ON EQUITY AND AUTHENTICITY:
DECOLONIZING IMAGERY OF NIGERIA

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by

Rebekah Raleigh

Dr. Keith Greenwood, Thesis Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the thesis entitled

ON EQUITY AND AUTHENTICITY:
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presented by Rebekah Raleigh, a candidate for the degree of

master of arts, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy

of acceptance.

Professor Keith Greenwood

Professor Cristina Mislán

Professor Jackie S. Bell

DEDICATION

This thesis required support and encouragement from so many friends and family to complete. I would be remiss not to acknowledge all of them.

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ABSTRACT

The negative narratives surrounding African affairs in Western media have been documented in numerous studies, but the work processes between African journalists and Western media have been less examined. This study focuses on work processes of Nigerian photographers working with Western media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to understand how they document authentic contextually-situated Nigerian life and the pressures they face to reinforce existing colonial narratives portraying Nigeria as underdeveloped and conflict-ridden. Ten photographers gave in-depth interviews discussing their experiences working for Western editors (for media and NGOs). These interviews identified patterns reinforcing visual tropes and colonial power dynamics.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

In 2005, Kenyan writer and philosopher, Binyavanga Wainaina published a satirical essay, "How to write about Africa." The piece snidely told the world that Africa consisted of "900 million people who are too busy *starving and dying and warring and emigrating*" (Wainaina, 2005) to participate in some banal Western-style life. He was right. Western media's Imperial gaze of Africa had focused on the most dismal narratives.

That same year, the winners from Pictures of the Year International (POYi), for "Magazine Photographer of the Year," both had intense, sad picture stories from the continent. Marcus Bleasdale photographed "street" children in Kinshasa (Democratic Republic of Congo) and the miserable toll of the oil pipeline between Chad and Cameroon (Bleasdale, 2005). Massimo Mastrorillo photographed gangs in Mozambique *and* a long essay on AIDS in Mozambique (Mastrorillo, 2005). The winner of the "World Understanding" award focused on conflict in DRC. The winner in the feature picture category that year was of an amputee from Sierra Leone. The winner of Newspaper Photographer of the Year, Barbara Davidson, submitted a caption with a portrait of a well-dressed Nigerian high school student that said, "Like many African villages, Eziowelle's school is a run-down building with no windows and few materials. Pupils have to trek long distances to class in rubber sandals or bare feet," (Davidson, 2005). The message was clear—Africa was dark and depressing. Despite many of the winning images being made on the continent, none of the winners were African.

I was in the room watching that POYi judging. Admittedly, I was taken with the work and, at the time, agreed with the judges. But a few years later, I took a job as a

photographer for a travel company that sent me to work in Southeast Asia. I'd previously backpacked around the region as a young traveler. However, when surrounded by Thai and Cambodian co-workers, I started to understand how little I'd understood the first time around. When I visited my hometown, people would marvel that I could "live that way" and chalk it up to a big adventure. I couldn't articulate exactly what made me so uncomfortable with that attitude—but I was. In many ways, life in Thailand was better. Medical care was excellent and affordable. When I'd been a staff photographer at a small daily newspaper in the Midwest, I'd avoid going to the doctor because my health insurance was so crummy. But my American friends didn't understand that life could be better in what they deemed "a third world country".

In a lot of ways, those two years in Thailand set up this research. Not in terms of expertise in a region, but in terms of cross-cultural understanding. It helped me to identify the ways in which American Exceptionalism and Western supremacy seep into the manner we (meaning Westerners) talk about other nations and the assumptions we make about the people who live there.

In my current work, I spend more time in sub-Saharan Africa than in Southeast Asia. Over the past six years, each time I returned to the continent, I devoted more time talking to photographers and video crews about their experiences with white foreigners. I started to understand that Western tropes about the entire continent were being replayed on the news, in fictional film and perhaps most damningly in photojournalism. That made me take a hard look at the work I'd admired and aspired to for so long.

Just like in 2005, African photographers continue to be nearly absent in the most important Western photography competitions. In late September 2021, World Press Photo

announced a new strategy to finally be more representative of the "World" in their name, which shifted the focus from a single Europe-based competition, to a series of regional ones. In a statement explaining why they were changing the way the contest operates, Executive Director Joumana El Zein Khoury said:

> In 2021, of the over 4,000 photographers from 130 countries who entered the World Press Photo Contest: 48% came from Europe, 22% came from Asia and 14% came from North and Central America, but only 7% of the entries were from South America, 5% from Southeast Asia and Oceania, and only 3% came from the whole continent of Africa. It's not because there are significantly fewer photographers in those places than elsewhere. When I asked a regional partner why, I was told, 'They don't think the competition is for them. They don't see themselves in the entries, don't feel represented.' (Khoury, 2021)

Whether or not this organizational shift to regional contests has the intended impact remains to seen. While contests may be a way for photographers to build name recognition, they don't offer financial compensation. In Africa, the two largest sources of photographer income working for Western clients are media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Like contests, these types of organizations have operated from an Imperial mindset that prioritizes Western supremacy at the cost of broad representation.

How the West Pictures Africa

It's been more than 40 years since the last European nation relinquished its colonial foothold in Africa, but the on-going legacy of colonialism survives and has "contributed to the mutual transformation of the colonizer and the colonized," (Gandhi, 2019, p.125). We, the Imperial West, are inextricably part of international systems of power—economic, military, and political that shape narratives about the continent. The way the Western world envisions "Africa" reflects more than discourses from news or

media organizations, NGOs have a large presence on the continent and mostly look to Western nations for funding. While the relationship between NGOs and local people is evolving, there has long existed "a kinship between the normative paradigms of colonial anthropology and the contemporary discourse of aid and development agencies," (Bhabha, 1994, p.347). This relationship "has not resulted in the transfer of power or the displacement of neo-colonial tradition of political control through philanthropy," (Bhabha, 1994, p.347). Instead, aid agencies and NGOs are partially to blame for the persistent negative narratives about the continent because they need to attract funding. Karen Rothmeyer argued in *Columbia Journalism Review* that, "These pressures create incentives to present as gloomy a picture of Africa as possible in order to keep attention and money flowing, and to enlist journalists in disseminating that picture," (Rothmyer, 2011). While British freelance reporter, Ian Birrell, says that. "NGOs help deliver a 'fraudulent' image of Africa as a place of unimaginable poverty and hardship," (Clark, 2015). Despite these ghastly narratives, (Jayarwadane, 2017), (Nothias, 2014), the entire continent of Africa is not a hopeless place desperate for Western intervention.

Research in how Western media approaches Africa illustrates that when European and North American media use the terms *Africa*, or *African,* "they provide a *racialized* view of the continent that refers to sub-Saharan Africa (understand, 'Black') rather than to the continent as a geographic entity," (Nothias, 2014, p.335). In 2017, then director of *NYT Global*, Jodi Rudoren, answered questions submitted by readers. In a video about foreign correspondents and international bureaus she said:

> In Africa we have three bureaus. East Africa in Nairobi. West Africa based in Senegal and South Africa based in Johannesburg. In the Middle East, where I was posted in Jerusalem, we also have bureaus in Cairo and in Lebanon. (Virella, 2017)

While there's certainly an argument to be made that socio-cultural linkages including language and political interests between Egypt and the Middle East exist and that would dictate how the bureau was run, failing to mention that Cairo is *in Africa*, reinforces Nothias' perspective on how the continent is understood by Western media and their audiences. *The New York Times* is not alone. In March 2018, *National Geographic* dedicated the entire issue to race, acknowledging that, "for decades, our coverage was racist." Photography historian John Edwin Mason noted, "*National Geographic* [came] into existence at the height of colonialism, and the world was divided into the colonizers and the colonized," (Goldberg, 2018, p.4).

For *National Geographic*, this binary divide between colonizers/colonized (essentially code for civilized/uncivilized) was more than a conceptual framework. It was visually reinforced by including Western journalists/photographers in pictures appearing in the magazine. In a content analysis of more 600 photographs from 30 years of the magazine, Catherine Lutz and Jane Collins created a specific set of categories "Western" versus "non-Western," which were, by their own admission, inexact and imperfect. They do however, help gather deeper understanding of "how people in other lands have been depicted, what they have been photographed doing, and how the photo has been composed," (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p.87). Imagery generally portrays non-Western people as primitive and distinctly othered. This is accomplished by focusing on "local dress," highlighting rituals (religious, cultural, etc), and illustrating the dichotomy between "us" (middle-class North Americans) and "them" (local people) by including Westerners in the pictures. This occurred so often that Lutz and Collins included it as an

item to be coded as part of the broader content analysis. It's not surprising that 25 years later, Mason also identified the tendency to include white foreigners in imagery as particularly problematic, noting, "It really creates this us-and-them dichotomy between the civilized and the uncivilized," (Goldberg, 2018, p.6).

There is a growing movement to shift narratives that focus on Africa's alterity (Mbembe, 2019) and subaltern position (Bhabha, 1994) to more accurately reflect genuine lived experiences across the continent. In 2012, Kenyan Twitter users promoted the hashtag #SomeoneTellCNN to call out the network's bias. They garnered enough attention that the network apologized (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019, p.138). Then it happened again in 2013 and 2015 (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019). Western media will apologize when backed into a corner, but systemic change will require broad re-envisioning of how the ecosystem of editors, photographers and producers tell stories in and about Africa.

There is very little research on African photographers (as opposed to other types of media workers like reporters, editors, and producers) so getting a sense of this work ecosystem and how its expectations or pressures influence work processes and products requires a narrower focus. Examining photographers in a single country can't explain what's happening on the entire continent, but it does provide a window to understanding how photographers in *that* country feel about and work through relationships with Western media and organizations.

Focusing on Nigeria

As the most populous country and largest economy on the continent, with a strong existing media market, there are many professional Nigerian photographers who have worked for, or tried to work for, Western media. Surprisingly, even as the country's influence in Africa (and the globe) grew significantly from 1975-2015, international media coverage remained relatively flat (Sy, 2017). The notable exceptions to this were national elections in 2003, 2007, 2011, and 2015 which "resulted in extreme spikes of media attention," (Sy, 2017). This consistent baseline implies that photographers working to showcase authentic lived experiences in the country are working in a zero-sum system when interacting with Western media.

There are thousands of NGOs operating in Nigeria. They vary in scale from UN-funded agencies like UNICEF or the World Food Programme, to international organizations such as Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation or Save the Children, to smaller organizations operating locally. These organizations rely on photography of the projects they fund for marketing materials to solicit donations and pitch media for earned coverage.

To date, most journalism studies focusing on African affairs examine existing coverage. There is some work with foreign correspondents on the continent and a smaller amount of Western research focusing on African news workers, although almost none of it focuses on photographers. This is a gap in the research, especially at a time when technology makes sharing imagery across the world easier than ever. This study centers on the experience of Nigerian photographers' interactions and assignments with Western

media and NGOs. By talking with working Nigerian photographers, this study attempts to document how they address the challenge of showcasing authentic Nigerian life to the Western world and the pressures they face to reinforce existing colonial narratives portraying Nigeria as underdeveloped and conflict-ridden. The next chapter will present the postcolonial theoretical foundation for the work. More details about the interview approach will appear in the methodology section (Chapter 3, beginning p. 30). Followed by results in Chapter 4 (p. 38) and discussion in Chapter 5 (p. 63).

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Postcolonial Theory: Power structures in the 'modern world order'

By identifying, naming, and clarifying the impact of colonization on the "modern world order," (Bhabha, 1994, p.246), postcolonialism details the lasting repercussions facing former colonies and the Imperial West. While "post" may suggest a period shortly after nations are decolonized, the theory has broader reach. It examines the relationships between Imperial nations and their former colonies, from first contact to present day. While former colonies may be sovereign in name, lands that were historically plundered to supply the West with raw materials are now stuck repeating that dynamic through "new transnational flows of humans and capital," (Birla, 2010, p.87). These extractive and exploitative relationships (Bhabha, 1994) advantage the West, creating additional wealth and global influence. Western nations then flex that power to extract more and the cycle continues. This is not by accident. Congolese philosopher V.Y. Mudimbe explains:

> First, the capitalist world system is such that parts of the system will always develop at the expense of other parts, either by trade or by the transfer of surpluses. Second, the under development of dependencies is not only an absence of development, but also an organizational structure created under colonialism by bringing non-Western territory into the capitalist world. (Mudimbe, 1988, p.5)

Former colonies are still treated as trading-post colonies or "a way to grow the metropole's wealth by means of asymmetrical, inequitable trade relations, almost entirely lacking in heavy local investment," (Mbembe, 2019, p. 11). But leaders in former colonies are working to break the cycle. For example, in 2020, more than 60 years after Ghana's independence from Great Britain, Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo

"visibly stunned" the Swiss president during a state visit when he announced that Ghana would no longer export raw cacao to the country. Chocolate is worth $1.6 billion USD to the Swiss economy, but cacao farmers in Ghana earn a meager $1 USD a day from their labor. Akufo-Addo explained that "There can be no future prosperity for the Ghanaian people in the short, medium or long term if we continue to maintain economic structures that are dependent on the production and export of raw materials," (Pilling, 2021). This power dynamic of Western supremacy prioritizes more than economic output, extending those inequities across politics, media, arts and diplomacy. While global capitalism builds the structure of inequity, it is reinforced through cultural expectations and communications, "that attempt to give hegemonic 'normality' to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples," (Bhabha, 1994, p. 246). By placing Europe and the United States at the center of power and labeling them "modern" and "rational," the periphery is treated as an exotic other.

This 'othering' of non-Western peoples is rooted in Orientalism— a term coined by Edward Said to explain how the West caricatured Asia but has since been applied broadly to the non-Western world:

> …the Orient is an idea that has a history and a tradition of thought, imagery, and vocabulary that have given it reality and presence, in and for, the West. The two geographical entities thus support, and to an extent, reflect each other. (Said, 2004, p. 5)

The Western world announces its own value and cultural supremacy in relation to the "other." Most Westerners haven't spent much time in developing nations, so their understanding comes from media, film, arts and diplomacy where Bhabha's "hegemonic normality" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 246) is on full display.

While many Western museums have been actively rethinking how they educate their visitors, they've historically showcased the non-Western world as uncivilized (Grewal, 1996). This portrayal encompasses more than dated dioramas in stuffy museums. African objects are rarely referred to as "design," an often-used word to signify sophistication in both aesthetic and thinking, but have instead, "been labelled variously as curiosities, ethnography or art," (Bhagat, 2016, p. 29). Scholars, writers, and activists have been calling out these stereotypes for decades, but progress is slow.

Western media consistently infantilizes and portrays the continent as incapable of self-governance (De B'béri and Louw, 2011). The messaging is broad, but relies on themes of famine, violence, and savagery (Mbembe, 2001). When covering conflict in Africa, Western media heavily relies on "reductive 'tribal' narratives" (Nothias, 2014, p.327), while ignoring political and economic context that would detail the complicit and complex roles of Western nations (Nothias, 2014). In 2000, *The Economist* print edition featured a cover with a gun-wielding guerilla fighter superimposed on a cutout of Africa. The headline read: The hopeless continent, (Nothias, 2014). In 2019, *The New York Times* set off a firestorm on Twitter after posting an ad seeking a new Nairobi bureau chief, describing the role as having, "a chance to delight our readers with *unexpected stories of hope* and the changing rhythms of life in a rapidly evolving region," (Kiruga, 2019). In nearly 20 years, Western media declared the continent had barely budged from "hopeless" to providing "unexpected stories of hope."

