

Jan-2019

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## Recommended Citation

Endong, Floribert Patrick C (2019). Pornography and Objectification of Women in Nollywood Films: A Study of Nigerian Actresses' Perception of Acting Sex and Nudity Scenes. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 20(2), 58-72.  
Available at: <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol20/iss2/5>

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## **Pornography and Women's Objectification in Nollywood Films: A Study of Nigerian Actresses' Perception of Acting Sex and Nudity Scenes**

By Floribert Patrick C. Endong<sup>1</sup>

### **Abstract**

Cinematic pornography and nudity are believed by many feminist critics to be a fertile site of women's sexual objectification. In view of this, many conservative actresses—particularly Black Africans—perceive pornography (in the form of acting explicit sex or nudity scenes) as a serious potential danger to their personal dignity and that of women in general. Using observations, literary sources and online interviews with Nollywood stars, this paper examines how Nigerian actresses perceive the increasing sexualization of Nollywood films and the act of playing nude or pornographic roles. The paper argues that Nigerian actresses mostly sound culture-sensitive and religious (thus conservative) on the two issues. They mostly associate soft/hard porn and acting sexualized scenes with women's sexual objectification. However, liberal voices within the industry view pornography as an inevitable component and a phenomenon with great aesthetical potential. Such liberal actresses either do not see pornography as a sexual objectifying institution or are just “unafraid” to be objectified or to objectify themselves for what they perceive as a kind of “*advancement*” in the industry.

*Keywords:* Nollywood Films, Pornography, Nollywood Actresses, Women's Objectification, Nudity Scenes.

### **Introduction**

On too many occasions, the media have been taxed with misrepresenting and negatively stereotyping women. This is in tandem with the fact that media images about women most often endorse or validate chauvinistic social myths and societal fixations which systematically debase women and relegate them to inferior status. Such media (mis)representations and stereotyping of women tend to equate women with beings who are valued not for their potential in socio-cultural development and politico-economic advancement but for the simple fact that they are (sexually) desirable to the men. In line with this, women are often portrayed as very seductive sex objects, decorative elements, weak victims, vulnerable and defenseless groups of physical objects and beings highly dependent on men among others. This type of problematic representations is very much visible in contexts such as mediated beauty pageants, highly sexualized pop videos and advertising messages where femininity, female beauty and female nudity are systemically associated with specific commodities on promotion. From a number of observable factors, it is

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safe to argue that the remarkable resilience of the media, particularly the advertising and entertainment industry, in the business of commercializing human body (particularly female nudity) has continued to fan the embers of the sensuality fantasy they (the media) seek to vigorously create. The popular, though disheartening, paradigm in the mass media industry is visibly centered on gratuitous female nudity and sex. In the specific case of advertising, it is popularly believed that products with extreme sex appeal have more chances to sell compared to those not associated with eroticized nudity. It has thus become extremely imperative for most opportunist media advertisers and marketers to achieve or secure a “woman effect” in the promotion of any new products. Even products that have little or nothing to do with the women’s needs, are made to incorporate images of a good-to-behold damsel (preferably a scantily clad or suggestively portrayed woman) in their advertising messages. The inclusion of such images is most often aimed at facilitating “a second look at the advert” (Oladejo & Agwanwo 2015, p.7). In such complex capitalistic processes, women have terribly been objectified and their nudity has somehow been systemically commoditized through the advertising media text.

The cinema medium has likewise been a site *par excellence* of women’s objectification. Such an objectification is often the fruit of film directors’ use of unjustified and non-functional (soft or hard) pornography or exotica as elements of film aesthetics. By these aesthetic styles, female actors are often made to act roles that tend to debase, degrade or denigrate them, roles that somehow implicitly re-enforce the myths of the woman viewed as sex object, wayward nymph and masculine pride (a cheap trophy for the men). Most cinematic portrayals of women are extremely and consistently oppressive and repressive. This has, according to popular imaginations, practically negated the possibility of a strictly alternative (feminist) orientation in filmmaking practice. In view of this scenario, Doane (cited in Briciu, 2013, p. 62) contends that “the simple gesture of directing a camera towards a woman has become equivalent to a terrorist act”. Such a gesture has mostly been an occasion to terribly objectify and commoditize her. Objectification in cinematic experience has thus become a site of the profound marginalization of female actors. In terms of objectification, actresses seem to be treated in a more lamentable way compared to their male counterparts. They are in most instances, solely responsible with providing the titillation. In effect, from a number of visible evidences, there is lower probability for penises to be seen on screen than for breasts or other female genitals to be exhibited on camera. It is even popularly assumed that women will–nay, *ought* to–reveal their breasts to attract audiences’ attention and eventually earn stardom.

