Sarkodie. This music video's plot revolves around a young heterosexual couple in love. The male protagonist, played by Patoranking, and his romantic partner are quite evidently in what seems to be a loving relationship. Patoranking even goes as far as claiming to be fully appreciative of this love to such an extent that he behaves quite 'gentleman-like' in that he exercises extreme self-restraint with regard to his sexual urges towards his love interest. He communicates this by assuring the woman that for as long as she refuses to engage in sexual activity with him, he will not force her into it. Consider this excerpt of lyrics from the song:

If you no gimme [give me], I no go take
Only your love I appreciate
If you no gimme, I no go take
Baby girl let's relate

Without actually saying it outright, Patoranking, with these lyrics, assures the woman that if she is not going to 'give' him, he is not going to take. That is to say, he will practice self-control instead of forcefully 'taking' with regard to sexual intercourse. If it is only her love she has to

offer now, that is fine with him – he appreciates her love. While implicitly quite misogynistic in its underlying insinuation that, as a man, he *should* be 'given' what he wants from a woman and should thus be celebrated for not forcefully taking it from her, it is the superficial sentiment veiling the misogyny that may be read as romantic in that Patoranking may be seen as going against the grain of violent masculinities that would have typically *demanded* intimacy from the woman. It would seem, in this case, that the woman is rendered a very accommodating space to agentially determine the rules/expectations in this relationship because she assertively dictates that, in this relationship, there shall be:

No kissing baby
No touching baby
No kissing baby
And don't call me baby

Here, it is apparent, that the woman is depicted as being in control of what happens to her body in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations, thereby, arming her with 'power femininity' (Gill 2008: 43).

The music video for the song, 'Johnny' by Yemi Alade (2014) – which is also the only one in the data corpus that is by an Afrobeats musician who is a woman – tells the story of a man by the name, Johnny. Johnny, a seemingly sexually promiscuous man who is depicted as having entered into relationships with several women in his neighbourhood, is finally caught in the act of his infidelity. Upon discovering that they have all been betrayed by Johnny, a group of women decide to teach Johnny a lesson to show him that he cannot get away with such behaviour just because he is a man. These women, portrayed as particularly agentic in their plight to act out on their collective rage towards this man, engage in public acts of outrage which may otherwise have been frowned upon by people subscribing to heteropatriarchal moral narratives of 'respectable' women's behaviour (Ligaga 2020). They actively challenge the patriarchal order that typically subordinates them into roles of servitude and invisibility in the public sphere. Instead of being 'respectable' women who are not supposed to disrespect the man's sexual agency to do what he wants as superior 'breadwinner', these women take charge of their lives by 'fighting' for their just treatment in the area of intimate heterosexual relationships. Also evident here, then, are traces of what may be read as agency and self-determination on the part of the African women depicted here.

Not only do these five briefly summarised music videos centralise women as important characters in the development of the storylines depicted in the music videos, they also add a welcomed nuance to these women's subject positions. These women are depicted as multi-

layered, intelligent and in leadership roles, for instance. Part of the content analysis for this study coded instances in the visual material wherein women are portrayed as instrumental in their role in the video's narrative progression. It was noted that there was a 67% screen time duration (69 minutes, 20 seconds) depicting instances wherein characters who are women are portrayed as valuable for more than just their looks but also for what they contributed to the music video (e.g., portrayed as central protagonists in the videos; fully dressed in unprovocative attire; driving the action in the plot of the narrative). This is still much lower than the 97% screen time duration (100 minutes, 23 seconds) during which men are portrayed as instrumental in their roles in the videos' narrative progressions. Yet, 69 minutes and 20 seconds of screen time accounts for a noteworthy duration to offer such nuanced portrayals of women. Read critically, I propose a new concept in the sub-section below – which I coin "sexssertiveness" – to capture how the variously empowering atmospheres afforded the women featured in the analysed music videos in tandem with a misogyrom sensibility, foster the constructions of black African women who are sexually assertive/self-assured in their sexualities. My theorising of these depictions allows me to make a fresh contribution to scholarship on postfeminism by adding this new analytical conceptualisation of the 'sexssertive' black African woman to the scholarly literature on 'midriff' femininities (Gill 2007; 2008) and African 'good time girls' (Ligaga 2014; 2020).

7.1.5. 'My body, my rules': Reading "sexssertive" femininities

The consistent misogyrom-aligned showering of the femininities depicted as central characters in these music videos, with overdramatised romantic gestures, largely encourages the constructions of what this thesis coins 'sexssertive' femininities. Notions of sex and sexuality and the idea of assertiveness as a personality trait, are interlinked to offer this original theoretical contribution. Assertiveness, broadly explained, refers to the quality of being confident and self-assured in one's communicative expressions. While sex/sexuality, on the other hand, speaks to the way human subjectivities experience and express themselves sexually. The latter has largely to do with the ways in which we identify and navigate romantic attraction through emotional, physical and erotic behavioural cues. My conceptual merging of these two notions is to capture the gender-relational instances across the corpus of analysed Afrobeats music videos during which women are, in very implicitly resistant fashions, visibly assertive in their sexualities. By being assertive in their expressions of sexuality, these women are depicted as confident and self-assured in their bodily communication of sexual desire, erotic and romantic attraction towards the misogyrom-aligned masculinities co-featured in these hyperreal gender-relational depictions.

These diverse, sexssertive feminine expressions are evident in how the featured women are confident in their physical appearances and self-assured in their sexualities, rendering them sexually assertive with regard to how they manoeuvre their bodies and what happens to their bodies in these music videos. The sexssertiveness partly underscoring these expressions of femininities is further evident in how the featured women are often depicted as actively communicating sexual desire and desirability for the male 'spectators' in these music videos through sensual movements, as well as confidently refusing unwanted sexual advances from said male lookers. Women's sexuality, thus, is partly relied upon to skilfully resist sexual oppression from heteropatriarchy, which may be read as an advance or achievement of the better treatment of women as it relates to the domains of intimacy and romantic relationships. What this does is that it implicitly infers a justification behind postfeminist-aligned claims in popular culture that feminism is no longer required (McRobbie 2004a).

We can see, then, how the feminine sexssertiveness – encouraged by the enduring masculine misogyrom sensibility undergirding these music videos – manifests in ways that may be deemed empowering to women, in the domain of sexuality. Much like the postfeminist 'midriff' figure in transnational advertising media (Gill 2007; 2008) and the 'good time girl' across social media self-representations by African women (Ligaga 2014; 2020), the 'sexssertive' African woman in the Afrobeats music video text, is agentic and self-determining as far as her sexual expression is concerned.

Quite restrictively, however, the empowering sociocultural 'passport' of sexssertiveness is only issued to women of a particular skin tone and body type as it relates to the visual culture captured in the corpus of analysed music videos. In their active entanglement in a misogyrom cultural sensibility, the gazes from the black men in these music videos saliently place young, light-skinned, lean- and curvy-figured black women on a pedestal; thereby actively co-constructing expressions of sexssertiveness in said women. As I have argued, there is sociocultural power in a sexssertive sexual expression. These light-skinned, lean- and curvy-figured women's hyper-celebrated 'look' renders them with the flexible, yet still variously male-controlled, opportunity to stretch the restrictive nature of heteropatriarchy as it relates to women's sexualities and bodies. As such, these marginalising, idealised epitomes of black feminine 'African beauty' exercise some agency over their sexualities mainly due to how the consistent misogyrom-aligned masculine advances directed at them feeds their confidence – aiding in negating insecurities about themselves. These are insecurities that are, unfortunately, implicitly instigated within black African femininities that choose not to conform to such restrictive ideals about feminine beauty.