Martin Scott has argued that research studies claiming to identify and quantify pervasive negative narratives surrounding African news coverage reflect confirmation

bias. Through a scoping review of literature, Scott identified that the great majority of these frequently cited journalism studies concentrated their news analysis on humanitarian crises such as the genocide in Rwanda or conflict in Darfur (Scott, 2017, p. 201). Given the subject matter, he maintains that negative coverage/narratives are appropriate.

To test that theory, Toussaint Nothias developed a comprehensive study of newspaper coverage focusing on African independence anniversaries. Between 2007-2012, 24 African nations celebrated their 50th anniversary of independence from colonial rule. Nothias performed textual analysis on 282 news articles covering the anniversaries in French and English broadsheets. The research identified that the four most prevalent themes were: social instability, violence and death, corruption, and poverty (Nothias, 2016, p. 10). He notes that the fifth most common lexical field was "progress and achievements," so the coverage wasn't *all* bad. Nevertheless, stories about celebrating independence from colonial rule had strong negative connotations. Postcolonialism doesn't find that surprising because former imperial powers tend to view the colonial lands only in relation to themselves—and the value that the colony provides to them. "When colonies still served their imperial masters as a land of resources to be plundered, travel writers described them as lush, desirable and 'worth taking.' After independence, there was no desire to reinforce the 'colonial portrait of cornucopic Eden,'" (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p.114).

African people are used as essentialized modules to help illustrate these narratives. As an anonymous exotic other, they are "analyzed not as a citizens, or even people, but as problems to be solved," (Said, 2004, p. 207). In Alice Walker's

documentary, *Warrior Marks*, a film about Female Genital Mutilation, African women of various socioeconomic status across Senegal and Gambia were "subsumed under the category 'African'," (Grewal & Kaplan, 2003, p. 267). More recently, American journalist David Conrad reflected on a story about garbage pickers in Kenya and noted that none of the people pictured in the corresponding images were identified by name. He noted that would be a problem for local (Western) news, but not for foreign reporting. He called it an "indelicate reality," (Conrad, 2015, p. 283) but did not argue it was problematic.

Western Imaginaries: A primitive continent of adventure and plunder

As Martin Scott noted earlier, most Western journalism coverage of Africa relates to humanitarian crises (Scott, 2017) but Western audiences are also consuming messages from film and advertising that shape their understanding of Africa. Feature films set on the continent serve an important role in how the "Global North" perceives African life (Orgeret, 2009), but Hollywood has done very little to deliver context and understanding, instead reinforcing two tired tropes. The first is to imagine "the African continent as a dark space laden with barbaric practices," (Osei, 2020, p. 378). In this classic understanding of "dark Africa," Westerners are cast as heroes and trusted to deliver needed aid, solutions, or justice. This includes recent films like *The Last Face*, (2017) starring an all-white cast (European and South African) as aid workers for Médecins Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders). The premise heroizes Western characters through their vocation, reinforcing the narrative that global capitalism is beneficial for former colonies. While the white characters deliver most of the dialogue, the "Africans

themselves fade into the background, rendered less as individuals than types*,"* (Lemire, 2017). Even in fictional films, Africans have been reduced to two-dimensional characters devoid of agency.

The second trope common in popular (Western) films treats the continent as a land of adventure. Sweeping imagery of open wilderness is commonplace in films set in Africa and reinforces the colonial idea of undiscovered paradise. *Out of Africa* (1985), a film rife with colonial tropes, is "an archetypal example of Africa as a stunningly beautiful and exotic background," (Orgeret, 2009, p. 506). This theme of Africa as an unspoiled landscape captures White/Western imagination about a land "frozen in time," (Nothias, 2014, p. 328), that features, "sun, savannah, and wilderness— [as] an integral part of a colonial portrayal of Africa as the 'white man's paradise'," (Nothias, 214, p. 328). In 2016, Hollywood reinforced this trope by rebooting *The Legend of Tarzan,* a story rife with "colonialist overtones" (Ehrlich, 2016). The Tarzan novels were predicated on the idea that it was preferable for a white infant to be raised as a feral child among apes rather than being adopted by African people. While the movie tried to distance itself from the worst stereotypes present in earlier film iterations, the main character, Lord Greystoke (Tarzan), undergoes a transformation from fully clad well-dressed European (meaning civilized) to barefoot and shirtless (meaning wild and 'African'). Throughout the film, Western characters remain clothed and shoed, while the 'noble' African characters went barefoot and half naked. At the end of the film, (white savior) Tarzan, at his most wild, rescues kidnapped Africans that are doomed to be enslaved. Essentially, when the white character has been subsumed by 'dark Africa' he can still save 'the Africans'. Nearly all screen time is spent gazing at white actors in the

'wilds of Africa' (when only 4% of the continent is white). It was so egregious that one American movie critic questioned why rebooting the story for a new film even seemed like a good idea (Kenny, 2016). Why does Hollywood revisit these colonial fantasy stories when so much other material is available? This fascination isn't limited to film. Peter DiCampo, an American ex-pat photographer working on the continent noted that, "the exotic and/or degrading version of Africa we've grown used to in photography can actually cause Africa to become imaginary in the Western mind—to occupy the same part of your brain as fantasy and adventure," (Jacobs, 2016, p. 97).

African filmmakers are creating movies that could help orient Western audiences to more authentic African experiences. Nigeria's film industry (often referred to as 'Nollywood') is the second largest producer of fiction motion pictures in the world (the US ranks third) ("Film industry," 2021). Since 2000, however, only two films from African nations have been nominated for an Oscar in the International Feature Film category—and both of those were from North African nations (Tunisia, Mauritania) ("List of Academy Award winners and nominees for best international feature film," 2021). Recognition at that level is an important way to grow an audience for international films. Unsurprisingly, *Out of Africa*, the quintessential colonial film won seven Oscars (Orgeret, 2009, p. 506).

While Tunisia and Mauritania are of *Africa*, Imperial media tend to view North Africa as separate from sub-Saharan. For example, in 2015 *The Guardian* reported that Nigerian writer Chigozie Obioma was the only African author on the longlist of finalists for the Man Booker Prize. But Moroccan author Laila Lalami was on the list as well

(Brown, 2015). After social media jumped on the error, they issued a correction. When interviewed, readers of *National Geographic* said they associated "the magazine with Africa, with the place name standing for both the race and a stereotypical primitivity, the man holding a spear, awash in body paint. Black people from New Guinea were seen as African, light-skinned people from Africa were not," (Lutz & Collins, 1993, p. 254). This primitive stereotype was on full display in 2006, when American Express ran billboard advertisements for a new credit card that donated funds to "help fight AIDS in Africa," (Bradbury, 2010, p.8) by showcasing fair-skinned Brazilian model Gisele Bündchen standing next to a Maasai man. The direction was clear:

> not only are 'African' and 'western' identities pitted against one another as homogeneous and polar opposites, but African identities are specifically crystallized and essentialized in the choice by the advertisers to use a Maasai warrior to represent Africa. (Bradbury, 2010, p. 10)

Therein lies the key message that so many Westerners have internalized: Africa and Africans *are not like us.* Perhaps this explains why colonial narratives are still so pervasive and alluring. But, in this great, essentialized continent, there is another adventure for the Western imagination: "the last frontier of economic expansion," (Nothias, 2014, p. 326). African scholars express frustration that their nations are still valued on their extractive potential for the West (as evidenced by the Swiss-Ghanaian cacao kerfluffle). Noting that, "Westerners want Africa to function socially and economically in such a way that the continent would mesh neatly into the globalised economy built by Europeans and Americans over the past two centuries," (De B'béri, & Louw, 2011, p. 337).

Indeed these two tropes (the land of adventure and land to be plundered) were evident in a 2011 cover story in *The Economist.* The headline "Africa Rising," ran with an illustration. Generally, a story focusing on a region's growing economy would use an image reflecting financial markets like a busy city center, or some other clue to growing urbanization. But this is *Africa* and the publication is *Western*. The cover featured a composited illustration of a Black child running with kite in the savannah. In an interview, the European illustrator who created the image, admitted to using a photo of a white child and altering him to look Black (Nothias, 2014, p. 330). There was, essentially, nothing African about the image at all. The question, of course, is how do we identify what is *really* 'African' in terms of imagery*?* The term 'authentic' appears in much scholarly research, although the definition around the word is muddled.

George Newman (2019) has divided the ways in which consumers describe the meaning of authenticity into three categories. The first is the easiest to distill. This includes specific objects (usually of value) such as an ancient coin. In these instances, the "test" of authenticity rests in the noun. Is the coin verifiably from the historical date, or is it a replica? The second is categorical. This is a descriptor of a *class* of objects or experiences like *organic* produce or a *suede* jacket. In these cases, the test of authenticity is in the adjective. This is harder to verify, but research shows consumers still feel relatively confident in their ability to determine authenticity. But the third kind of authenticity is different, and it's what is most important to this inquiry: values authenticity. By Newman's own admission, it's the most difficult to distill. His list incorporates everything from a Jazz performance to a Christening ceremony. In the broad list of qualifying experiences and events the common thread was "the motivations

and values of the producer," (Newman, 2019, p.15). While Carroll describes this sort of authenticity as "culturally contingent and historically situated," (Carroll, 2015, p.4).

Given those parameters within this nebulous, but important term, how do we apply "authenticity" to coverage of Africa? Are we assessing the motivations of the people being covered or the journalist reporting? For the purposes of this research, we're assessing the values of the journalist/photojournalist. Western journalists have been "parachuting in" to cover stories across sub-Saharan Africa as stepping-stones for their career for decades.

This exploitive practice cannot be separated from the coverage, as the motivations are more focused on career than providing accurate context. For example, reporting by former East Africa Bureau chief for the *New York Times*, Jeffrey Gettleman, has been described as the "worst of parachute journalism" (Seay, 2017). After leaving his post in Nairobi, he published a memoir, *Love, Africa: A memoir of romance, war and survival*. The book was endorsed with a blurb by Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Meta (formerly Facebook), who is neither an expert in African affairs nor journalism. She is, however, widely influential as a figure for global capitalism. If we're trying to assess the motivations of the producer, asking Sandberg to endorse the work seems a clear indicator. Critics with relevant expertise described the book as "reductionist and exoticising," (Seay, 2017). Another said Gettleman only followed "the stories with the most thrill and bloodshed and also the biggest [career] pay-off," (Weitzberg, 2017). Critics acknowledge that Gettleman is a strong writer and that he could have been a "more responsible reporter. If only he had received the right editorial guidance from the *NYT*," (Weitzberg, 2017). The natural question then, is why didn't the *New York*

Times demand a different kind of reporting? One that required deeper context and use of local expert sources? We can only surmise, but if we use values authenticity as a measure, the answer would be a fixation on Western supremacy.

Western Hegemony: An ecosystem for global storytelling

African news workers express frustration that Western media aren't interested in authentic stories from the continent. Nigerian journalist Shayera Dark had a story about a Nigerian Paralympian rejected by a North American news website because it was too "optimistic," (Dark, 2019). In Ghana, a recent study revealed that local journalists feel culturally defeated and dominated by European media, (Serwornoo, 2018), although they didn't feel there was an alternative. Radio reporters in DRC said European-language news only focused on the most negative stories (Fiedler & Frère, 2016).

There are similar experiences involving photography. A foreign news correspondent in East Africa (whose nationality was not identified) wrote a story on the growing rate of diabetes due to processed and prepared foods in Kenya and interviewed middle-class Nairobians. She was startled when the international picture desk (based in the West) ran a photograph of refugees in Dadaab Refugee Complex, and told the researcher "OK, so they have just done another "Africans are all poor and ill" photo to match a story they obviously haven't read,'" (Nothias, 2020, p. 254). Local working photographers know this dynamic well. A Kenyan photographer, whose name was kept anonymous as part of a study, said that international wire services only wanted images of despair, adding that, "I don't think it matters what tribe you are--or I mean whether you

are Kenyan or mzungu or what. If you work for the agencies these are the kinds of images they want." (Kautsky, 2009, p. 14). It's no wonder that critics have singled out photo agencies for simplifying Africa into a "repetitive trope," (Jayawardane, 2017).

While photography is often treated as an explicit truth, under the edict that "pictures don't lie," the process of image-making in media context has many layers. This ecosystem of photographers, editors, publishers, agencies and audience combine to create and reinforce narratives that are more powerful than the individual images themselves (Lutz & Collins, 1990). For example, researchers performed a content analysis that examined 20 years of feature photography from the global photojournalism competition, Pictures of the Year International (POYi). The study revealed that the content of winning photographs in the category shifted significantly over time—from traditional features (lighthearted, warm photographs) to imagery focused on adversity. The researchers also noted that among the feature category winners in 2019, "five of the six relate to a social issue, and out of those, all five depict racial or ethnic minorities, and four were from international locations," (Midberry, Comfort & Roskos, 2020, p. 767). This bias toward negative narratives surrounding people of color comes with real consequences. For some photographers, winning contests is a gateway to better paying assignments at larger publications. If they tailor their submissions, and, ultimately their eye, towards imagery that's trending, how will we break away from these stereotypes? The authenticity that documentary photography strives for is only attainable if we acknowledge and celebrate the daily lives (and hopes and dreams) of people of color in the United States and around the world.

It's not just the subject matter that reinforces these biases. There are organizational/academic practices that exclude photographers from certain regions--meaning research on photojournalism reflects a mostly Western perspective. Prior to their recent September 2021 announcement shifting their global strategy, the elite World Press Photo Foundation, based in Amsterdam, was a frequent offender. In addition to their annual contest, they fund research related to the work practices of photojournalists. In two recent global studies conducted by survey, both with more than 500 respondents, neither had a single response from Africa. This was ignored by the researchers who did not call out or offer any explanation as to why no one from the continent had participated (Hadland & Barnett, 2018) (Hadland, Lambert & Campell, 2016).

Given the previous seeming invisibility of African photojournalists to World Press Photo Foundation, it's not surprising that, in 2018, their invitation-only workshop known as the Joop Masterclass did not include a single photographer from the entire continent (Jayawardane, 2018), even though more than 20 had been nominated. World Press has since added African photojournalists to the selection committee as a first step, but contest and travel fees are much higher for photographers earning a living in "soft" currencies. Leading one photographer to say, "We've seen plenty of well-intentioned initiatives, but if they are not making headway, WPP and others need to recognize that they make not actually be doing anything but making themselves feel better," (Jayawardane, 2018). Decades of these kinds of omissions means that:

> the way the world pictures and imagines Africa and Africans will remain as they have historically been framed by the geopolitical west- as a location of a special brand of savagery and darkness to which those in the west have no parallel experiences or equivalent. (Jayawardane, 2018)

While World Press may have taken steps towards a more inclusive workshop and contest, the issue is deeper than that as African photojournalists are expected to deliver images that reinforce the existing negative narratives.

