

## Origin and Development of Photography Industry in Sokoto Metropolis C.1903-1978

**Oyewole Clement Oyeyemi, PhD**

Department of History  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso  
[cooyewole@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:cooyewole@lautech.edu.ng)

&

**Adetutu Segun Adewale**

Department of History  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso  
[sbadetutu@lautech.edu.ng](mailto:sbadetutu@lautech.edu.ng)

### Abstract

Photography remains an important source of historical documentation, since it makes events more real by providing more than a glimpse into historical events, people and places. Thus, it evokes the look and feeling of a former time period. Nonetheless, the subject of photography has not received adequate attention in historical scholarship. This paper therefore examines the origin and development of photography within Sokoto metropolis to document the impact of photography in Sokoto metropolis. Using qualitative methods of data collection, including oral interview, archival documents, and written text, the paper notes the efforts of individuals involved in the expansion of the industry in Sokoto metropolis. The paper reveals that pre-colonial Sokoto city, enjoyed artistic impressions of important personalities, events and places that served as a means of historical documentation, until the introduction of modern photography by European Travelers in the middle of 19<sup>th</sup> century and later by British colonial government. This culminated in the establishment of colonial office in-charge of photography, commercial photo studios and by the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the establishment of photo printing laboratories largely due to the awareness of the importance of photography in keeping memory of events and people alive more lucidly.

**Keywords:** events, places, artistic-impression, memory and modernity

### Introduction

The word photography comes from the ancient Greek words: photo for 'light' and graph for 'drawing', that is, drawing with light. When a photograph is made light or some other form of radiant energy, such as x-rays is used to record a picture of an object or scene on a light sensitive surface. This was the reason why early photographs were called sun picture because sunlight itself was use to create image.<sup>1</sup> Another definition given to photography is that, it is the science and practice of creating durable images by recording light or other electromagnetic radiation, either electronically by means of an image sensor, or chemically by means of a light sensitive material such as photographic film.<sup>2</sup> Also, photography is defined as the act or process of producing image of object on photo sensitive surface. It is also seen as the act, practice or occupation of taking and printing photograph. According to World Book Encyclopedia, photography is defined as writing or drawing with light. Photograph is referred to as a picture made with camera, while camera is simply defined as a dark box with a tiny hole that admits light.

Even though there was no modern photography in the pre-colonial Sokoto city, there were quite a number of artistic impressions of important personalities, events and places within the city that served as means of historical documentation. These artworks were made by the indigenous artists; this indicates that the society had evolved its own means of historical documentation before the imposition of colonial

---

<sup>1</sup>.schphoto.com/html/history.html; see also J.P. Smith, *The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1980's*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 1989. P.29, J.R. Marvin, and David, L D.(1993), *Introduction to Photography*, Fourth Edition, Wadsworth Publishing Company, California.1993.Pp125-129.

<sup>2</sup>.<http://www.wikipedia>

rule on the society. The people of Sokoto began to know about modern photography through the activities of the 19<sup>th</sup> century European Travelers, Traders and Missionaries whose reports about the economic potentials of the ancient city to their home governments facilitated the subjugation and eventual imposition of colonial rule over the Caliphate.<sup>3</sup> It is important to stress that prior to the conquest and eventual establishment of colonial rule over Sokoto which was the seat of the Caliphate, there are historical evidence which suggest the existence of flourishing local industries within the city. These industries ranged from local craft to manufacturing such as iron smelting, dyeing, leatherwork, weaving, carpentry and many others. The availability of raw-materials made these local industries to flourish and grew to meet the needs of the people within the city and other parts of the Caliphate.<sup>4</sup> However, the introduction of colonial socio-economic policies such as wage-labor, taxation, the establishment of modern industries like cotton/textile ginnery and many others gradually withdrew labor and other resources from the local industries which led to the collapse of these local industries.<sup>5</sup>

### **Photography in Sokoto Metropolis during the Colonial Period**

During the colonial era, the colonial government established the Department of Information for the purpose of covering government's activities through photograph for documentation.<sup>6</sup> Most of the photographs of colonial officials and events were taken by Colonial Photographers, some of which were preserved in the National Archives Kaduna.

