

Creating the Hope of New Nigeria Through Photography: An Analysis and significance of the picture titled “City boy in the 60s”

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Abstract

The advancement in technology has made it possible for hardware device to be used to take photographs, to store images and videos and to use them to convey messages and to create sentiments of different kinds. Digital camera is one of such devices commonly used by both professional and non-professionals to produce automatic images of people and events. While digital cameras can be used to produce photographic images for recording keeping and as souvenir of special events some also use digital cameras to take photographs for publicity, journalism and editorials. The different motives for using digital camera to take photograph prompt me to examine '*Creating the Hope of New Nigeria through Photography. Analysis and Significance of The Picture titled “city boy in the 60s”*'. This means that photographic picture could be used to inspire hope and fashion a new people. I shall analyse the photo titled “city boy in the 60s” and then bring out the relevance of the picture to the socio-political context in Nigeria.

Key words: City boy in the 60s, Contemporaneity, Photographer, Picture, Visual elements.

Introduction

In his keynote address at the American University of Nigeria (AUN), Akinwumi Adesina spoke about “Building a New Nigeria: Imperatives for Shared Prosperity¹”. He focused on what Nigerians can achieve in common if they harmonized their natural and human resources and especially, if the spirit of inclusiveness is promoted. On his part, Ogunde examined the historical crisis of Nigeria since independence in 1960 and

proposed “a road map to new Nigerian narrative”. He spoke about “revitalizing integrative institutions” and “building a truly democratic, inclusive governance structure².”

However, little attention is paid on how photographic picture can be used as a means of creating a new Nigeria. Pictures are representations or images created by different means and through diverse devices. Pictures are generally used for the purpose of teaching³, as souvenirs of special events and to convey different sentiments of love, well-being and existential realities. Pictures could be considered inanimate objects but they elicit some kind of *emotion* in the part of the human brain called amygdale⁴. Human beings react differently to the image before them. For this reason, a photographer's work could orient a particular audience to think, feel and act in a certain way.

While this work does not neglect other approaches to creating a new Nigeria, I intend to propose a new perspective of creating a new Nigeria through photography. In expounding my thought, I am going to use the descriptive analytic method. This is because this work shall be examining present issues in Nigeria which have historical antecedents. This method will facilitate a good association of the picture I am going to use and the lived-experiences of majority of the Nigerian people.

In the first part of this work, I will describe the universe of reference of the photographic picture taken by Esther Umoh as a framework for explaining why this picture is a relevant material for philosophical analysis. In the second part, I discuss some of the visual elements used in the analysis of photography, with a view of attributing to the picture the lived-experiences of millions of Nigerians. In the third part, I will reflect more on the significance of this picture for the emergence of a new Nigeria.

The photographer of the picture “City boy in the 60s”

According to Ukpong⁵, “Esther Umoh, a photographer and poet who shot the viral photo of Mr Obi in Lagos”. She is the official photographer for the Peter Obi campaign train. I was able to get a few information about the life of Esther Umoh. She is a Nigerian and the owner of a poetry brand

known as Pendrops poetry⁶. She is from Udong Uko LGA of Akwa Ibom State and a graduate of the Communication Arts Department, University of Uyo. She is the “last out of 4 girls and in a family of 7”. Her career as a poet was probably inspired by her Dad who was a poet and her elder brother who did poetry. And she wrote her first poem in JSS3. She wrote poems on different subjects such as about friendship. Although there are fragments of information about her love for poetry little or nothing is known about her interest in photography. However, the particular picture which made her popular was the one she titled: “City boy in the 60s”.

The universe of reference of the photographic picture “City boy in the 60s”

The universe of reference here is comparable to Husserl's phenomenological method, the transcendental epoché, where the focus is on the analysis of human experience instead of the natural world. The picture therefore indicates a universe composed of many people; it simply shows humanity and does not distinguish the ethnic group, tribe, religion or social status of anybody. I consider this picture “as the representation that the consciousness gives itself of an object, an event, a sensory impression, outside of any actual perception⁷”. In other words, it is an image that explains lived-experience of a people, not necessarily in the present but over the years; not essentially visible to the eyes but as but as they are intentionally felt and known by the people.

