

Female Body in Cordillera Music Videos

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Abstract

Music has always been a significant part of life. This is probably the reason why humanity has invented and innovated ways of how music could always be present wherever and whenever it wants to be heard.

In the Philippines one of the most underrated music genres is the country music produced in the local regions. One of the regions that produce this kind of music is the Cordillera Administrative Region which is also one of the most dominated regions during the American colonization period in the Philippines. It is located at the northern part of Luzon, and is known as the home of the Igorots, or the “people from the mountains”.

Due to the colonial influence, the CAR, including the local songs and music videos produced in this region were seen as highly influenced by the American cowboy culture. The production and consumption of this music and these music videos are representations of the Cordilleran or Igorot’s representation and portrayal of the way they view their culture, society, and selves.

The main focus of this research is the way the Igorot perceive the female body. The music videos were analyzed through their lyrics, mise-en-scene, the roles given to women, and the interrelation of these three elements within the representation process. Through the lens of Laura Mulvey’s Male Gaze Theory, it was seen that the portrayal of female body in the music videos was objectified by both voyeuristic and fetishistic gaze. This study also claims that the ideologies of the people working behind the production of the music videos affect the domestication of women in the Cordillera.

Keywords: female body, indigenous people, male gaze

1. Introduction

Music has always been an essential part of the Filipino life. Through the years, humanity has found ways on how to make music as portable and accessible as it could be, in the same way that the music genres have transformed and emerged from one genre to another. As the Philippines respond quite fast to the emerging trends in the world, it seems that there are still parts of it that remain conservative.

The Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) is one of the regions in the northern part of the Philippines. The CAR is one of the most influenced regions during the American colonization period in the country from 1898-

1946. In the same way, the history of American colonization should explain the present Cordillera culture that is hugely similar to the American cowboy culture.

1.1 Women in Music Videos

Alexander (1999), in her study about the roles of women in music videos, classified the women in music videos into three categories: the conventional woman, the self-reliant woman, and the internal paradox. Most of the emphases in the conventional women are focused on their physical appearances. They are portrayed as passive and dependent in man’s attention while the self-reliant women are portrayed as independent, self-reliant and dominant in sexual relationships. The third,

which is the internal paradox, is shown in videos where the male and female are shown in conflicting roles in a single video. (Alexander, 1999)

In 2011, Billboard celebrated their 30th anniversary and released a top-ten list of the “best music videos ever” from year 2000 and above. The top on the list is Lady Gaga’s *Bad Romance*, where the theme of the song is desperation, bitterness and revenge to a lover who left the persona. The music video started with bipolar sequence of events; from foreplay to an attempted murder. While the whole video showed Gaga’s attempts on seducing men by her movements and attire that is driven by her strong desire to avenge herself. Then later on, Gaga kills the man, her past lover who tried to kill her before. As said in the lyrics “I want your love, and all your love is revenge. You and me could write a bad romance.” This music video by Gaga was identified as the most wanted video of the decade, as per voted by the readers of Billboard.

1.2 Igorot and the media

The Igorots are identified as the highlanders from the northern part of the Philippines. They are also known as one of the ethnic groups who have the richest culture in the country. Like the other ethnic groups, they are known for their practices, customs and traditions. However, it is not well known that their culture has been penetrated by the ethnic media. This type of media is defined as the type of media that is used by the minorities, to represent themselves to the public. (Tindaan 2008)

The Igorots also have their own music videos. In 2013, a study was conducted by De Velez et.al (2013), regarding the self-portrayal of Igorots in their music videos. They found out that the Igorots try to defend, and counter themselves from the misrepresentations of the mainstream media. They used elements of their past colonizers while shaping a new, and

accurate form of their identity in their own music videos.

2. Method

This study is an exploratory research about the state of representation of women in the Cordillera through music videos. The researchers interpreted and analyzed the nine (9) music videos of Cordillerans produced by Marcons Dayaoen. The songs were chosen from the albums with the highest sales wherein women and women’s appearance is most eminent. The texts were analyzed through the lens of Mulvey’s Male Gaze Theory and claims were supported in reference to other studies conducted about the Filipinas and Igorots.

