

BOOTY WITH BEAUTY

industry with purpose

This November, officials at the Miss World Inc were a determined lot. Protests, riots, and violence in Lagos, the venue of this year's beauty pageant left 200 dead and hundreds wounded. Religious leaders objected to the 'exposure' by swimsuit clad contestants, while feminists protested about the commodification of women. Nigerian officials were in a quandary. Undaunted, the organisers shifted the venue to London. While a few potential beauty queens were disturbed enough by the turn of events to opt out, others were undeterred. What exactly are the contentious issues? Here are some voices on the subject:

Yes, a beauty pageant is a trivial indulgence, and some may argue that it even diminishes the status of womanhood. However, given a choice between the bearded wannabe Taliban face of any protagonist governor of Sharia, uttering his imprecations against the beauty contest on television, and the sight of sylphid aspirations of femininity on parade, I have no hesitation in opting for the latter. Never has a frivolity acquired such profundity in the pluralist character that is the very essence of the Nigerian nation!

Wole Soyinka, Nobel laureate for literature
Times of India, 02.12.2002



Karen

BEAUTY CONTESTS are strange events. These days, if you say you dislike them, you are told that you are a stuffy old feminist who cannot accept that the world has changed. And that just as the American interest in Iraq is not about democracy but about oil, so beauty contests are not about beauty but about commerce. So we must stop objecting and simply accept that it is oil and money that make the world go round. The world is certainly a big enough place to accommodate the promoters of the Miss World contest as well as those who oppose the commerce that flourishes on the basis of exploiting women's physical attributes. But that space shrinks when commerce overtakes common sense, overrules logic, ignores reality and reeks of crass insensitivity. This time round, all of this happened.

-Kalpana Sharma
The Hindu, 01.12.200

“ Nigerian Islam's encounter with that powerhouse of subversion, the Miss World contest, has been unedifying, to put it mildly. First, some of the contestants had the nerve to object to a Shariah court's sentence that a Nigerian woman convicted of adultery be stoned to death and threatened to boycott the contest – which forced the Nigerian authorities to promise that the woman in question would not be subjected to the lethal hail of rocks.

And then Isioma Daniel, a Christian Nigerian journalist, had the effrontery to suggest that if the Prophet Muhammad were around today, he might have wanted to marry one of these swimsuit hussies himself. Well, obviously, that was going too far. True-believing Nigerian Muslims then set about the holy task of killing, looting and burning while calling for Daniel to be beheaded, and who could blame them? Not the president of Nigeria, who put the blame squarely on the shoulders of the hapless journalist. (Germaine Greer and other British-based feminists, unhappy about Miss World's decision to move the event to London, preferred to grouse about the beauty contest. The notion that the killers, looters and burners should be held accountable seems to have escaped notice.) ”

Salman Rushdie
The New York Times, 27.11.2002