

Of moments and memories: remembering and the art of photography in the works of Sunmi Smart-Cole

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ABSTRACT: *Photography has served the purpose of documentation, information, education and creation of works of art. Telling stories without the illustrations such as what photography provides is somehow abstractive. Creative photography as evident in the works of Smart-Cole has aided the proliferation of images arising from improvement in technology than any other work of art. This study investigates photography through the lens of literature; how Sunmi Smart-Cole found his métier in photography and analysed moments and memories in the works of Sunmi Smart-Cole. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with Smart-Cole, and from journal articles, books, and Internet sources. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive approach of art historical research. The study argues that with photography, the world is offered a series of discrete histories and sets of anecdotes and faits divers. It concludes that Smart-Cole's photographs generally arouse interest, desire and curiosity, they also reflect spontaneity; the narratives are useful memories that aid the remembering of diverse contexts of identity, and the socio-political history of the Nigerian nation.*

KEYWORDS: photography, images, moments, memories, portraiture, sunmi smart-cole

INTRODUCTION

The word "Moment" is a derivative of the Latin word "*Mōmentum*" which implies action, movement, impulse, or course of events. A moment is a comparatively short period, a stage in one's historical or logical development. A moment can be interesting, funny, happy, joyous, or sorrowful. The Italian poet, Cesare Pavese (1908-1950) has observed that often, "We do not remember days, we remember moments". Whereas,

one hardly knows the value of a moment until it becomes a memory. The birth, naming, graduation, wedding, installation/coronation, swearing-in, and cultural ceremonies, as well as sporting activities, are interesting and wonderful memories worthy of being recorded for future purposes. When a dear one dies, the whole lifetime of such an individual becomes a memory, indeed, a memory to treasure! A moment lost, is gone forever, except it is captured by memory, the retention of which is more or less ephemeral; a moment can also be captured by mechanical devices such as in photography, which makes the memory a bit more permanent. This study investigates how photography has been used to capture moments, keep memories alive, and aid the remembering of important circumstances.

Photography is the art and science of “drawing with light.” Photography has been a very effective medium to capture the beauty, bring out people's emotions, and have a vision of the world in a tangible form. A picture or pictorial representation produced through photography is known as a photograph. The photograph is empirical evidence that captures historical documents of different subjects and events around the world. It also serves as a work of art and has been used to keep fond memories of great moments such as marriage, naming ceremonies, and rites of passage. In essence, photography has been used to record different people's personal and corporate histories, values, feelings, and cultural environments. The photograph holds sway above the written word; hence, the maxim “a picture is worth a thousand words”, that is, no amount of words can describe an image or an object exactly. Hence, a piece of a photograph can give a lot of information and convey so much meaning more effectively than a lot of words used in descriptive language. Photography can be used to trace the origin of an event and navigate the missing gap in historical development.

With the advent of photography, its subsequent progressive technical processes allow the printing of just a copy on a plate or glass, thus reserving the privilege and access to photography to the elites because photography was very expensive (Turner, 1987). Photography entails the use of a camera which is often manipulated for personal creative expression. The earliest camera known as the Camera *Obscura* was used by Renaissance artists to achieve precision in perspective drawing and painting of realistic sceneries. Thomas Wedgwood, Heinrich Johann Schulze, John Herschel, Joseph Nicéphore de Niepce, Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, and William Henry Fox Talbot were among the initial inventors/contributors to the development of Photography (Litchfield 1903, Turner 1987, Richard 1995, Collier 1997, and Hirsch, 1999). Photography differs, and significantly outwits all other techniques of image creation in the visual arts, both in capacity and capability (Oguibe, 2004).

The first photographic studio in Lagos was operated by T. Harpin at Ita-Faji Market as far back as 1885, later by T. Y. Taylor in 1886, and, N. Walwin Holm in 1897 at Tinubu Street, Lagos (Adeniyi-Jones 1984, and Haney 2011). The socio-political and cultural developments prior to Nigeria's independence and much after, set the stage for a new order. The emerging generation of photographers eagerly took advantage that photography offered to document Nigeria's path into nationhood. By the 1960s, photography had become a crucial part of the people's lifestyle not only in Lagos but

all over the nation. Photographers document sceneries and events such as landscapes, naming, birthday, and wedding ceremonies; it is also used in making portraits, passport photographs, and pictures for obituary columns in the newspapers (Adeniyi-Jones). Photography is used to collect, classify, document and catalogue all categories of visual data for different purposes; it is also used in the creative industries vis-à-vis advertising, fashion, journalism, and film production; in medicine, surgery, law and surveillance activities for security diagnosis, as well as in contemporary digital culture.

