"I would call the one that I like, I would admire her and tell her I like your boobs": Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis of Men's Narratives of Street Harassment in Lagos Transit Environments

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## Introduction: Street Harassment



- Any from of <u>unsolicited attention from male strangers in public spaces</u> ranging from:
  - mild forms staring, touching, kissing noises, comments about a female's body, etc.
  - to extreme forms groping, lewd comments, public masturbation, sexual violence, etc. (Bowman, 1993; Armstrong, 2016, Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2021; Fireborn & O'Neill, 2021)
- Conceptualized by romantic traditionalists as a form of flattery/ males flirting with females
- Trivialised as a form of male admiration

## **Street Harassment**

- Gendered form of public space violence
- A quotidian form of public space violence that females are victims of
- Perpetrated by mostly male strangers against females in public spaces
- Also known as public intrusion, stranger harassment, public space harassment, eves teasing, sexual harassment (Govinda, 2019; Ceccato and Loukaitou-Sideris, 2021)

## **Street Harassment**

- Deliberately performed by men Hinged on patriarchal structures
- A form of hegemonic masculinization of public spaces
- Forces women to adhere to model societal expectation of femininity
- Limits women's functionality and productivity in public spaces
- Limits women's sense of freedom in public spaces
- Inimical to women's feeling of security in public spaces
- Violates women's rights to public spaces affect their physical and mental health (Bowman, 1993; Guatam, et al., 2019; Luqiu and Liao 2021).

## **Public Spaces**

- Literal streets; Restaurants; Recreational centers; Market places; Public vehicles
- Populated; less/non restrictive;
- Sites for the perpetration of all kinds of crime
- Sømetimes gendered in the way women's bodies are policed
- Transit environment are the most unsafe of all public spaces (Madan and Nalla, 2016).

### **Transit Environments**

- Relied upon by people without private cars
- Populated, thus a site of crime and victimisation
- Crimes are ungendered. victims of reported crimes in transit environments are most often men, but women are at higher risks of sexual harassment and assault crimes which are most often underreported (Solymosi et al., 2018; Eagle and Kwele, 2019, p. 3).
- Men and women utilise the space, but literature has revealed that women use the space more in their daily activities of shopping, childcare, household obligations, etc.
- Eagle and Kwele (2019) argue that there is an inherent misogynistic culture in the commercial transport system which exposes women to violence, and causes them traumatic stress. (Otu and Agugua, 2020).

Transit Environments in Lagos

- Crowded
- Utilised by many people in Lagos
- Enabling environment for crimes
- Workers are mostly men drivers, conductors, loaders and agberos
  - motor park touts also locally known as 'Agberos' are known to solicit for passengers. In the process of soliciting for passenger, they treat some of their passenger with disrespect, indignity and in worse cases, violently. The target of their misbehaviour and criminal activities are most often women.











### Men's Narratives of Violence

- Narratives provide an understanding or people's realities
- A reflection of societal practices
- Reveal the subjective positions of the narrator
- Men's narratives about their perpetration of violence displays a performative function through which men project several selfrepresentations especially in relation to preferred notion of self.
- Provide insight in their subjective positions about this form of violence against women, but also helps to understand how men construct and negotiate their masculine subjectivity and identities in contexts of street harassment

## Why Street Harassment?

- Studies on gendered violence have focused more on domestic and intimate partner violence
- Studies on public space violence have examined its impact on women, Alcade, 2020; Ahmed et al. 2019); The social meaning of women's experiences of street harassment (Chafai, 2020); Men's reasons for perpetrating violence against women in public spaces (Govinda, 2018; Fireborn & O'Neill, 2021); etc.
- Most of these studies are limited to studies outside Nigeria (except for the studies of Aborisade, 2021, Otu and Agugua, 2020, etc.)
- I argue that street harassment is a form of gender othering, a form of victimisation that limits women's freedom of movement in transit environment, and by extension, their independence, productivity and general feelings of safety. This study thus answers the following questions:
  - a. What verbal elements represent androcentric notions of everyday violence in men's narratives about the perpetration of street harassment?
  - b. What are the ideological underpinnings in men's narratives about the perpetration of street harassment?
  - c. What are the possible implications of these notions on women's safety in public spaces?