According to feminist critics such as Okuma (2001) and the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film (2014), the persistence of women’s objectification in the cinema partly rests on female actors’ passivity, complicity and lack of initiatives. Such passivity and complicity are made manifest in the fact that some actresses view nothing wrong in playing dehumanizing roles in films, particularly scenes where they are treated as sex objects and asked to produce gratuitous soft porn in the form of acting nude or sex encounters. In view of this, radical feminists such as Okuma (2001) and Murphy (2015) strongly believe or suggest that women’s objectification could be reduced or completely redressed if actresses categorically reject parts which debase and dehumanize them in particular and womanhood in general in these video films. In tandem with this, Okuma (2001) passionately argues that: “One really wonders how directors of films with extreme stereotyping of women are able to get women to act these parts [explicit sex and nudity scenes]” (p.51). One may understand that for economic reasons and thanks to inferiority complex, female African script-writers find themselves compelled or tempted to churn out more damaging portrayals of women. Sex is popularly believed to sell media contents including video film

productions. “Nevertheless, if women refuse to play roles which debase and subjugate them, film makers will create women characters that actress will be willing to play” (Okuma, 2001, p.52).

Okuma’s reflection – the same as the women-affirmative postulations of a number of radical feminists – somehow reveals the presumed complicity of actresses in the survival of women (self-) objectification in the cinema production. In effect, a popular belief stipulates that, by accepting to act unjustified and non-functional explicit sex and nudity scenes, actresses advertently or inadvertently act as agents of women’s objectification in films. By so doing, they implicitly give credence to chauvinistic cinema philosophies which relegate women to sex objects and mere “commodities”; thereby perpetuating women self-objectification. However, (soft) pornography and acting sex and nudity scenes all constitute a complex phenomenon which must be addressed with nuanced approaches or languages and within nuanced frameworks. No doubt cinema critics, and audiences have divergent views over the issue. Female actors similarly have concurrent views over the use of soft porn in films. In effect, while some of these female actors do not actually see acting nudity and explicit sex scenes as a vector of women’s objectification, others cynically endorse cinematic pornography and women’s objectification as they are cool with commodified sexuality. A case in point is Hollywood actress Sofia Vergara (cited by Ngomba 2015), who somehow legitimizes women’s objectification in cinematic production contending that “I’ve never understood why women get so offended [by their being objectified]. I just don’t believe in all that drama, which is why I’ve made a whole joke out of it”. In the same line of argument, Van Deven (2009) slams the cultural and spiritual based argument held by conservative actresses who place a moral judgment on their liberal counterparts who accept more or less exploitative roles.

The issue of objectification is becoming a phenomenon which, seemingly, cannot be universalized. To some female and non-feminist schools of thought, (self-) objectification – the same as beauty – may just be in the eye of the beholder (Van Deven, 2009). Chauvinistic authors even see no evil in the phenomenon (or some versions of it), promptly brandishing the concept of positive sexual objectification. However, most feminist theorists conceptualize women’s sexual objectification (particularly in media communication) as a serious problematic (Murphy, 2015; Langton, 2009; Nussbaum, 1995). They actually view it as a sexist sexual representation in which women are equated with sex objects and their functions are relegated to “the other”, the “subordinate thing” and the spectacle (Atwood, 2004, p.8; Aubrey *et al* 2011, p.362). Using the Nigerian film industry (Nollywood<sup>2</sup>) as a case study, this paper examines how Nigerian actresses perceive soft porn and the necessity, or superfluity, of acting (unjustified) sex or nudity scene. Based on online interviews with Nollywood actresses and a critical exploitation of literary sources, the paper seeks to examine the extent to which these Nigerian actresses equate female nudity and acting sexualized scenes with women sexual objectification or exploitation.

## Review of Conceptual Literature

This section provides a conceptual definition of women’s sexual objectification and self-objectification, two inter-related notions which are central to the feminist theory. It equally reviews relevant literature to highlight basic characteristics, manifestations and the morality of the phenomenon of (self) objectification. Objectification, as can be observed, is derived from the word “object”. It literally means viewing or treating somebody, most often women, as objects. Though

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<sup>2</sup> Nollywood is a nickname used to refer to the Nigerian film industry. To some authors, Nollywood only represents one of the multiple genres of the Nigerian film industry meanwhile, to others, the term could be used to generically refer to the whole Nigerian film industry.