In these music videos, the sexssertive women get away with negating public scripts of respectability pervasive in various African cultures. Their participation in a "raunch culture" (Levy 2005; Lutwama-Rukundo 2016), for instance, is welcomed by the heteropatriarchal black spectating men variously surveilling these women's feminine performances. It is precisely their explicit sexuality and semi-nudity that are celebrated in these music videos, rendering them hyper-visible and sexually desirable without explicitly bearing the brunt of public shaming within the hyperreal contexts depicted in these music videos. Said public shaming does not even appear in the analysed viewer comments threads from the analysed music videos.

That said, however, it is fascinating, to observe how the sexssertively raunchy black femininities – enjoying misogyrom-aligned advances from 'powerful' black masculinities – are quite ironically reconstructed into adhering to the very notions of respectability as soon as they have been courted into romantic relationships by the men in these music videos. The women who, after being actively 'chased' and courted by the African men in the storylines depicted in the analysed music videos, are variously dressing in ways that may be read as (in)advertent attempts to *not* be seen as raunchy, hypersexual and self-assured in their semi-naked bodies. The physical appearances of women depicted as being in (committed) romantic relationships with the protagonist men in the analysed music videos, are fashioned in ways that are less 'skimpy' and oversexualised. Figure 18 below, drawn from Tekno's (2015) 'Duro' music video, illustrates how the woman who is depicted as Tekno's romantic partner, is dressed in a way that would pass as 'respectable' when viewed through such public scripts about women's bodies. The woman – dressed in a dark red dress that covers most of her body while revealing only her forearms – can be said to successfully negate the "slutty" stereotypes of female sexuality pervasive in media cultures (Levy 2015).



Figure 18: Tekno depicted in romantic embrace with his love interest in the music video for the song 'Where' (Tekno 2015).

Arguably, what figure 18 demonstrates, is how heteropatriarchy rears its surveilling head by intricately enforcing its alignment with restrictive public scripts of 'decency' as it relates to African women's expressions of their sexualities. Evident in the music video captured above is an implicit ideological underpinning that places the heterosexual-identifying woman's feminine expressions at the mercy of the heteropatriarchal man in this music video. For this man's scopophilic gratifications while on the 'chase' as eligible bachelor, women's oversexualised, raunchy bodily expressions are explicitly celebrated. Yet, when a romantic relationship is established – following successful advances on the part of Tekno, in this instance – the 'captured' woman's sexssertiveness is somewhat diminished so as to 'make an honest woman' (or 'wife material') out of her. This woman is, as a result, depicted as negating participation in raunchy expressions of sexuality for the surveilling black man's gaze in the music video in question, thereby appearing as if willingly towing the line in relation to moral narratives about African women and their gendered and sexual expressions of their femininity, in terms of public appearance (through dress sense, for instance).

All these observations considered, one may still be tempted to concede, to an extent, that the picture is perhaps not entirely bleak with regard to the empowering representation of women in popular discourses, specifically as it relates to the visual discourses of the Afrobeats musical genre. However, such a simplistic conclusion would be naïve for this study to draw. Precisely because I have shown, throughout my analytic discussions of the findings, that an implicit, sociosexually-disempowering, and misogynistic undertone, characterises much of the gender-relational depictions prioritised in the corpus of analysed music videos. Considering this

analytical crossroad and the implications of its influence in aiding this thesis to contribute to larger debates around popular media cultures and their catalytic roles in the constructions of gender and sexuality among other aspects, it is crucial to engage in further critical consideration of these findings. This way, more nuanced conclusions may be drawn. In the section to follow, I embark on said critical considerations of the observations made thus far in order to make an argument about where the sociocultural power lies among the men and women depicted in the hyperreal scenarios crafted in these texts, more especially as it relates to the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships.

7.2. 'Sexssertive' and empowered femininities: social façade or gender-relational possibility?

In this sub-section, I connect sexssertiveness with the concept of misogyrom in tandem with a postfeminist sensibility to examine the possibility of reading women's empowerment in the visual discourses captured in the analsyed corpus of music videos, particularly as they relate to the domains of sexuality, intimacy, and romantic relationships. I will show how the dynamic thread of a misogyrom sensibility – that I propose underscores these gendered depictions in the analysed music videos – offers an empowering potential as it relates to women through these hyperreal depictions. However, these postfeminist-aligned readings of women's empowerment, agency and what I have theorised as sexssertiveness, I argue, are social façades that are effectively mediated and pseudo-legitimised by discourses of extreme romanticism which – if taken at face value – may encourage the uncritical absolving of heteropatriarchy from its deeply toxic nature towards women's sociocultural advancement and just treatment in the domains of sexuality and romantic relationships. Essentially, the *actual* power remains firmly in the hands of men.

Misogyrom as a gender-relational cultural sensibility prevalent across the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study, variously mediates the constructions of femininities in these texts, as it does masculinities per my arguments in chapter six. As an underlying sensibility across the diverse gender relations depicted in the analysed music videos, misogyrom is effective in fostering flexible ground for the expression of what can be considered postfeminist-aligned, sexssertive and self-determining femininities. Due to its cultivation of romantic and egalitarian gender-relational atmospheres (while still inherently misogynistic in its cultural superiorising of men), a misogyrom sensibility allows room for the pushback against the rigidity of patriarchy in its largely denigratory treatment of women

compared to men, especially in the context of intimate heterosexual relationships and expression of sexuality.

Sustained through active, and perhaps inadvertent, performances of ideal manhood that conceal misogyny and sexism with overtly courteous acts of romanticism that, on the surface, appear to be void of violence and hostility, misogyrom appears to render women a 'safe space' to assert their sexssertiveness, in the domains of intimacy and romantic attraction. The femininities featured in the analysed texts assert their sexssertiveness by, for instance, being depicted as confidently assessing, rejecting and generally being critical of the courtship attempts from the 'parading' masculinities who, as chauvinistic patriarchal norms would dictate, would typically resort to exercising dominance by forcefully convincing women into accepting their courtship advances.

Here, interestingly, despite the arrogant visual and lyrics-driven emphasis on their wealth, physical 'sexiness' and strength, as well as their self-proclaimed sexual prowess, the diverse masculinities centralised in the corpus of analysed music videos are constructed as particularly *not* demanding control over the attention and affection of the women to which they are pleading romantic love. They come across, especially through their lyrical content, as not expressing entitlement over women's bodies. This is an observation that may be appreciated by several pockets of feminist scholars (Mowatt, French, and Malebranche 2013; Sommers-Flanagan et. al 1993; Bretthauer, Zimmerman & Banning 2007; Ligaga 2014; Ligaga 2020; McRobbie 2004b, etc) who have variously spoken truth to power as it relates to heteropatriarchal men and their relationships with women's bodies.

Being variously implicated in a misogyrom sensibility, the masculinities centralised in the analysed music videos, are saliently depicted as exerting overt emotional labour in pursuit of romantic relations with the women they wish to court. This emotional labour is partly also manifesting as 'peacocking' behaviour that these men engage in. Peacocking, as some relationship 'experts' explain in popular, oft non-academic discourse, is something men do so as to emphasise what they perceive are their strong attributes in order to stand out from their 'competition' in their pursuits to attract women (Hayes 2019). In so doing, the peacocking man invests significant emotional labour while trying to convince his love interest as to why he is the best choice of romantic partner.