Through the Lens and Across the Desk: How photographers work

To understand the importance and influence of what publications *want* from the photojournalists at the scene, we must examine how photographers work. Generally, it can be broken down into two types of labor. First, there is the actual work of making pictures. This is both a series of technical skills required to master the equipment and behaviors in the field (which encompass everything from gaining access to building rapport with subjects). Photographers also must understand the subtext of the scene so that they can "recognize and document elements that might otherwise seem mundane," (Thomson & Greenwood, 2016, p. 639). This level of intimacy with subject matter also helps build rapport with whomever is being photographed because when the relationship between the photographer and subject is not well-managed, the imagery lacks authenticity and depth.

The manner of rapport-building is distinct to each photojournalist, but there are trends in how they describe this part of their work. In a study of photographer-subject interactions, American photographers in the Midwest cited time as an "extremely significant" factor in being able to capture images that are authentic and unstaged (Thomson & Greenwood, 2016, p. 633). Similarly, Kenyan freelance photographers employed by international wire services in Nairobi cited lack of time (due to incredibly

short turnarounds that wire services require) as the biggest barrier to making "good pictures," (Kautsky, 2009, p. 16). In addition, the Midwestern photographers overwhelmingly agreed that subjects, "were, on average, more comfortable with photographers who shared similar demographic characteristics," (Thomson & Greenwood, 2016, p. 634). They cited race, age and socio-economic status as significant factors in mitigating subject "reactivity" (meaning camera-awareness or performance).

While there is no correlating research with African subjects, we do know that Africans have expressed frustration with Western media and its tendency to fixate on the most negative narratives. There have been several incidents where African activists on social media have called out Western news organizations for their bias. These voices are influential. In 2015, after CNN referred to Kenya as a "terror hotbed," activists pushed for an apology from the network—and they got it. CNN sent a vice president to apologize to President Kenyatta in person, (Nothias & Cheruiyot, 2019, p. 138). Africans are using new methods to reclaim the narrative surrounding their countries. Whether this wariness of foreigners (and any reactivity it might induce) is at play when foreign photographers are involved warrants more inquiry.

Second, there is the work of career-building. As staff roles at publications have all but evaporated, most photojournalists work on a freelance basis, meaning that they aren't represented in the newsroom hierarchy and have multiple employers, (Warm body with a camera" 2017, p.7). Thus, photographers are constantly marketing themselves to gain access to assignments that pay well enough to manage the significant financial overhead that their equipment requires. Larger publications/media pay much better than small,

local outlets. So, photographers spend a fair amount of time trying to get connected to them—including meeting with editors from various publications to "meet them in person, show one's work and discuss potential collaboration opportunities," ("Warm body with a camera", 2017, p. 14). This is viewed as more effective than emails to busy editors who might not even read them. There are "relatively few linkages between the international mainstream photo agencies and local markets," (Kautsky, 2009, p. 8) so connecting directly with picture editors is key to professional and economic survival. But with the best-paying assignments coming from Western media, and the picture editors for those publications residing in offices in Europe and North America, how are photographers on the continent supposed to compete when securing a visa to enter the country for a meeting could take months?

African photographers and creatives are working to fill this gap—creating new photography festivals and workshops like LagosPhoto festival and Addis Foto Fest (Addis Ababa). The hope is that editors will travel to the talent- so that African photojournalists can have the same face-to-face meetings. It's too early to know if it's working. Back in 2009, a Kenyan picture editor at a national newspaper, told a researcher "The only thing I know is that the time is coming when the foreign agencies will not have to send somebody from outside to come and do an assignment in another country because there will be photographers there to do that job," (Kautsky, 2009, p. 23). But in 2017, Alice Gabriner, International Picture Editor for TIME magazine, told *The New York Times* that she travels to photo festivals and regularly hosts meetings in her office as a way to find new talent. She also said she had not attended a photo festival in Africa (Richardson, 2017). The cost of this exclusion is real because, "Like many

editors… she also prefers to work with photographers whom she knows and whose judgments she understands," (Richardson, 2017). Picture editors have broad control over contracts for their publication. Photographers understand their influence—leading one freelancer to say, "you don't really work for the organizations. You work for the editors," ("Warm body with a camera", 2017, p. 14).

Herein lies the unique tension for the relationships that photojournalists must manage to be successful. Is the most important relationship with the editor or the subjects being photographed? If subjects are more authentic, and less "reactive" (as Thomson & Greenwood described it), to photographers who share demographic characteristics (and make them feel understood), how can we expect the foreign photographers "dropping into" assignments on the continent to deliver authentic imagery that honestly showcases lived experiences?

Knowledge Production: Showcasing authentic African stories

The crux of this issue is not only that African photographers are denied employment opportunities by Western media/publications but reflects exclusion on a broader scale. In prioritizing Western journalists and Western discourses on African affairs, one can reasonably assume that many indigenous life stories have been neglected and local histories untold (Shome, 2019), "These issues are not just about media but about knowledge production itself." (Shome, 2019, p. 307) This further pushes the question of authenticity as related to the motivation of the producers, when we consider that colonial

patterns and power dynamics are also present in training news workers on the continent. Wendy Willems notes that:

> Scholars in the 1980s and early 1990s were often reflexive and critical about the relevance of Western approaches to media and communication, whereas the mid-1990s and 2000s saw more of an accommodation and appropriation of Western theory, as evidenced by the shift toward the use of liberal-democratic theory as dominant framework to explain the role of media and communication on the continent. (Willems, 2014, 425)

This shift came about as African universities were struggling financially and Western donors (NGOS, etc.) stepped in, but with the funding came influence (Willems, 2014). Scholars argue that this research financing model has shifted the way journalism and media are taught—prioritizing European-language media, norms and narratives over African ones (Chibuwe & Salawu, 2020), creating "low regard" for indigenous language media (Chibuwe & Salawu, 2020, 143). This is particularly troublesome because research shows that during periods of crisis, African audiences heavily favor indigenous language news sources (Fiedler & Frère, 2016), presumably because of the deeper context and understanding of the reporting, which is essentially how Carroll described authenticity when he used the phrase "culturally contingent and historically situated." (Carroll, 2015, p.4)

Thus it, "is meant to establish a power relationship between the Self as the West/North/colonizer and the Other as the East/South/colonized," (Alahmed, 2020, p. 408). This power dynamic implies that "Africa is incapable of generating indigenous knowledge," (Oloruntoba, 2014, 339). While that may refer to academic research, one could see how hiring ex-pat (photo)journalists to cover stories in places where they don't speak local languages reflects the same attitude. Oloruntoba went on to state that

Western scholars, "continue to produce knowledge that is essentially abstracted and deviates from the realities of the African condition," (Oloruntoba, 2014, 339).

Africa has been dealing with non-Africans (such as missionaries and colonial administrators) making declarations about the region from "self-declared locations of authority," (Anyidoho, 2008, p. 28) who were validated by a trusting Western audience for the entire colonial relationship. Again, the parallels to criticisms of news discourses apply. Scholars have argued that the academy must center "Africa as a legitimate historical unit of analysis and epistemic site from which to interpret the world while at the same time globalising knowledge from Africa," (Parashar & Schulz, 2021, 870).

The same is true for media. It's not enough for European and North American news organizations to cover stories from the continent, or even keep foreign bureaus that employ ex-pat journalists. While many, largely white, European and North American journalists have adopted new thinking, it has not been fully internalized. Toussaint Nothias named this phenomenon, "postcolonial reflexivity" explaining that:

> it may help individual journalists avoid some of the worst pitfalls in journalistic writing about Africa and adopt new angles or develop projects that disrupt stereotypes…At worst, however, postcolonial reflexivity offers ways to rationalize one's ongoing contribution to racialized news discourses." (Nothias, 2020, p. 261)

While Western journalists are making an effort to shift their thinking, the same resources aren't applied to support local journalists telling local stories. That kind of media had strong readership in the past. Historically, "during the time of political struggle, a lot of indigenous newspapers cropped up to assist in the fight of independence, but disappeared as soon as independence was achieved," (Motsaathebe, 2018, p.176). While indigenous language media is not currently thriving, "In many African countries, alternative

associative formations are working to empower everyday people, despite the fact that the human benefits derived from these forms of social capital have been overlooked by many Afropessimistic discourses," (De B'béri & Louw, 2011, p. 343).

Returning to our initial inquiry, how does this segue with photojournalism on the continent? By "focus[ing] on identities which have been constructed independently from the dominant narrative," (Roy, 2018, p. 320), African photographers are breaking through the tired tropes. South African photographer Cedric Nunn said, "We came to the conclusion that we needed our own standards and institutions that would have a different set of values attached, and depart from sensationalist images,' that agencies based in the geopolitical west preferred, and sometimes demanded," (Jayawardane, 2018). Hopefully WPP can begin to meet this need with regional contests. This push to highlight a different sort of photography of life on the continent has real impact because "Feature photos are not mere entertainment, rather they are a narrative device we use to negotiate what it means to be human and to articulate what we value in our societies," (Midberry, Comfort & Roskos, 2020, p. 780).

There is an appetite for change. This study uses a postcolonial approach to understand how Nigerian photographers interactions with Western media and organizations align with changing Western ideas about working in the region by asking the following questions:

RQ1: How are Nigerian photographers documenting authentic experiences that subvert Western imaginations about life in the country?

RQ2: How are Nigerian photographers ensuring that authentic imagery reaches an audience?

RQ3: What pressures do Nigerian photographers face (real or perceived) to perpetuate stereotypes when working for Western organizations?

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

Qualitative Research: Seeking meaning

This research relied on qualitative methods to unpack the complex roles, relationships and rituals that shape both the image-based narratives of Nigerian life and the professional relationships required to distribute and share that work. While we can quantify instances where Nigerian photographers have been excluded or marginalized (workshops, bylines, rates), understanding how they empower themselves by working through and around this system isn't as obvious. Quantitative research could track rates that African photographers get paid versus their Western counterparts to document inequity, but qualitative research is different. Qualitative researchers, "look for useful ways to talk about experiences within a specific historical, cultural and/or political context, and consider the research process within relevant social practices," (Brennen, 2013, p. 15). To explore the complexities of how photographers thrive (in a system that has mostly excluded them for generations), we needed to look at more than numbers.

Qualitative interviewing provides an opportunity for deeper, more nuanced data. The open-ended quality of semi-structured interviewing provides greater breadth than structured interviews (Fontana & Frey, 1994) and focuses the data on the perspective, experiences, and emotions of the photographers. This, in turn, creates an opportunity to "explores respondents' feelings, emotions, experiences and values within their deeply nuanced inner worlds," (Brennan, 2017, p. 28).

Snowball Sampling: Cultural practice in research

Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method. This strategy was employed for two reasons. First, I had worked in the field with the primary participant, having built a professional relationship with him over four years. That existing relationship gave me a head start on what Fontana and Frey called "getting in" (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p. 7). Second, as a Western foreigner trying to conduct a study from another continent, it was important for me to work in a manner that was as culturally relevant as possible. Nigerian culture is highly relationship-based. Interactions that might be considered impersonal by Western standards (such as a research interview) require a level of social familiarity and verified rapport. Blindly emailing photographers to solicit participation would have been unlikely to succeed and at worst, considered rude. Given the cultural dynamics at play, snowball sampling seemed to provide "the opportunity to communicate better with the samples, as they are acquaintances of the first sample, and the first sample is linked to the researcher," (Naderifar, Goli & Ghaljaie, 2017, p. 2).

After the first participant agreed to be interviewed and to make introductions to other photographers, I sent an email to introduce myself and the project (see Appendix A) that he forwarded to others. This method was an effective recruiting technique. One photographer even mentioned the initial participant in our interview, "I do not argue with him. Like I can't do it. If he told me somebody needed something, I'll do it because I respect him," (interview with WB, 1 August, 2021). Each photographer was contacted via email initially and subsequent communication also happened via email, unless they requested an alternate method. Two photographers preferred to communicate via WhatsApp. Each photographer was offered several time slots to select from. Each slot

was slated for 60 minutes, and they ranged from 3-8 PM in Nigeria, which was 9AM-2PM in Chicago (my location). After the photographer selected a time slot, they received a Google Calendar invitation with a Zoom link.

The first participant made introductions to eight photographers, four of whom gave interviews. Then, those subjects were asked if they would make introductions and three agreed that they would. This second round of requests resulted in an additional five interviews. Ultimately, 17 photographers were approached and 11 agreed to participate. Several photographers did not immediately log into the call at the top of the hour. This is to be expected based on Nigerian cultural norms. I waited in the call until 15 minutes past the hour, at which point, I sent an email (or WhatsApp message, depending on stated preferences) to the photographer offering to reschedule. At this point, two photographers then joined their call. Three other photographers did not immediately join the call, I waited in the call until the time slot concluded and then sent a follow up. All three rescheduled their interview time. Ultimately, one photographer who had agreed did not log into the scheduled video call, or the rescheduled call. The photographer did not respond to subsequent efforts to follow up via email and WhatsApp. Because this last interview was never completed, the total number of interviews for the study was 10.

Interviews: Themes and questions

The question set was divided into four sections. It began with warm-up questions, which consisted of fact-based background information, such as the number of years the photographer had been in the field and what kind of clients they work for. Then, the question set followed with three sections rooted in postcolonial theory: Photographers

and Knowledge Production in Nigeria, Western Imaginaries and Nigeria's Many Facets, and Western Hegemony in Working Relationships. These sections were devised to ensure that the interview focused on unique aspects of postcolonial relationships: how Nigerians are excluded/included in creating information and understanding, the disparity (or lack thereof) of Western beliefs about Nigeria and Nigerian realities, and how unequal power dynamics influence work and work products when working for Western organizations (media or non-governmental).

One photographer asked to see the question set in advance of deciding whether to participate. To accommodate that request and treat all interview subjects fairly, the question set was sent to all participants ahead of time, with a note that reviewing the questions prior to the interview was entirely voluntary. Notably, the question set was sent without with the subject headings to avoid influencing the answers. For example, under the section about "Western Imaginaries" there was a question that asked if Western clients understand daily life in Nigeria. The goal was to elicit information about how that understanding (or lack thereof) may influence their shot lists or picture edit. But framing that question under a section calling out Western imaginaries, may have directed answers in a way the researcher was trying to avoid. So, while the headings were directly aligned to postcolonial themes, and the questions were written to respond to those themes, the actual postcolonial thematic language was left out of the question set. The goal was to hear directly from the photographers themselves, without researcher theoretical bias influencing the interview. The entire question set is available for review in Appendix B.

Interviews: Technical details

Originally, the calls were slated as recorded video interviews, so that body language could be coded in addition to the statements photographers made. This was ultimately abandoned as several interviews had minor technical issues. For example, video was turned off halfway through because of a poor connection or to extend the life of the battery. Several photographers used their phone for the video call and were in transit of some sort: walking, driving, waiting at the mechanic, or between other scheduled meetings. Ten interviews were conducted and recorded via Zoom between July 21, 2021 and August 24, 2021. The length of each conversation ranged from 23 to 78 minutes. All files were stored on my computer and additionally backed up via Microsoft OneDrive (cloud storage). All interviews were conducted before the transcription process began.