critics have argued and demonstrated that men can, to an extent, be objectified (by women), most feminist critics and theorists prefer to conceptualize objectification as a dominantly male “felony”. Additionally, though objectification can occur at various realms of human life, this section will principally give attention to sexual objectification. In tandem with this, sexual objectification will be construed as the act of seeing or treating someone as a sex object. Sexual objectification is a highly complex phenomenon with a variety of characteristics, some of which include the following:

1. Ownership: treating someone as a commodity that can be owned (bought or sold)
2. Instrumentalism: the treatment of someone as a means to satisfy one's personal desires or reach one's purpose.
3. Denial of subjectivity: viewing one as not having a personal desire or opinion and treating such a person without taking his or her view(s) into account.
4. Denial of autonomy: treating someone as lacking in autonomy or self-determination
5. Denial of humanity: Treating someone as if he/she is not a human being.
6. Fungibility: viewing or treating someone as being interchangeable with other objects.
7. Inertness: treating someone as being inherently passive and lacking in agency.
8. Violability: treating someone as if he/she has no integrity
9. Silencing: treating someone as lacking the capacity to speak or complain.
10. Relegation to the physical: treating someone in terms of his/her appearance (most often their level of beauty, ugliness and so on) and
11. Reduction to body: treatment of someone as identified with his/her body or body parts. (Kant, 1963, p.163; Langton, 2009, p.228-229; Nussbaum, 1995, p.257)

Though a number of chauvinistic discourses have attempted to justify women sexual objectification on various grounds (introducing or brandishing the concept of positive objectification), most feminists equate women sexual objectification to a morally problematic phenomenon. Feminist arguments identify a wide range of socio-economic institutions such as social inequalities, pornography and prostitution among others; as well as cardinal *ideological state apparatuses* such as the media as dominant vectors of women sexual objectification. Certain brands of feminism have, in this respect, explored or endorsed Emmanuel Kant's conception that women sexual objectification could be occasioned by the exercise of sexuality outside the confine of a monogamous marriage. In his *Lectures on Ethics*, Kant (1963) succinctly notes that sexual love practiced outside the bounds of monogamous marriage reduces the loved one to an “object of appetite”. Meanwhile, as soon as that appetite has been satisfied, “the person is cast aside as one casts away a lemon which has been sucked dry” (p.163). From the premise that a person is made or reduced to a object of appetite by another “all motives of moral relationship cease to function, because as an object of appetite for another, a person becomes a thing and can be treated and used as such by everyone” (Kant 1963, p.163). Kant further argues that in a context of monogamous marriage, sexual purposes have priority over humanity. In other word, humanity is viewed merely as a means to achieve sexual purpose and this leads to degradation, subordination and dishonoring of humanity. Kant's conception is however arguable in that it is difficult if not impossible to objectively establish the fact that someone – be it in a monogamous or polygamous – automatically objectifies his sex partner. In view of this, Halwani (2010) begs to disagree with Kant's position, underscoring that, with the exception of rape, it is rare for someone to treat a sex partner as an

object. “Not only are we aware of their humanity; we are also mindful of it” (Halwani, 2010, p.193).

While Kant and others focus on sexuality as a conduit of objectification, other feminist observers examine pornography, popular culture and the mass media have been at the root of women’s objectification. With specific respect to media production/contents, feminist critics often argue that there is a symbiotic relationship between women’s (sexual) objectification and the male monolithic gaze and non-gendered look which seems to govern most artistic and media traditions or techniques. With particular reference to the filmic text, it may be remarked that the narrative structure of classical filmic production always sets the masculine characters as being active, powerful and at the centre of the dramatic action; while the female character is mostly passive and powerless. The latter is always portrayed as an object of desire for the male characters and indirectly for that of the male spectatorship or audiences. Quoting Mulvey, feminist scholar Smelik (2004) perfectly corroborates this view as she identifies three typologies of gaze which systematically objectify women in classical cinema contexts. She notes that while male characters most often direct their gaze towards female characters in mainstream cinema, the spectator is subtly made to identify with the male look “because the camera films from the optical, as well as libidinal point of view of the male character”. This complex process enables the existence a tri-dimensional (male) gaze by the camera, the character and the spectator which simultaneously objectifies the female character and makes audiences view her as the spectacle. Through this complex process of voyeurism, women are connoted as “to-be-looked-at-ness”.