It is in this egotistical parading of themselves as 'ideal' lovers and 'providers', that these masculinities portrayed in the analysed music videos, appear to engage in symbolic forms of self-auctioning which may come across as though the critical and sexualised gaze and its

inherent power is briefly shifted from masculine subjectivities to feminine subjectivities. This is so in that the women, in such instances of men's peacocking, are invited to temporarily bear the active gaze as targets of the self-auctioneering done by the men. In the context of the analysed visual data, the women depicted to be actively pursued and serenaded by the peacocking men in the music videos, variously appear to be temporarily empowered in that they are seemingly rendered an examinatory gaze to counter-objectify these men. The counter-objectification, I would argue, very briefly manifests in moments when the courted woman actively 'assesses' her peacocking pursuer to make a decision on whether or not he is worthy of her attention and affection. Once having 'decided' on a suitable suitor, the women featured in many of the analysed music videos, are overtly assured of their value as partners through romantic discourses of infinite love and fidelity, communicated by the protagonist men in these videos through their song lyrics, especially.

The women are showered with romance and are made to feel they can, for instance, confidently dictate that there shall be 'no kissing' and 'no touching' (or sexual activity) until such a time when *they* are ready. This relates to what I have coined – through a postfeminist lens – sexssertiveness, which affords the featured women the freedom to be assertive in their sexualities, negate African societal "public scripts" of respectability in relation to expressions of womanhood (Ligaga 2020: 2), and variously "bring men to their knees" (Gill 2008: 43) by the use of their sexuality and physical attractiveness. Just by this sheer sense of agency afforded them in regard to their bodies, they may be seen as somewhat empowered in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations involving their bodies.

Further to that, and on a broader scale, when considering the general visibility of women in the corpus of music videos analysed, an argument could be made about the empowering potential that such hypervisibility engenders in terms of women's active participation in public cultures that may lead to socioeconomic ascendance and social capital. While prejudicially favourable to a particular (black) feminine beauty aesthetic (young, light-skinned, lean- and curvy-figured, weave-adorning women), the general visibility of women in the corpus of analysed visual data, could – if taken at face value – be regarded as a positive advancement of the feminist agenda. This increased visibility of women in these widely disseminated and transnationally consumed media texts, may indeed "…be celebrated as a positive development in on-going feminist conversations about gender, power and society" (Ligaga 2020: 11).

However, as I have shown in this chapter, while the visibility of women in these texts is not a concern, it is the *types* of representations that are not entirely flattering in that the featured

women are still largely oversexualised – at times regardless of their role in the plot of the music video. In looking at black women's bodies, Mowatt, et. al (2013) argued that questions of invisibility make reference not just to their exclusion from mainstream discourses, but also the *ways* in which these bodies are reduced to stereotypical, sex-objectified forms (emphasis my own). This includes the positioning of women's bodies on display through a minute focus on specific parts of the body – a visual trope observed to be prevalent in the corpus of visual material analysed in this current study. Further to this sexualised objectification of the featured women's bodies, are instances wherein women are portrayed as mere decorative, unimportant 'objects' there to 'flank' the men in the music videos in order to enhance the sexual and/or aesthetic bravado of said men (often the musicians to which the songs are credited). This, as per the content analysis results in chapter five, was the case for a total of 55% of screen time. That is to say, for a combined total of 56 minutes and 55 seconds of the total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual material analysed, women are relegated to mere decorative objects.

What, then, does one make of this complex dialectic of misogyrom at play in the visual culture of the Afrobeats music videos analysed, where women are quite evidently sometimes treated with respect, adoration and an atmosphere for sexual assertiveness on the one hand; while, on the other hand, they are equally often denigrated to disempowering positions of oversexualised object of men's pleasure? A useful pursuit, I'm convinced, is to seek out where the power *actually* lies in these misogyrom sociocultural relations among men and women as depicted in the corpus of music videos analysed in this thesis. That way, a more reflexive observation can be made about potentially how far the multiplicity of feminist agendas towards equal power division among men and women in the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships have come, and how effective have feminist discourses been in inspiring the young, cosmopolitan youths participating in the production of these popular cultural texts in contemporary Africa, to promote gender-relational equality and the just treatment of women in the domains of sexuality, intimacy and romantic relationships. In that vein, I argue that the power still firmly lies in the hands of the men featured in these music videos in their capacities as cultural chaperones of heteropatriarchy.

This is most evident in three ways. Firstly, the featured men, in their prejudicial preferences for particular types of feminine 'beauties', sustain harmful, heteropatriarchal 'patterns of desire' (hooks 2003) that implicitly suggest that it is only the light-skinned, weave-adorning, lean- and curvy-figured woman who can unlock these men's spectacular love and adoration. What this does, as I have argued earlier in this chapter, is communicate to 'non-conforming' women that they are not good enough in the eyes of these hyper-romantic men. This may

subconsciously encourage a proactive pursuit, on the part of some women, towards this overly celebrated 'look'. As a result, an innate sense of confidence surveillance by said women may encourage the continued usage, by pockets of dark-skinned African women, of potentially harmful skin lightening creams and weight-control dietary regimes as attempts to reach their 'goal' appearance so as to also access the kinds of romantic, emotionally in-touch African men depicted in these music videos. At the core, then, power is wielded by these men who effectively 'control' women's views about their physical selves; even beyond the hyperreal 'worlds' captured on screen.

Secondly, it is the featured men who remain in positions of dominance over women and their sexual expressions by non-coercively encouraging the sexualisation of women in how they sing about these women's 'assets' (buttocks), for instance. For Davido (2014) to, for example, 'romantically' instruct his love interest to gyrate her buttocks for his pleasure, and she obliging to the request, he wields power over her. This is a level of power that may go unnoticed because of how effectively Davido veils it with overly romanticised expressions of love, fidelity, and adoration towards the woman.

Lastly, we have seen in chapter six that these masculinities, centralised in the analysed music videos, thrive on asserting their dominance and superiority by overtly parading their wealth, social statuses and positions as ideal breadwinners. It is in these narcissistic expressions of masculinities that these featured men co-construct femininities that are shown as voluntarily taking on gender roles of (sexual) servitude and willing beneficiaries of men's provision, rescue out of economic constraint, and sexual satisfaction. Although such feminine constructions can indeed easily be subsumed in, and overlooked by, those observing from a postfeminist discursive lens of empowerment and agency, the sub-texts of such gender-relational depictions successfully place sociocultural power squarely in the hands of men.

To help sum up my argument, I want to, once again, briefly draw on a study that was undertaken by Ifeoma Vivian Dunu and Gregory Obinna Ugbo (2015) in Nigeria, which focused specifically on the music lyrics of Afrobeats artist, Flavour, as they relate to women and their bodies. In a focus group discussion about the nature of Flavour's musical lyrics in regard to women, some women's responses alluded to an interesting observation which captures particularly what my theorisation of misogyrom partly proposes. As Dunu and Ugbo (2015: 46) aptly summarise:

> The women pointed out that although most of Flavour's songs tend to adore, praise and make women prominent; it only creates false pretence of empowerment that only serves to secure the woman for the man's satisfaction and fulfilment.