In line with Husserl's idea, the universe of reference here intends to establish “pure consciousness” irrespective of the presence or not of the familiar “world” which the people have always known. The “pure consciousness” is the same for everyone even though the description of the phenomenon is based on personal opinion. For example, many people could complain of hardship, but their complaints are based on individual judgment. Husserl distinguishes this “pure consciousness” from “indexical experiences”. The latter is characterized “by their *singularity*. Sometimes, individual experience of the subject could constitute his or her “actual world” and move gradually to many “possible worlds” which could be anticipated. This becomes the “intentional horizon” of the subject.

In presenting the universe of reference of the picture to be examined, the question of contemporaneity is very important. “Contemporaneity’ belongs to the being of the work of art. It constitutes the essence of ‘being present’⁸. It simply “means that in its presentation this particular thing that presents itself to us achieves full presence, however remote its origin may be. Thus contemporaneity is not a mode of givenness in consciousness, but a task for consciousness and an achievement that is demanded of it. It consists in holding on to the thing in such a way that it becomes ‘contemporaneous’⁹. In other words, the picture to be analysed will achieve its complete object as a phenomenon, not because of apparent existence, but most importantly because of the message(s) it communicates at-this-time to a large population at the same time.

From the above, it is possible to understand why “Gadamer positions the discussion of the phenomenon of art into a broader hermeneutic complex, which concerns the existential positioning of Dasein as being-in-the-world¹⁰”. Considering the full reality of human existence at the time this picture was taken, there is no doubt that it reflects the failing state of things in the society. However, this state of things should provoke human beings not only to conceive highly meaningful orientation to give to their lives, but also to work towards achieving the beautiful future they intend to give to themselves.

Nigeria: the condition of human survival since 2015

I am choosing Nigeria as a case study for two reasons: **1)** the picture was taken in Nigeria **2)** the picture reveals the “facticity” of human existence. Some of the state of affairs which overwhelmed Nigerians since 2015 to date are: the problem of insecurity, bad governance (leadership), unemployment and religious extremists. I shall comment on them briefly:

Insecurity: Here, insecurity is understood as “the state of being subject to danger or injury¹¹”. There is insecurity of lives and properties and the highest form of insecurity witnessed in Nigeria is unleashed by bandits/herdsmen and the terrorist group called *Boko Haram*. While Ndubuisi-Okolo and Anigbuogu examine the effects of insecurity on

industrialization and sustainable development in Nigeria¹², Adegbumi focuses on its threat to human existence and economic development in Nigeria¹³.

Leadership: This has to do with the ability of an individual (or group of individuals) to lead, influence and direct a group in order to achieve an objective. The ordinary Nigerians feel that their leaders have failed them. Most of them struggle to occupy political offices not because they want to serve but for pecuniary gains¹⁴. This leads to corruption, embezzlement, misappropriation of public funds, etc.

Unemployment: This is a condition where young men and women who are healthy and capable of using their energy to work and contribute to the development of the society cannot find work. The rise of unemployment in Nigeria has destabilized cohesion and peaceful co-existence. The human being needs to be gainfully engaged in order to satisfy basic needs.

Extremists / fanatics: Extremists views and ideologies have cause mutual suspicion with regards to political leaning or religious beliefs. They advocate violent and illegal actions against others. Nigeria has not been spared of the consequences of extremists' views like the destruction of human lives and properties¹⁵.

In spite of the precarious situation of living in Nigeria before the 2023 General Elections, the masses were united with a firm purpose of charting a new course. Various slogans like “a new Nigeria is possible,” “take back our country,” “our votes must count,” etc were re-echoed everywhere. It was a situation of utter hopelessness and abandonment of hope. This socio-economic and political situation coincided with the emergence three major presidential candidates: Peter Gregory Obi (Labour Party), Atiku Abubakar (People's Democratic Party) and Bola Tinubu (All Progressive Congress).

The political atmosphere of in Nigeria announced some kind of Aristocratic Revolution where the average Nigerian wished that those who wielded so much power should not be and are irresponsible should

not govern. The ordinary Nigerian was enthusiastic about participating in the 2023 general. For the first time in many decades, Nigerians were ready to express their “civic devotion to the state as a political entity¹⁶,” through elections; and they were motivated by the need for self-determination. The state of hopelessness and the aspirations of many Nigerians to stand again on their feet were beautifully captured by a photographer – Esther Umoh.