In the same line of argument, Micheo-Marcial (2015, p.19) insightfully observes that women portrayals in the media are shaped by chauvinistic frameworks which in turn are the result of male domination of these media industries in terms of numerical representation and ideology. In most popular cultures, women are identified, valued, profiled or stereotyped on the basis of their bodies or physical appearance. Male dominated social institutions subtly coin ideals, norms and standards of feminine beauty, sexuality and sensuality which women have to follow to gain social acceptability. Micheo-Marcial (2015) writes that:

The image of a woman in a bikini shouldn’t be taken at face value. One must take into account the fact that the person behind the lens is most likely a man, the person who came up with the concept was most likely a man, and most of the creative force behind the image is likely stemming from [...] a man. That is not to say that there aren’t female photographers or creative geniuses, but we shouldn’t deny the skewed gender ratio within most professions, or the fact that the standards of beauty and sensuality are imposed by industries that are largely domineered by men. (p.19)

The media of mass communication are part of the social institutions highlighted by Micheo-Marcial above as providers of standards or models of female beauty, sexuality and sensuality. Most women internalize these standards and ideals of feminine beauty or physical appearance in the quotidian management their bodies and appearance. This scenario most often leads to women self-objectification in the realms of appearance, body and sexuality. In tandem with this, women self-objectification is associated with their being preoccupied with their appearance and body for social acceptability. The phenomenon, in this context entails correcting body (size or shape) and appearance according to social standards/ideals of feminine beauty. Such body correction is effected through a set of disciplinary practices which include both “radical”

strategies such as dieting, plastic surgery or physical exercises as well as relatively mild strategies such as dressing and hair styles, way of walking, of talking, and posture among others. The visible implication of this act (of body correction) and disciplinary practices is that, women systematically “relegate” themselves to objects or things which should be decorated and gazed upon (principally by men). Self-objectification therefore offers a model of objectification in which the *objectifier* and *objectified* is one and the same person (in this case a woman). Being conscious of the fact that they are being watched by men, women manifest the desire to always be sensually pleasant to men by molding their bodies and appearances according to models and norms of feminine beauty designed by men. Barty (cited in Papadaki 2010, para. 12), clearly illustrates the double role (of *objectifier* and *objectified*) the woman plays in such a context when she notes that the process involves the woman taking “toward her own person the attitude of the man. She will then take erotic satisfaction in her physical self, revelling in her body as a beautiful object to be gazed at and decorated.”

### **Cinematic Nudity, Pornography and Women’s Objectification**

In their varying argumentations, both apologists and detractors of cinematic pornography and nudity tend to adopt a viewership/spectatorship perspective more than an actor/acting perspective. Both schools of thought tend to give a greater attention to the perception by or impact of pornography on viewers and those represented in films; rather than on the actors. The detractors – who are mostly radical feminists - vehemently *problematize* (soft) porn on multiple grounds but principally on the assumption that the practice enables a multifaceted sexual objectification of women. In line with this, radical feminists like Tanner (1994, p.58) equates cinematic pornographers with men who treat the women in their lives “as doll-like objects born to serve their erotic fantasies, physical needs”. Such postulations are deeply pitted on the arguable premises that pornography is a central tenet of the exclusively male sexual script which in turn is a cardinal confirmation of masculinity. Another premise in which the demonization of porn is anchored is that, as a system, pornography brings to the open the hidden private world of masculine sexual pleasure. In this wise, pornography must be demonized on the excuse that it serves as a socialization system which tends to glamorize the dominant male sex role. Radical feminists view the sexually explicit in any cinematic experience as a representation which most often, largely depends for its charge on women sexual objectification. Such an experience has all the facets of sexual violence. Feminist MacKinnon perfectly identifies the link between cinematic pornography and women sexual objectification when she defines pornographic art as:

The graphic sexually explicit subordination of women through pictures or words that also includes women dehumanised as sexual objects, things, or commodities; enjoying pain or humiliation or rape; being tied up, cut up, mutilated, bruised, or physically hurt; in postures of sexual submission or servility or display; reduced to body parts, penetrated by objects or animals, or presented in scenarios of degradation, injury, torture; shown as filthy or inferior; bleeding, bruised, or hurt in a context that makes these conditions sexual. (MacKinnon, 1987, p.176)

Cinematic pornography is therefore regarded by a most feminists as inherently sexist. This is thanks to its characteristic reduction of women to passive and perpetually desiring bodies – or

bits of bodies. Such cinematic pornography equally reduces women to bodies which are eternally available for servicing men. Quoting a number of feminist works, Attwood (2004, p.8) succinctly posits that pornography reduces ‘woman’ to ‘object’” meanwhile, as a typical form of violence against women, objectification is made particularly explicit in the two popular – though arguable – claims that:

1. The word “pornography” refers to the graphic depiction of women as vile whores; meanwhile whores exist only within a framework of male sexual domination; and
2. Pornography is the theory, and rape the ultimate practice.