Photography has thus become ubiquitous as a social phenomenon; hence, this study examines photography through the lens of literature; how Sunmi Smart-Cole found his métier in photography, it also analysed moments and memories in the photographs of Sunmi Smart-Cole. The methodology employed is qualitative, data were sourced through in-depth interviews with Smart-Cole, and from journal articles, books, and Internet sources. The study relies on the descriptive theory as argued by Collingwood (1994) and Day (2008) to describe different subjects as captured in the photographic genre of Smart-Cole, with a view to obtaining a useful and meaningful understanding of the photographs. Data collected were analysed using the descriptive approach of art historical study as argued by Panofsky (1955), D'Alleva (2005), and Munsterberg (2009).

Photography through the lens of literature

There is a number of studies on the inventions and developments of photography, others investigate photography as an evidential truth, as a means of data collection and investigative journalism, as a tool in the hand of missionaries and colonial propagandists, as well as a means of expressing cultural individualism, social status, and reconstruction of African history. For instance, Hopkinson (1980) examines the developmental stages of photography as one astonishing, and a rather strange forecast made by de la Roche (1729-1774) in a work called "Giphantie," an imaginary fiction. Roche predicted it was possible to capture images from nature, on a surface which had been coated with a sticky substance. Roche argues it would not only provide a mirror image on the sticky platform but would remain on it after it had been dried in the dark and that the image would remain permanent. Turner (1987) observes that the Camera Obscura was significant to the development of photography; it was used by Renaissance artists such as Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci as an aid in drawing pictures from the right perspectives. Turner's study further traces the fundamentals of photography to consist of optics (light), chemistry, and darkroom which marked the two processes in the development of photography:

Collier (1997) traces the landmark attained in photography to the first successful attempt by Nicephore Niepce who experimented with material that hardened when exposed to light but requires eight hours for the image to form. The image in this experiment was the historic landscape picture of a building and a tree, which became the first surviving photograph that sets the stage for the quest to find a lasting way of making photography accessible to many. Collier also observes that Louis Daguerre and William Henry Fox Talbot invented "Daguerreotype," and "Calotype" or "Talbotype"

in their separate experiments respectively. These were the first photographic processes available to the public and were widely used from the late 1830 to the 1850s.

The studies of Pinney (2011), Edwards (1997, 2001, 2006, 2011) and Vokes (2012) inter-switched photography and anthropology in a manner that explored views about ethnographic material and its relations to knowledge construction. Photography is seen as a tool for anthropologists/ethnographers, it offers them a dual opportunity as observers and participants in the processes of data collection. Geary (1991) examines the relationship between the photographer, the subject/object and the need to redefine methods by African historians to look critically at pictorial records and how they complement other forms of evidence. Sawatzky (2011) describes photography as a tool used for social engagement, which is also used to collect, classify and catalogue all kinds of visual data. Bajorek (2020) uses formal analyses of images and ethnographic fieldwork with photographers to understand how photography could be used in decolonial engagement and contribute to social and political change. Bajorek further argues that photography as an evidential truth can be used to bring the past to the present in which African states can benefit so much by bridging the lingering historical and practical gap through the appropriate use of photography and cultural images. Jenkins (1985) observes that information provided by photography in missionaries' publications between 1863 and 1888 was used as a tool for connecting people in the West with the realities of the socio-cultural environment where the missionaries operated in Africa. Thus, photography helps as a verifiable evidential truth to reinforce the messages the missionaries preached. Jenkins argued that some African elites see some photographs by the missionaries and colonialists as a tool of propaganda to subjugate Africans and the African culture into a Western mode to prove superiority. Oguiibe (2004) also examines the incomparable form of the image-making of photography over other visual arts, and how it has been used as a tool of colonialism in Africa. Macmillan (1968) examines the works of George S. A. Da Costa and Walwin Holm as one of the earliest professional photographers in Lagos, Nigeria. Da Costa's works cover the construction of the railway from Lagos to Jebba, and to Kaduna in the late nineteenth century. The works of these two photographers cover various subjects on outdoor and portraits of distinguished colonial and indigenous people across West Africa.

Cohen, Colard, and Paoletti (2016a) examine the practice of studio photography from the 19th Century to the periods of independence in Africa. The study relies on the works of four contemporary photographers to understand the contextuality of the subjects. It argues that the works of the photographers exemplify novel creativity and versatility in portrait photography and that photographic portraits evince the subjects' identities and social status; it also serves as a window to understanding African realities. Cohen, Colard and Paoletti (2016b) examine relies on the works of four photographers across Africa (Sammy Bolaji, Mohamed Camara, Saidou Dicko, and George Osodi) to trace the history of portrait photography. The study argues that since the 1990s, photography has evolved from the portrayal of absolute realism to portraiture beyond self-representation; this has resulted in a well-established genre of African photography with a distinct style of individual photographers.