It closely looked at the signs and symbols in the music videos that were used in the representation and portrayal of femininity. Qualitative content analysis is also used to identify and analyze these signs and symbols.

Non-obtrusive observation was used in gathering the data for this study. The data needed for this study were gathered by watching the pre-selected Cordillera music videos. In line with the objectives that aim to know about the production process and the producer’s effects to the portrayal of women, the related literature with deep understanding regarding the state of the women in the country would be used as framework.

Textual analysis is used to analyze and understand the semiotic messages that are communicated in the song lyrics and in the music videos. We considered song lyrics and music videos as texts that connote the meaning of a woman. The researchers used coding sheets while in depth analysis and observation were used together with the coding technique in tallying the relevant details that are needed to be analyzed for this study.

3. Result and discussion

3.1 Objectification: Voyeurism

Voyeurism is an active, controlling gaze which is also sadistic in ways for it tries to investigate the female then punishes or saves her. (Rose 2012) On the other hand, objectivism is shown in situations when the woman causes pain on the man. It was as if objectifying the woman has become their coping mechanism, not as a response to the anxiety brought by their castration but even when they inflict discomfort on men. This objectification comes with sadism or with saving the female character. The songs analysed showed a mixture of both.

The song, Igorota (Igorot woman) began with comparing woman to the morning star that whenever the person singing looks at her, he finds her very pleasing to the eyes. He feels the same every time he sees an Igorota. He watches the Igorota just as like how he watches the morning star – from a distance – and finds pleasure in it.

He then he starts to investigate the Igorota by describing closely from head to toe – from the braided hair to the sando and skirt. He mentioned her kindness and industriousness in field and in the household. The same situation is evident in *Agmaom-omas e dekna*. The song is about a woman the person had just met, and he began by talking about the pleasure of looking at a girl from a distance, like for example, in the song: enjoying looking at a woman through the mirror as she giggles while fixing herself. The person felt very happy, not because he too is being looked at but because of being smiled at by the woman. And as the space between them decreased, they have also started to become intimate with each other. This intimacy had caused the man to become more attracted and interested to her, to the point that he already smells and combs her hair with his fingers as the woman sleeps in his lap.

Mulvey (1999) argued that males cannot bear the burden of being objectified that is why they are the ones who control the dynamics of a film. This is seen in the song, *Kimat Di Matam* (The Sparkle of Your Eyes). The man was puzzled by what he feels towards the female character. He thinks of her every night and day, wondering if he was deceived by her sparkling eyes. In this case, the female's gaze caused him discomfort, making him think that he was deceived. He then goes through investigation. The uncertainty that the situation brought to him urged him to go to the elders, to a fortuneteller and even to a priest but none of them can give them the assurance if they are for each other. He calls out to their god, Kabunian, to lead the girl to her so that he may give life and happiness in her eyes. This part of the lyrics says that the sparkle in her eyes is lifeless or dull, only they'll have each other that it'll be better. There are songs wherein investigating the female was not present but the need to save them and the lack is evident. Like in the song, *Ayshy Ngatay Shanag Jo* (Don't You Have Any Dream?), wherein it is calling men to rise up to court girls and have their own family. This call came from the complaint of women of not being courted by men. There is a desire for women to be pursued and longed by men, to be saved from wherever circumstance that they are in. The men were asked to stop their vices and save these women from their misery or to save them from the feeling of lack, of not having men. So the line says, "the pleasure of having a family", tells the men that real pleasure is not on vices but on saving and leading the women and the family, the pleasure in lording it all over them.

Aside from the anxiety that the woman gives because of her castration, she also gives a different kind of anxiety when it comes to romantic feelings. *Adak Law-an Sik-a*, is a story of how a man fell in love with a girl who, eventually, liked another man. The man who fell

in love with her was crying because of grief and hard feelings and there is nothing he can do about it. The way he coped with the situation was to just look at the girl from the far away: “Do not mind me, I will just think about you”. In other words, the pain he was going through created a distance between him and the woman. Since, he can longer have her other than being a friend he assured the woman that he will be fine just thinking about her– looking from afar, watching her in an inanimate form, objectifying her.