Though often addressed with nuanced approaches, the cinematic practice of acting nude roles or simply romantic scenes is viewed by some critics as a form of (soft) porn. In this line of thought, nudity specifically is often contrasted with nakedness and branded as a symbol of actors’ objectification. Sharing corollaries, Berger (2003, p.51) pointedly notes that: “to be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude. Nakedness reveals itself. Nudity is placed on display [...] The nude is condemned to never being naked. Nudity is a form of dress”. This conception of nudity conflicts with definitions which present nudity as a form of art or artistic expression.

However, pro-porn feminists and other apologists of nudity view no harm or actors’ sexual objectification in mediated sex and nudity. To some apologists of the phenomenon, pornography and objectification are just in the eyes of the beholder, while to others it is a natural and unavoidable consequence of the sexualization of a film. Such observers equally predicate the unavoidability of soft pornography and women’s objectification on the fact that sex is part of human life and that, it forms a typology of visual art and strategic communication in a film. However, Murphy (2013) insists on making a clear distinction between pornography (which is not inherently harmful) and *pornified* images of women which, of course, amounts to women or actors’ sexual objectification. She opines that it is possible to depict even hard core sex in a film without the women being objectified or objectifying. She anchors her postulation in the premise that displaying female nudity *per se* may not inherently amount to pornography and women’s objectification. Murphy (2013) thereby predicates women’s objectification on a number of pre-production tools and technical determinants including script structure and *voyeurist* camera angles. She insightfully contends that:

It isn’t about skin or sex or even voyeurism. It’s about the choices made with regard to context and, essentially, camera angles. The camera is responsible for putting the audience in the position of the *objectifier* and of forcing us all to see women onscreen through the male gaze. The camera can make different choices. Directors can also make different choices about the kinds of bodies (friendly reminder: all bodies can be objectified, so objectifying less conventional bodies is not radical *per se*, BUT putting non-conventional/imperfect bodies onscreen and not making those bodies the butt of a joke is a good thing) that are depicted onscreen and the contexts within which those bodies are depicted. (Murphy, 2013, para 5-6)



A perspective related to the above mentioned postulation is that non-actors (audiences or cinema critics) do not stand at a vantage position to pertinently determine whether a scene is exploitative or not. In line with this, only actors occupy the position to determine whether a specific scene causes their being objectified or not. Like many other postulations by pro-porn critics, this view clearly illustrates the lack of consensus on the issue of objectification among actors, film critics and other relevant schools of thought.

### **Women's Sexual Objectification in Nollywood Films**

Women's sexual objectification—through soft or hard core pornography—has visibly become a tradition in the prolific Nollywood film industry. This, of course, is not unconnected to the fact that nudity and sex have always constituted a very enticing bade used by filmmakers to attract audiences and achieve astonishing economic success. In the course of over sexualizing and *pornifying* their cinematic productions, a good number of Nollywood film directors has in one way or the other, advertently or inadvertently been guilty of the “sin” of women's sexual objectification. Egregious examples of films with such women's (sexual) objectification materials include Ben Chukwuma's *Room 027*, *Bold 5 Bades*, *The Benjamins*, *Bedroom Assassins*, *Taboo*, Andrew Odiase's *Strange Act*, P. Collins' *Sexy Game*, Chibuikwe N.'s *My Soul Mate*, Omist's *Fulton Mansion* and Judith Mazagwu's highly criticized *Destructive Instincts* among others. Also worth noting are gay movies such as *Pregnant Hawkers*, *Sinful Act 1&2* and *Lesbian*. The above mentioned films and many others have serious pornographic content with numerous instances of women's sexual objectification or exploitation. Women in these films are in many ways presented as seductive sex objects and bodies that are eternally predisposed to be used for men's sexual desires. In Afro Candy's *Destructive Instinct* for instance, Afro Candy's (lead actress') body is so revealing in the sex scenes, while her male counterpart cannot really be identified. Similarly, in *Dirty Secret* where there are various sex scenes involving Muna Obiekwe and his female lover, Muna is shot in these instances from the back position while his female partners' naked features are subtly exposed with principal focus on her breasts.

In most Nollywood productions, the camera is made to focus mainly on exposing female genitals more than penises and other elements of male nudity; thereby objectifying the women more than men. In most nay all sex scenes, emphasis is unfailingly and particularly put on the woman's body though the latter is never “the only culprit”. As Uzundu (2015, p.139) pointedly puts it, women, in Nollywood movies, have mainly been obscenely portrayed “as objects of gaze and consumption by men; their bodies are objectified as spaces for acts of sexual pleasure or objects of abuse”.