Also, in a bid to encourage the spread of Western education and literary activities in the Northern Region, the colonial government established Northern Nigerian Publishing Company (NNPC) in Zaria in 1958.<sup>7</sup> Late Alhaji Modi Yabo (Alias Koroto) and Alhaji Abubakar Pai were among the first set of people from the then Northwestern State employed in NNPC and sent abroad to be trained in photography, cinematography, graphic-arts and other aspects of publishing.<sup>8</sup> When they returned from oversea training, they trained some staff of the company and also trained people like Alhaji Musa Danbaba, Alhaji Umar Adamu, Alhaji Shehu Malami among others who were the first set of northerners to engage in commercial photography in Sokoto metropolis, and this further increased the level of awareness among the indigenous people about photography.<sup>9</sup>

### **Photography in the Early Post-colonial Sokoto Metropolis**

After the achievement of independence, there was an increased influx of immigrants from the southern part of Nigeria and other West African coastal towns to northern Nigeria in search of employment opportunities, and some of the immigrants who came had been exposed to Western cultures including knowledge of photography, brought along with them lots of personal collection of photographs they had gathered and this further increased people's awareness on personal photograph. Some of these immigrants into Sokoto like other parts of northern Nigeria came along with different forms of skills and as they settled down they began to establish workshop to practice their skills which included tailoring, automobile, mechanical and electrical and electronic repairs, hairdressing, photography and other forms of small scale enterprises.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup>E.A.Ayandele 'External Relation with Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Explorers, Missionaries and Traders' in O.Ikime (ed) *Groundwork of Nigerians History*. Heinemann Educations Books, Ibadan. 1980. P.370.

<sup>4</sup>S Abubakar, "Birnin Shehu, The City of Sokoto: A Social and Economic History C.1809-1903.*PhD Thesis*, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. 1982, Pp.8-12.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. A.T.Adamu, "Colonial Capitalism and Craft in Northern Nigeria State Articulation in Sokoto Province 1903-1960" *PhD Thesis*, Stanford University, USA, 1985, P41. See also. W. Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bogle Louverture Publication, London, 1972, Pp224-238.

<sup>6</sup>NAK/Info/325/File no.112, Department of Information.

<sup>7</sup>NAK/EST/1956,281,File no.728. Special Report on Promotion of Literacy in Northern Nigeria

<sup>8</sup>NAK/STF DEV/1958,42,File no.82. Report on Staff Development

<sup>9</sup>Mallam Kabir Abdullahi (Alias K.A. Photo),oral interview.

<sup>10</sup>R.O. Olaniyi, "Yoruba in Kano: A Commercial History of a Migrant Community in 1912-1999" PhD Thesis, Bayero University Kano, 2004, Pp55-70.

When the twelve states were created in 1967 by the then General Yakubu Gowon's administration, Sokoto became the capital of the Northern-western State. Some staff like Alhaji Umar Adamu and Alhaji Abubakar Pai of the Northern Nigeria Publishing Company (NNPC) from the Northern-western extraction who were trained Photographers had their services transferred to North-western State Civil Service especially into the Ministry of Information as government Photographers.<sup>11</sup> Quite a number of photographs taken in this period are kept in the Archives of Sokoto State Ministry of Information for historical documentation.<sup>12</sup>