Most, although not all, interviews included conversation unrelated to the research. In those moments, an important cross-cultural lesson occurred. In the world of Western work, the sense that *time is money* is often present in interactions considered transactional. Meetings that are "off course" are considered "wasted time". As a Western woman, I initially jumped into the interview. From my perspective this was to be respectful of the photographers' time. They are busy working professionals who were not receiving any compensation for the call. Culturally, this was a misstep. Nigerian business is highly relational and the reason that snowball sampling was the only way to reliably source interview subjects. I was stopped by a photographer who was taken aback and asked questions about my motivations for the research. At the time I chalked it up to cultural difference, but in hindsight, I wonder if he was assessing my authenticity. After

that experience, I changed the manner that I began each interview to include an introduction of myself, explain a little about how I'd come to this research and invited the photographer to ask any questions they had.

Then the audio component of the recording was uploaded to Otter.ai, a transcription software, from a company that labels itself a "start-up based in Silicon Valley." The software was reliable with a North American Midwest accent (the interviewer) but struggled significantly with the various Nigerian accents of the photographers. Transcripts as delivered by the software were intermittently legible and nonsensical. Each machine transcription was then re-transcribed by hand—adjusting the incorrect words and adding appropriate punctuation so that the conversation made sense in text. Due to connectivity, there were some moments that were indecipherable even to a live human and were listed as "inaudible" in the transcript. Each photographer was given a pseudonym of two initials and the names of other participating photographers (who may have been referenced by a friend) were coded with the relevant pseudonym. Finally, interview transcripts were trimmed to remove chit-chat, or other background information. As mentioned above, several photographers asked questions about the motivation for the research before we began the question set. This part of the conversation was removed for two reasons. First, it was mostly the researcher answering questions posed by the interview subject. Second, not everyone asked questions ahead of time, so the data wasn't consistent. The trimmed aggregate source material added up to 182 single-spaced pages printed with 12pt Times font. The median transcript length was 17 pages, while the average was 18.2 pages. Once the transcripts were cleaned up and trimmed, the coding process began.

Codes, Themes and Categories

The transcripts were read a third time to develop an initial set of codes, which were largely descriptive in nature. They included tags of specific words or phrases used by multiple photographers, like "poverty porn" or pictures they "won't take." These were uploaded to Dedoose, a qualitative research software, for ease of tracking and coding. After the first reading, the codes were revised to better reflect the broader commonalities of the interviews and the theoretical concepts being explored. This inductive coding approach was selected so that I could "find the answers within," (Blair, 2015, p. 17), and ultimately led to transitioning from a descriptive set of codes, to process codes, or themes. This shift revealed themes that were more reflective of "the human condition" than "topic-based nouns" could provide (Saldana, 2016, p.78).

Though the researcher had some expectations around codes that might emerge, predetermined themes were not curated. Westerners have been speaking for Africans for centuries, and it was important that codes and themes reflected their perspective and the language they used. Similar to the manner in which postcolonial language anchored the initial question set, but was not presented as part of the interview, those headings organized the codes into categories, but were not, themselves, used as codes. To reflect the agency of the photographers, the themes are action-focused, while the codes that make up that theme are instances of that action. For example, the theme "Reflecting personal values," is supported by the codes "Photography as activism," "Personal vision/style," and "Avoiding certain images."

Each transcript was read four times, in alphabetical file order by pseudonym from BF through WB during the coding and code-refining process. The action-focused themes

were then applied to the broader categories to understand how the photographers respond to power imbalances identified by postcolonial theory. For example, when trying to understand how Nigerian photographers may be either included or excluded from knowledge production, and centering Nigeria as an epistemic site, the themes "reflecting personal values," "translating across cultures," and "grounding the profession in African perspectives" emerged amongst answers from throughout the interview. The entire set of codes can be viewed in Appendix C.

As themes were applied to categories, they were reviewed to ensure that the codes were reflective of the photographers' perspective rather than the researcher. This meant that there were some surprising results, specifically to RQ2, as will be explained in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This research focused on Nigerian photographers working for Western media outlets and NGOs to better understand how postcolonial power dynamics influence their work product and work relationships. Although the photographers all have unique client sets (combination of western media, photo agencies, NGOs, events, and art galleries), strong themes emerged about their experiences creating imagery for Western audiences and their feelings about current narratives that assume Nigeria is under-developed and Nigerian people are under-educated. This narrative influenced not only the kinds of imagery they were asked to create, but also the work opportunities they were offered.

The first research question asked, how Nigerian photographers are documenting authentic experiences that subvert Western imaginations about life in the country. Three themes emerged in the interviews that reflected the photographers' desire to share and illustrate a more authentic Nigerian experience. First, a theme of striving for equity emerged—this theme encompassed two aspects: equity for photo subjects and equity for Nigerian photographers as professionals. The professional aspect will be addressed as part of RQ2. For RQ1, photographers cited disparities in how African people are portrayed compared to Westerners, and their interest in changing the status quo. Second, they discussed ensuring that work reflected their personal values, encompassed aspects of creative identity and their commitment to respectful representation. Third, the photographers talked about how they translate across cultures, meaning how they work to ensure that Western editors or audiences understand what is happening at the scene.

Reflecting Personal Values: Managing requests for 'poverty porn'

Documenting authentic life means there are some pictures these photographers refuse to make. Nine photographers singled out "poverty porn" – pictures purposely focused on hardship and suffering – as assignments they would question. Photographer NP[1] said, "If a client comes to me with a brief, this is what they want. And it doesn't sit well with what I stand for. I would politely decline. I'll tell them, I'm sorry, I will not be able to do that," (NP).

Several photographers felt that poverty porn imagery only reinforced existing dismal Western narratives about Nigeria, or Africa more broadly. FQ said that has caused her to reevaluate the way she thought about some famous photographers, "I no longer see them as icons. Because now I'm seeing that they are problematic, because now I understand that I'm like, 'Oh, no, that's not how we should portrayed," (FQ). NP noted that when clients ask for this kind of imagery, he feels a sense of responsibility, "I want to do what you want, but I have--as a Black photographer and as a young photographer, I, it's my duty to represent my people well," (NP). FQ agreed with the commitment to representing people well when she said:

> When a client would, you know, send me links of images they saw, and maybe they thought it was maybe images of some people in Africa that they thought, if I could replicate. I just say straight... I tell them to their face, 'I don't do this type of images. The sad-looking ones. I don't have time for those things. You can call your Western photographer.' (FQ)

[1] For ease of reading, citations will refer to the pseudonym assigned to the photographer. For a list of interviews and dates, please see the References section.

Another strategy the photographers employed to avoid making these sorts of images involved trying to negotiate with the client or manage the concern in the field by editing what they shoot. OP, a photographer who was particularly focused on client-service, said "I give constant feedback to my clients and the people I work with. This about the situation on ground. And I oftentimes avoid taking some kind of pictures that would drive some kind of narrative," (OP). LO mentioned, "I wouldn't take picture of a child that is naked or that has flies on his face, you know, I would just ignore it totally," (LO). Another photographer mentioned that she would tell subjects, "Wear your best clothes. And you know, let me just take portraits. I don't want to photograph you barefooted," (FB). One photographer mentioned feeling particularly conflicted in situations like this, "Most times, I turn it down. Sometimes I shoot, but I'm very uncomfortable. Sometimes I try to strike a balance and shoot images in such a way that maybe they still tell the story, but not as explicit," (WB).

The reasons photographers gave for avoiding poverty porn imagery varied. Some focused their responses on being respectful of the people being photographed, OP said "all my images are made to respond to dignity of people," (OP). While LO focused on relatability, "I try as much as I can to show more of what the reality is, but also showing that these people are human beings, and that you can relate with them," (LO). Some photographers tried working with the client to ensure they protected the subjects' dignity. When working with NGOs, NP said:

> …it's about me trying to have that conversation about empathy, and pity-- that they are two different things. People have the idea that, 'Oh, just give us a photograph that will make people look at them, and have pity for them.' But I'll volunteer to make a photograph that when you look at it, you have empathy, and compassion, not necessarily pity. (NP)

Delicately negotiating access was another way that photographers worked to cultivate empathic imagery. WB said, “I don't just assume that these people are specimens that I have been given access to photograph. I try to connect, to make comfortable as much as possible, to make them happy to be photographed,” (WB). Another photographer, who had worked on a particularly sensitive project talked about building rapport with subjects through small acts that denote respect, like learning phrases in the local language because, “when people see you even make an effort to speak their language, drink their water too, you know, like, you accept them, then they also accept you,” (FQ). One photographer discussed his own journey to delineating between pity and empathy and cited an assignment early in his career:

> Pity is not exactly good for work, because I mean, it's not a good place to work from. So I had to rid myself of those [feelings of pity] and rid them myself of those earlier misinformation and literally engage with people and hear them. And think that was how I think I got rid of that fear. And did better. (CL)

This refusal to perpetuate the Western idea of Nigerian life as impoverished or malnourished was not about refusing to document complex issues or people in crisis. Many of the photographers talked about their most delicate stories as deeply important to them because they felt they could make a difference in a meaningful way.

Reflecting Personal Values: Photographers as activists

Most photographers talked about the work they do as a platform to enact change. FQ said photography was a way to, “Question my society. Question norms,” (FQ). BF mentioned he strives to “tell the story that can bring change,” (BF). While LO said, he chose photojournalism because he “wanted to use my pictures to talk about issues,” (LO). NP noted that there are “a lot of photographers who want to change the world,” (NP). OP

said the amplification provided by photography coverage can lead people to say, “Okay, hold on a minute, what we've been doing is actually, you know, not right,” (OP).

Beyond this sense of identity as an activist and the work being part of that, several mentioned specific ways they were working to enact change. One offered direct assistance saying, “Some people that I have the ability to refer [to aid organizations], I do refer. Others that I have the ability to support, I support,” (OP). Others pointed to specific images or projects that had brought awareness to an issue or resulted in strong fundraising for the community featured. NP mentioned he had completed, “a personal project, that got some communities water--like two communities’ water. I crowdfunded on Twitter,” (NP). CL mentioned an environmental story about air pollution from “black soot,” (CL) there had been “one protest about it. The government still didn't listen,” but after the story ran in European media, “it was, like, a big issue,” and resulted in change. While the photographers use their work product (imagery) to advocate for change for large scale issues, they also cited the process of work—and the choices that encompasses-- as an opportunity for broad change in the industry.

Striving for Equity: Disparities for photo subjects

When photographers discussed why they avoided certain kinds of photography, they frequently cited maintaining the dignity of the subject. This commitment to the people they photograph also emerged when discussing frustrations of the kinds of imagery that already exist and have created expectations about what they will deliver. Five photographers specifically cited children as a concern. Some asked why it’s socially acceptable to make pictures of naked children in Nigeria (or Africa more broadly) when it

would be considered inappropriate to photograph Western children that way. One photographer referenced a conversation:

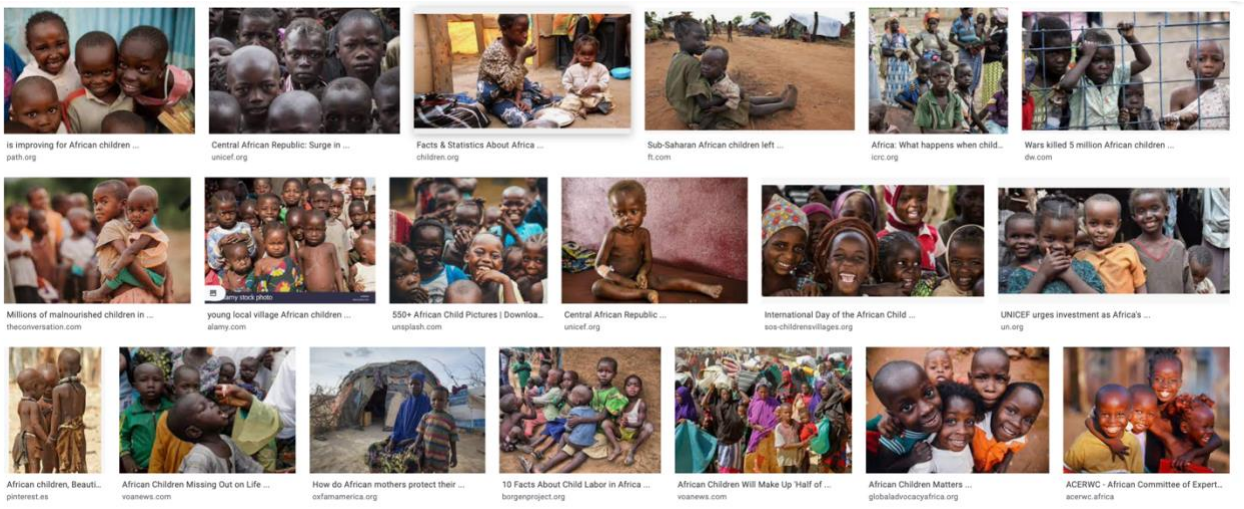
> …a friend of mine was talking about, was complaining, about the white man's gaze of the continent…How, when you Google, Africa or Nigeria, the series of the images that pop up are always very funny, very off. Like, you see a child or a naked child or child not wearing pants, with flies everywhere, that kind of thing. (CL)

While UB talked more broadly about this issue of gaze when she said:

> Oh, there's a way White photographers take our picture. They will show Africa like it's all suffering. And oh, and of course, a Nigerian photographer, for the most part, can never take a picture like that. (UB)

To verify whether this was true, Google image searches were briefly conducted. While Google image results are not the focus of this research, they do illustrate the disparities the photographers identified. A Google image search of "African children" on September 3, 2021 returned the following results in the first three rows (19 images total):

FIGURE 1



Three photos show at least partially unclad children (shirtless or mostly naked), five images show children barefoot, 11 images could be reasonably labeled negative in tone (children looking sad, pitiable, behind barbed wire, etc).

On the same day, a Google image search of "American children" returned the following results in the first three rows (21 images total):

FIGURE 2

Not a single child is barefoot or shirtless and only one image could clearly be labelled sad (bottom left). Although, in a strange twist, a photo that apparently illustrates childhood trauma (second from right, middle row) features a Black child with a slight smile. When talking about these differences, one photographer (LO) cited specific legal protections available in Europe that protect the privacy of minors, but added, "Those rules that we respect in the West --just apply it here, whether or not there are legislations and protections for those people," (LO).

Reflecting Personal Values: Personal vs. paid work

All photographers interviewed talked about the work reflecting their personal values as a way to authentically showcase daily life, although the way it did, varied. Only three of them used "artist," to describe themselves or referred to their work as art, but nine talked about cultivating their creativity, while another six discussed pursuing gallery

shows as a venue for their work. Eight photographers distinguished between personal work and paid but considered them equally important. The photographers valued personal work for several reasons. One explicitly mentioned his mental health and using personal work as an outlet to "to keep myself in a proper in the frame of mind," (CL). While another discussed the value of having creative freedom, or to explore telling a story "with no endgame in mind," (OP). For BF, it's about personal and professional growth:

> For me, why a personal project is important…I think that's when I'm able to develop my own, I will say, vision. I have that freedom. You know, without being influenced by my clients' interest. Or rather, it's my own personal connection, relationship to what I see. And I think that's one great thing I love about doing personal work. And I find that in my journey, it has been helping. You know, *creating my own niche, giving me the chance to stand out in a multitude of many people*. (BF)

While BF never explicitly self-identified as an artist, he finds value in cultivating a personal vision to attract more paid work. Many other photographers agreed, although most of them didn't see an opportunity to convert personal work to paid assignments (through pitching editors). This was for various reasons. Three photographers cited creative control as a reason. FB said that personal work was the only place, "I get to express my creativity 100%," (FB) while another noted:

> Who would fund your project for five, six years consecutively? Who would fund your project, for it to go from being just 2d images to 3d to all of these different forms? You know, I rarely pitch and also because I don't want an editor's thoughts to influence what I'm doing. I didn't start the project because of what they had to say. (FQ)

FQ wasn't the only photographer who noted that time, and its impact on story development as an important distinction. OP noted for paid work that, "the schedule is usually rushed," (OP) and FB said, "most times, paid work assignments is like one week

and then you're expected to, you know, turnout images. And for me, it's not enough," (FB). Another photographer mentioned that personal work was a place to highlight stories outside of the media agenda:

> Your personal work does not necessarily have to be like, the most important thing right now in the country to talk about--your personal work could just be something you personally are interested about. (GP)

But if this work is personal—and not pursued with an audience in mind, does it help further the cause of sharing authentic imagery? For this researcher, the answer is yes, as it builds the historical record of a place through primary source material that was locally produced and thus avoids the issue of the 'Western gaze.' Notably, one photographer didn't pursue personal work and explicitly stated, "The truth is, I have bills to pay, I have a family to cater for. I cannot engage in this for an artistic purpose. So for me, it is more a job than it is a hobby or artistic,"(OP).

