

Isimi Taiwo's Revelation of Gender a Paradigm through drawing

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Abstract. The role artists play in a society is dependent on how much attention he pays to the issues that affect and impact of the people. It is important to add that the mode of depiction in the visual arts also stands as a veritable portal that can make or mare the communication path. Taiwo Isimi relies on the representational art form of hyper realism, and is able appeal to a client's sensibility that exhibits a paradigm change that favour the female gender in a patriarchal society like Nigeria.

Keywords: Paradigm, female, male, girl, society, hyper realism

1. Introduction

Some artists continue to find the representational art form a veritable to describe and engage the viewer in the social changes that takes place in the various societies. While some artists argue that representational is not as potent as relying conceptual art, some artists are still able to rely on this art form to tease out paradigmatic nuances that are topical in man's daily lives especially in Nigeria. Gender roles around the world change periodically as a result of a variety of agencies such as wealth and poverty, social status and campaigns targeted at revealing the challenges women face when some roles are adhered to that are inimical to the place of the woman in the society and the home. Tayo, Chukwuedozie and Ozoya (2015: 6) aver that

In almost all societies, men and women differ in the activities they undertake, in access and control over resources, and in participation in decision making...The crucial aspect is that there are not just gender differences but there are fundamental gender

inequalities. No matter where you are born, you will generally tend to have greater options, more opportunities and more resources-if you were born a male. Changing gender inequalities is a long-term complex project.

It is important to point out that the type of upbringing a male has while growing up either informs or misinforms the male of the roles of a woman to her detriment or favour. The author of this article was brought up in such a way that he and his siblings took turns to do dishes, cook, sweep and do laundry as early as age 8. This type of upbringing hence makes it possible for he and siblings to find it difficult to lead lives that believe in the stereotypical gender roles of what males and females should do; especially when they got married. Tayo, Chukwuedozie and Ozoya (ibid: 8) add that

Patriarchy functions as a significant part of Nigerian society, especially because the Nigerian culture is structured within a patriarchal order. ...Women's role in the home focuses on the care of the children, attending to the needs of the husband, and socializing children to honour their families.

A variety of myths are relied upon that has led to the undue advantage held out against the woman. For instance, the Biblical account of the creation of Adam and Eve in the book of Genesis is always used to further attempt at make the female to be more silent and passive in favour of the male. The line that a rib was taken from the man's side to create the woman is usually the punchline that is used to have shackled than motivated to be supportive. Even though the Bible mentions thus, "I will make a suitable companion to help him", it is seldom viewed as a

way through which both the male and female come together to literarily help one another. But for those that have a multiple unbiased view of things, such people this article holds unequivocally will relate with this scripture and others in favour of both the male and the female.

The society has the police and the law courts as the revered and feared agency that are legally shouldered with the responsibility of upholding the law. With the aid of published laws and the members of every society are expected to live as law abiding citizens. However, musicians, playwrights, dramatists, novelists and visual artists all stand through their variety of depictive media serve as the unlearned judge of the society. The different types of narratives that affect the vulnerable in any society are constantly criticized by all artists. As the continue to wrestle with its ailing past by drawing comparisons with developmental attainments in other societies, it rises through a variety of agencies to make amends to any narrative that serves as impediment to any section of the society. Western education, electronic and the print media, and the social media platforms continue to aid the advancement of changes view themselves as individuals and as a collective. One of such narrative is that which attempts to cage the woman into the kitchen and bedroom. As much as the wall of separation between male and female continue

to fall into experiential spatial liberty of equity. Visual artists like Taiwo Isimi continue to rely on the pulse of public sensibility to make attempts through art practice to elicit constant positive change.