This period is also important in the history of photography in Sokoto metropolis because, since there had been increased awareness about private photograph collections, some of the immigrants with the knowledge of photography began to establish photo studios in the metropolis, thus the first commercial photo studio in Sokoto metropolis -De-Rex Photo Studio was established at Emir Yahaya Street in 1968 by Mr. Francis Suleiman, one of the immigrants.<sup>13</sup> Subsequently, between 1968 and 1975 more immigrants joined the business and established more photo studios at various locations within the metropolis, while a good number of other immigrants began to enroll their children and wards for apprenticeship training in the newly established photo studios. This explains why the Yoruba, the Edo, and the Igbo became the dominant ethnic groups in photography business in Sokoto metropolis from the earliest time up to the 1980s when few Sokoto indigenes and other northerners began to develop interest and join the business as well.<sup>14</sup>

The table below shows the list of early photographers in Sokoto metropolis with their location, business name, ethnic affiliation and their year of establishment:

**List of Early Photo studios Established in Sokoto Metropolis between 1968 and 1978**

S/N	STUDIO/BUSINESS NAME	STUDIO LOCATION	ETHNIC/ PLACE OF ORIGIN	YEAR ESTABLISHED
1.	De-Rex. Photo Studio	Emir Yahaya Street	Ogori	1968
2.	Lere Photo Studio	Ahmadu Bello way	Yoruba	1969
3.	K. C. Photo Studio	Sokoto cinema area	Igbo	1970
4.	Jossy Photo Studio	Rijia street	Yoruba	1970
5.	Olu Photo Studio	Kofa Atiku Area	Yoruba	1970
6.	Paddybest Photo Studio	Sokoto cinema Area	Yoruba	1970
7.	Alpha and Omega Photos	Emir Yahaya Street	Ogori	1970
8.	Sun and Star Photo Studio	Rijia Street	Igbo	1970
9.	Alhaji Prince Photo Studio	Modibo Adama street	Yoruba	1971
10.	Ideal Photo Studio	Ahmadu Bello way	Yoruba	1971
11.	Franco Noble Photo	Ahmadu Bello way	Ogori	1971
12.	Awalu Nwanne Photos	Emir Yahaya Street	Igbo	1971
13.	Danbaba Photo	Emir Yahaya street	Hausa (Kano)	1971
14.	Princwell Photo Studio	Emir Yahaya street	Igbo	1972
15.	Shehu Mallami Photo	Aliyu Jodi Road	Hausa (Sokoto)	1972
16.	Son of Angel Photo Studio	Angwan Rogo street	Igbo	1973
17.	Young Star Photo Studio	Rijia street	Igbo	1973
18.	Sunny Photo Studio	Diplomat area	Igala	1973
19.	Ben Bros Photo	Rijia Street	Edo	1975
20.	Ever bright Photo	Emir Yahaya street	Igala	1975
21.	Umar Maihoto	Emir Yahaya Street	Hausa (Sokoto)	1975
22.	Uncle Joe Photo Studio	Sokoto Cinema Area	Edo	1975
23.	Oropo Photo Studio	Rijia street	Yoruba	1975

<sup>11</sup>SOKS/MOI/PER Index/ File no. 8/1969. Alhaji Umar Adamu, oral interview. He was among the people employed then, and later rose to the position of Director of Photography.

<sup>12</sup>SOKS/MOI/ PER Index /File no.74./1967. Sokoto State Ministry of Information Archive.

<sup>13</sup>Mr. Francis O Vincent ( FrancoNoble Photo), oral Interview.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

24.	Dacon Photo Studio	Aliyu Jodi Road	Igbo	1976
	Sammy photo studio	Agwan Rogo Area	Yoruba	1976
	Young Angel Photo Studio	Rijia street	Igbo	1977
	Yasco Photo Studio	Marafa Danbaba Area	Yoruba	1978
	Yokolo Photo Studio	Diplomat Area	Edo	1978

**Source:** field work: Date 14<sup>th</sup> July to December, 2012

It could be observed from the above table that within the first one decade of the emergence of commercial photo studio in Sokoto metropolis, immigrants such as the Yoruba, the Edo, the Igbo and others were the dominant ethnic groups among the pioneer photographers in Sokoto metropolis. From the list only three were Hausa out of which one is from Kano.