The second research question asked, how Nigerian photographers ensure that authentic imagery reaches an audience. The result was surprising. With access to so many digital channels, including social media, the literature created expectations that photographers would take advantage by engaging the broad audiences they provide. While seven of them mentioned using Instagram at least semi-regularly, the result was that these photographers were less interested in direct distribution than in working to advocate for professional development and inclusion in the established media platforms. Perhaps this reflects seeking paid work, but no one mentioned social media as a channel to deliver unpaid (personal) work to a broad audience.

Translating Across Cultures: Understanding subtext

The work of a photographer requires understanding what's happening in a moment, so that they can pick up on details others might miss and then explain that to an audience (whether those are viewers or editors). Without this contextual clarification, unfamiliar audiences will rely on existing belief systems to confirm what they see. For example, messaging around refugee resettlement frequently generously praises the United States, with the UNHCR calling it a "leader in refugee resettlement since the 1970s," (*Myths and facts about refugees in the United States*, 2020). Since 1980 the USA has admitted 3.1M refugees to resettle in the country. But Uganda, a nation with less than 15% of the population and a GDP of less than 1% of the USA, has admitted 1.4M refugees through an open-door policy to people in migration. Western viewers aren't told of the generosity of the Ugandans when viewing imagery of the people fleeing conflict in the region, missing an opportunity to better understand a region they know little about.

This deep background understanding that helps contextualize stories also applies to photographers while they are working in the field. CL noted, "there's nothing as genuine as a local perspective to a place," (CL). These insider relationships create some distinct opportunities to influence how Westerners perceive life in Nigeria. Six photographers saw themselves as "cultural liaisons" to an unfamiliar Western audience, while one thought that was "too much burden to put on one person" (FQ). Some photographers felt they had a responsibility to fill that role. FB considered it "part of the work of a photographer," (FB) continuing that, "You have to talk about your work. You have to explain it…You have to make them [the audience] understand…I see myself as that [cultural liaison] 100%," (FB). NP agreed that:

> People may not be able to come here. These people may not be able to visit here. It is important to represent the people here--so that they [viewers] have, like a balanced view of the place…I like the stories to have a caption on my each of my photographs to give context to my photograph. So that you get to know the person or what the community's about. (NP)

Others accepted the title of cultural liaison but saw it as more of a byproduct of their profession. BF noted, "It wasn't done consciously. But I realize those pictures you put out there can go a long way to impact people. To make some influence," (BF). CL agreed that he'd "never really thought about it," (CL) but believed he had taken on that role.

In a similar vein, more than one mentioned decoding cultural interactions as an important asset. BF noted:

> …sometimes when you don't belong to that place you may lose…I call it lost in translation, you might lose that translation. So I'll say it has advantages and disadvantages, you know, in terms of communication, understanding the codes in which people relate, live their daily life… coming from that community can put you at an advantage. (BF)

It's not about being from a similar geographic location that helps create this "insider" status. Photographers also talked about their insider status from a place of familiarity of their subject's experience. OP, who photographs for several international NGOs said:

> Because I myself have lived in a place of poverty, have lived in a place of need…So I know, somehow, I might not understand that particular situation, but I understand what it is to be in need, to be want, to be in poverty, to have somebody coming to you to try to want to help you. So I've been in that situation. I don't take it for granted. (OP)

While WB talked about building trust by "try[ing] my best so as not to appear socially or economically above my subject," (WB). That point of view was reiterated by WB who talked about communicating with subjects, "in the language they understand…You know, the way we measure food, the way we measure money, this is language," (WB). GP

noted that “somebody [from] outside [Nigeria] would probably miss” details “because they haven't been in the environment enough,” (GP). Indeed, OP noted that while working in Chad, being an outsider reduced his “efficiency as a storyteller,” (OP). While

Grounding Profession in African Perspectives: Relationships with picture editors

Picture editors were called “very important” (BF) and said to have “immense power” (LO). They assign paid work and they also control what imagery eventually gets published. Their picture selections “determine the image or the representation of a country, of a continent on that publication, especially if they have a huge readership,” (LO). BF called them “gatekeepers” for the way “the Western people see the world,” (BF).

While many photographers said they had strong relationships with specific editors, they spoke about the general construct of working with Western picture editors differently. Many of them mentioned that picture editors didn’t listen to the photographers’ suggestions or ideas because they “know how the storyline wants to go. And most of them are biased,” (FB). FB continued that when photographers push back the editors ask “Can't you make it work?” (FB). While CL noted he wished picture editors would be “more open-minded” and “try to get more perspective. Because you might be losing something. Might just be myopic about the story you're trying to curate or curate for publication or something,” (CL).

As noted in the Review of Literature, Western media focuses on particularly dismal and narrow narratives when covering stories in Africa. When picture editors treat local photographers as service providers, with an expectation that they will deliver what

is requested, this narrative cycle is hard to break. This is particularly true because most of the editors the photographers work with have never visited Nigeria. CL said of the 10 Western editors he's worked with "Maybe two?" had visited Nigeria. He also said he didn't think the other eight had ever been on the continent. That was repeated by most of the interview cohort. NP and FB each said one editor they work for had been in Nigeria to visit. GP said "very, very few of them," had set foot in Nigeria. While LO said it happened "rarely." OP mentioned that his editor at a major Western stock agency hadn't ever visited, although many of his NGO clients had. This lack of on-the-ground experience has real consequences for work relationships and work products. The picture editors' Western 'expertise' is built on a foundation of existing Western narratives.

To interrupt this closed loop, the photographers said they should be treated as partners in the reporting/storytelling. UB said, "we're [Nigerians] best to tell our story." While NP noted:

> They should trust African photographers, they should trust that we know our work. They should trust that we are intelligent enough to make good decisions. They should trust that we are in a position to help them--that our suggestions do matter. So, it shouldn't just be about, "This is what I want. This what I want." It should be more of "How can we achieve this?" (NP)

This issue of trust between a photographer and an editor is an important one to making strides in including African photojournalists in Western publishing platforms because the picture editors use referrals as an important way to source talent.

After meeting several editors at New York Portfolio review LO said, "they passed on my name to other publications, you know, it's a closeknit network," (LO). CL noted that most of the assignments he'd gotten from Westerners came from "recommendations." Six other photographers concurred that referrals and

recommendations “go a long way,” (WB). CL doubted the value of social media and a website for marketing purposes because “I don't think editors actually scout. I doubt they do,” (CL) noting that they’d rather ask someone they know for a recommendation.

Grounding Profession in African Perspectives: Supporting local professionals

All photographers interviewed noted that they had not studied photojournalism in a Western-style degree-seeking course, though nearly all of them were university graduates. They have degrees in journalism, sociology, biology, philosophy, computer engineering and history. This is not unique among photojournalists in Nigeria. WB said, “All of us are all using acquired knowledge. We're using informal knowledge. Because I don't have any friends in my circle, who has been professionally trained to be a photographer,” (WB).

Many of them expressed the value in having expertise outside of photojournalism. The biology graduate, LO, noted that his science background gave him deeper understanding of medical stories. While the sociology graduate, FB, mentioned her degree helped to connect with subjects. One photographer, FQ, who had “a background in theater,” discussed how different types of stage directors influenced the way she works collaboratively with subjects. BF found his lack of formal photography training to be an asset as a freelancer because:

> I kind of learned all kinds of photography. And that made me ready for different kinds of clients. So I've worked for NGOs, a lot of work for editorial, a lot. I've worked with university institutions, like in University of Padova, King's College University. But currently, I will say my client roams between journalism, NGOs, art institutions.” (BF)

This community of photographers works hard to support each other, their peers, and newcomers. Several photographers discussed how difficult it was to find mentors early in their careers. CL said “Most people I reached out to... maybe they were busy or they were not just interested at the time,” (CL). In turn, these photographers have formed cohorts, “but in a more informal way--meaning I interact with photographers, not necessarily setting up a platform for that,” (BF). FQ noted that she was only engaged in photographic “communities that are not necessarily defined as communities like community of friends, where we share ideas,” (FQ).

These informal associations are opportunities for photographers to connect with others who understand them because “somebody from Africa, we have some commonality in terms of our experiences - daily life. It's very similar, so we can relate with each other,” (BF). They have also built informal networks to guide newcomers:

> I mentor young street and documentary photographers, so that they don't make the mistake that most of us did, especially when it comes to the stereotypes. So, if you are trying to tell people that photographing poor-looking people is not documentary photography, and we are not telling the younger ones that are coming into the industry, when they see the pictures that are available everywhere, they just believe that's what it's all about. (NP)

By supporting the generation of photographers coming behind them, the photographers are working to build a large cohort of professionals. The importance of the scale of the community cannot be ignored, because as noted in the Review of Literature, many Western picture editors think there aren’t enough skilled photographers working in Africa to hire locally. The photographers are breaking through this Western erasure by strengthening their community bonds, visibility, and professional influence.

Striving for Equity: Disparities in work assignments

As mentioned earlier, the theme "striving for equity" was the only one that applied to two research questions, as the photographers seek equity for the portrayal of African photo subjects and for themselves as professionals within the media landscape. The first theme was addressed in RQ1, so this will focus on the professional equity issues.

Of the photographers interviewed, four said their access to major Western clients (both media and international NGOs) was "getting better." BF, who has been working for 15 years noted that recently, "they've [Western media/NGOs] been more interested in hiring a local photographer," (BF) although GP explicitly wondered if the uptick in assigning locally reflected the COVID19 pandemic limiting travel. But nearly all photographers interviewed talked about Western photographers being flown in to cover the biggest stories or projects:

> I think things are better now. Some years back, you will hardly see local photographers in *New York Times* or something like that, or in any of these publications. But the truth also remains that there are some big projects and they will still bring in western photographers. (LO)

WB concurred that, "they don't usually need a lot of us because they have enough photographers who are from other places--who are usually white. So, the opportunities are very limited," (WB). FQ added:

> I've had an editor tell me that there will be times when they'll fly-in an "expert" to cover in the biggest stories. And it didn't make sense to me. Because if the local photographer can do the smaller stories what is the difference with the bigger stories? It's the same thing. It's the same photography. It's the same writing. There's still a lot… they feel like we are good for the smaller jobs and Westerners are better off for the bigger jobs to tell a story of a continent they know nothing about. (FQ)

This two-tiered assigning system is not limited to media. FB added that:

> NGOs value local photographers, because--they want-- they know the local photographers can give them can get the access they want. But then when they have it all figured out. Then they just use their own photographers, but I still think that they value local photographers in the initial stage. (FB)

Finally, CL pointed to digital platforms as a way for Nigerian photographers to push back on the narrative that they lacked the skill of their Western counterparts:

> The fact is, that I don't think they value our African photographers as they should, because there's always, there's so many things involved. Initially, the excuse was that… the local guys are not as skilled as the western photographers. But now, I mean, the internet is opening everything to everybody. Like we see these days, we actually realize that the kind of work we create here, can stand with any creative from any part of the world. So that's falsehood, or that line they've been peddling about how "oh, you guys are not as experienced" doesn't hold water anymore. So, I really don't know what the what the excuse is. (CL)

All photographers interviewed expressed a desire to work with the largest international outlets to share their work on the broadest platform possible. Among the cohort, several had attended Foundry (a selective workshop sponsored VII agency) or 6x6 Africa (a selective workshop sponsored by World Press Photo) or been nominated for the Joop Masterclass (in the last two years). Others had been shortlisted for major grants or portfolio reviews from organizations like Alexia Foundation and National Geographic. This cohort of photographers was highly skilled, even though most of them had been working professionally for less than 10 years.

While both Foundry and 6x6 are recent additions to the suite of professional opportunities on the continent, they are both sponsored by Western organizations, who created them after being called out for excluding African photojournalists. World Press has also created the "African Photojournalism Database," (APD) which labels itself "a directory of emerging and professional African storytellers." All ten photographers interviewed, were members of the directory at the time of their interview (summer 2021).

Although belonging to the database didn't seem to provide huge value to them. LO described it, "I don't think there is much going on [with APD] apart from you know, the whole creating a list of photographers from various African countries on their website. And sometimes they promote the work on World Press photos website," (LO). WB added, "I'm a member of the Africa Photojournalism Database. Although I have never been published there before," (WB). Many photographers mentioned seeking mentors for their careers, while APD aims to fill that gap, "many of us have not been lucky enough to get a mentor from the platform," (NP). But NP also added that APD provided the photographers with some level of accreditation to the Western market, "that kind of like solidifies you more as a photojournalist," (NP). Continuing the effort to connect the photojournalists to Western markets, GP said:

> It gives people...the members opportunities to, to apply for contests like the, like the World Press photo, and some contests being a part of the African photojournalism database. When you need to apply for some contests, some usually come with like a waiver for members of this organization where you don't, where you do have to pay the contest fee sometimes. So that I think that that comes in handy. (GP)

Just as the impact of shifting from a global contest to regional ones remains to be seen, the African photojournalism database is also a relatively new development in how Western media and organizations connect with photographers on the continent. It's unknown if it will be a successful bridge. Regardless, a database can't solve the issue of exclusion if Western editors don't change their mindset about Africans as skilled storytellers.

Striving for Equity: The issue of rates

There was a divide in the cohort about whether or not they were paid fairly that coincided roughly with their years of experience. The emerging photographers and most established photographers felt they were paid fairly, given their experience. The youngest photographers qualified that they were paid fairly "for my level" or as an "emerging photographer." The photographers in the middle (with four to five years of experience) expressed the most displeasure with rates, especially compared to Western counterparts. NP said, "If they are willing to pay a lot of money, they want to fly-in their photographer. But if they don't want to spend a lot of money, they want to hire a local photographer that would be cheaper," (NP). While FQ expressed frustration that Western photographers were paid higher rates *and* received additional support in the form of insurance and hazard pay while working in high-risk zones. CL felt that editors occasionally intentionally low-balled rates to him because "they're just trying to take advantage of the fact that you need the money," (CL) and later added:

> I still don't understand how it's okay to pay someone else higher than somebody else when you're doing the same level of work. And even when the African photographer ends up getting more. Like that person gets, get a fresher perspective. You still think they shouldn't earn the same amount? (CL)

The most established photographers did not express frustration over rates and notably expressed the least frustration over Western photographers being flown into Nigeria for assignments. Given the small set of people included, further inquiry into rates paid to local photographers that cross reference their years of experience would be valuable. It's possible the most experienced photographers weren't facing the same rate disparities, or had simply grown accustomed to it, or had the most trusted relationships with Western

media and didn't want to publicly complain. This issue of relationship management was an important one to RQ3.