It is such observations that help us see the toxic nature of romanticism in its attempt to guise misogyny and thereby re-assert heteropatriarchal, sexist social cues to debase women through a 'false pretence of empowerment' in the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships. I wish to argue, then, that traces of postfeminist cultural sensibilities in tandem with a misogyrom sensibility – encouraging a reading of women as empowered and agentic in the analysed music videos – are regressive for the feminist advancement of gender-relational equality. This is so because these sensibilities implicitly encourage misogyny to prevail through the iteration of regressive patterns of behaviour that uphold (hetero)patriarchy in these popular cultural texts. Therefore, readings of empowered, 'sexssertive' black African women – as positive progress in the plight towards equal gender power relations in a notably heteropatriarchal African popular cultural imaginary – should be celebrated with caution, as they may derail the feminist plight towards women's *actual* (sexual) empowerment across their diverse African contexts in and beyond popular media texts.

7.3. Chapter summary

This chapter engaged a critical reading of notions of womanhood and femininity in the corpus of Afrobeats music videos analysed in this study. By embarking on this close reading of performativities of womanhood and femininity in the analysed Afrobeats music videos, this chapter has highlighted in what ways the multimodal discourses of this musical genre – based on the limited purview presented by the analysed corpus of music videos – can be read as inherently misogynistic in their constructions of femininities in relation to masculinities. The chapter based a significant part of this discussion in a Mulvey-aligned psychoanalytic feminist theory by focusing on the role of desire, sexuality, and visual pleasure within mediated texts in order to expose implicit and explicit gendered power imbalances at play out within the contexts crafted by the corpus of visual material analysed in this study.

On the whole, these readings of the constructions of femininities in these music videos were significantly developed within the theoretical bounds of psychoanalytic feminist theory and theories of representation and gender performativity. This pursuit was done with the goal of establishing how African women are portrayed in relation to African men in these music videos in order to make an argument about the gender-relational atmospheres characterising the hyperreal contexts depicted in these texts.

I have argued that the gender relations depicted in these music videos are largely underscored by what I have, in chapter six, coined misogyrom. I propose this concept to refer to a gender-relational cultural sensibility that may also be deployed as a conceptual lens through which to consider gender performativities that are at once implicated in the perpetuation of heteropatriarchal, misogynistic imbalanced power relations and overt traces of hyper-romanticism towards women. I propose that the misogyrom sensibility underscoring these gendered depictions in the analysed music videos, offers what can be read – through the deployment of a postfeminist sensibility – as an empowering potential as it relates to women through these hyperreal depictions. This empowering potential, I argue, manifests in what I have theorised as sexssertiveness on the part of the featured women. This theorisation builds on existing theorisations of women as 'midriff'-aligned (as per Gill's (2007; 2008) conceptualisations in relation to women's representations in advertising media), and as embodying a 'good time girl' sensibility (as per Ligaga's (2014; 2020) conceptualisations in relation to African women's self-representations in social media).

Their sexssertiveness is evident in how the featured women are depicted as confident in their physical appearances and self-assured in their sexualities, rendering them sexually assertive with regard to how they manoeuvre their bodies and what happens to their bodies in these music videos. However, these readings of women's empowerment and sexssertiveness, I contend, are mere social façades that are effectively mediated and pseudo-legitimised by discourses of extreme romanticism which – if taken at face value – may encourage the uncritical absolving of heteropatriarchy from its deeply toxic nature towards women's actual sociocultural advancement and just treatment in the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships, especially.

To assert my stance, I demonstrate how – in three ways – we can conclude that the power evidently remains squarely in the hands of the men depicted in these music videos. These men variously rely on this power to continue subordinating the women featured in these music videos, to positions of (sexual) servitude and hypersexualised objects for the men's satisfaction and fulfilment. In that vein, the feminist agenda seems to be variously undermined by the very seamless perpetuation of a misogyrom sensibility – in notable tandem with postfeminist sensibilities of sexually liberated women – that this musical genre's visual culture appears to thrive on.

8. CONCLUSION: NEW AND OLD NARRATIVES OF GENDER, SEXUALITY AND AFRICANNESS IN AFROBEATS MUSIC VIDEOS

This thesis has concerned itself with critically exploring the ways in which the musical genre of Afrobeats multimodally portrays gendered lived experiences to its global audiences via music videos. To tackle this aim, the thesis interrogated the messages concerning gender, sexuality and Africanness that are prioritised by the main artists in the Afrobeats scene, and an examination of the conversational tropes emanating from YouTube viewer commentary in relation to the portrayals of gender, sexuality and Africanness in the most popular Afrobeats music videos, was carried out.

This final section of the thesis offers a concluding discussion grappling with the findings and arguments presented in the thesis. The section starts off by rendering a comprehensive overview of the analytical chapters five, six and seven that collectively encapsulate the central theses of this study. This is done to remind the reader of the key arguments advanced in this study and, thus, sum up the study's main contributions. The thesis's contributions, as shall be evidenced in this chapter, carry significant theoretical iterations. To arrive at said theoretical contributions, this study deployed a carefully crafted methodological approach to construct two data corpuses that were subjected to a two-pronged analytical framework involving a quant- and qualitative content analysis, prior to the enactment of a multimodal critical discourse analysis.

These data sets consisted of 25 Afrobeats music videos with their accompanying song lyrics, accounting for 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time. The music videos were downloaded using a web-based program called OVC v3.0; a freely accessible video converting software that allows users to download YouTube videos and store them in .mp4 format on a personal computer or any external storage device. The second data set was made up of 2,500 YouTube comments directly sampled from each of the 25 Afrobeats music videos. To download these YouTube comments, an online platform called 'YouTube Comments Scraper', was used.

The thesis's main contributions advance existing bodies of work in cultural and gender studies. Specifically, my theorisations of two new analytical concepts; namely, 'misogyrom' and 'sexssertiveness' are valuable in the analysis of gender performances and representations in popular cultural texts and beyond. These theoretical contributions provide new analytical vocabulary to scholars of gender and popular culture to read gender relations and issues of

gender power distribution, more especially in popular cultural texts. Although, these concepts may be applied in critical analyses of gender relations beyond the parameters of popular culture. I now provide an overview of the three analytical chapters to sum up the significance of this study.

8.1. Overview of analytic chapters

This thesis has relied on three analytical chapters to advance its contributions to knowledge. Chapters five, six and seven were able to aid this study in critically exploring how the Afrobeats musical genre portrays gendered lived experiences to its global audiences. Chapter five relied on descriptive statistics from a quantitative content analysis of almost 104 minutes of screen time to demonstrate that, based on the limited purview offered by the corpus of analysed music videos, women's implicit and explicit sexual expressions as featured characters in these texts notably characterises this musical genre's visual culture. In terms of camera angling, for instance, women's bodies were found to be more sexually objectified (39% of screen time: 40 minutes, 21 seconds) compared to men's (4% of screen time: 4 minutes, 8 seconds) through camera angles that rendered women's body parts on display by focusing in on isolated body parts (including breasts, buttocks, hips and thighs) of the featured women. Women's bodies, featured across the analysed music videos as central characters, were also nearly twice as likely (51% of total screen time: 52 minutes, 47 seconds) than the featured men (28% of total screen time: 28 minutes, 58 seconds) to be depicted as engaging in implicit acts of sexuality/sexual expression to render themselves sexually alluring through performative sexual innuendos.