Photography speaks volumes about cultural individualism, social status, unity, and friendship. The study of Sprague (1978) relies on the 1970s' examples of Ila-Orangun, southwestern Nigeria, to illustrate the aesthetics of the charming portrayal of self among the Yoruba. Sprague argues that photography is used among the Yoruba to create an identity on the portrayal of who they are, and how they wished to be seen; and as a visual medium for artistic, political, and cultural consciousness. Nwafor (2011) investigates the photographs of the uniform dressing pattern of the Yoruba (*aso-ebi*) during social engagements in Lagos. Nwafor argues that the subject matter of contemporary photography has changed in form and style with the focus shifting from personal portraiture to a wide range of uses which include pressing political and other socio-cultural dynamics. Adeeko (2012) investigates the show of affluence and portrayal of self-dignity through photography in *Ovation Magazine* in contemporary Lagos, Nigeria. Lawal (2001) examines the themes, sources of inspiration, aesthetics, techniques and styles in the works of three Nigerian photographers: Sunmi Smart-Cole, Don Barber and Phillip Trimnell. The study argues that photography can be used to advance the course of humanity through documentation of positive ideals and values as well as the historical landmarks of the socio-cultural phenomenon. Bowles (2016) relies on the studio photographs of Felicia Abban to analyse dress politics and the framing of self in Ghana. The photographs reveal Abban's combination of traditional and contemporary artistry to depict style and elegance through a lifestyle of dressing in flamboyant Ghanaian wax-prints attire aimed at looking good.

Mthethwa, Brielmaier, and Enwezor (2010) examine the works of Zwelethu Mthethwa whose photographs explored the urban, rural and industrial landscapes in South Africa. Mthethwa's used photography to reconstruct the black South Africans' history as dignified people who are resilient under unpleasant socio-economic situations. The study reveals the efforts of the people to maintain their socio-cultural uniqueness through their choices of dressing and the decoration of their homes and worship centres. Mthethwa's photography questions the Western documentary conventions that project "Afro-pessimism", and advocates a paradigm shift, it also offers a new technique marked by colour and collaboration between the photographer and the subjects. Sey (2015) examines the murder of two press photographers with similar scenes of anti-apartheid activism in 1985 by using photographs as visuals to analyse and draw references on events in history. It concludes that photographic images can be used in investigative journalism, and as a means to spur viewers into civic action in response to the trauma they depict as an aesthetic image. The studies reviewed so far are useful contributions to scholarship; however, none of them specifically focused on the photography of Sunmi Smart-Cole.

Sunmi Smart-Cole found his métier in photography

Sunmi Smart-Cole (Figure 1) was born on September 25, 1941, in Port Harcourt, Nigeria, to a Nigerian mother and a Sierra-Leonean father. Smart-Cole is largely self-taught as he had little formal education due to financial constraints, he used to buy second-hand magazines with the intent of grasping the language, content and ideas. He also grew up in a pidgin English-speaking environment and would often tune his Radio to the British Broadcasting Corporation to listen to news/information before leaving for

work, this was an opportunity to master the tones and dictions of the newscasters. Smart-Cole became an elementary school teacher at age fifteen, in the rural area of Port Harcourt. He was apprenticed to an architectural draughtsman at age seventeen to learn the rudiments of architecture, a vocation in which he became an expert, he designed, among others, the country home of Sir Albert Margai, former Prime Minister of Sierra Leone.



Figure 1: Sunmi Smart-Cole
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

In 1964, Smart-Cole organised the maiden Nigerian Jazz festival at King's College, Lagos; and by 1966, he was appointed as an Artist and Road Manager by Steve Rhodes, a musicologist and bandleader who had a company that managed artistes. This afforded Smart-Cole to road-manage music maestros such as Fela Ransome-Kuti, Sir Victor Uwaifo, Sunny Okosun, Pat Finn and their musical bands among others; he also met many popular Lagos socialites that were in vogue. By 1967, Smart-Cole started operating a barbershop known as "Sunmi's Place", at No. 1, McEwen Street, off Herbert Macaulay Way, Yaba, Lagos. However, by September 1972, he shut down the barbershop and travelled to the United States of America where he worked as an electronic draughtsman. In what seems like a run-of-luck, Smart-Cole instinctively bought an Olympus camera in 1976 without the intention of becoming a professional photographer as he still had his job as a draughtsman. Getting the camera prompted him to enroll on a photography course at Foothill College, Los Altos, California; and within two years, Smart-Cole has become a good photographer. This is how Sunmi Smart-Cole found his *métier* in photography, the art that actually defined him as an artist with an international reputation.