The third research question asked, what pressures (real or perceived) Nigerian photographers face to perpetuate stereotypes when working for Western organizations. The photographers interviewed expressed frustration about the photographic portrayal of Nigeria, and Africa more broadly in both media and from NGOs, but every photographer distinguished between them. Western media frustrations were rooted in agenda-setting and a fixation on certain narratives such as terrorism, Boko Haram, and political corruption. The conversations around working for NGOs, however, focused on need to deliver imagery that supports the narrative to reinforce fundraising from Western sources.

Frustrating NGO Narratives: A world without joy

It's important to understand the level of influence NGOs have in how the world pictures "Africa." In the Google image search for "African children," conducted in September 2021, 10/19 are from non-profit aid organizations, and five could reasonably be labelled "poverty porn" (See Figure 1). For comparison, 6/21 images for "American children" are from similar organizations, and only 1 of them has a distinctly sad/pitiable tone (See Figure 2).

Eight of the photographers discussed the pressure to deliver imagery with this tone because NGOs believe it's effective for fundraising from a Western audience. These narratives are pervasive. FQ, who was finishing an artist's residency in Europe at the time of the interview, noted that, "looking at the TV the other day and I saw this campaign or

adverts, for water by an organization. I was just like, 'they use all of these things to come and make us look like, you know, everybody in Africa has no access to water,'" (FQ).

OP, who works for some of the NGOs with the largest presence on the continent said, **"**the sadder the story, the more the more money it brings in," (OP). NP agreed that for NGOs, "their goal is to make money. So, the pictures will always be pictures of poor-looking people," (NP). CL explained that NGOs only want imagery that reinforced the established narrative because they are, "trying to gather such and such traction from people," (CL). He added that "it's counterproductive because you think NGOs should get it. But they don't," (CL). OP noted that sometimes the best stories could be about subjects who no longer need support because through previous aid or partnership, they are now self-sufficient:

> One is to say that our project is working. And we have saved this guy. The other is don't publish the story at all. It doesn't fit into the narrative that we want to publish. So, I also feel like there's a narrative that we constantly, absolutely push--that we need more. (OP)

NGOs, unlike news organizations, organize a lot of the storytelling elements prior to the photographer's arrival. Frequently subjects will have already been selected, based on whomever the organization is working with and has decided to feature. FB noted that they frequently cover the same subjects and tell the same story more than once:

> They've worked with that same subjects, you know, maybe two months ago, and I'm confused. I'm like, Is there a competition here? There are other people to photograph there are other people with the same story. Why are you not focusing on them? Why is it only this person? (FB)

Perhaps this is a reflection of the NGO pushing a narrative and having found a subject who is willing to participate. The relationship between NGO fundraising and the

narratives they use to accomplish their goals warrants more inquiry. But it also creates some complexities for the photographers in the field, who don't want subjects to feel coerced. LO said he makes, "it clear that whether or not you approve, it won't stop the kind of benefits you get," (LO).

Agenda Setting: What Western media covers

Western news organizations were less likely to ask for explicit poverty porn, instead focusing on established dismal news discourses like terrorism and political corruption while ignoring other stories in the country. This is unsurprising given the current research about news coverage of the continent (Nothias, 2016). CL said, "there was a time Boko Haram was the crème de la crème. That was the top story. If you're not doing any story around insurgency, you barely get any attention," (CL). The extensive coverage of the crisis in northeast Nigeria resulted in "some Western people think[ing] that it is all over Nigeria," (FB). LO agreed that, "the representation of Nigeria is terrorism, fraud. What else? Crime, you know, this type of image of what Nigeria is, and I know Nigeria is way more than that," (LO). This narrow news focus has real effect for working photographers:

> Western media are always looking for more bigger stories like End SARS something basically that the big guys-- they think the whole world wants to know about. So yeah, I think the reason why this might be is because a lot of pitches are being ignored and because I've done a few pitches myself and the kind of--how would I put it? The kind of response I get...Usually are about how this story isn't like timely or isn't like a major thing the publication wants to talk about right now. So they need something more bigger and more shocking to engage their audience. (GP)

Another photographer mentioned that pitching outside established news discourses was ineffective because, “There's a certain type of story they're looking for…when you look at the stories that have been published, you know that if your story is not like this, it necessarily might not be published, you understand?” (WB). FQ noted that even when big international news stories arise, many Western media fly in photographers to cover the story:

> It's so infuriating, because with the amount of photographers that were covering the protests last year, we still had, you know, some of these platforms bringing in white people-- It was so stupid to me, because we had so many people photographing in different parts of Nigeria. (FQ)

Even though the photographers interviewed all stated a desire to work for big Western media (because of the size of the platform), most of them (7/10) said they didn’t read/watch Western news very often because it didn’t feel authentic to their lived experiences:

> I've come to realization like this media [Western news] are not created for we, Africa. It's created for themselves. So as soon as I'm aware of that, I'm not bothered, they just want to satisfy their interest, and it's fine, if it works for them. But that will not change the way I see my work. I think it's more important for me to find the way I see my work, tell the story that can bring that change. And that's why I think the importance of why local media, well, photographer to really work hard to really project the complex story of the country, not just one side of the story. (BF)

Agenda Setting: How Western media fails to document authentic life

All photographers interviewed talked about Nigeria’s diversity and how Western media failed to tell that story. None of the photographers claimed that life in Nigeria was perfect, but they expressed frustration that the narrative laser-focused on the negative and ignored other stories. FB referenced a story she had shot about Nigerian heroines,

"That's not to meet the Western media wants, obviously, no, but I did it." (FB) WB noted "We go to parties. We do game nights in our houses," and there are young Nigerians "who are creating solutions through tech," (WB). LO acknowledged, that "insecurity is affecting some parts of the country," but also highlighted, "the richness of culture…the music, the art scene." FQ said "it's a very diverse society. But for some of our hiccups here and there, it [has] really interesting people, interesting languages, very colorful," (FQ).

Nigeria is one of most linguistically diverse countries in the world (more than 500 languages are spoken) and home to nearly 400 ethnic groups. The landscape varies from urban centers to scenic beaches to interior rainforests and rural outskirts. It would "be impossible to mention Nigeria, without acknowledging the unidentical realities and situation in every region of the country," (GP). This diversity applies to lived experiences, too:

> life in Nigeria is in layers…It's multi-layered. There's joy. There's sorrow. There's hope. There's chaos. There's despair. There's opportunities. There's inequalities. There's this massive spirituality, ethnicity, tribalism. It's complex. In all, I love being in Nigeria, I must tell you, you know, one thing I love about it? It gives you room for imagination. There's no, the system doesn't restrict you. Unlike in the west where everything is so regulated. You can like imagine you could go to anywhere here, there's this freedom for you to imagine. If you can imagine and if you can aspire, you can do it. So I will say in regardless of that, I still prefer to be in Nigeria. (BF)

In addition to frequent mentions of Nigerian diversity in lifestyle, language and ethnicity, 7/10 photographers discussed the positive cultural mindset of Nigerians. "The typical Nigerian is hopeful," (NP). OP agreed, "We are still happy people. People who are striving to do better to live better. And that oftentimes do not get highlighted because of all the reality... of the reality sad stories sell," (OP). This theme carried through when CL

said, “We're very aspirational. Like, the average Nigerian, even if he doesn't have so much he can dream. Like, we can dream” (CL). This theme of optimism showed up again when UB said, “There's a bright side to everything here. People are really enjoy themselves,” (UB). GP said “Nigerians are achievers.” FB noted that Westerners might think Nigerians are, “aggressive, but we are nice people. Yeah, actually, nice people. We're just very expressive,” (FB). This sentiment was echoed by others as well. CL talked about “the passion,” and “the energy of the people, how driven they are.”

Though the photographers are all working with different organizations and editors, and have work that covers different issues, strong postcolonial themes emerged from the interviews. These will be addressed in the coming chapter as part of the discussion section.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

Discussion

There are several studies from the past two decades that use a content analysis to document how Western news frames stories about Africa (Beattie, 1999; Chari, 2010; Gruley & Duvall, 2012; Nothias, 2016; Ezeru, 2021). Those studies are important markers for journalism researchers, but continued scholarship to understand the influences in working environments that lead to those narratives requires qualitative methods. This research contributes to a small but growing cohort of studies speaking directly with African journalists (rather than foreign correspondents working on the continent) to document the sometimes invisible, but always palpable pressures that Nigerian photographers face when working with Western media and NGOs.

Photographers, specifically, have been rarely studied. Given the ease of global distribution of imagery, which does not require linguistic translation, photographers working for Western media and organizations have the unique position of being able to share stories quickly with the entire world. Photography's growing level of influence in our increasingly connected systems of global information, means that imagery will be central to authentic documentation of stories from Africa.

This research set out to answer three questions. First, how are Nigerian photographers documenting authentic experiences that subvert Western imaginations about life in the country? Second, how are they ensuring that authentic imagery reaches an audience? Finally, what pressures do Nigerian photographers face (real or perceived) to perpetuate stereotypes when working for Western organizations?

Authenticity, not internalized colonial attitudes

Given the plethora of digital self-publishing options from websites to social media, it can be easy to suggest working outside the traditional media landscape would provide opportunities for newer voices. Indeed, this researcher expected to hear more about the value of social media for reaching audiences. But building an audience, especially a foreign one, is a skill set outside of photojournalism and storytelling. In late October 2021, the photographer in the cohort with the largest social following on Instagram had 107,000 followers. At the same time, *The New York Times* account listed 13.6M. Social media influencing is its own profession.

Instead of opting out of existing professional structures for photojournalists (which have been dominated by Western photographers since their inception), these photographers seek to change the system from the inside. This is not a case of "internalized orientalism" (Alamed, 2020, p. 419) where African journalists who seek associate themselves with Western media have internalized colonial attitudes and thus reinforce "negative images about the continent," (Sewornoo, 2018, p1371). Rather, these photographers are seeking full partnership with Western media—telling local stories authentically while sharing them broadly through the existing Western audience. It's a much harder task to access that broad Western audience without a conduit to existing platforms. As noted in the Review of Literature, the Nigerian feature film industry makes more movies than Hollywood every year, but they are not widely viewed by Western audiences and have been totally ignored by Western institutions like the Oscars.

Two things would be required for imagery by Nigerian photographers to reach Western audiences. First, centering Nigeria as an epistemic site, with endemic knowledge creation (storytelling) rooted in local (and indigenous) experience. Second, Western media and organizations would need to decolonize their relationships with the continent, which they treat as a "trading-post colony," (Mbembe, 2019, p.11), defined by, "inequitable trade relations, almost entirely lacking in heavy local investment," (Mbembe, 2019, p.11). As Nigeria continues to assert its ethnic, cultural, and political autonomy, self-creation of news imagery is integral to reclaiming that narrative. Committing to local knowledge production and shared value creation would lead to more authentic storytelling with broader international audiences while starting to dismantle the historical hegemonic media relationships between the Imperial West and Nigeria.

The imperative for this is two-fold. First, the social responsibility of the press demands accuracy and truth. But Western imaginaries of Africa as the dark continent have consistently been identified in research. Coverage has reinforced particularly negative narratives that Africa is incapable of self-governance (De B'béri and Louw, 2011), conflict-ridden (Mbembe, 2001) and corrupt (Nothias, 2014). If Western media truly believes that holding powerful people, organizations, and governments accountable is integral to the role of news, (which would align well with the idea of "values authenticity") we must acknowledge that can't happen without empowering local news workers (and in the case of this research, photographers) to challenge the "unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority," (Bhabha, 1994, p. 246). The power structure in our "modern world order"

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 246) that needs to be held accountable, is, in fact, us—the Imperial West.

Centering Nigeria as an epistemic site

Conversations about the importance of knowledge production generally prioritize academic scholarship over other kinds of knowledge (such as agricultural or health expertise of indigenous people). In the realm of global scholarship, African scholars have been overlooked by the West who operate under "the idea that Africa is incapable of generating indigenous knowledge," (Oloruntoba, 2014, p. 339). Instead, Western scholars, "continue to produce knowledge that is essentially abstracted and deviates from the realities of the African condition," (Oloruntoba, 2014, p. 339). Media is guilty of this as well, as evidenced by the cover of *The Economist* that altered a white child to look Black back in 2014 or the picture of refugees living in Dadaab that ran to illustrate a story on middle class Nairobians. Centering knowledge production in Nigeria would not be an effort to isolate the country from broader global conversation, because "a necessary and complementary move is from the centre outward," (Anyidoho, 2008, p. 33). Rather, it would be to cultivate local knowledge production and build an infrastructure for sharing that information.

Industries outside of journalism/media have begun to reconsider the manner in which they have paternalistically treated African nations with regard to knowledge production. For example, in 2017, while on a visit to Burkina Faso, French President Emmanuel Macron declared that stolen African antiquities located in French museums would be returned, or restitution would be provided (Hunt, 2019). This was a stunning

move that "swept aside" (Hunt, 2019) a century of French museum policy. Dutch and German museums followed suit (Hunt, 2019). This is not just the repatriation of cultural artifacts, but a re-centering of knowledge hubs that house cultural artifacts locally.

In the case of news, there are similar moves to be made. For example, The *New York Times* maintains 4 bureaus on the African continent (Johannesburg, Dakar, Nairobi and Cairo). In October 2021, only one bureau chief, Ruth MacClean, is African (two are US citizens, and one is Irish). Although notably, MacClean is white and was educated in Europe. Given that the *New York Times* invited their Nairobi bureau chief to pursue "unexpected stories of hope," (Kiruga, 2019) in a job posting, it's reasonable to surmise that bias in hiring, not lack of skill on the continent, is at play.

The question then, is how does this influence the authenticity of photography of Nigerian life? The answer lies in respecting local knowledge and not dominating it with narratives created by the West for a Western audience. While suggesting that, "writing reporters write differently depending on their audience is hardly a provocative statement," (Kautsky, 2009, p 12) there has been resistance to the idea that photographers represent the world differently depending on their background or perspective because "it questions the strong position of the 'photographic evidence,'" (Kautsky, 2009, p 12). Here the test of "values authenticity" applies. Photography can be presented out of context—just like Barbara Davidson's portrait of a well-dressed Nigerian high school student, that was accompanied by a caption stating that barefoot students "have to trek long distances to class," (Davidson, 2005). Her motivation seems to be more about winning contests than actual documentation. It's not surprising then that the

photographers in this study mostly agreed that Western photographers and Nigerian photographers make different kinds of pictures of African people.

The pursuit of authenticity requires people steeped in local knowledge to be respected and honored for that information and trusted to explain it to foreigners who may not understand. It is not to "simply 'reverse the gaze' but rather 'gaze into the world' from where we [Africans] stand," (Schoon, Mabweazara, Bosch, Dugmore, 2020, p.7). This is both an effort to shift the narrative and to broaden the subjects of storytelling. Given the narrow focus of Western media, we must ask, how many important local stories have been ignored? With that in mind, if we don't honor their profession as knowledge producers, authenticity remains out of reach. Without grounding news with local talent, the cycle of colonial dynamics continues, with the West taking what it wants without reciprocity.