2. Art and Gender Paradigm

Taiwo Isimi studied at the University of Lagos graduated with BA degree in Creative Art in 2009. His depictions are hyper realistic such that the untrained eye will conclude that the drawings he makes are mere photographs. Be that as it may, his artistic oeuvre reveals his ability and skill to use the media he chooses to depict issues bothering on human behavior. In an email communication between Taiwo and the author, which was prompted by his Instagram post of his, he explained that “I was already on the verge of drawing something similar to what my client gave me to draw. It was about a woman plaiting a girl’s hair plaiting another girl’s hair. ...But when I saw this particular picture I thought to myself “I ‘ve never seen a man loosen a child’s hair before...interesting. I was drawn to the composition of the two subjects and their gesture, especially the look in the baby girl’s eyes. I was even more committed to doing the drawing when my client told me of the relationship between him and his daughter’.

Figure 1
 Title: Father and daughter
 Size: 16.5 by 23.4 inches
 Medium: Graphite, charcoal and pastel on paper
 Year: 2019
 Source: Taiwo Isimi



Isimi, through his drawing depicts a liberated wife that is practically a partner as seen in the man loosening his daughter’s hair. Again, it is obvious the daughter has a father she can hold out as model in choosing a husband when she comes of age for marriage. The girl’s face seems to tense gently at the intrusion of the photographer. Instead of feeling vulnerable about having her father loosen her hair, she sits poised in admiration of his decision as a totem experience of him playing father at a role her mother has and continues to play. This reveals to her another side of what her father can do ignorant of the abomination that trails her father’s action. The look is sustained in the finished drawing with the air of urgent want for privacy with her father that easily

emits his dedication to a role of loosening his daughter’s hair. He works through each of the corn-row styled hair with the hair-pin used by many women for loosening plaited hair. The stark reality depicted in the drawing reveals an air of growing strong bond that the father has and continued to build as time goes on. The father’s act therefore marks an unforgettable experiential milestone both subjects and the family as a whole. And when she turns eighteen and stops plaiting her hair and begins to braid her hair with hair extensions, she will still make it a point of duty to show it him to earn his complement.

The stereotype that had boxed the woman into restriction has been opened through a variety of agencies and advocacies, and yet how much still needs to be done are still been addressed through various institutions. As modernization continue to take root in every culture, Nigeria seems to be ahead in Africa with evidence seen when Mrs. Franca Afegbua became the world's first black female senator, Professor Grace Alele-Williams became Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin and first woman to receive a doctorate degree; this not to forget in the annals of history when Mrs. Funmilayo Ransom Kuti (d. 1978) became the first woman to buy and drive a car.

The economic status of the subjects in this composition reveals that the man and his daughter are of the middle class. The long-sleeved shirt and knee-length pair of trousers tells of the amount of modernization imbued in the family. The daughter is seen wearing a pair of knee-length trousers and a short sleeved shirt, presents her as a girl that most probably attends a private school. The settee is most probable made of leather and serves as a pointer to his taste for some classy items. The other furniture in the drawing is the side-stool the girl is sitting on. The artist has chosen to leave the background bare, perhaps, with the aim of directing viewers focus on the two subjects. It is however pertinent to add that his use of the coloured medium of pastel to depict the girl's clothes takes the focus away from the man loosening a female's hair. Yet, the wonder for many viewers is to continue to baffle at it the man loosening his daughter's hair. When the author asked him via WhatsApp messenger why the girl's clothes are coloured he said "There isn't any particular reason really. Dats how her clothes r in d reference. I use saturated colours in my pencil drawings as part of the uniqueness in my works". It is clear that in his desire to carve a niche for his work because of the rising number of hyper realist artists, that singular act will always suggest to some viewers that the focus is the girl and not the strangeness in the man loosening a girl's hair.

It is pertinent to hold from observation that the client and the daughter are both Christians which points to why he can easily rely on the sermons taught in the church he attends to have impacted on him enough to loosen his daughter's her without pride or prejudice. The look on the man's face is that of someone that does not fill he is forced to do what he is doing but one of duty as a father and a husband. The daughter's stir at the first viewer; the photographer, says nothing near shock or disgust but of pride that her is loosening her hair. This is an experience that she will grow up with share among her female peers with

pride and joy. It might also become a 'trophy' of sorts she will continue to hold out at her friends with an opportunity she will hope she can open to her friends to come over the next time her father promises to loosen her hair. The drawing itself becomes a first trophy for the family to cherish and show to any that would care to appreciate beyond its being an art work but a totem of gender equity of imminent changing paradigm in patriarchy laden nation.