As earlier mentioned, women's sexual objectification is generally conceptualized, especially by feminist observers, as the tendency to treat women as a bodies, “valued predominately for its use to (or consumption) by others” (Aubrey *et al* 2011, p.362). Based on such a conceptualization, women sexual objectification in cinematic experience can be viewed as the visual (re)presentation of actresses' bodies (skin exposure and close-ups of female actors' body parts) and their behavioral portrayals (using sexualizing gestures in the explicit presence of the male gaze). In most Nigerian movies, emphasis is placed not only on the advertently sexualization of scenes but equally on the westernization of the production. Daring experiments such as nudity and sex are believed to have the potential of enabling the whole production to meet international standards and to sell the movies. Some producers, however, dissociate their use of pornography from women's objectification through claims that their use of nudity and sex scenes help them sell

sexiness and not sex. In an online interview, film and pop video producer Ogonru Sesan (cited by Efoghe: 2016, p.5) argues that:

People say we objectify women but I don't objectify them. I find women very attractive and try to showcase them not in their best form but in their sexiest forms; because on video and depending on the songs. That's what sells. If the song [or film] is conservative, [...] you shoot the women looking conservative.

The female nudity portrayed in numerous Nollywood movies is hardly functional as it is mostly irrelevant to convey the essence of the movies in question. Rarely is this female nudity artistic or beautifully shot. The nudity seems to be designed basically to titillate and present women as sex objects and the spectacle. Similarly, sexual behaviours are portrayed in a highly unrealistic and tempting manner that even neglects romance and decency. Nudity attracts both attention and controversy which, according to numerous film producers and directors, are necessary to market their productions. On this basis, naked female actors become objectified not only with respect to sexual emotions. They are victims of a double objectification: they are both sexual and commercial objects.

### **Nollywood Actresses' Perceptions of Acting Sex or Nudity Roles**

Nollywood actresses perceive sex and nude roles from personalized and complex, points of view. Their perspectives on the issue are, of course, influenced by the concurrent perceptions they have on pornography as well by their level of sensitivity to Nigerian cultural and religious values and cinematic codes. Their perceptions of soft porn, acting nudity and sex scenes are therefore subject to controversy and one needs highly nuanced language to describe them (such perceptions). While some Nollywood actresses utterly reject pornography as a women-objectifying variable and an irreligious aesthetic element in film production, others find it a pertinent communicative element based, of course, on contexts (film genre, script structure, morality of the director etc). Some of them the actresses view pornography as inevitable or rather indispensable artifacts for a film industry aspiring to survive and compete with foreign film productions. This specific position is echoed by Nollywood actress Queeneth Hilbert who contends that: "Nollywood has no business doing movies if it cannot absorb pornography". Pornography is believed – not just by the actresses – to have the potential to make filmic production real, more "appetizing" and to raise it to an international standard (Akande 2013, p.35). Therefore, to a number of Nollywood actresses, acting in the nude or making love on camera is just "doing one's job"; that is, being professional. Queeneth Hilbert further makes a case for, or legitimizes pornography on the ground that it is practically inevitable as an aesthetic filmic element. As she succinctly puts it:

Pornography makes [Nigerian] films more real. When you shoot in South Africa or Ghollywood [the Ghanaian film industry], there's no movie you are going to do without emotion, love and sex. I don't call it pornography, I call it doing your job. If your script says you should do something, it is doing your job (cited in Akande, 2013, p.35).

In the same line of argument, Nollywood actress Ezeokafor Sylvia notes that acting nude or pornified roles is simply being professional. Though subject to profound controversy in the African socio-cultural context, it is a noble tradition which has long been integrated into prominent film industries in the world. As she argues, acting nude or porn “[is] part of the job. Sex sells and it happens every minute in Hollywood. In Africa, we want to be Africans and non-Africans at the same time. It’s something we knew before we signed up as actors”. This contention somehow evidences the fact that some Nollywood looks to Hollywood and its fleet of actresses and megastars as models, yardsticks and sources/forms of inspiration. Even actresses who, through daring cinematic experiments, have manifested inclinations which are near to hardcore pornography fondly base their arguments on Hollywood standards to justify acting nudity and sex scenes. A case in point is Judith Mazagwu (Alias Afro candy) who defends her venturing in the pornographic genre noting that:

I, Afro candy, solemnly want to clear the air here and now that I do not act porn movies. [I] never acted in any porn movie and I am not a porn star. I act in regular movies, not afraid to go naked but that doesn’t make one a porn star. I am a boss and I know where I invest my money [...] What I do is not different from what the soft porn Hollywood does, (that is) regular movies with some nudity, but because Nigerians are so backward they term it porn (quoted in Eromosole 2014, p.33).