## Research Method

- Dara gathering
- Informal semi-structured interviews with male workers in five transit environments: Ikorodu, Mile two, Berger, Mushin and Idumota)
  - ► About 100 men
  - about 40 women
  - Translated and transcribed
- Data Analysis
  - Discourse analytic approach the analysis of language in use in relation to context
  - Analytical Framework

#### Feminist critical discourse Analysis (Lazar, 2007)

- women/females in language use; focuses on how gendered ideology and power relations are reproduced, negotiated and contested in through text and talk
- Postcolonial Feminist Theory
  - questions the conceptualization of gender in in colonized countries, and considers all forms of violence against women as a social and cultural construct

#### **Interview Questions**

- a. What do you feel about women's presence in this park? How do you interact or communicate with women in the park
- b. What makes you talk to a female in the park? What are the things you see in a female that makes you talk about her or to her?
- c. If you see a female you like or find attractive, how do you communicate with her? What do you do, and what do you tell her? How do you tell her you like her or that she is fine?
- d. When you see your fellow men talking about a female or making fun of her, what do you do? How does it make you feel? What if you know her?
- e. Why do you think men harass women?
- f. Do you think there should be a law that considers street harassment a crime?

# FINDINGS: Women's Perception of Street Harassment

- Inappropriate male behaviour crude and uncouth
- Unflattering, embarrassing and humiliating
- Sometimes caused by:
  - indecent dressing
  - overfriendliness with the men in the environment,
  - walking as if without a purpose, etc.

- "Street harassment is when they talk about you and when they touch
- A person that I don't know cannot touch me; I don't have a problem with calling of the names because they are the owner of the mouth
- "I consider touching as harassment; if they call names,
   I just ignore them
- "If you dress properly, no man would harass you
- "I feel insulted most times, but I don't take it personally; talking about my body, I don't have a problem until you touch me

## Thematic Analysis

- Common features in the men's narratives
- Clarifies the complex interactions between male and females in the transit environments
- provides insight into the interplay of gendered cultural expectations and individual (ir)responsibility

#### **Themes**

- Men's conceptualization of street harassment
- Dimensions in the perpetration of street harassment
- Gender dichotomy in the perpetration of street harassment
- Women's bodies in transit environments
- Male bystanders intervention
- Perception about the creation of a policy on street harassment

## Men's conceptualization of street harassment

- Portrays the Nigerian sociocultural representations of gender stratification and performativity, and notions of violence
- Ambivalent and contradictory
- Blame women
- Position men as beings that have rights over women's bodies (admiration/disgust)
- Represent toxic and hegemonic masculinity
- ortrays structural gender equality, one of the Nermaths of colonization

### **Excerpts**

It is only an animal in form of a man that harasses women. As a conductor if you are on your duty post you don't have any business with such and sometimes there is no way a man would see a very beautiful lady and not approach her

I would call the one that i like, ask her how she is doing, I would admire her, I will tell her I like your boobs. Some would insult me and if she doesn't agree i would let her be.

As a passenger if i see that you are not properly dressed i would tell you that next time you should dress well ... Any woman revealing her boobs would make other men harass them.