He returned to Nigeria in 1982 as a leading professional photographer, and by 1983, he started working with the Guardian Newspaper where he pioneered the Photonews magazine featuring events for Nigerians overseas. Between 1985 and 1988, Smart-Cole was the Editor of Lagos Life magazine of the Guardian newspaper, he was appointed as the Managing Editor of the *Guardian* newspaper group; and later, the Photo Consultant to the *Daily Times* newspaper. Smart-Cole was appointed a contributing Editor to the *Ovation* (photographic) magazine in 1993, and Photography Director to

This day newspaper in 1996. Smart-Cole captured the iconic photograph that offered the international community their first glimpse of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida as the new Head of State in Nigeria after the coup d'état of August 1985. He eventually became the official photographer of Gen. Babangida's administration between 1985 and 1993. He started the Sunmi Smart-Cole Gallery of Photography at 7, Ararti Street, Yaba, Lagos, in 1990. Smart-Cole is a member of Photographers Association of Nigeria, he has also been rendering free services to train photojournalists and aspiring photographers.

Smart-Cole has three books published on his photography: *The Photography of Sunmi Smart-Cole* (1991); *A Pictorial View: the Foreign Policy of the Babangida Administration* (1993), and, *Sunmi's Lens – Medium Between Man and Nature* (2011). He has held more than 30 photography exhibitions across the globe; his first was a solo exhibition held at Stanford University, Stanford, California, in 1978. He was later invited by the Nigerian National Council for Arts and Culture to exhibit his works at the National Arts Theatre, Lagos, in December 1978. He has also exhibited in the USA, Liberia, Hong Kong, Yugoslavia, and in Nigerian High Commissions in Addis Ababa, Brazil, and London (to promote the country's image) as a cultural ambassador. Terra Kulture, Lagos, held a retrospective exhibition of his photographs in 2019. Smart-Cole has also won many honours, including the prestigious 3rd Commonwealth Photography Exhibition award in Hong Kong (1983); the JADEAS Trust award for creativity (2001); the first TINAPA Movie Awards "Achievement in Entertainment Award" (Golden Camera Award, 2007); the VIVANTE award as a Champion of Nation Building (Unique Value Innovators) 2008, and the Photo-Journalists Association of Nigeria (PJAN) award for Inspirational Support (2008); and a Life Achievement Award (2011). Smart-Cole was among the thirteen journalists from different media that received honorary awards at the 14th edition of the Wole Soyinka Award for Investigative Journalism in 2019.

Moments, Memories, and Photography

Photography has been playing significant roles in capturing admirations and other phenomenal experiences; reflections on such historic moments do not only fascinate the sight but also allure the soul. How could one tell stories without illustrations such as what photography provides? Or, how could one explain the look of the *Earth from the Moon* (Figure 2) without the aid of photography and would not look somehow abstractive? The photograph which has kept the memory of such a significant event alive was taken by astronauts on the Apollo 8 mission as they orbited the Moon in 1968. It afforded people to see for the first time what the Earth actually looked like from space (Kluger, 2017).

The Nok terracotta, the Ife naturalistic bronze figures and the Benin bronze figures are photographic representations that keep the memory of Nigeria's most important artistic legacies alive. Most of the Ife naturalistic bronze figures are personages of the *Ooni* (King of Ife, and spiritual head of the Yoruba race) which have been used as photographs by ethnographers and historians to trace the history of the Yoruba people. In addition, the *Ere Ibeji* (carved wooden twin figures) is a photographic representation

that keeps the memory of the departed twin alive among the Yoruba people. It also connotes spirituality which connects the dead with the living (Lawal 1996, 2001). This is akin to what used to happen in the Western world when portrait paintings were exclusive of the emperors and the nobles prior to the advent of photography.

The importance of photography in capturing moments and memories as a means of recording history is exemplified by the picture of Lagos showing Broad Street (Figures 3 and 4). Figure 3 reveals the Broad Street before Nigeria's independence in the early 1950s. The Carter Bridge (Figure 4), built in 1901 was the first bridge in Lagos and still exists although it has undergone diverse transformations. Figures 3 and 4 show some moments captured by photography and bring to memory the light human and vehicular movements as well as the bicycles as one of the means of transportation at the time the photographs were taken, as against the neck-breaking traffic jam of the present times. With photography, life style, social activities, and infrastructural development among others have been documented, portraiture dominates early subject matter, landscape, nature, sports, photo-journalism, and other socio-cultural milieu later became common practice.