Decolonizing imagery of Nigeria for a Western audience

As noted previously, the manner in which these photographers aspired to share their imagery of authentic lived experiences focused on full inclusion in Western media/organizations rather than circumventing them through digital self-publishing. These photographers sought full professional recognition and equity from Western organizations. They cited Western photographers "flying-in" to cover stories and pay disparities as chief concerns. This reflects persistent 'neo-colonial' relations within the 'new' world order and the multinational division of labour," (Bhaba, 2005, p. 9). The current colonial relationship is reinforced in other ways, too.

When Mbembe referred to trading-post colonies (Mbembe, 2019), he was referencing the Western practice of extracting raw materials, like the unprocessed cacao Ghana will no longer supply to Switzerland. But this dynamic, and its repercussions, applies to knowledge production and, by extension, knowledge work as well. When Western media or NGOs capture and distribute photography from Nigeria (or Africa more broadly), those images are then *monetized*. As news products, they drive subscriptions and generate advertising revenue. In the world of NGO marketing, they are used to solicit donations through campaigns. Imagery may not be a raw mineral, but it is an asset produced by a knowledge worker that can only be made on location.

When the photographer who is making those pictures is not local, the financial loop reinforces colonial structures. Western media and organizations pay Western photographers to capture imagery in Nigeria and then return to the West and earn money from those pictures. The logic still applies when local photographers are paid less than their Western counterparts. The West's knowledge/information trade relationship is almost "entirely lacking in local investment," (Mbembe, 2019, p. 11) as evidenced by the coveted *New York Times* bureau chief roles filled by Westerners.

Breaking hegemonic relationships and honoring the experts

The photographers in this study identified two distinct ways they feel pressured to deliver imagery that perpetuates negative stereotypes about Nigeria. In the case of news, this push came from Western media's myopic focus on stories about conflict and corruption. This begs an interesting question regarding Martin Scott's (2015) conclusion that journalism studies documenting pervasive negative narratives are limited because

they tend to study coverage of humanitarian crises. If, as the photographers note, the Western media covers humanitarian crises and conflict at a far higher rate than other stories in the country, there isn't a lot of other coverage (such as features, financial news, sports) to study. Perhaps a content analysis comparing coverage from foreign bureaus in Africa versus those in Europe for a major Western publication would begin quantify the disparity, if any exists.

There is also an opportunity to speak with Western picture editors assigning stories in Africa, which would build on Nothias' 2020 study of how foreign correspondents in Kenya and South Africa respond to criticisms that their roles have contributed to negative discourses about the continent. Many of them agreed with the criticism and used it as a guide to help intentionally avoid stereotypes, a phenomenon Nothias dubbed "postcolonial reflexivity," (Nothias, 2020, p.245). Although he noted that postcolonial reflexivity wasn't always useful for checking bias—as some correspondents used it as cover to rationalize continued participation in "racialized news discourses," (Nothias, 2020, p. 261). A similar study focusing on the picture desks in the West could begin to illustrate how and why stories are selected for photography coverage in Africa. Is the focus on negative imagery simply a lack of knowledge about the continent? Or are editors responding to the expectations of their readers?

The pressure from NGOs was different. It came in the form of shot lists or explicit directions from the client to shoot poverty porn to reinforce the desired narrative. Nearly every photographer interviewed had worked for an NGO, documenting projects locally for materials that would be used to solicit donations in Western nations. The

photographers talked about how NGOs had specific narratives they needed to illustrate. This is particularly complex, considering that NGOs are integral to facilitating stories relevant to their organizations for Western media in-country. Some NGOs run media-tours. The Head of Media at Christian Aid, former journalist Andrew Hogg, notes that between NGOs and media, "The relationship may at times be uneasy, but it is *mutually beneficial* (emphasis mine). Journalists want access to stories and first-hand accounts which aid agencies can supply, and the agencies want to draw attention to issues of concern, as well as promote their work," (Clark, 2015). The issue at hand is who the mutual beneficiaries are. As stated, the organizations/people benefitting from the NGO/media alliance are the Western NGOs and the Western media. The people who are purportedly being 'helped' have been removed from the equation, illustrating Homi Bhabha's assertion that "the contemporary discourse of aid and development agencies" has reinforced "political control through philanthropy," (Bhabha, 1994, p.347).

If, as these photographers noted, NGOs are frequent offenders of colonialist views of Nigeria (or the continent) and pitch *those* stories to Western journalists, there are some deep questions to be asked about authenticity and veracity. The questions get even more complex when considering that journalists are then ferried into a foreign nation to interview people the NGO has arranged for them to meet. Are those stories actual news or the result of public relations' work to earn media that solicits donations? This relationship merits further inquiry.

Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size and the sampling methodology. As many of these photographers were friends, or at least familiar acquaintances, it's possible they recommended others with similar thoughts or ideas. Snowball sampling provides a slice of a view into the complicated dynamics that Nigerian photographers must navigate in order to earn a living, make progress in their profession, and reinforce their desire for change, but can't be applied for broad conclusions. Also, the most seasoned photographer in the cohort had been working professionally for 15 years. Meaning that the interview cohort was of early to mid-career professionals. Unfortunately, the most established photographers I approached declined to be interviewed. Their perspective would have been valuable.

When this thesis was originally proposed, it was intended to examine the relationship between Nigerian photographers and Western media organizations. However, the paucity of news assignments from Western publications for local photographers coupled with the needs of NGOs to document their activities in-country, broadened the focus to include organizations that publish imagery, but under different ethical guidelines than journalism aspires to. It became clear that while there were similarities, there were differences that cannot be ignored. For example, the pressure from NGOs was direct in terms of shot lists that drove a clear narrative of poverty, malnutrition or some other "need". While assignments for media focused explicitly on humanitarian crises or conflict, so the choice of coverage from the media organization set up a narrative, not the explicit desire for a type of image. The impact of both types of clients remains consistent. In the future, if Western media continue the trend of hiring

more local photographers for coverage, it may be possible to focus specifically on news coverage.

Another factor that may limit this study is timing. As the interviews were conducted during July and August 2021, the COVID19 pandemic made global travel unpredictable and often times impossible. While many photographers mentioned that it seemed Western media and organizations were hiring locally more often, it's unknown if that trend will continue once global travel resumes to pre-pandemic levels.

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CL, personal communication, August 16, 2021
FB, personal communication, August 17, 2021
FQ, personal communication, July 23, 2021
GP, personal communication, August 2, 2021
LO, personal communication, August 6, 2021
NP, personal communication, August 24, 2021
OP, personal communication, July 21, 2021
UB, personal communication, August 11, 2021
WB, personal communication, August 1, 2021

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Appendix A

Recruitment email

Dear Photographer,

Western media coverage of Africa has influenced narratives about life on the continent. Digital (self)publishing has opened opportunities for stories that are usually ignored by Western media. Photography is an important part of this movement. I'm interested in understanding how Nigerian photographers are working to showcase daily lived experiences in sub-Saharan nations. In addition, the research will also address how Nigerian photographers work to distribute imagery to an audience unfamiliar with authentic West African life. I would like to interview you about your photography and experiences with Western media.

This research is part of my master's thesis in journalism from the University of Missouri (USA). The journalism school is over 100 years and well-regarded nationally. Participation will involve a video interview--approximately 60-75 minutes long. It would take place between July 1, 2021- August 15, 2021. Interviews will be transcribed. If you would prefer to remain anonymous, you may choose a pseudonym for identification in the thesis. If you wish to read the results of my study, I will email a copy upon its completion in late 2021.

If you have any questions about the research please contact Rebekah Raleigh by email or WhatsApp (bekah.raleigh@gmail.com,+011-773-710-1603) or my thesis advisor, Dr. Keith Greenwood by email or telephone (greenwoodk@missouri.edu, +011-573-882-4867).

Thank you for your support of journalism research and education.

Respectfully,

Rebekah Raleigh

Appendix B

Interview Question Set

WARM UP QUESTIONS

- How long have you been photographing? Tell me about how you started
- What are your most common subjects?
- Who are your regular clients? Tell me about how you got connected to them.
- Do you speak any languages in addition to English? How often?

PHOTOGRAPHERS AND KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION IN NIGERIA

- Do you think photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?
    - How do you reconcile that?
    - Do you think the nationality of the photographer plays a role?
- Do you have personal work that differs from paid assignments?
    - How are they distinct?
    - Are there stories/people/places that are consistently overlooked or ignored by Western media?
        - Have you pitched those stories/people/places?
        - Why do you think Western media doesn't cover them?
- What media that you read/view feels most reflective of your lived experiences?
    - What makes it that way?
- Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are Africa-focused? Tell me about them.
    - Do the kinds of conversations you have in those communities differ from the kinds of conversations you have with Western publications?
    - How do these organizations support your work and the photographic community?
    - Do you have conversations with other photographers (African or otherwise) about the expectations from Western media for assignments on the continent?
- Is there anything that gets lost when you're working with Western media?
- Do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience?
    - What does it mean to take on that role?
    - Do you have a support system to help carry that load?
- How do you share photography that you love but doesn't fulfill the assignment need or wasn't paid work to begin with?
- Do you enter contests? Which ones?
    - Tell me how you select which imagery to submit.

WESTERN IMAGINARIES AND NIGERIA'S MANY FACETS

- Tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be.

    - How do you feel about that narrative?
    - Where do you think it comes from?
- If you were to make the perfect image about life in Nigeria, what would it be?
        - Where would they be published/shared?
    - Do you think Western viewers would see the same messages/understanding from those pictures?
    - If not, what can Western viewers/media do to better understand 'Africa'?
- Thinking of the editors you work with most frequently—have they ever visited Nigeria (to the best of your knowledge)?
    - What about anywhere in sub-Saharan Africa?
    - Do you think they understand what "daily life" looks like?
        - What do they get right?
        - What do they miss?
    - Do you ever have to help them understand the situation on the ground?
        - How do those conversations go?
        - Based on your conversations with Western picture editors, what do you think the West values most in Africa? What about finds most interesting?
    - In your experience, how do picture editors shape the West's view of 'Africa'?
        - Do you try to influence that? How?
- Have you ever covered a story that's given more importance abroad than it is at home? Tell me more.
    - Why do think Western media was more interested in it than African media?
- Tell me about your relationships and interactions with the people you photograph.
    - How do you gain access?
    - Are people generally welcoming? How often are you working domestically and face a language barrier?
    - Has there ever been a time working (in Africa) that you really didn't 'fit in'. And gaining access to photograph was hard? Tell me about it.

WESTERN HEGEMONY IN WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

- Tell me if/how European/N. American workstyles differ from Nigerian/African ones.
    - How do you bridge that difference?
    - How do the publications you work with bridge it?
- Have you ever photographed an assignment for Western media?
    - Is it different than working with media in Africa?
    - If yes: Was it different than photographing in Nigeria? What about broader Africa?
    - If no: Is there a reason?
- Do Western media organizations value local photographers?

        - Are you paid fairly for your work?
        - Do you work with any ex-pats in Nigeria? Do you think their relationships with picture editors are similar to yours?
- Do you work with any picture editors who really 'get it'?
    - Tell me about what makes working with them so positive.
    - Have you met many of the editors you work with in-person?
        - How do you communicate?
        - How did you initially get connected?
- Do you get the names of everyone you photograph? Why/Why not? Does Western media use them?
- Have you ever worked with a Western reporter together on a story? Tell me about it.
- Are there certain times of year or events where Western media has a bigger appetite for imagery from Nigeria? What are they?
- How do you get connected to publications you want to work for? Tell me about the process.
    - What helps you 'get noticed' by Western picture editors?
    - How often do you turn down assignments?
        - Under what circumstances?
    - How often do you pitch projects or stories to Western media?
- Tell me about your work process with editors, from initial contact for an assignment to payment.
    - Where is your influence most felt?
    - What about theirs?
    - Is there anything you wish picture editors for Western publications had deeper understanding of?
    - Do you feel they understand your vision? Do they trust your judgment? Can you give me an example either way?
- When picture editors talk to you about what they are looking for—do any themes come up frequently?
    - Has anyone ever asked for something that surprised you?
    - Has a picture editor ever asked for an image that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

Appendix C

List of Codes, Themes and Categories

CATEGORY: Photographers and Knowledge Production

- THEME: Reflecting personal values
  - Photography as activism
    - Doesn't fit into media narrative
  - Personal Vision/Artistry/Style
    - Time and intimacy
    - "second access" building rapport w subjects
  - Avoiding certain kinds of photography
    - Pity vs empathy
- THEME: Translating across cultures
  - Code-reading (understanding cultural norms/mannerisms)
  - Explaining working conditions to editors (internet access/speeds, traffic, logistics…)
  - Western ignorance about Africa/Nigeria
    - Africans perceived as unreliable/unintelligent/unskilled
    - Nigeria perceived as underdeveloped even in major cities
- THEME: Grounding profession in African perspectives
  - Knowledge outside of photography as an asset
  - Supporting formal photo education, local workshops
  - Funding Local Work
  - Informal/self-taught photographer
  - Informal associations/groups
  - Photojournalism as a career option/documentary storytelling
    - Not vocational

CATEGORY: Western Imaginaries and Nigeria's many Facets

- THEME: Documenting authentic life
  - Nigeria's diversity: language/religion/landscape
  - Nigerians as joyful, aspirational, upbeat people
  - Empathy
- THEME: White Savior Positioning
  - Hunger/malnutrition
  - Naked child
  - Flies
  - Poverty porn
- THEME: Frustrating NGO narratives
  - Fundraising

    - Attention seeking (media tours, advertising, etc)
- THEME: Western Media Agenda-Setting
    - Boko Haram, Corruption, Conflict, etc
    - Rarely accepting pitches
    - Stereotyped imagery
    - Treating Africa as a block—rather than independent nations or unique regions

CATEGORY: Western Hegemony in Working Relationships

- THEME: Striving for equity
    - Treating white subjects and Black subjects differently (dead bodies, naked kids, etc)
    - Western editors treat African photogs differently than Western ones
        - Pay disparity
        - Project scope disparity
        - Hazard pay, security, etc

- THEME: Developing as professionals
    - Lack of Feedback
    - Contests
    - Influence/Power of Picture Editors
    - Importance of referrals
    - African Photojournalism Database

Appendix D

Interview with BF: July 28, 2021

Run time: 49:02
Years active as photographer: 15

RR 00:23
Okay. So let's get started. Tell me…These are… I have some a few warm-up questions. So tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing and how you got started.

BF 00:36
I would say, I would say I've been photographing since 2001. But it started as a hobby for me. But professionally, it's been 2006 to date.

RR 00:51
And how did you get started?

BF 00:54
I got started when I got my first camera as a gift. I mean, before then, I loved photography and dreaming one day when I get a camera, of taking beautiful pictures that I see in magazines. And so as soon as I got the cameras as a gift, I just went out taking pictures, with not good technical knowledge. But you know, I would just ask photographers, "What are the basic rules?" They'd tell me, but I wasn't satisfied enough.