Like Hilbert, Ezeokafor and Mazagwu cited above, most pro-porn Nigerian actresses employ a nuanced, ambiguous and/or seemingly insincere rhetoric to differentiate hard pornography from romantic scenes or soft porn. Such an ambiguous rhetoric is equally deployed to distinguish objectifying/pornified nudity from functional nudity. Nigerian Actress Abebe Moet (quoted in *Dimita Papers* 2015, p.23) uses the term “tasteful nudity” to endorse acting nude role exclusively in a scene whose length is not very provocative and where the length of her understanding identifies with the real character she is contracted to act. She categorically contends that “I am not going to do that kind of motion picture where all we discuss is sex. [...] I am not going to go nude or anything like that. However, I do accept that there’s tasteful nakedness. I’m not going to do anything disagreeable”. In the same line of thought, Nollywood actress Chelsea Edogun (cited in *Dimita Papers* 2015, p.12) confides that:

Acting nude is no more something new in the film industry. Yes, I will act nude under the privilege circumstances, which incorporate a decent script with a decent group to work with. At that point acting nude is no major ordeal on the grounds that as an actress I ought to have the capacity to place myself into any character, the length of its expert.

Ezeokafor adds a few elements to the privileged circumstances highlighted by her colleague, Edogun cited above. She notes that her acting a nude or porn role in a movie will essentially depend on the quality of the scripts, the typology of the film, and the morality and professional soundness of the director. Acting in such a context will therefore be determined by “how good the script is, how favourable it is to [her] as an actress, the kind of movie and most importantly, the director”. As she puts it “He has to be a director I trust. He has to be someone who produces without demeaning my acts”. (Ezeokafor cited in *Damita Papers* 2014, p. 23). As

revealed by Abebe, Edogun and Ezeokafor all three cited above, many Nigerian actresses will prefer acting soft pornography to core porn, and this will be under well-defined conditions. However, some will view even soft porn as a very daring experiment. In tandem with this, Nollywood actress Uche Iwuanyanwu (in an interview granted the Nigerian tabloid *Vanguard*) concedes that:

If I get a script (that's a sexual script), it doesn't mean I have to make love in front of the camera, I just need to act. For the fact that I've accepted a script, it means I should be able to do the job but I'm not saying I would go nude in front of the camera. I'm saying I would want to be professional about my job. If I get a script and I have to go nude, I don't have to take jobs like that. I can take jobs that are decent because this is Africa and we respect our bodies so much. So nothing would make me go completely nude or act porn. [But] if you want me to do a romantic scene, of course, yes (cited by Sholola and Nwanze, 2014, p.31).

Most Nollywood actresses' rejection of soft porn is partially anchored in their conservative belief that acting nude role or porn systematically debase and objectifies women. A case in point is Nollywood actress Ogechi Peters (2015) who, underscoring the demining effects of nude and pornographic roles, declares that "I don't need to go nude to reveal the world how the great woman that I am". Ogechi, here, indirectly censures the myth and tradition adopted by liberal and relatively adventurous actresses which consists in accepting nudity or sex roles to achieve stardom. Such a scenario illustrates instances of self-objectification in which an actress treats her body as an instrument to achieve stardom. In the same line of argument, other Nollywood actresses predicate their anti-porn perspective on socio-cultural values and spiritual principles. In tandem with this, Ebere Agu declares that "I won't act nude but it'll depend on the king of nudity. Also, keep in mind that my system will be the temple of God. I will not defile it" (cited in *Dimita Papers*, 2015, p.27). As illustrated in the case given above, some anti-porn actresses manifest a pious attachment either to conservative Nigerian values or fundamental religious principles. Acting nude or pornographic roles is therefore viewed as an abomination, a sign of western cultural corruption and irreparable spiritual felony. Nude and sex (pornographic) roles are thus equated to grave carnal sins like prostitution, adultery and fornication (if the actress is not married) among others. This theory is confirmed by Nigerian actress Omoni Oboli in a statement where she justifies her rejection of a sex/nudity role in a Hollywood film:

It is embarrassing that the outside world still thinks that with a fat big pay, you could just bend down and do any trash. I made it known to him [the film director] that in my culture, you are only subjected to your husband [...] I don't believe actresses in Nigeria have gone so low to get this kind of pay, but there are some who believe that acting nude can help them get a house in VGC or Lekki<sup>3</sup> [...] You might be seen flocking around the big and mighty with the cash you got for being nude, but remember a time comes when a child of yours, unfortunately, may stumble on such films.