Figure 2: Earth from the Moon (1968)

Source: http://cdn.theatlantic.com/assets/media/mg/photo/2017/04/portraits/of-the-earth-moon-system/m21_as11-44-1551/main_900.jpg?1493054046



Figure 3: Broad Street, Lagos, before Nigerian Independence
Source: BroadStreet403252017_https://lagosstudies.wcu.edu



Figure 4: The Carter Bridge, Lagos Built in 1901
Source: <https://buzznigeria.com/old-images-lagos/>

Critical Analysis of Sunmi Smart-Cole's Lenses

In analyzing the lens-captured images of Sunmi Smart-Cole, Panofsky's (1955) three methodological imperatives for addressing iconographic and iconological issues in art have been considered. These are Pseudo-formal analysis; Proper iconographical analysis; and Iconographical interpretation; these are also emphasized by D'Alleva (2005), and Munsterberg (2009). These scholars argue that formal analysis entails studying certain characteristics that an artist (photographer) wants to convey visually, these are line, shape, space, mass, scale, colour and the eventual composition of these

elements to express thoughts, ideas and inspirations. The works of Smart-Cole were analysed to obtain their intrinsic meaning and explain deeper emotions as expressed by the photographer. The photographs x-rayed larger pictures of the philosophical, political, religious, social statements and tendencies informing the Nigerian environment. The critique of Sunmi Smart-Cole's twelve (12) photographs under review can be captured under a major theme: Webbed Intrigues; these are representatives of photographs by Smart-Cole from 1983 through 2006. Smart-Cole's photographs are often in black-and-white, like the renowned American photographers, Edward Henry Weston (1886-1958) and Ansel Easton Adams (1902-1984). Black and white photographs eliminate distractions and increase creative tendencies, with distinctive romantic touch and nostalgia that suggest timelessness. Preston (2019) quoting Heinrich van den Berg argues that *"Color photography is like a novel that spells everything out in detail, whereas black-and-white photography is like poetry—its strength isn't in what's said; it's in what's left out."*

In "School Bus" (Figure 5), Smart-Cole captured the plight of students in one of the creeks of Niger Delta in Nigeria, the students are going to school in a paddled canoe sarcastically termed "School Bus". Such students ought to be in an engine boat, but poverty and lack of government attention to their plight resulted in what the photographer reflected sarcastically. Poignantly, the photographer seemed to express his deep feelings about the situation, position and lives of the lens-captured souls against an adroit government providing educational services to the downtrodden school-age children. Policies are formulated, resources are allocated, yet with little, almost insignificant success. The photographer reflected the touching, piercing, and pungently-pervasive effect of pretence, ignorance and a conspicuous false conception on the part of the Government and the Nigerian Ministry of Education. "Teacher Brutality" (Figure 6) expresses a significant aspect of school life, especially in the areas of students' management where someone is expected to teach, instruct, mentor and inculcate discipline. Sometimes the teacher-educationist display barbarity, cruelty, inhumanity, savagery, and engage in illicit immoral student-teacher sexual relationships. Smart-Cole's lens captured a moment of excess – corporal punishment rather than a moment of guidance and counseling. This photograph anticipates reforms in the management of discipline in the educational sector; a review of teaching methods, principles and practices in education to accommodate an improved approach to student management.



Figure 5: School Bus (2006)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole



Figure 6: Teacher Brutality (1984)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

“Stormy Times in the Niger Delta” (Figure 7) explicates all the catalytic effects of mineral exploration in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The region is characterized by politics associated with mineral exploration, environmental pollution/degradation, theft, revolt, banditry, brigandage, and excessive youth exuberance with restfulness. These activities in no doubt affected the development and future of the area represented by the teeming youths. A speed boat loaded with youths is seen against blustery water waves, this is nothing other than the expression of the precarious nature of happenings in the Niger Delta. “Wake up Nigeria” (Figure 8) represents the soul of a nation called “Nigeria; this is personified as a sleeping matured man, fully clad without shoes in an unwholesome environment. The male figure is the only human recognized in that

tattered environment, taking a nap on a dilapidated work table placed at the corner wall of unfinished block walls surrounded by litters of waste materials. An empty damaged canister of gas stands in the foreground. The entire composition substantiates a lack of consciousness: the male, fully-dressed figure without shoes epitomizes an incomplete 'questionable' dressing manifesting lack of direction and outright insensitivity. The dilapidated work table exemplified the partially fallen ruins out of misuse and neglect of the Nigerian Constitution upon which the entire administrative structure of the country rests. The damaged, emptied gas canister expresses a lack of energy in the sleeping male figure manifested as a soul that has been snuffed out of energy. 'Wake Up, Nigeria' therefore onomatopoeically captures the Nigerian nation, a strategically endowed entity which needs total reformation, the entire composition embodies a complete witticism.