These interpretations demonstrated that sexuality and sexual expression, in the analysed music videos, were gendered in ways that significantly objectified women's bodies more than that of men. The (mostly black) women centralised across the analysed music videos were visually rendered in hypersexualised ways that sexually objectified them for the diverse black men's visual perspectives equally centralised in these texts. Men in the analysed music videos were also more likely (66% of total screen time: 68 minutes, 18 seconds) to be depicted as bearing an active, objectifying gaze over the sexualised women's bodies, compared to this gaze being held by women (only noted across 38% of analysed screen time: 39 minutes, 19 seconds) in the analysed music videos. The chapter proposed that such findings demonstrated that gender performances, in these music videos, are anchored in forms of power relations that variously render men as domineering and women as subservient, sexually-alluring, 'decorative objects',

at the service of (heterosexual) men and their self-aggrandizing masculine expressions and objectifying visual points-of-view.

The inductive qualitative content analysis of the YouTube comments revealed that commenters' perceptions about physical appearance and performance ability were notably gendered in ways that placed women's bodies under constant surveillance. While the physical appearances and perceived performative prowess of the visually mediated men's bodies were sporadically commented on by viewers, it was the women's bodies that were more consistently subjected to the opinions and attitudes of viewers of these music videos. This demonstrates, thus, that indeed, "[…] women's embodied appearances are overburdened with meaning and widely considered other people's business, hence in need of scrutiny, comment and control" (Dosekun 2016: 1).

Chapter five was also instrumental in helpfully exposing a key observation that, based on the corpus of analysed music videos, inferences could be made that the worldviews underscoring these gender-relational portrayals are of an undeniable heteronormative nature. Nowhere (i.e, 0% of analysed screen time) across all the analysed music videos were instances of same-sex, homoerotic acts of sexual expression – indicative of homosexual desire either between two or more men or two or more women – prioritised. This suggests, thus, that this musical genre's visual culture partly thrives on the implicit erasure of queer, non-heteronorm-conforming sexualities and sexual expressions. As such, gendered lived experiences were found to be portrayed as exclusively heteronormative.

Another key pattern in the findings was the consistent centring of a particular feminine beauty aesthetic that appeared to celebrate young, lean- and curvy-figured, abled-bodied, light-skinned black women whose hair was most often styled in the form of weaves, wigs, or hair extensions. It was found that the black women cast as "leading" characters in the analysed music videos – identified by their proximity to, and relationships with, the protagonist men in the depicted storylines – were more likely to be light-skinned in that 68% of the total corpus of music videos (i.e., 17 out of the collected 25 videos) depicted a light-skinned women as 'leading' character, as opposed to only 36% of the total corpus of music videos (8 out of the collected 25 videos) portraying dark-skinned black women as 'leading' characters. The chapter argued that such representational patterns carry psychosocial implications on young black women who engage with these music videos to see themselves represented. This suggestion was supported with evidence stemming from several of the analysed viewer comments that expressed a sentiment which invoked conversations around the marginalisation of dark-skinned black women in these

music videos. Music videos that these commenters suggest are made *by* black people *for* black people. As such, dark skinned black female commenters and viewers are variously made to feel side-lined in the discourses of 'black pride' and 'African pride' that characterise much of the viewer commentaries analysed in this thesis.

Concerning the visual depictions of the diverse African contexts against which the depicted gender relations occurred, the findings in chapter five demonstrated symbolic framings of Africanness that emphasised ideas of affluence. Africanness was variously constructed through contextual indicators of luxury and lavishness that appeared to visually promote notions of Africanness that were divorced from ideas of poverty and struggle, among others. The depictions across many of the analysed music videos visualised a sense of unified men and women engaging in communal enjoyment of food and beverages, communal engagement in celebratory cultural ceremonies and dancing; against backdrops evident of lavishness, and consumption of 'luxurious' products such as champagne and extravagant cuisines in opulent properties. The chapter argued that such mediations of lavishness and luxury are value-laden in that they do significant work with regard to inferring how the featured African subjectivities in these music videos wish to present themselves: as affluent, luxurious and lavish. Viewer sentiments, in this regard, were found to be notably utopian in that a noteworthy celebratory narrative of 'African pride' prevailed in these YouTube comments.

Using some of the key findings offered in chapter five as analytical points of departure, chapter six offered critical readings of performances of manhood and masculinities in the corpus of music videos. This enabled the thesis to provide a nuanced reflection on the dominant constructions of masculinities as performed, sexualised and Africanised across the corpus of analysed texts. Chapter six proposed that four dominant 'ways of seeing' African masculinities through the corpus of analysed music videos, were prioritised in the data. The chapter highlighted that the diverse men in the analysed music videos were depicted as 'heteropatriarchal masculinities', 'breadwinner masculinities', 'sexualised masculinities', as well as 'romance-oriented masculinities'.

The emphasis on heteropatriarchal masculinities, the chapter demonstrated, was achieved through the visual and lyrics-driven iterations of a queer exclusionary, exclusively heteronormative, African 'maleness' that notably upholds the status quo of 'compulsory heterosexuality' in relation to gender and sexuality expression across much of the regions in the African context. I partly link this observation to the still-prevailing and actively enforced anti-gay laws, policies, and socio-religious discourses across the majority of the diverse regions

in the African continent that variously defend the enactment of life-threatening repercussions on individuals found to engage in queer expressions of sexuality. These broader structural and ideological formations, I suggest, play a catalytic role in the negation of a homo-erotic visual and performative aesthetic on the part of the creators of the analysed music videos, arguably as a means to safeguard their socioeconomic success. Problematically, I argued, this will continue to inspire and legitimise the vilifying, under- and heteronormatively-biased representations of non-normative, queer masculinities within mainstream African popular media and cultural productions.

With regard to 'breadwinner masculinities', chapter six demonstrated that, in their persistent and overt mediations of a materialist culture, the analysed texts evidenced a materialistic masculine sensibility that strongly aligned with ideals of 'breadwinnerism'. On the basis of gender relations among men and women – as was articulated in the corpus of music videos – there was an evident multimodal construction of a (heterosexual) masculinity embedded in ideals of economic/material provision (breadwinnerism) by men towards women. This, I argued in alignment with existing literature, is key in aiding men in their preservation of cultural power (real or perceived) over women through economic superiority (Mills and Ssewakiryanga 2005). Such gender relations – mediated by men-owned money and material commodities – perpetuate the patriarchal ideologies and structures often responsible for the subordination of women.

Furthermore, I advanced an argument in chapter six that the corpus of music videos demonstrated a perpetuation, by creators of this music, of a notably sexualised (African) masculinity. At play here, I argued, are iterated instances within this male-dominated musical genre wherein a black, palatable and commodifiable African male sex symbol, was variously constructed. The chapter went on to suggest that the hyper-visibility of said sexualised masculinities engendered partly-misogynistic perpetuations of men's dominance over women through discourses of sexual power and potency characterising much of the hyperreal gender-relational conditions captured in the corpus of music videos that were analysed. Women's sexualities and sexual expressions, as a result, were variously depicted as controlled by, and/or reliant on, the sexually domineering men.

Lastly, chapter six also demonstrated that the expressions of manhood in these music videos were convincingly articulated as hyper-romantic, in that they were constructed as being full of love and emotionally invested in the 'well-being' of the women with whom the frames were shared. The African men depicted in these music videos were largely portrayed as

commitment-driven, family-oriented, loyal, and capable of offering infinite romantic love to the women they got romantically involved with across the hyperreal contexts depicted in the music videos. Considered through a feminist critique of popular music, such depictions of 'romance-oriented' masculinities, are key in demonstrating a notable dissociation – by performers of this music – from notions of violence variously associated with musical genres dominated by black men, such as rap and hip-hop, in existing studies. This important finding notwithstanding, such depictions – if taken at face value, I argued in this chapter – may be internalised without noticing how complexly engrained they are in a culture of benevolent sexism wherein men's prosocial behaviours towards women are romanticised more than they are called out for their regressive, sexist undertones.