Unlike in the previous songs, Biag di mangasawa talks about the life of a married man. According to the song, there was freedom and continuous happiness in marriage. As we looked at the story line, the wife is the one who serves her husband in the morning, when taking a bath and even when they go to bed at night. It was emphasized that as the wife did these things, she never complained (*Si adi manrir-riri*). Voyeurism is not only about saving the female character; it can also punish her. This is behaviour of the husband towards his wife is a form of sadism that Mulvey mentions in her theory. This is a kind of submission and slavery that the female undergoes as a punishment and the husband finds continuous happiness in this (*Ya ragsak si enggana Ay agay patenggana*).

However in other songs that talk about men in Cordillera, it portrays them as active. In the songs *Dakami nga Igorot* and *Kabanbantayan*, both talk about the activities of men in their daily lives. *Dakami nga Igorot*, tells

the story of the food that they consume and on how they put on their g-strings. While in *Kabanbantayan*, the men were seen to provide for the family. It was mentioned that their source of living are the things that men mostly do such as hunting and cultivating. These sources of living being highlighted and even being regarded as something to be proud of is a way of telling how successful men are in helping the family and the community unlike women. Going back to the song, *Igorota*, it ended with a line asking God to “help” her and give her an everlasting life. In the end, despite the beauty and good personality that the female character beholds, she needs to be rescued. As what Rose (2012, 160) have said, women are seen as “threatening but weak”.

It can be seen that the even on the components of the lyrics of the songs, the notion of active/male and passive/female is already evident, males are to look and females are to be looked at. If there is a space or distance that suggests a voyeuristic gaze, there is also that space that the male and female occupy in order to move. This space also suggests an active/male and a passive/female, in this case, it is the male that gets to move in bigger and wider space than the female. Thus, the male is active not only in looking at the female and objectifying her but also taking a bigger space for both gaze and movement while the female is in static position or moves only as far as the man allows.

3.2 Fetishism: Beauty in Display.



Figure 1. The woman gives a constant side glance as she passes by the camera in *Kimat Di Matam* (Romy Anghel 2008)



Figure 2. The man and woman pose during picture taking, *Kimat Di Matam* (Romy Anghel 2008).

Fetishism objectifies the woman by looking at her as a mere display of beauty, making her a reassuring object rather than a threat. (Rose 2012) This manifests by focusing on the physical aspects of the woman or anything about her which can be redecorated to be pleasing for men (e.g. hair, face, body, clothing, etc.). These are also emphasized by the use of camera movement techniques such as close up, zoom in, tilt up/down, etc.

The first appearance of the woman was in a slow motion. She was walking while passing by the camera while giving a sideways glance (Fig. 1). The side glance of the woman was portrayed as a show of interest emphasized by giving a welcoming big smile.

Figure 2 is a powerful contradiction shown wherein the woman wore sunglasses as the man stood behind her. The infatuation had caused a negative effect to the man for him to say that he was deceived. The uncertainty of having the woman made it worse. The sunglasses were used to make the woman look good. At the same time, the hiding of eyes removes or lessens the anxiety it has caused the man making the woman a lot better.

Aside from the sunglasses, the woman in the music video was dressed up in a westernized sense. In Fong's (2006) study on pop culture, the Igorots have learned to appropriate American songs by using their own language but borrowing the tunes from these songs. In the same way, the music videos also used accessories for the woman that resembles American-ness. The woman was shown with long hair, shades, necklace, shoulder bag, top and boot cut – a typical Southern American girl. Boot cut jeans are for the comfort of wearing boots and are usually used by cowboys. (History of Jeans, 2009)

In the ending part of the song, the man mentioned his intentions to make the woman complete, as he will be the one to bring true happiness and amusement in her eyes. The man was very persistent in pursuing the girl as a way of rescuing her, of making things right for her.