Figure 7: Stormy Times in the Niger Delta (2006)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole



Figure 8: Wake Up, Nigeria (1984)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

“Fela Over-Dressed” (Figure 9) depicts Fela Anikulapo Kuti (1938-1997) an iconic figure who lived an entirely controversial life. Fela was popularly referred to as an enigmatic figure (*Abààmì Èdà*), he was a Nigerian multitalented individual: bandleader, multi-instrumentalist, music composer, sage, political activist, the creator of Afrojazz-funk, a brand of music that combines West African music with American funk and jazz, the genre has also gained worldwide acceptance. Fela was often a half-clad entertainer and performer in life and on stage, a character which labelled him as anomic, he was often at loggerhead with the Nigerian government, especially on issues of misrule and corruption. Although Fela was seen as an uncooperative, self-assertive, troublesome, and a polygamist; he was also an unapologetic Pan-Africanist who is highly-admired with world recognition as Africa’s brightest star artiste. Fela’s portrait as captured by Smart-Cole explicates richness, and, transfiguration, someone who chooses to be almost ‘undressed’ but was ‘over-dressed’ with accolades. In “Actress Omotola” (Figure 10), Smart-Cole presents the portrait of Omotola Jalade Ekeinde (b. 1978) one of the biggest stars of Nigerian movies industry (Nollywood) who has featured in over three hundred flicks. She holds the honour of being a Member of the Order of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (MFR), for contributing to the growth of the movie industry. Omotola was among the *Time Magazine*’s One Hundred Most Influential People in the world in 2013. Smart-Cole’s lens captured and explicates the changed face of Nigerian (African) women represented by Omotola who is quintessential of beauty and brain, an icon of recognition and acceptance, hope, authority, and confidence reflective of the modern African woman who has come to register her assertiveness and dominance on the world stage. “Fela Over-Dressed” and “Actress Omotola” epitomizes the influence of education in transforming an individual into an iconic personality which is recognized the world over.



Figure 9: Fela Over-Dressed (1986)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole



Figure 10: Actress Omotola (2004)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

“Two Tired Souls” (Figure 11) chronicles the state of despair, lack of clear vision, and despondency in both flora and fauna of the Nigerian landscape. There are two sets of souls in this photograph that explicates tiredness: a horse and the rider on the ground; and, two others running away from the scene at the far end of the picture. Metaphorically, both the horse and its rider were down as a result of failed strength – exhaustion in a deserted landscape; it is a picture of souls crying for help, tired of every sense of reasoning. Ironically, the two other souls in the background who could supposedly be the rescuers are also running away, an implication that they are tired and weary of rendering assistance. There is the probability that the patience, tolerance and pleasure of the two people running were exhausted. The horse rider could be said to personify Nigerian leaders while the horse epitomizes the Nigerian failed state with forlorn hope. However, in the true Nigerian spirit of resilience and “Never Say Die”; despite all odds, a typical Nigerian soul believed in the victory of good over evil; light at end of the tunnel; tenacity, and prevalence of success over vagaries of life: the horse and the rider are expected back on their feet. The spontaneity captured in the photograph is an allegorical statement about the Nigerian nation. “Meanwhile in Lagos” (Figure 12) depicts the metropolitan city of Lagos which used to be the seat of the government in Nigeria before the headquarter was moved to Abuja in December 1991, though it remains the economic nerve centre of the nation. Lagos chronicles various events witnessed across the federation from growing cultures to overblown, uncontrolled characters. Lagos is highly urbanized and ranked as one of the ten fastest-growing cities in the world. “Meanwhile” refers to a time before something happens at specified periods or possibly events happening simultaneously. As of 1985 when Smart-Cole captured this photograph, street fights and youth restfulness dotted the landscape of Lagos; as of now, insecurity, all sorts of agitations and uncertainties amidst economic hardship pervade the Nigerian landscape.