Through a feminist-aligned critical multimodal discourse analysis of said forms of performative masculinities, chapter six successfully advanced an argument that the representational patterns characterising these masculine performances are undergirded by a dialectical cultural sensibility that is at once misogynistic and romance-oriented towards women. Based on this observation, the chapter introduced a new concept, 'misogyrom', to capture this cultural sensibility. This theoretical proposition encapsulates one of the thesis's significant contributions to knowledge. The proposed concept of 'misogyrom' is offered to render scholars of gender and cultural studies with a new concept in our vocabulary to make sense of (heteronormative) gender-relational conditions that are variously implicated in the concealing of misogyny through the overdramatisation of romance discourses and acts of romanticism by men towards women.

By marrying the terms 'misogyny' and 'romanticism', misogyrom is proposed to capture a cultural sensibility wherein the sociocultural dominance of men over women is successfully sustained through the masking of heteropatriarchal misogyny and sexism with men's acts of overt romanticism towards women. I argued in this chapter that, if taken at face value, a misogyrom sensibility can perpetuate the uncritical absolving of patriarchy from its toxic nature in relation to the just and empowering sociocultural treatment of women across various domains, most especially the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. This means that men's misogynistic dominance over women in terms of economic provision, sexual satisfaction, and heterosexual romantic relationships, will continue enjoying normative hegemony as no more than signs of 'romantic', 'real' (African) men, should a critical feminist voice be abandoned or undermined in our research pursuits.

These pertinent findings from chapter six were partly stretched into chapter seven wherein a critical reading of performances of womanhood and femininities was prioritised. Chapter six's theorisation of 'misogyrom' was partly injected into chapter seven as a key mediator of the forms of feminine expressions constructed in the analysed texts. As such, chapter seven foregrounded further evidence of both sides of the complex dialectic of misogyrom by successfully reiterating the ways in which this musical genre's multimodal discourses are misogynistic, while also demonstrating traces of romanticism which could variously be read as signs of egalitarian treatment by black African men towards the women across the hyperreal contexts crafted in the analysed music videos. I based a significant part of this analysis in psychoanalytic feminist theory by focusing on the role of desire, sexuality, and visual pleasure within the mediated texts to expose implicit and explicit gendered power imbalances at play within the contexts crafted across the corpus of visual material.

By examining the value-laden (black) men's visual perspectives through a feminist psychoanalytical reading of the positioning of women's bodies in relation to men's in the music videos, I advanced an argument that, through performing explicitly and implicitly sexualised forms of femininities, the women centralised across the corpus of music videos, become key sites of male-driven misogyny in that their value is diminished to statuses of mere sexual objects for (heterosexual) men's enjoyment. At a 51% duration of screen time (accounting for more than half of the 103 minutes of screen time evaluated), women were depicted in scenes wherein they suggested or seemed to elicit sexual appeal, arousal, or desire through eroticised behaviours such as hip/pelvic thrusts, gyration of buttocks, stroking of breasts, buttocks, thighs; long/slow-motioned lip licking.

These sexualised femininities were quite often depicted as being at the receiving end of overtly desiring black masculine 'looks' that explicitly objectified said femininities. Statistically, instances wherein women's bodies were subjected to a sexualised male gaze from the men with which the screen was shared, were portrayed for a duration of 68 minutes and 18 seconds out of the total of 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysed screen time. These findings reiterated a key representational pattern in these music videos wherein women's bodies are sexually objectified predominantly by black male onlookers as themselves subjects taking up space. Essentially, femininities are shown to be significantly valued for their sexual attributes, above all else.

I also suggested, in this chapter, that the pervasiveness of these forms of sexually explicit, subservient feminine expressions in the analysed music videos, engender a potentiality to

implicitly socialise young and impressionable women viewing these texts to internalise the desiring, dominant gaze of the empowered black masculinities in these music videos as primary points of views about their physical selves (Frederickson and Roberts 1997). That way, heterosexual-identifying women viewing these music videos may internalise the kinds of feminine physical and performative aesthetics emphasised in these videos as ideals to strive towards in order to command attention and adoration from heterosexual masculinities in their constant pursual of women as romantic and/or 'sexual conquests' (Martino, Collins, Elliott, Strachman, Kanouse, and Berry 2006: 438).

Such patterns of representation, I further argued in this chapter, are variously disempowering to women. They are more so disempowering to women in that, the women's bodies depicted in these texts, were often positioned as lacking in terms of being multifaceted and able to embody leadership as opposed to servitude. Also, through sustaining a men-driven culture of fetishism and voyeurism over women's sexualised bodies, these music videos perpetuate a dangerous gender-relational ideology that women's rights to privacy are less valued, and thus exposes them to situations of being more prone to violation in their unjust position as ancillary sexual objects. That said, however, my arguments in this regard did not turn a blind eye to the evident depictions of women as empowered, especially in the domains of sexuality and sexual expression. Through a plot analysis of five of the analysed music videos from the larger corpus, this chapter demonstrated that some of the visual portrayals of women could be read as partly tantamount to traces of agentic, self-determining femininities who – through postfeminist-aligned discourses of the 'midriff' women in advertising (Gill 2007; 2008) and the 'good time girl' in social media self-representations (Ligaga 2014; 2020) – appear to 'have it all' and are using their sexualities to 'bring men to their knees' (Gill 2008: 43).

By so doing, this chapter was able to theorise feminine performativities as 'sexssertive'. This new concept – constituting another significant aspect of this thesis's original contribution to knowledge – weds the notions of sex/sexuality with the personality trait of assertiveness, to offer a novel way to describe women's perceived autonomy in the domains of sexuality and intimate relations. This chapter's readings of 'sexssertive' feminine performances, as they relate to the hyperreal contexts crafted in the corpus of music videos, were embedded in broader postfeminist discourses of women's empowerment, agency, and self-determination in the domain of sexual expression. By so doing, I was able to offer a novel analytic concept to capture a cultural sensibility – closely related to ideas about "midriff" women in advertising media and "good time girls" in social media representations in Africa – which I specifically

situated in the media genre of music videos. As such, I have partly taken postfeminist-aligned scholarship about women's empowerment and agency in popular culture somewhere new by convincingly applying the scholarship to the music video text as a popular cultural form in a Global South context.

Even so, chapter seven also showed that a narrow, discriminatory standard of feminine beauty characterises the physical appearances of the black African women centralised within these music videos. As such, the chapter argued that notions of 'sexssertiveness' and sexual agency were variously attributed to women who conformed to this limited, arguably whitewashed, standard of feminine beauty emphasised across the corpus of music videos, thus symbolically excluding black African women whose self-fashioning and physical body structures are perceived to not conform to said discriminatory standards. A sexssertive sensibility, much like a midriff sensibility, is just as regressive and discriminatory to significant pockets of black women without the cultural capital to self-fashion in ways that will bolster "[…] their proximity to a white ideal" (Pilane and Iqani 2016: 126).