3. The Female Space

The mantra that the 'place of the woman is in the kitchen' is nothing short of cliché as more women in Nigeria and the world over are proving the equal worth in national and international development in areas of specialization initially viewed as the specific preserve for the male. Barker (2012: 185) explains that "Cultural modernism is an experience in which 'All that is solid melts into the air'. This phrase coined by Marx, suggests change, uncertainty and risk." The change taking place continues to favour the female and of course the male, because when a woman is allowed to go through the tiers of schooling get a job or start a business, she is able to assist the husband in the financial responsibilities in the home that was initially solely held by the man.

Storey (2012: 128) adds that "Post-structuralism reject the idea of an underlying structure upon which meaning can rest secure and guaranteed. Meaning is always a process. What we call the 'meaning' of a text is only ever momentary stop in a continuing flow of interpretations following interpretations". Cultural stereotypes have continued to change that continue to make equity possible for both male and female in some spheres of life and living. The patrilineal life style that structures the woman's duties and responsibilities is fast changing and this is what Taiwo avers through his client's experience. In local parlance, Taiwo's client would be said to have been bewitched by his wife. The gender stereotype expects that the woman should loosen her daughter's hair and when she cannot carry out the duty, any other woman she trusts should do it. Sibani (2017: 433) avers that

Religion plays a vital role in the cultural life of different spaces. It is deeply rooted in peoples' experiences and influences the socio-economic and political direction of the society. The status of women in the society in the society is an outcome of the interpretation of religious text and the cultural and the institutional set-up of religious communities. The role of religion is obviously complex and it varies across time and space.

The plethora of innumerable works in the representational art form made in the last five to six years brings one to ask what informs the message behind the works made. Only the artists name will be mentioned and these are artists that produce paintings and drawings in the hyper-realistic form, namely, Olumide Oresgun, Raji Bamidele, Ayo Filade, Chiamonwu Joy and Arinze Stanley. These artists listed above are Taiwo's contemporary and leave and practice together in Lagos, yet, this article seeks to advance a study that sets a parameter to assess the content and context of their depictions with a view to tease out the topical messages the present and discuss it value statement they make. Inference is drawn from Soyinka in Nolim (2009: 222) who holds that "I believe implicitly that any work of art which opens out the horizons of the human mind, and intellect, is by its very nature, a force for change, a medium for change". This statement is remains a call to all artists that use their various medium of expression to reveal the various topical issues that prevents human liberty which Wole Soyinka had, and still holds dearly. Chinweizu et al in Nolim (ibid: 88) aver that

The artist in the traditional African milieu spoke for and to his community. His imagery, themes, symbolism, and forms were drawn from a communally accessible pool. He was heard. He made sense, and again; For the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writer, as a public voice, assure a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writings, and not preoccupy himself with his puny ego. Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment is mandatory for the artist.

This observation and responsibility continues to be evident in the contemporary and modern artists. Isimi and some other visual artists continue to use their art to advance human freedom with the aim of attaining equity in the face of the yawning gap that exists between both gender. The artist is the barometer of any society and the drawing serves as a window to what is happening in the life of a few other men; just like the author of this paper does to his younger daughters.

4. Conclusion

For the visual artist to maintain its relevance in the Nigerian society, perhaps, the representational art seems to be a portal that can close the yawning gap of art appreciation, for most parts of the country. This is borne out of the fact that more than 70% of exhibitions held in Nigeria annually takes place in

Lagos, from observation. Therefore, it is important for an orientation take place early in every individual's life. The challenge of artistic knowledge and experience can only be gained from offering Fine Arts at the primary and secondary schools when the subject is made compulsory at bot tiers of education. This will on the long run make it possible for more Nigerians to find the representational art form in general as totem for measuring and proving their level of self-development in a society that is always in a flux.

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