Visual Elements used in the analysis of the Esther Umoh's photographic picture



This photo was taken by Esther Umoh. It was taken from her twitter handle @EstherUmoh

Visual elements of the picture

I intend to apply some tools and techniques used in the analysis of picture to explain the composition of the picture taken by Esther Umoh. Although it might sound trivial to engage in such analysis but a few commentaries will bring out the intensity of the message conveyed by the picture itself. We shall not be concerned with questions relating to the intention of the photographer but shall focus on the salient waves communicated by the image. The visual elements will be centered on content analysis, visual analysis, contextual information and the technical quality of the picture.

First is the content analysis of the picture. This has to do with describing what I see. I see a digital image. That is, an image composed of picture elements or "representation of a real physical object or scene, from which we can obtain an accurate spatial (geometric) and/or spectral (for the case of a hyperspectral image) representation with sufficient detail (resolution) for processing, compression, storage, printing and display¹⁷". It is about a boy standing in front of a vehicle with people beside and behind the vehicle, apparently running in the direction of the vehicle. The image looks like people cheering an important dignitary who is standing at the open sunroof of the car.

Second, the visual analysis of the picture. **With regards to the visual analysis** of the picture, I can say that the elements are perfectly arranged in order to capture a young boy in front of a moving SUV, with a man smiling from the open sunroof of the car, a young boy apparently running towards the boy in front of the moving SUV, the aides waving hands or pointing their hands towards the boy in front of the car and then many people running behind and besides the car in the direction it was going to. The background is full of images of people, street lights and probably a pedestrian crossover while the foreground indicates empty space and asphalt road.

Meanwhile, the important visual elements in the image are the young boy in front of the car, the man standing at the open sunroof of the car and the crowd running along the direction of the car. The use of colour in the picture is also very significant. In my appreciation of the picture, I can say that the ash colour seems to be dominant when the picture is closely examined. I perceive this colour at the top background and the foreground. This colour is associated with neutrality, conformity, boredom, uncertainty, old age and indifference. In other words, the picture presents the image of people who are interested in charting a new life full of certainty. The dominance of the ash colour intends precisely to convey the concern of the people who want to bring about a new dawn. These people shall be the focus of my philosophical analysis.

Third, the contextual information of the picture. A lot can be said about the contextual information put across by the picture. The information that

accompanies the image is found on the twitter handle @EstherUmoh. Some of them are: “People don't realise OBI took his cap off in this moment. A leader with empathy. Symbolic” (@YubbyNduonofit Feb 13, 2023). “Pendrop creating histories for future generations and putting smiles on faces of present generations. God is with you” (@O_Temmy Feb 13, 2023). “Your pic spoke so many words. Well done” (@DebaFunmi, Feb 13, 2023). “God bless you for capturing this iconic moment and helping to change this boy's story” (@iam_wilsons, 13 Feb, 2023). “Thanks again for this pic. I look at it a lot and each time I do, I see how blessed Peter Obi is & how much of a blessing he will be to Nigeria as a president I see the dedication of the people that work for him and the belief the people have in him. These things can't be faked” (Imorji, Feb 13, 2023). “This picture gives me this particular feeling; tears of hope in my eyes” (@CHIGOBEN, Feb 13, 2023).

According to the interpretation of Udugba, the boy was “standing in front of Obi's SUV with his arms held out and staring up at the presidential candidate as if he were waiting for a superhero to come save him”. Although Esther captioned the picture “City boy in the 60s” many people gave it other captions like “Daddy Oyoyo,” a slang for welcoming parents' home in Nigeria; “The actual renewed hope,” “A photo with a thousand words,” “the story, the moment and the connection¹⁸”.

According to Yusuf Alabi (the young boy who stood in front of the moving SUV): “I stood in front of Peter Obi's convoy because I wish I was 18 years old so that I can vote for him. But since I cannot vote for him I came to the front of his car to pray for him so that he will win the election. My parents and my uncles and aunts said he is a good man”

I don't think that the comments of people in Esther Umoh's twitter handle or the various captions of the picture can change how I see the picture because I think that at the time the picture was taken, Nigeria was in dire need of a leader who carries all the qualities that majority of the people found in Peter Obi (the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party in the 2023 General Elections).