In the music video of the song *Adak Liv-an Sik-a* (I Cannot Forget), it shows how the man and woman met and how devastated the man was when the woman liked someone else. Other than these are scenes of the man's memories of the woman when they are still so close together; of how he fell in love. The music videos presented these memories by showing

scenes of woman posing and projecting on the camera, the woman being pursued and the man being the one giving gifts to her. Often, the face of the woman would be shown in mid shot or close up shot. Close up and mid shots are used for a more intimate relationship, a threat turned into a reassuring object. (Rose 2012)

The music video of the song *Marikit She Benguet* (Lady in Benguet) begins with an excessive use of flower and the eye contact that the woman does with the audience. Most of the shots taken were during a beauty pageant, wherein the women were wearing make-ups and long gowns.



Figure 3. Women supposedly doing their work but is shown to pose with their bilao in Marikit She Benguet (Raul Beray 2008).

While the song mentions the women working in the field, the portrayal showed something else. The *bilao* was only used as props for the women as they posed and smiled at the camera. The setting seen were only at the backyard or in front of the house, not in the actual field. This is also present in the song *Igorota* (Igorot woman) wherein mentioning the women's work focused only on the *bilao* being worn by a smiling woman.

Just like the song *Kimat Di Matam*, this song also starts with a midshot of a woman giving a sideways glance at the camera but this time the make-up used made the eye more visible and expressive.

As we went through the music video, the lady in Benguet was mainly defined by the standards of being in a beauty pageant – elegant looking, wearing make-up, fashionable. We all know that when someone joins a female pageant, there are standards that they follow.

But what is common is the use of make-up to have a “better” grooming. May it be a beauty and brain, it was always the beauty that comes first. Fiske (1987) argued that ideological codes such as that of attractiveness can be condensed to the of a lipstick. He elaborated it by picturing the villainess who is more moral than the villain but her image should not cross that of the hero or heroine. It was her lips then that differentiates her from the heroine – thinner and less sexually attractive. (cited in Marris and Thornham 2004) In the same way, the make-up used in the music videos showed that the eyeshadow that gives more emotion to the eyes with the eyeliner makes the eyes sharper and bolder; the nose line making the nose look pointed and a perfect eyebrows, etc. – all of these were used to enhance and to make the women more pleasing to be looked at.



Figure 4. Clips portraying beautiful ladies of Benguet in Pageant as the setting in Marikit She Benguet (Raul Beray 2008).

Figure 5. Igorot man and woman wearing traditional clothes

Figure 5 highlights the difference between man and woman, male and female when it comes to clothing and grooming. Grisham (1931) describes a male and female Igorot through the clothes that they used. A man's tribe can be distinguished from the others by the pattern of his *G-string* while woman wore a *tapis* or a skirt. She further described the woman by "her long hair coiled in rope-like strand around the head ... and her standing is seen by the number of strings of agate beads as well as her gold earrings" (339). Though not as exact as the above texts described, some of the descriptions were also seen in the music videos. The male wears a vest with a band in his head, having a short haircut; where in totality is seen to be masculine. While the female wears a *tapis* or skirt and has her hair much longer than the male, which is seen to be feminine.

3.3 Domestication of Women

For Freud, the anatomical difference has been the basis of sexual difference – male and female, where female was seen as lacking. This view of female as lacking was seen in the gendering of our society.

In our study, we have identified that the domestication of women can be rooted from the naturalized voyeuristic gaze of male towards female. It has been a form of punishment, leaning on its more sadistic side. Going back

further, seeing the female as lacking, as not having penis has been the primary basis of the gendering of male and female is biological difference such as in their reproductive systems. (Eviota 1993) Culture has made the difference of male/men and female/women natural and innate thus causing us to do our work according to what seemed to be predestined for our gender. (Eviota 1993)