# Sociocultural Dimensions in the Perpetration of Harassment

- Everyone has rights to public spaces (hustle, earn money, take care of family, etc).
- Men consider the policing •
   of women's bodies their responsibility (paternalism and control)
- Not done out of spite but done correct women who have "misbehaved"

- We don't have problem with women generally. We relate with them like we relate with men I don't really have women's time, but if a see a girl that is not dressed well, sometimes, I talk to her with my eyes or if she is walking close to me, I tell her "what are you wearing like this, ...
- Men do it a lot because they are men, and try to be dominant. because it is a man thing. But women should also learn to dress well. Majorly women are the main cause of harassment. I can insult or harass a woman when she dresses immorally, even when she is married
- If the government makes it a law, a lot of when will be arrested if not every man, because it is a man thing. But women should also learn to dress well. Majorly women are the main cause of harassment.

# Gender Constructions in the Perpetration of Street Harassment

- Hegemonic constructions of masculinity through which women are expected to be "feminine" (subservient, tolerant of male attention, non-confrontational)
- Deliberately constructed to demonstrate male power and dominance, as well as pack identity
- Used to position men as disciplinarians
- A reflection of why men think women dress the way they do (to attract male attention)

- See this girl going, I anyone will appreciate her because she is dressing well. Once you dress anyhow and open your breasts and your buttock, they will rough handle you. As a man like this, I will now see a breast open down and I will be looking? Impossible. I will try my best to feel it and touch it...
- ☐ I don't harass ladies oh, but when I see my fellow men here harassing them, I take my eyes off it cos its none of my business... But any girl that responds, we join tighter and insult her. Because for her to respond, it means she's a prostitute. Any girl that dresses anyhow is a prostitute.
- I am an agbero. Anyone that open her breast or buttock, I help them to expose it very well. One day, here at berger, on the other side, I saw a girl with a short dress with zip in the front and more than half of her breast was outside. My friend was asking her why she dressed like that and she had the guts to tell him to mind his business. Imagine! In our park oh. I decided to teach her a lesson for talking disrespectfully with my friend who was trying to correct her. I just went to her and pulled down her zip. All her breast and body became open and we started laughing.
- ☐ But some of them dress anyhow to draw attention. When we harass them, we give them the attention that they want.

## Women's bodies in Transit Environments

- Objects of male attention lust, admiration, disrespect, displeasure, etc.
- Policed (fashion choice or body structure by men through street harassment
- Punished for failure to uphold sociocultural standard of female dressing and decency
- ond slut) through street harassment

- "I will treat a lady how she dresses. Men don't harass women because they are men, but because the women allowed for the opportunity for that. If your dressing is not good, the wrong ones might come and the right one might also come, the way you dress would determine if you will be harassed. Our culture puts importance on properly covering her body."
- As a woman, man must call you, e mean say dem de admire you. Man must admire you, dem must call you as far as you be woman. But all these short clothes attract men faster than long clothes. But na the way the woman drees go determine how I will talk to her. For me oh, once the woman dress like street girl, I will be attracted to her faster
- I think often times, it's about how some dress... if you dress decently, no one will talk to you anyhow. Some ladies almost show us their pants in their dressing. So, so we use those expressions like "*Idi re*" "*close you boot*" "*olosho*" because we want them to feel embarrassed, we want them to feel ashamed of what they put on..."

## **Bystander Intervention**

- Represents (un)willingness to intervene in the harassment situation
- Influenced by personal opinion about street harassment,
  - attitude towards the female,
  - relationship with the man perpetrating the act, etc.
  - Consideration of personal safety
- Women are held accountable

- Girls who dress immorally I do not regard them, I don't embarrass them. .. when my friend does this I don't join them I just laugh, I don't tell them to stop, because she deserves them
- ☐ I don't feel anything when my girlfriend or any female I know is being harassed because I do it to other women too. I always tell my girlfriend to dress responsibly. If you dress responsibly, no one can do you anyhow or embarrass you
- ☐ I won't take such harassment, if i see my fellow man doing that i would scold him
- ☐ If I am walking with a woman and she is being harassed, I would feel bad, i would feel embarrassed that i am working with someone that is harassed, i would advice her to stop that dressing.
- Our character is very different from one another if i call the man to tell him that what he is doing is not good, he would think i want to chance him instead i would just call someone that is closer to the man to tell him that this person is related to me
- ☐ To me I find it as fun, if i am in the mood i would join them, if it's someone i know i would warn them to stop