The textual information is intended to be true-life and to orient the choice

of people in voting during the 2023 General Elections. Irrespective of the effects (example, hope) that the picture created in the mind of the people, the context is very much political. Therefore, the contextual information responds to the questions “Where,” “How,” “Why,” and “For whom was the image made.”

Fourth, source of the picture. I found this picture on the twitter handle of Esther Umoh (@EstherUmoh10). It was taken in Orile-mile 2 road, Lagos, in February, 2023. It is not clear what the source intends to communicate. But it appears to be making a subtle comparison between Peter Obi with regards to what Bola Tinubu's twitted in July 27, 2022-#Cityboy (@officialBAT). The source seems to be reliable if one is allowed to look only at the caption of the picture in Esther Umoh's twitter handle.

Fifth, the technical quality. This has to do with the quality of the image, the colour or whether the image suits my purpose. I would begin by saying that the image suits the purpose of this article because I intend to communicate the lived-experiences of Nigerians and their hope for a better future. Notwithstanding the fact that the colour (ash) expresses uncertainty, the posture of the people and the sentiments conveyed reveal the commitment of a people who wants to “take back their country”. Considering the calibre of the photographer, I think that the quality of the digital image is without pixilation.

The significance of the picture “City boy in the 60s” and the emergence of a new Nigeria

Pictures in general can serve as powerful tools for communication, raising awareness, and inspiring action. In particular, the picture taken by Esther Umoh is very significant for the creation of a new Nigeria. This photographer has shown that photograph can be a great means of bringing to consciousness the need to drive social change in Nigeria. A lector of the above picture who knows the history of Nigeria might draw one or more of the following significance:

Firstly, it captures Nigeria's degraded economic and socio-political reality which can be described as a situation of helplessness, of

hopelessness and despair. This is vividly captured in the outstretched arms of Yusuf Alabi. His held out arms are not symbol of power as such nor of might but rather, a sign of openness and acceptance; it could also be a notice of invitation into one's space or community but most importantly, the willingness to cooperate, collaborate and support the leadership of Peter Obi. In the light of the symbolic outstretched arms, this means that a new Nigeria can only be created with the collaboration of all.

Secondly, the picture evoked emotions and conveyed complex narratives of the lived-experiences of Nigerians. In line with Husserl's idea of "pure consciousness", the picture presents the struggles and aspirations of Nigerians. It is possible to read through the picture several issues and aspects relevant to creating a new Nigeria. It reveals the framework for addressing societal challenges especially the collective transformation of political institutions, and the necessity to transcend events that divided Nigerians or created mutual suspicion in the past. In this regard, it not only amplifies the collective story of Nigerians but created a platform that challenge stereotypes, break down prejudices, and promote inclusivity in shaping the future of Nigeria. This is evident in the composition of the crowd who appears to be running along the direction of the SUV. Considering the multi-ethnic and multi-tribal composition of Nigeria, it is impossible to distinguish or classify those in the picture according to their tribes or religion. This means that a formidable Nigeria cannot be built based on prejudices. Nigerians must first be Nigerian before talking about their ethnic or tribal origins.

From the foregoing, one could imagine the capacity of the picture to reshape existing perceptions and narratives about Nigeria. That is to say, that the picture has the capacity to shift the perception of Nigeria or Nigerians as a people divided or separated into different ethnic groups, religions, tribes, etc to a nation of "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress." This perception does not undermine the individuality of people as belonging to different ethnic origins but explains the fact that a collective vision for a new Nigeria should be the priority of all and sundry. In effect, it can motivate individuals to engage in advocacy, support causes, or contribute to positive change that reflects the values of justice, equality,

and progress. Briefly, it captures the sense of collective identity that could help forge a common vision for the future.

Conclusion

Esther Umoh's picture has projected the existential situation of Nigerians, not as it is spoken of but as it is lived through history and expressed "consciously". It has given Nigerians the opportunity to tell their own stories. Considering the world of reference of the photograph, it is a visual evidence to advocate for political changes that will bring about a new Nigeria. This change will definitely engage policymakers, activists, and organizations to influence public opinion and decision-making processes to adopt approaches that will change the narratives of Nigerians. This work may not be exhaustive in presenting how a new Nigeria can be created through photography but it has raised awareness to the possibility of photography, an aspect of art work, to fashion a new nation. This has created opportunity for further research on how other aspects of arts that could promote governance.

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