### **The Oil boom and Photography Industry in Sokoto Metropolis**

Between 1972 and 1982, Nigeria witnessed economic boom, the government of General Yakubu Gowon appointed Udoji Committee to look into what to do with the excess income from the crude oil sales. The committee recommended increment in the workers' salaries and allowances and arrears payment. The arrears were later named Udoji Arrears when it was paid in 1975. The aftermath of this was government's magnanimity to the civil servants and the number of gigantic capital projects executed in the country pushed more money into circulation. This led to increase in the purchasing power of the people as they had extra money to spend on others things after the basic necessities of life were met<sup>15</sup>. Thus, the passion for photography among all classes of people in the society increased and this consequently increased the level of patronage the photo industry received in Sokoto metropolis. By 1973 virtually every professional studio photographers within Sokoto metropolis had acquired at least one photo printing machines – Krocus or Opemus Enlargers, as the black and white photograph was predominant, the period of economic boom also afforded some of the studio photographers good opportunity to procure more than one printing machines due to the increased patronage they received from the customers.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, in 1976, when late General Murtala Mohammed's regime created nineteen states out of the old twelve and Sokoto metropolis still retained its status as the capital of the new Sokoto State, the Photography Unit in the State Ministry of Information became a full department.<sup>17</sup> The Department of Photography was created in the ministry with the aim of recruiting more personnel and training them as government's photographers. The rationale behind the upgrade of Photography Unit into a full department with additional staff was to have more Government Photographers to cover the increasing activities of the various government Ministries and Parastatals in the State for documentation.<sup>18</sup>

Again, by 1976, the activities of commercial photographers had become more noticeable as the metropolis had twenty-eight commercial photo studios. This was because the target of every professional photographer was to establish a well furnished photo studio in order to attract more customers for patronage; this was also as a result of the increased patronage received by the photo studio operators. Consequently, the commercial photo studio operators began to offer outdoor services as

<sup>15</sup>Abdulrahman Araoye,(PrincePhotoPalace), oral interview. He explained that after the Udoji award was paid he and many of his colleagues in the photograph business were able to make so much profit that many of them to buy land and commenced the construction of their personal houses, some in Sokoto and others in their home town.

<sup>16</sup> Mr.Francis O Vincent...opcit. He informed me that the first eleven photo studios on the list of professional photo studios in the metropolis in the table above were the first set to acquire two photo printing machine, and that it was made possible during the period of economic boom. This was also confirmed by other photographers interviewed.

<sup>17</sup>Alhaji Adamu Ibrahim, oral interview. He explained that this was the period when photography unit became a full Department in the Ministry and the staff in the Department increased to eight. See also SOKS/MOI/PER.Index.No.22/File no.2, 1977, Sokoto State Ministry of Information Archive.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

well.<sup>19</sup> Also, during this time, the first phase of mobile photography began in the metropolis especially with the use of Polaroid camera which produced a picture within sixty –seconds. This enabled Photographers to go about the nooks and crannies of the metropolis in search of customers. This was as a result of the quick production of pictures by the Polaroid camera coupled with the availability of more money in the hands of the people due to the economic boom of the period. This new development, however, was not without new challenges in the industry, as the period brought about the influx of new people into the industry who were non-professionals.

