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

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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