Figure 11: Two Tired Souls (1983)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

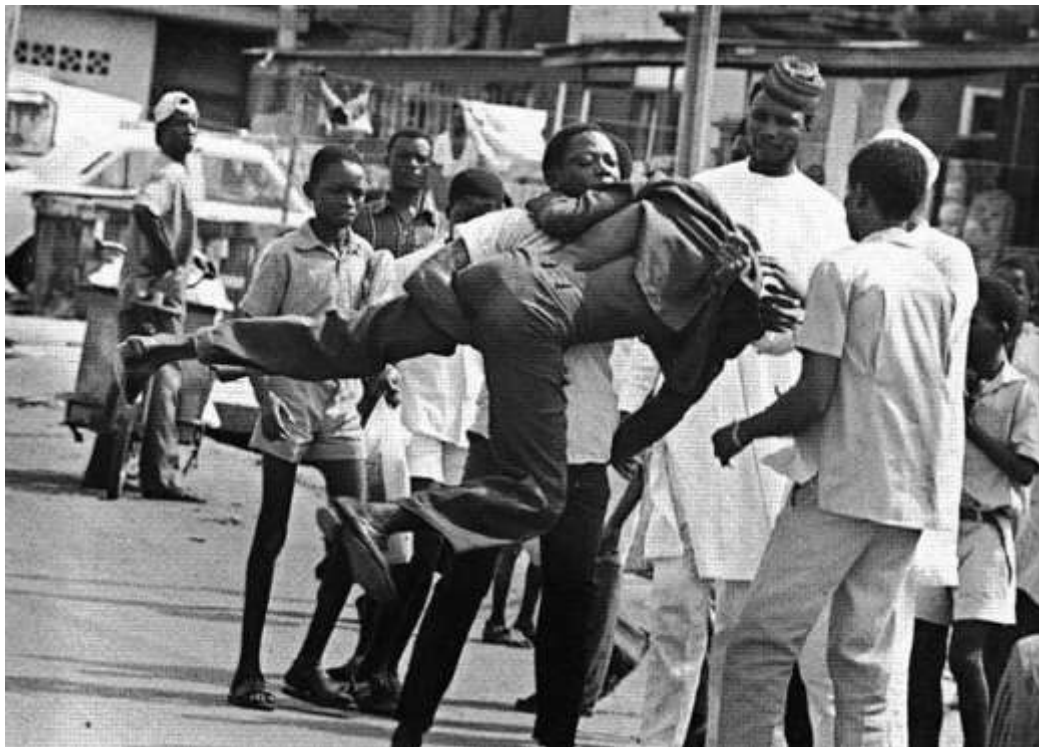


Figure 12: Meanwhile in Lagos (1985)

Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

In Figure 13, “Power!” (Gen. Muhammadu Buhari), this photograph symbolises the corrective “power” generated and institutionalized in 1983 to curb excesses of the

political and civilian ruling class characterized by profligacy, wanton indiscipline and corruption. A military junta carried out a coup d'état that ousted the democratically elected regime of Alhaji Shehu Usman Aliyu Shagari (1925-2018), and subsequently installed Major General Muhammadu Buhari (b. 1942) as the military head of state in Nigeria from December 31, 1983, to August 27, 1985. Within this short period, the Supreme Military Council headed by Buhari was deemed autocratic and repressive. The stern-looking, squared-face General, was tagged the “Strongman of Nigerian Rulership”. The photographer captured the profile head of Buhari set against the hovering Nigerian Coat of Arms. With the authoritarian military power, Buhari was able to curb rising crime and corruption waves in the country. He also carried out some social, political and economic reforms; he instituted the War Against Indiscipline (WAI) scheme that was strictly enforced by soldiers. Buhari promulgated decrees that purged the civil service structure, jailed more than five hundred politicians, detained individuals found compromising state security, he also detained many people without trial under the obnoxious Decree 4 of 1984, thus raising serious concerns about human rights. Buhari wields the “Power” of his military regime in an autocratic, dictatorial, and suppressive manner; he was overthrown in a Coup d'état in 1985.

Figure 14 captures the cynical portrait of “President Ibrahim Babangida”, the gap-toothed army General who deposed Major General Muhammadu Buhari. Babangida was the Military President of Nigeria from 1985 to 1993. Babangida instituted some economic and social reforms that stabilized the country. He worked towards returning the country to civilian rule, he however annulled the election that was adjudged the best ever presidential election in Nigeria, the June 12, 1993 election which was won by Chief M. K. O. Abiola of the Social Democratic Party. The annulment brought Babangida’s cynicisms to the fore, he was daubed “Maradona”, a name that stands for master dribbler, deceit, fascist, and the likes. Babangida’s image captured by Smart-Cole in the wake of his administration shows the ever-smiling face of the General covering his eyes, one that somehow explicates his inner character.