Women were known to have works that are related to the "natural" side (e.g. nurturing, sex, eating, etc.), making them live into the "natural sphere". (Salleh 1997, 54) The same societal expectation is seen in Cordillera through their songs as studied by Fong (2006). In the song, *Igorota*, there were lines that mentioned the expectations for women. "*Tan am-mo na ay es-estem abes ina, Ya ay-wanam di pamilya*" (because he knows that you will take good care of my mother and your family). This is not just a description of the woman but also a command enforced by the man to the woman. It is a way of instructing the woman, that in order for them to be liked and praised they should stay the way they are. Furthermore, they should be able to do house chores and take care of the family, that as a woman you should be good at it. This shows how men dictate and define the role of the women through the songs. The mother of the man was also separately mentioned in the song; she stays inside the house to be taken care of by her wife. It shows then that women do really

stay inside the house. She could go out and work in the field (*Nagaget ka ay man-ubla si nem-a*) but only in support to her husband, not as a way of supporting the family which boxes women to their nurturing world. Salleh (1997) explains this as an effect of men's tacit presumption of woman's animality that rationalized women's exclusion from the economic production.

Kabanbantayan (Hometown) is a song that talks about the things that are to be proud of in the Cordillera such as clean rivers and wide places. It was highlighted that these places are their source of living since the time of their ancestors. The works mentioned were fishing, hunting, cultivating and planting rice – all associated to what men do. Unlike in the song, *Biag di mangasawa* (The Married Life), it does not only talk about how the man punishes the woman by making her serve him in their married life. It also shows that the things he made the woman do had something to do only with works inside the house. The song mentions having someone to help you with work, to scratch your back and to talk to at night *who will never complain*.

In terms of roles, the thought of women being pursued by men shows that women only need to wait and men will do most of the move, men will initiate the relationship – a passive/female and an active/male. In the music videos analysed such as *Biag Di Mangasawa* and *Aysbi Ngatay Shanag Jo* showed that men started to domesticate women after their marriage. Most of the clips showed that women as the one who cooks for the family, washes the clothes and the dishes, scrubs the husbands back as compared to men who chops the wood (in *Biag di mangasawa*) and goes hunting and fishing (in *Kabanbantayan*). This is similar to what Eviota (1993, 11) described as the reproductive or woman's works: "it includes processing and preparing food, house cleaning, gathering firewood, fetching water."

4. Conclusion

The music videos that were analysed showed that the female body were objectified in either voyeuristic gaze or fetishist gaze. In voyeurism, the female were place in a platform wherein they can be focused on for a gaze. The male character in the music video tries to investigate or if not, the female character will end up being saved or being punished by the male character. The mise-en-scene of the music videos were also utilized for the voyeuristic gaze by showing shots that suggests "peeking in" such as pan to the right camera movements while hiding behind the leaves.

The female body being placed in a platform did not only suggest a voyeuristic gaze but also a fetishist one. The male characters were able to control the female characters in their thoughts by thinking of them or through a look that merely watches the female and finding pleasure in it. In most of the songs that used fetishist gaze involved male characters that were rejected by females while some used the female body as fillers and display of beauty. The male characters who were rejected used objectification as way of coping with the discomfort that the female characters brought unto them. They did this by thinking about their good memories. It was further emphasized in the mise-en-scene part of the videos wherein the flashbacks were female characters projected to the camera, intentionally or stolen. They are either waving to the camera, smiling at the camera or doing seductive poses. There was also a dominant use of make-up wherein the eyeshadow gives emotion to the face; the eyeliner makes the eyes sharper and bolder; the nose line making the nose look pointe and a perfect eyebrows, etc. – all of these were used to enhance and to make the women more pleasing to be looked at.

It was also found out that the objectification of female body amplified the

stereotypes of femininity (female) and masculinity (male) and led to the domestication of women. Objectifying the women had been their defense mechanism not only on the castration anxiety but on different kinds of discomfort that men felt towards them such as rejection and uncertainty. The fetishist gaze had the greatest influence on how femininity was seen on females by their use of props, costumes and make-up. The domestication of women was a manifestation of the sadistic effect of voyeuristic gaze.

Therefore, female body in Cordillera music videos is being objectified through the lyrics of the songs and through the mise-en-scene used in the videos. The objectification of the female body being naturalized is one of the many explanations in the existence of myths of femininity and masculinity and not to forget, the domestication of women. This only shows what Eviota (1993, 26) also have said, “for the media, women re no more than dutiful housewives or the sexual objects of men”.

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