# Perception about the Creation of a Policy on Street Harassment

- Street harassment exists because there is no policy on it
- There are more serious issues of national concern that deserves government intervention
- Policy cannot work because women are as guilty as men
- Too many men would be in prison, so it is not worth it
- There should be a policy it should be considered a crime to harass women, and women to dress indecently

### **Excerpts:**

I feel there should be a law. Harassment is not a good thing. If government wants to ban harassment then it is worth it. Harrassment is a crime.

They should not ban it because it is not a crime and sometimes the dressing alone causes it and i feel it is not good for a woman to dress that way because it is totally bad

For me there is nothing government would do about that... there are lots of things government is supposed to do for us

Yes, there should ban i mean there should be security in anywhere in Lagos. Women are not safe

It will be good, once they stop it i will also stop doing it. The ladies want to cause commotion dressing like that. When there is a law to ban it, then I will stop female

## Discourse Strategies Narratives about Street Harassment

- used to minimize, deny or excuse the perpetration of street harassment
  - Justification
  - Minimisation
  - **Endorsement**
  - Normalisation

- There are some ladies that would just wear short gown / top without wearing skirt under it, some guys would just walk up to them and insult them but if you dress properly no man would harass you
- When people see people with big bum bum, they are likely to be attracted. And they can shout about it sometimes and I can't judge them.
- There are some things that you must learn to overlook, you can't be
  picking unnecessary fights. People like you that's why they try to say
  those things, to show that they are attracted
- A lady that exposes her body, they would call her different names. The way you dress is the way you would be addressed
- When we say thing like 'fine babe" "close our booth! "why didn't you wear brazier", we are admiring them. Its not bad na. we are playing with them, we are just using it to catch fun. If other men do it to my wife, I will tell her they are joking with her, she should be patient. There is no need fighting or arguing with them. Some ladies actually like it and enjoy it when we do it to them, especially some of the ladies working here in this park

## **Masculine Identities**

# (Dis)align with the perpetration

- Abnormal and irresponsible
- Gatekeeper of social etiquette
- Parental figure
- Admirer
- pisciplinarian
- Married and respectable
- Educated and responsible

- It doesn't make sense to harass a woman, you don't have to behave like a tout, not everyone that is a driver that is an illiterate. If you see a lady that you like you just approach and talk to them normally
- Yes, we want them to feel embarrassed, we want them to feel ashamed of what they put on, we want to use that word to caution them if i say such i would say it for you to hear it you cannot do anything to me, you can talk or grumble,
- but ladies of nowadays have spoilt alot of things so if you see them dressed like that you would want to harass her or insult her first so that she can receive training identity of parent
- If i see a lady that has a beautiful shape, i would admire her, admiration is not a crime even though someone admire my wife i would not be angry. So I called you my type because I am admiring you
- Sometimes the dressing can make a man harass a lady, he can rape you too, some people would be married and still go after a woman because you have exposed yourself and sometime, the body type can make a man harass the lady.
- I am a married man and i am a very focused man. I don't have time to harass any women
- I am a school sat holder, and cannot compare myself with the a man that did not go to school. Many of them did not go to school, they do not have knowledge and they do not have goo thinking that is why they behave like that.

# Conclusion

- Street harassment is perpetrated for punitive, corrective, admirative reasons.
- Used to police women's bodies in transit environment
- ► However, the perpetration of it by men in transit environment is hinged on and shaped by the Nigerian sociocultural and ideological constructions of masculinity and femininity it is a performance of male dominance
- Men in transit environments do not consider it a serious phenomenon especially as they regard it as their right to make women appear "decently" in public spaces
- Street harassment will continue to be perpetrated in these environments until there is a definite policy on it

## THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!