Figure 13: “Power!” (Gen. Muhammadu Buhari), (1984)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

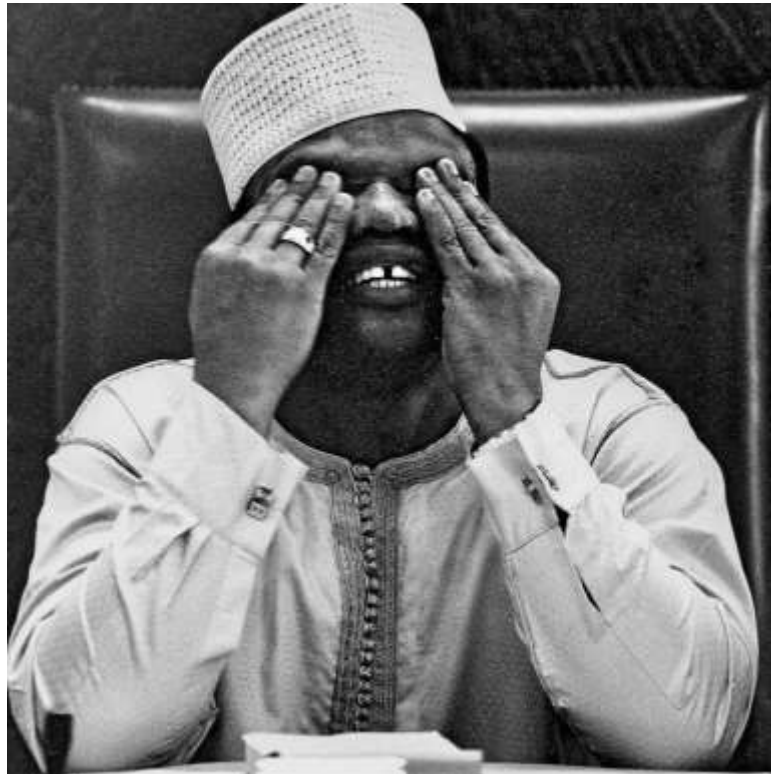


Figure 14: President Ibrahim Babangida (1985)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

The Arresting Officers, Judges, Executioners (Figure 15) typifies what Nigerians went through under the dictatorial military regime of Major General Muhammadu Buhari between 1983 and 1985. Smart-Cole aptly captured the challenges of the groaning common man in Nigerian society which was characterized by flagrant disrespect for the rule of law, misuse of power by the “lawless” law enforcement agents, and unprecedented abuse of human rights. In “Never Again” (Figure 16), Smart-Cole captured some law enforcement officers in uniforms with their guns, standing in the middle of a highway in Lagos. This was a common scene in Nigeria when Major General Muhammadu Buhari overthrew the democratically elected regime of Sheu Shagari on December 31, 1983. This led to many soldiers on the streets of Lagos and other major cities to consolidate the taking over of government by the military junta. The military and paramilitary personnel were high-handed and committed all sorts of atrocities and abuse of human rights that heralded the public outcry “Never Again”. Major General Muhammadu Buhari was later elected as Nigerian civilian President in 2015; unfortunately, the flagrant disrespect for the rule of law and human rights abuse that characterized his military regime between 1983 and 1985 have not abated. A social movement erupted throughout the major cities of Nigeria in October 2020 as many took to the streets to protest police brutality, widespread torture and other cruel, inhuman treatment/punishments of detainees in the custody of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a special branch of the Nigeria Police Force. The protest tagged “#EndSARS” started at the Lekki Toll Gate, Lagos, and was accompanied by vociferous outrage on

many platforms of the social media. Amnesty International (2016) has earlier noted the Nigeria Police Force for unlawful activities and extrajudicial executions.



Figure 15: The Arresting Officers, Judges, Executioners (1984)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole



Figure 16: Never Again (1983)
Source: Courtesy of Sunmi Smart-Cole

CONCLUSION

With photography, the world is offered a series of discrete histories and sets of anecdotes and faits divers; with the interesting, iconic and historical moments that have been captured. Human beings generally have a strong connection to their memories which photography has helped to make more permanent. Creative photography as evident in the works of Smart-Cole helps to visualize the gamut of socio-political challenges in Nigeria in a silent but salient manner. Sunmi Smart-Cole is reputed as the father of modern photography in Nigeria, dexterity and a high sense of visual aesthetics are the hallmarks of his photographs. He started as a photojournalist and advertising photographer, he also excelled in portrait photography with his subjects covering the common man and notable influential people across the globe. Smart-Cole's photographs generally arouse interest, desire and curiosity, they also reflect spontaneity. His photographs of the military era serve as visual activism that found the voice for the voiceless, this is in congruent with the argument of Sey (2015) that photographic images can be used as a means of spurring viewers into civic action. Smart-Cole's photographs capture salient scenes and moments that might have been ignored, yet the narratives are useful memories that aid the remembering of diverse contexts of identity, and the socio-political history of the Nigerian nation.

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