Moreover, as from 1976 the new group of photo enthusiasts that emerged in Sokoto metropolis was referred to as the Freelance Photographers. The Freelance Photographers were those who purchased camera for their personal use during special occasions like ceremonies, picnics and so on.<sup>20</sup> To this group of people, photography was a hobby, they only took photographs with their cameras whenever they feel like doing so and they often used simple camera like the single lens automatic camera otherwise called Free Focus cameras like Polaroid camera. Consequently, as from 1976, three categories of people were engaged in Photography Industry in Sokoto metropolis, they were; the official photographers of the Sokoto State Ministry of Information-who were civil servants, second; the Commercial Photographers and third; the Freelance Photographer-who were often referred to as the seasonal photographers.<sup>21</sup>

### **Expansion of Photography Industry and the Establishment of Sokoto**

#### **Professional Photographers Union (SOPPU)**

As pointed out earlier, commercial studio photography in Sokoto metropolis did not commence until 1968, and by 1978 the number of photo studio in the metropolis increased to twenty-eight. During this period, only black and white photography was prevalent and most of the photographers had their studios closed to their residential houses while pictures were processed in the Darkroom in the studio.<sup>22</sup> Oral information gathered indicates that without photo studio and the printing equipments in this early period of the development of the industry, the profit margin a photographer could get would be very low; hence, every professional photographer struggled to acquire at least one printing machine.<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that it was during this time when commercial photographers began to increase in an unprecedented manner, that some group of people in the industry rose up and played important roles to ensure that the industry was well coordinated. People like Mr. Francis Suleman-(De-Rex Photo), Alhaji Musa Danbaba (Danbaba Photo), Alhaji Abdulrahman Araoye-( Prince Photo Palace), Mr. Francis O Vincent(Franco Noble Photo) to mention just a few of the pioneers. They organized series of meetings of all professional photographers in the metropolis and convinced their colleagues of the need to have a union which would serve as an umbrella for them to co-ordinate their activities, these efforts culminated into the formation of the Sokoto Professional Photographers Union (SOPPU) in 1971.<sup>24</sup>

The main aim of the union was to enable professional photographers speak with one voice on matters concerning their business especially in order to have uniform price for their customers. Another reason for the formation of the union was to checkmate the sabotage activities of the non-professionals-Amateur Photographers who had no studio but were engaged in the business and often charged customers lesser prices. The pioneers of the association got it registered with the State government in order to ensure that the union was well recognized.<sup>25</sup> Mr. Francis Suleiman (De-Rex Photo) became the pioneer chairman, while Alhaji Abdulrahman Araoye(Prince Photo Palace) served as the first General Secretary of the union.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>19</sup> Abdurahaman Araoye ...opcit.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, The freelance photographers were mostly the few educated elites in the metropolis.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Alhaji Musa Banbaba, oral interview.

<sup>23</sup> Mr.Kenechukwu Nweke, oral interview.

<sup>24</sup> Alhaji Umar Adamu, Oral interview, Confirmed by Mr Joel Odomehla, oral interview.

<sup>25</sup> Alhaji Ibrahim Adamu, Oral interview.

<sup>26</sup> Mr. Francis, O Vincent-FrancoNoble Photo...opcit.

The photographers' union became so strong that by 1978 the union was able to curtail the activities of all amateur photographers which enabled the professionals in the business to make super profits. It was from this period that the foundation for a formidable photography industry was laid such that the industry became more attractive to new entrants in the subsequent years. The industry later became one of the largest employer of labour not only within Sokoto metropolis but also in other towns and villages around Sokoto metropolis.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has demonstrated how the people of Sokoto began to know about photography through the activities Europeans especially the Explorers, Missionaries and Traders of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also, the establishment of Photography Unit in the Colonial Offices with Colonial Photographers trained to cover Colonial activities for documentation as from 1903 increased people's awareness about photography. The influx of the immigrants from the southern Nigeria and other West African Coastal towns into Sokoto in search of employment opportunities up to the early period of Nigerians independence further exposed people in the metropolis and aroused their interest in photography which culminated into the establishment of the first commercial photo studio in Sokoto Metropolis as from 1968. Also, roll call of early photo studio operators, their locations, year of establishment and their ethnic affiliation has been duly captured in this paper. The paper also highlighted the roles of some prominent individuals whose efforts brought about the establishment and consolidation of the business such that it become a big industry that employs a good number of people in the metropolis and in Sokoto state at large.