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<sup>3</sup> VGC and Lekki are sumptuous residential areas in Lagos of Nigeria. Actress Omoni Oboli makes reference to them here to make allusion to the upward social and economic mobility some actors and filmmaker's hope to make by accepting even demeaning role in the Nollywood film industry.

What reasons are you going to give to him or her? (Omoni Oboli cited in Van Deven 2009, para 5)

As can be noticed in the above quotation, nude and soft pornographic roles are viewed by certain female observers (notably actress Omoni) as “trash” and demeaning acts. An actress who accepts to play such roles is “going low” that is, she unscrupulously degrades herself and somehow get herself guilty of self-objectification. The aspects of “denial of humanity” and “instrumentality” occur here, as Omoni seems to suggest that accepting nude or sexualized/pornographic roles leads to a scenario where actresses treat themselves as things or objects that are less than humans. Such an act committed by actresses equally manifests the viewing of their bodies as money-making instruments or techniques.

While conservative Nollywood actresses associate pornographic and nudity roles with objectification, liberal actresses such as Sylvia Ezeokafor endorse self-objectification through viewing their bodies as instruments they can – or should – exploit to distinguish themselves in the cinematic industry (and earn stardom). Ezeokafor actually suggests such a philosophy when she reveals that “I do not have a problem with nudity in movies. I am an actress. And my body is my tool” (cited in *Dimita Papers*, 2014, para 7). It goes without saying that a good synonym for the phrase “human body as tool” used by Ezeokafor above is “human body as instrument” which brings to the fore the aspect of instrumentality, a cardinal characteristic of (self) objectification.

Though it is an accepted premise that acting is theoretically not *reality* but an actor’s skillful interpretation of a film script, many religious and culturally sensitive Nollywood actresses associate playing nude role and sexual personae with having sex in some sense. Omoni cited by Dan Deven (2009) above echoes such a belief when she rejects nude and pornographic roles on grounds that fidelity to one’s spouse is an inviolable injunction in the religious and cultural background from which she comes. As she puts it, “in my culture you are only subjected to your husband”. Some actresses likewise, find it spiritually impossible to dissociate such sexual make believes (playing erotized/pornographic roles) from the intimate act of sex making. A case in point is Nollywood actress Uche Iwuanyanwu who views sexual acts to be genuine – what she categorized as lovemaking – when it is between husband and wife, what is hardly the case in typical acting contexts. Iwuanyanwu further describes sex as a site of intense spiritual workings. She contends that “sex is spiritual to me; that’s what I think. To other people it might not be; but to me, it’s very spiritual. If I have to go into sex, it has to be with the right person because spirits are actually transferable through sex”. By defining sex on camera in accordance with metaphysical frameworks, and by equating it with a form of sexuality exercised outside the bounds of marriage, these actresses somehow enjoin Kant (1963) who quickly identifies extra marital sex as a site of mutual objectification by the sex partners involved.

## Conclusion

Feminist critics have, most often, censured female actor’s acceptance of nude or pornographic roles, on the ground that pornography intrinsically and extrinsically encourages the sexual objectification of women. According to such positions, pornography –notably the one depicted in cinema or other forms of popular culture – encourages male audiences to view women as sex objects destined to satisfy various masculine desires. However, some actresses beg to differ with this feminist and sometime conservative theory. Many female actors canvass for an intelligent dissociation of pornography from women’s objectification. For this strand of actresses, there can

be pornographic contents without women's objectification, provided the camera *obscura* does not seek to serve the male monolithic gaze.

Like their counterparts from the West, Nollywood actresses appear seriously divided over the issue of nudity and pornographic roles as vectors of women's sexual objectification. As has been shown in this essay, their respective perspectives on the issue are shaped by cultural, religious and philosophical/ideological determinants. Most of them are still influenced by doctrinaire religion and the Nigerian conservative cultures and so, question or even demonize pornographic roles, equating them to objectifying variables. Some are subtly influenced by the "intimidating" gaze of Nigerian conservative/religious society, to strongly repress any form of liberal sexual ethics that may have manifested in their positions on the subject. Such conservative Nollywood actresses view pornography (in Nollywood) as a (self) objectifying factor, since it creates conditions favorable for treating actresses' bodies as instruments which could be used to achieve stardom, or to make money. Liberal actresses on the other hand strive to liberate themselves from the Nigerian cultural and religious bandwagon or spiral of silence. They see pornography as a positive accident in Nollywood and as a phenomenon with great potential to raise the standard of the industry so that it can be as competitive as Hollywood and European cinema. Such liberal actresses either do not see pornography as a sexually objectifying institution or simply don't mind being objectified or objectifying themselves for what they fervently perceive as the "advancement" of the industry.

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