Having advanced these arguments, the chapter found itself at an analytical crossroad in terms of what to make of the traces of women's empowerment embodied by the sexssertive women depicted in these music videos, given the largely misogynistic inflections characterising the gender relations crafted across these hyperreal contexts. To unravel this conundrum, the chapter purported that said traces of postfeminist-aligned discourses of empowered and sexssertive (African) women, are mere sociocultural facades that are successfully sustained through a misogyrom cultural sensibility that debases women through false pretences of empowerment in the domains of sexuality and intimate relationships. Should a critical feminist voice in our research pursuits be undermined, strides made in various feminist plights towards women's just treatment across their diverse societies, may be derailed at the expense of (black African) women's *actual* sociocultural advancement and representations in (African) popular media cultures.

8.2. Limitations of thesis

This study's methodological approach relied on an analysis of research data sets constructed through unobtrusive processes of sampling, collection, and analysis. The methodological approach was unobtrusive in its exclusion of human beings as direct research participants. Instead, two data corpuses consisting of media texts in the form of Afrobeats music videos and YouTube viewer comments were constructed and subjected to critical analyses in order to

advance this thesis's contributions to existing knowledge in the fields of feminist, cultural, and gender studies.

A quantitative content analysis of the music videos was performed alongside an inductive, open-coding, qualitative content analysis of the YouTube comments, before both data sets were eventually subjected to a multimodal critical discourse analysis deployed as the central analytical foundation anchoring this project. All mentioned analytical pursuits were unobtrusive, low in monetary cost, and significantly researcher reliant. These characteristics are considered as strengths in relation to the research process. The data analysed in this thesis could be treated in an unobtrusive, non-reactive manner where I was able to successfully examine the contents therein "[…] after the fact of [their] production without making the [producers thereof] self-conscious or reactive to being observed while producing [them]" (Riffe, Lacy, Fico, and Watson 2019: 10). This means, then, that there was a practically non-existent possibility for these already-produced and publicly disseminated data sets to be altered by producers thereof during the period of my analysis thereof, after having collected and stored the data offline.

However, for this study specifically, it should be noted that some limitations were presented. Due to cost and time constraints, the data coding procedure – to arrive at the descriptive statistics presented in this study – was performed solely by myself as author of this thesis to gain a bird's eye view of the dominant representational patterns characterised across the corpus of visual data in relation to gender, sexuality and Africanness. This is a limitation in that the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of analysed visual data cannot offer inter-coder reliability and may, arguably, have been subjected to coder bias as there was only one data coder. In order to ensure a balanced level of reliability, I relied on a process of repetition with regard to carrying out the quantitative coding sessions. I carried out four separate sessions of quantitative coding of the music videos – at different parts of the day – over a period of two days. The first day of coding involved a morning and an afternoon session of coding the 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time, based on the coding sheet and codes that were constructed in alignment with scholarly studies that also successfully engaged content analyses of visual data such as music videos to elucidate gender representations (e.g., Cara Wallis (2011) and Sommers-Flanagan, et al (1993: 748). The separate sessions yielded similar results in comparison. This was followed by another two sessions – during the following day – wherein the same 103 minutes and 30 seconds of visual data were subjected to quantitative coding. By once again yielding

comparatively similar results, I could vouch that the repetition technique affirmed the overall reliability of the descriptive statistics stemming from this process.

The methodological design deployed in this study has given added priority to qualitative analysis by adopting a multimodal critical discourse analysis as the central thrust of the study. As such, even though both quant- and qualitative data collection and analysis pursuits were relied on, greater emphasis was placed on the qualitative analytical pursuits given the study's research questions and theoretical frameworks that collectively call for a qualitative sensibility as foundation of the project.

8.3. Afrobeats music videos in a global cultural milieu: Key take-outs

This study contributes to burgeoning scholarship from the Global South that cast critical attention on the transnationally popularising African musical genre of Afrobeats. By specifically focusing on music videos produced within this music scene, as sites of multimodal representation, this study was able to critically examine messages about gender, sexuality and Africanness as prioritised in a collected corpus of 25 highly-viewed (see Table 1, page 64) Afrobeats music videos produced between 2012 (when this musical genre's transnational footprint is argued to have expanded (Hancox 2012)) and November 2018 (when data was collected from YouTube for the purposes of this project). This study broadly developed within the theoretical bounds of psychoanalytic theory in its feminist iterations, and gender performativity theory, alongside the theoretical contributions from representation theory, critical visual analysis, and social constructionism theory to aid in focusing the thesis within a broader gender and cultural studies framework.

Several decades after initially proposing her arguments about a (heterosexual) male gaze in film media, Laura Mulvey's (1975) ground-breaking arguments are interestingly reiterated in the musical genre of Afrobeats within a notably different context and media culture, if the corpus of analysed music videos is anything to go by. The heteronormative, sexually motivated, female disempowering, male gaze initially proposed by Mulvey, can be said to transcend time, context, and media form, given its salience in this current, Global South focused, study of gender representations in the media. This study shows that psychoanalytic feminist analysis in contemporary media cultures – across diverse contexts – is still a very useful analytical framework with promising possibilities for scholars of gender and cultural studies. The applicability of this theoretical framework in a non-western context, examining music video texts as opposed to films, evidences its analytical flexibility.

This thesis has shown the pervasiveness of a culture of voyeurism and fetishism variously implicating (black) women's bodies in toxic gender relational depictions that debase these women to hypersexualised objects of black African men's sexual desires. The (predominantly black) African women depicted in these music videos are variously disempowered through such depictions of their bodies as an implicit broader sociocultural subtext undergirding such depictions is that women's right to privacy is less valued, and thus exposes them to situations of being more prone to violation in their continued unjust positionings as ancillary sexual objects. This, then, raises broader research questions about women's treatments within the Afrobeats music scene on music video sets when the camera is not recording. As such, I would recommend that future studies into this musical genre deploy an ethnographic approach to explore the music video production processes prior and during the creation of these evidently popular music videos. I am convinced that such research pursuits would yield valuable findings about the conditions of work (in their gendered implications) for the actors and crew members working in the Afrobeats music scene, given the gender-relational constructions iterated in the music videos emerging from this musical genre.

Judith Butler's (1988; 1990) contributions pertaining to gender performativity have variously demonstrated that the influences of diverse societies' social, cultural, political, and historical ideological regimes on the kinds of 'acts' associated with 'manhood' and 'womanhood' across said societies, are undeniable. These 'acts' or behavioural cues are normalised as inherently linked to biological sex, and conformity to said behavioural cues is implicitly celebrated as 'natural'. This valuable argument stemming from Butler's work is notably echoed through this study's analysis of its empirical object. A critical analysis of Afrobeats music videos – approached as sites of gender performativity – has demonstrated that various behavioural cues are perpetuated by the men and women featured in these music videos to express seemingly idealised notions of 'manhood'/masculinity and 'womanhood'/femininity.

On the part of the men's bodies mediated in these music videos, manhood is performed along normative "sedimented expectations of gendered existence" (Butler 1988: 524) aligned to compulsory heterosexuality, breadwinnerism, and sexual dominance over women, for instance. While women appear to variously align to normative gendered expectations of sexual servitude and hypersexualised femininity, for instance. Strikingly, however, this study has shown that while these gendered performances are strongly aligning with normative, African heteropatriarchal expectations of manhood and Africanness, and womanhood and Africanness; the African youth creating these music videos are pushing the boundaries somewhat, notably

when it comes to performances of African womanhood. This is so in that the women's bodies hypervisibilised in the visual culture of this musical genre slightly challenge the restrictive expectations and moral public scripts about acceptable African womanhood. The black African women are, as such, sometimes depicted as sexually agentic or 'sexssertive' as I have theorised their behaviour, and they also appear to variously negate heteropatriarchal men's attempts at sexual dominance over their bodies. It would seem, that allowance is made in the Afrobeats musical genre for a notable subversion of African moral public scripts about gender and sexuality as they relate to African women's public representations of their bodies.