### **References**

- Abubakar S, "Birnin Shehu, The City of Sokoto: A Social and Economic History C.1809-1903." *PhD Thesis*, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. 1982.
- Adamu A.T, "Colonial Capitalism and Craft in Northern Nigeria State Articulation in Sokoto Province 1903-1960" *PhD Thesis*, Stanford University, USA, 1985.
- Ayandele E.A 'External Relation with Europeans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: Explorers, Missionaries and Traders' in O.Ikime (ed) *Groundwork of Nigerians History*. Heinemann Educations Books, Ibadan. 1980.
- Bako A. Sabon Gari Kano: A History of Immigrant and Intergroup Relation in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Usmanu Danfodiyo University Press. Sokoto, 2006.
- Marvin J.R, and David, L D. *Introduction to Photography*, Fourth Edition, Wadsworth Publishing Company, California. 1993.
- Olaniyi R.O, "Yoruba in Kano: A Commercial History of a Migrant Community in 1912-1999" PhD Thesis, Bayero University Kano, 2004.
- Rodney W, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, Bigle Louverture Publication, London, 1972.
- Smith J.P, *The Photography of Invention: American Pictures of the 1980's*. MIT Press, Cambridge, 1989.

### **Oral Interviews**

- Abdulrahman Araoye, (PrincePhotoPalace), 59 years, interviewed in his photo studio- at Modibo Adama street, Marina Area, Sokoto. 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.
- Alhaji Adamu Ibrahim- Director of Information Sokoto State Ministry of Information, 49 yrs, interviewed in his office at Ginginya Secretariat, Sokoto. 4<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.
- Alhaji Abubakar Jabo the Director Sokoto State Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, 59 yrs, interviewed in his office at Giginya Secretariat, Sokoto. 15<sup>th</sup> August 2011.
- Alhaji Danbaba Musa, 61 years, interviewed in his photo studio-Hajiya Fatima photo Studio, no.4, Emir Yahaya Street, Sokoto. 14<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.
- Mallam Kabir Abdullahi (K.A Photos), 52 years, interviewed in his photostudio at no. 8, Ahmadu Bello Way, Sokoto. 16<sup>th</sup> August 2010.
- Mr. Francis O. Vincent (FrancoNoble Photo), 58 yrs, interviewed in his photostudio at No.45 Ahmadu Bello Way Sokoto, 21<sup>st</sup> July 2010.
- Mr. Joel Odomehla, 57 years interviewed in his photostudio-UncleJoe Photo Studio, no.25, Rijia Street, Sokoto. 28<sup>th</sup> July, 2010.

Mr.Kenechukwu Nweke, 58years interviewed in his photo Studio-KC Photo Studio at Sokoto Cinema Area, Sokoto. 16<sup>th</sup> August, 2010.

Mr. Oke Olasunkami, Branch Manager Fototek Colour Laboratory,42year,interviewed in his office,no 4,Gobir Road, J.Allen area,Sokoto.2<sup>nd</sup> August 2010.

Alhaji Umar Adamu, (Retired Professional Photographer and former Director of photography, Sokoto State ministry of Information), 66years, interviewed in his house, opposite Shagari House, Kofar Atiku area, Sokoto. 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2010.

#### **Archival sources**

NAK/Info/325/File no.112, Department of Information.

NAK/EST/1956,281,File no.728. Special Report on Promotion of Literacy in Northern Nigeria

NAK/STF DEV/1958,42,File no.82. Report on Staff Development

SOKS/MOI/PER Index/File no. 8/1969. Sokoto State Ministry of information Archive.

SOKS/MOI/ PER Index/File no.74/1967. Sokoto State Ministry of Information Archive.

SOKS/MOI/PER.Index.No.22/File no.2,/1977, Sokoto State Ministry of Information Archive.

#### **Internet sources**

[schphoto.com/html/history.html](http://schphoto.com/html/history.html)