Even so, it is crucial to reiterate that the dominant gender performances across the Afrobeats genre's visual discourses, particularly as captured in this study's corpus of music videos, are still significantly implicated in limited, heteronorm-conforming formations which continue to implicitly marginalise non-heteronorm-conforming African subjectivities; debasing these non-heteronorm-conforming Africans' sexual expressions to toxic justifications of 'un-Africanness'. In that sense, arguably holding us back with regard to open-minded acceptance of diverse gender expressions and sexual identity formations in our context.

As it relates to men and masculinities, the Afrobeats musical genre appears to go *some* distance in its subversion of hegemonic masculinities in the music's explicit constructions of masculinities that are overtly romantic towards women and notably void of violence or aggression towards women and other men. My analysis has shown that this musical genre – based on the limited purview captured in the corpus of analysed music videos – allows us to see black African masculinities in ways that partly negate notions of violence, risk-taking behaviour, and criminality often attributed to black men in Africa (see Langa 2020; Ratele 2008, for instance). In that sense, we are interpellated to perceive 'alternative' masculine expressions (Langa 2020) that appear to value the egalitarian treatment of women. Therefore, while undoubtedly embodying inflections of hegemonic masculinity in their active attempts at economic, social, and sexual superiority over women; these black African men also notably refrain from violent or forceful subordination of women. Instead, they successfully veil their misogynistic attempts at maintaining sociocultural and sociosexual dominance over women – a symbolically violent pursuit, to be sure – with overdramaticised romanticism, allowing them to construct what this thesis coins a 'misogyrom' cultural sensibility wherein women (who present a very limited and discriminatory black feminine beauty aesthetic) are able to revel in the romantic atmospheres crafted in this musical genre's visual culture.

The Afrobeats musical genre appears to align to global media and popular cultural formations of a "sex sells" discourse to enhance the genre's success and popularity. This musical genre appears not to reinvent the wheel when it comes to gender representations in youthful, black-centric, male-dominated musical genres such as hip-hop and rap, for instance. Interestingly, this African-inspired genre variously adopts and adapts elements of the widely successful hip-hop and rap cultures (e.g., women's oversexualisation and sexual objectification through song lyrics and representations in music videos; men's hyper-consumerism and alignments to 'breadwinnerism' based on large spending of money on women) to aid in its own success. The genre appears to re-appropriate the 'sex sells' mantra in popular media cultures by inscribing an active romanticism and gentleness into a widely sexist and misogynistic media culture in order to inject it with a unique selling point so as to stand out in a globalised popular cultural milieu and music industry. This music's multimodal iteration of a non-violent, non-aggressive, black masculine-dominated gender-relational sensibility is seemingly positively regarded by transnational consumers of this music. This further bolsters the genre's transnational success with audiences who read these multimodal constructions as reflections of real-life African gender relations.

Given that this study in no way aimed to generalise any of its findings, only a relatively small corpus of 25 music videos were collected so as to offer a treatise that qualitatively made sense of the messages concerning gender, sexuality and Africanness in Afrobeats music, to inspire conversation and further research into this musical genre through a lens of gender studies in the Global South. As such, this study offers future research projects into this musical genre and its visual culture, helpful points of departure into interrogating the inferred ideologies concerning gender roles and sex difference, particularly in a contemporary African context that is undeniably globalised in many ways. A useful approach, for future studies into gender representations in Afrobeats music videos, will be to move beyond a focus on *just* the content, by incorporating the methods of interviews or focus group discussions with musicians, song-writers, music video producers and directors in this scene. Such analytical pursuits would yield crucial data to variously affirm or refute the findings presented in this current thesis by offering the voices of the producers of these popular cultural texts to unpack their motivations behind the representational tropes prioritised in their music videos.

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Appendix A

Table 4a: Frequency of occurrence (in screen time) of content categories[5]

CATEGORIES CODED ACROSS CORPUS OF 30-SECONDS MUSIC VIDEO SEGMENTS (207 music video segments in total)	FREQUENCY COUNT	RATE OF OCCURRENCE (PERCENTAGE)	COMBINED SCREEN TIME (103 minutes, 30 seconds in total)
Womens' sexual objectification by camera	80	39%	40 minutes, 21 seconds
Men's sexual objectification by camera	8	4%	4 minutes, 8 seconds
Women's implicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression	105	51%	52 minutes, 47 seconds
Men's implicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression	57	28%	28 minutes, 58 seconds
Women's explicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression	65	31%	32 minutes, 5 seconds
Men's explicit sexuality/acts of sexual expression	55	27%	27 minutes, 56 seconds
Women on women homo-erotic expressions/acts indicative of same-sex desire	0	0%	0 minutes
Men on men homo-erotic expressions/acts indicative of same-sex desire	0	0%	0 minutes
Women as bearers of the active desiring gaze	76	38%	39 minutes, 19 seconds
Men as bearers of the active desiring gaze	137	66%	68 minutes, 18 seconds
Women as instrumental in their role in the video's plot/narrative progression	139	67%	69 minutes, 20 seconds
Men as instrumental in their role in the video's plot/narrative progression	200	97%	100 minutes, 23 seconds
Women as decorative/background subjects in their role in the video's plots/narrative progression	113	55%	56 minutes, 55 seconds
Men as decorative/background subjects in their role in the video's plots/narrative progression	21	10%	10 minutes, 21 seconds
Body type of featured women: • lean, athletic, visibly curvy • plus-sized, full-figured, large	 193 46	 93% 22%	 96 minutes, 15 seconds 22 minutes, 46 seconds
Body type of featured men: • lean, athletic/muscled	 207	 100%	 103 minutes, 30 seconds

[5] There was a total of 207 (n=207) 30-seconds music video segments to code. That is, 103 minutes and 30 seconds of screen time.

• plus-sized, full-figured, large	45	22%	22 minutes, 46 seconds
Hairstyle of "leading" woman/ main artist's love/sexual interest or the main artist herself (if female): • wearing a weave/hair extensions/wig; relaxed/straightened hair; natural Caucasian hair (in instances where leading lady is Caucasian)	153	74%	76 minutes, 35 seconds
• wearing natural (unstraightened) hair in the form of afros, cornrows, dreadlocks, short-styled (fade cut, brush cut, bald head etc)	50	26%	24 minutes, 50 seconds

Table 4b: Frequency of Occurrence of Content Categories[6]

CATEGORIES CODED PER OVERALL MUSIC VIDEO (25 music videos in total)	FREQUENCY COUNT	RATE OF OCCURRENCE (PERCENTAGE)
Main artist(s) is a woman	1	4%
Main artist(s) is a man	24	96%
Skin tone of "leading" woman (or "leading" man')/ main artist's love/sexual interest: • light-skinned • dark-skinned	 17 8	 68% 32%
Celebration and community: • Yes • No	 16 9	 64% 36%
Wealth and consumerism • Yes • No	 16 9	 64% 36%
Multimodal expressions of 'Africanness': • visual expressions of Africanness • Mediation of "traditional African dance" • Linguistic expressions of Africanness	 13 14 17	 52% 56% 68%

[6] There were a total of 25 (n=25) music videos to code.