So I was looking for more, you know, more knowledge. And all I had to do was to use the internet to look for photographers who I really liked their work. And in that period, I stumbled on a photographer called [name redacted], we kept corresponding. He'd give me feedbacks. Along the line, he proposed to give me books on photography, so that I can study very well and understand some basic principles. Principles about lighting. Principles about composition, you know. I read that book, so, that I gained my confidence on how to, you know, master the use of the photograph, I mean, the camera. And you know, truly I fell in love with photography.

Photography became like a very powerful tool for me to communicate. You know, I remember, each time I take pictures, and I show it to people, and they like it, it gives me satisfaction. But also, I'm also during that time was quite challenging for me as well, because photography for us--at that period was not considered like a serious profession--it's more like a vocational training. So what it means is a bunch of people who do photography primarily do things like event photography, like wedding birthday, in-studio photography, nobody, or rarely, will I meet people who go into photo documentary storytelling in general. It wasn't that common or popular. So, it was very hard. For me, it's like, each time I take pictures for reasons-I love taking picture of landscape, you know, culture, when I take those pictures and I take it to the laboratory to process they could not understand me, they keep saying, "Why do you come with negatives that comes with animals, landscapes? We want you to come with wedding pictures." And so it was quite challenging.

And you know, that's one reason, like I said earlier, I had to use the internet to find photographers I like, I really like their work. And you know, that's how I went on, you know, to develop myself. But at that time, it wasn't like, a career for me…was something I really love as a hobby. I had my job. But as time goes on, I became so passionate about photography, I took it very serious. I was attending workshops, like photographic workshops, so you know, to improve my knowledge. In fact, my passion for photography made me go into study journalism, because like I said, there's no formal place you could do like photography, training, but I remember in journalism school, you could do photography as a course. So, I thought to myself, let me go to study journalism as a way of improving my photography or using it for storytelling. So, I would say those are one of the when--I say informal ways I got my own education as a photographer.

RR 03:46
So that's a great segue, who are your regular clients?

BF 03:51
Um, my regular client is so mixed. And I will say so I think also, as a result of the fact that I didn't have any formal trainings, so I kind of learned all kinds of photography. And that made me ready for different kinds of clients. So I've worked for NGOs, a lot of work for editorial, a lot. I've worked with university institutions, like in University of Padova, King's College University. But currently, I will say my client roams between journalism, NGOs, art institutions. So what I mean my work is kind of being shown in art galleries. I have a gallery in London, so my work goes around that realm.

RR 04:35
And do you speak any languages in addition to English? What are they?

BF 04:39
I would say I could manage a bit of French because I said, in fact, my first professional experience, I was a photographer started in France.

RR 04:49
okay.

BF 04:50
I was lucky to be in France to develop my project in France they call--artistic residency. So there I learned a bit of France, French, but as I left, I lost French. So I will say currently I only speak English pidgin English, Yoruba. Yeah, that's it. French? I don't like saying I speak French, but I can figure out when people speak.

RR 05:14
And do you think…when as a photographer, do you think that pictures of people tell their story or the photographer's?

BF 05:22

For me, I think, for me, I keep saying, I will say people tell the story, we are just a medium to let me say, elevate the story. I keep telling people, for me, getting a great story depends 70% on my subject, how we collaborate, and the 30% is my skill. So what I mean, when I mean, someone's presence is like the key, what is the collaboration with the guy-logistics, all those things plays a big role in bringing the best. You know, and for me, personally, I'm very sensitive to the energy I get from the people. You know, for me, I try to be sensitive to the people. So yes, people are the story, we are just being lucky to be able to tell their story.

RR 06:02
Do you think the nationality or the ethnicity of the photographer influences that at all?

BF 06:10
What you mean by that?

RR 06:11
So I mean it when you so when you're in Nigeria, and you're working, especially in a Yoruba population, do you feel like your relationship or your collaboration with subjects is easier or better when you're working with people who you feel familiar to them? Or do you think that --do you think it's better when you're seen as foreign and different?

BF
I think it depends on the subject you're working on, and the people you're working with, they both have the advantage and disadvantage. Of course, sometimes knowing the people gives you this kind of open doors because they trust you. And sometimes even the fact they know you make them more skeptical about your interest—like "Why you want to do this story?" I will say it depends on what you're doing. You know, it has its strengths, and it has its disadvantages. But one key thing I think I find working in the community, you understand--there's what I call them. Translation, you know, me being in our society make me understand the codes, the language, there are things which is hard to really express to, by not being part of that place, and me coming from that time, gives me that chance to understand it.

And sometimes when you don't belong to that place you my lose, I call it lost in translation, you might lose that translation. So I'll say it has advantages and disadvantages, you know, why in terms of like communication, understanding the codes in which people relate, live their daily life… coming from that community can put you at an advantage.

RR 07:30
Do you have personal work, that difference differs from the work that you get paid for?

BF 07:38
Oh, yes. Oh, yes, I have tons of personal work, to be honest. I mean, I started photography more interested in developing my personal work. So yes, in fact, if you go on my website, I have a category like, projects, project means work inspired by my own

interests. Or even if it's a commission work, but at the end of the day, I find a way of bringing my own personal slant to it. Or sometimes I have been commissioned, but after the commission, I continue to develop the project to become my own. So yes, I do develop my own personal projects, and I do project being paid for.

But for me why a personal project is important. I think that's when we are able to develop my own, I will say, vision. I have that freedom. You know, without being influenced by my clients' interest, or rather, it's my own personal connection. Relationship to what I see. And I think that's one great thing I love about doing your personal work. And I find that in my journey, it has been helping. You know, creating my own niche, giving me the chance to stand out in a multitude of many people. You know, for instance, the kind of subject I do makes people recognize my kind of photography. For instance, and when they see a certain project, like for instance, on football, they could relate, "okay, this reminds me of [name redacted] photographer". In that way, without that I cannot find my own identity, my own voice, my own vision. And somehow it has also made me reflect on my interest-- in things I like personally. Without it, I cannot know the kind of person I am in a way. So yes, personal project, for me is so important. Of course, the commercial work is important because it pays the bills for me, you know?

RR 09:07
So do you think there are stories that are consistently overlooked or that your Western clients aren't interested in? Are there things that you've pitched before? And you just you can't get anyone to pick them up?

BF 09:25
Yeah, I mean, that happens because I think--I find out that everybody has an agenda. Currently, I'm going through one situation, where, at the beginning, the client was telling me, "We want to give you a creative freedom to express your your own idea of blah, blah, blah." And right now, I could see them being really insistent on one thing, even when I didn't tell him and even what they want me to do is visually boring for me. It doesn't reach a larger community. It doesn't look sustainable. They just want to-- because I think aligns with their own interest. Even if at the beginning, they were giving me this impression that, "you know, we like your kind of work." They hired me because they saw my personal project, they would like the way you do your personal work, but I can see how they've been kind of pushing me to their own interest. So it's a tricky one, you know?

RR 10:21
Yeah.

BF 10:21
I've been lucky. I mean, I've been lucky to have been, you know, being published being, you know, paid to do so. It depends.

RR 10:29

What media are you reading or listening to or watching when you're at home that feels like most authentic to your life there?

BF 10:39
I think, I look, to be honest, I follow most, our local media. For instance, I follow a lot what they call Punch newspaper, It's the Nigerian newspaper. So I think that's what I follow. Because even for the Western media, to honest, I found out is the same thing. I see some element of agenda--and what kind of story they promote. So you see a certain topic, when you watch Al Jazeera, it's so different. When you watch CNN, you ask yourself, are you watching the same story? Because they all have different slants to the story. So that's the ultimate identity. They're just like, you know, what? Many of them have agenda. Why it's good story source. I still like to look locally. So a lot of time I find myself reading our Nigerian newspaper.

RR 11:23
And are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly Africa focused?

BF 11:28
So there's one called @everydayAfrica, I don't know if you know about it. But again, it's not even driven by Africans but of course, the idea is African focus. So I was, I'm one of those like, panel members. Yes, I do that. Then. I mean, we have different like, photography communities in Nigeria, like we have like, like centers where photographers can come learn photography. Time to time they call me over to like, mentor, teach the people. So I will say I belong in a photographic community, but in a more informal way--meaning I interact with photographers, not necessarily setting up a platform for that. But I, most of the time, I get photographers and photographers reaching out to me, you know, for mentorship or guidance, even today, I had one photographer, you know, FQ? Maybe? photographer.

RR 12:20
Oh, yeah. I just talked to her.

BF 12:24
Yeah, I mean, I know. So we got to like she, she called me for some, you know, suggestion or, you know, feedback about her work. So, you know, that's the kind of thing that happens for me.

RR 12:35
And do you think the kinds of conversations that you have with other African photographers are different than the ones that you have with Western photographers?

BF 12:46
What is it, like, conversation from a photographic standpoint? Or photography from a daily life standpoint?

RR 12:52
either.

BF 12:54
I think from daily life, it's totally different. Maybe photography is similar, because we are trying to just tell the story and address certain global issues but from daily life it's so different. You know, because our needs or wants. So different person, the converse-- kind of conversation I had with a friend today will be so different from the next photographer who is from here [London], I will discuss with. So I will say yes, they are different conversations. Because someone like me, or a friend, somebody from Africa, we have some commonality in terms of our experiences - daily life. It's very similar, so we can relate with each other. Somehow, we will have some common aspiration and goal as a person, a young photographer.

RR 13:30
And how do you think that's different than the what's your I just looking for a little more detail when you talk about your common aspirations? What are those? Can you tell me?

BF 13:39
So I mean, beyond. So that person beyond just being a good photographer, becoming successful. You want to make sure you have a good happy family. You want to take care of your family. You have enough income to do that. Politically, we're going through a lot of tough situations right now. So you have what's happening combination of how political leaders actions are affecting our daily life and insecurity.

For instance, we complain about even some like your mechanic garage, how unfaithful they are to fixing your cars for you. Or you know, today, you went to fix your you took your computer to the computer guy, and you realize he could not do it very well. So I will say, the common thing is our daily lives by you know, for like, for me, and mine. Beyond being a good photographer, I'm interested how I want to keep my family you know. Beyond photography, I'm more concerned about how the political situation is affecting my daily life, my aspiration, my chance of becoming successful, you know. Those things doesn't necessarily affect somebody from America because the politics in America doesn't really have I mean… the police in Nigeria doesn't really affect their daily life in the long term. But for me, the decision of a political leader makes today can affect my future aspiration. So this kind of conversation I will say makes it different from what I'll be having with FQ as to a guy from the US or UK?

RR 15:02
Do you have conversations with photographers--African or otherwise--about the expectations from Western media? Do you ever? Like, do you talk about what it's like to work with Western media?

BF 15:18
Nah, I mean, it comes up in conversation, but it's not something we take really topical, you know what I mean? And then not always, but it could just pop up but not want to be

not what kind of committee up to sit to say, look, what's going on today? What's happening? We'll say it, we don't necessarily dig into that so much, in my opinion.

RR 15:41
Okay. When you're working with Western media, and this is really funny, because you used this phrase before, and it's actually written on my question list, because I have to ask everyone the exact same questions. As far as my thesis. Is there anything that gets lost in translation when you're working with Western media?

BF 15:57
Yeah. I think that. I think definitely. There's so many things that could get lost, like I said. The language-- because even the way I wink my eye to you, as a Nigerian, might mean, somewhat different to an American guy. I could wink my eye to him, because you, you understand what I'm saying? I can wink that same eye to a British guy, he doesn't understand what I'm saying. So even though a wink alone is communication, and even I will say, we are very Nigerians or Africans, we are very good at using body for communication. So even if you don't understand that body language, you may, you might miss so many communications.

In fact one, one experience I had, I still remember that experience was during the election of 2015. And the journalists were working. It was a celebration, because the guy we were supporting won. We're just walking by the road, nothing major. But because I was able to hear some kids speaking in the local language celebrating, and I told my journalist, "hey, you need to come and hear what these kids are saying." She didn't understand but on the hearing what they said. She was intrigued and thought that was a very important information for her. And so imagine if I didn't understand that language. I wouldn't have passed that piece of information. So yeah, I will say that this question of loss in translation, like I said…the codes… what codes mean? Like the difference in codes is an understanding like language. How you use your body. Sounds. Sometimes even the smell can lead you to something that can brings another expression. The sound of Lagos. For instance, it's hard to describe Lagos without understanding the intensity of the city. You can see the pictures, but it's hard for you to really dig in very well without being there. Hearing those crazy sounds, you know, sometimes even those smells can make him miss some translation. You know what I mean?

RR 17:52
Yeah, that's a great segue, do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison, or Westerners who don't know anything about Nigeria?

BF 18:02
I mean, I'm not consciously coming to say I want to be cultural liaison. But I think what I imagine my work could have done is bring some daily realities of Nigeria, which is also the culture because culture is about how we live our life day to day. I'll say my photography has managed to do a bit of that. I give an example I had a friend who's lived in Nigeria. He's an American, we lived together for so many years. And he was always frustrated, because there's no way to share his experience living in Lagos with his

parents, because they don't understand anything. He says. That's what I mean by lost in translation. But the only thing he could use to give them an understanding is showing them Instagram pages, “you need to go look at this page, then you can understand a sense of what Nigeria is.” So in that way, I will say yes, that I've helped to do that. It wasn't done consciously. But I realize those pictures you put out there can go a long way to impact people. To make some influence.

RR 18:56
How do you share photography that you love, but isn't either it doesn't fulfill the assignment, let's say you were out shooting for a client, and you get really inspired and it's sort of off, so you don't even send those images. Or It's not paid work? How do you share that work with the world?

BF 19:12
I think the biggest the easiest one is today's what we call Instagram. I mean, I will say that's one of the biggest is this platform, you can just drop your picture and you can reach a whole lot of people around the world. I've been lucky. I think I have like 104,000 followers. So that gives me that latitude to share those images which are which I do time to time sometimes when I go on assignment, and I have some outtake which didn't go to the final selection. And I revisit the portfolio I kind of share that time to time.

RR 19:48
Do you enter contests?

BF 19:52
Yes, I enter contest. I'm very selective of the contests, enter. I'm not just entering contests because I want to win prizes. First of all, I want to ask myself with my story in that contest really make an impact. I mean, will it bring the work to the right audience? If it's not fulfilling that, then I'm not too keen. I'm not a big I'm, I'm not too keen about awards, to be honest, I don't think awards, is the best way to grow as a photographer. Sometimes it can even cause some say, so you find out some people, you know, just because a picture, a photograph wins an award, and everybody wants to take pictures that certain way. And my problem with that it doesn't make you find your own way. Because you want to do the picture which people want, rather than doing the picture that comes from you. So I would say I'm not like heavy on competitions. I mean, I'm not against people who do it. I'm not against people who organize competitions, I think they play their own role. But I just I'm not very heavy. I will say I apply once in a while, I will apply if I only believe that competition is very good for the works I want to send but I will not just say, “Well, I want to be in competition and just have to send any pictures because I want to be there.” I'm not that kind of photographer.

RR 21:04
Which contests do you enter?

BF 21:07

And to be honest, the only one I entered, I will say in the last four years is one called contemporary content, contemporary art photographic prize for African photographers. I'll say that's the only one really, then when I entered lately, which Yeah, I entered lately but, which didn't make it through. But again, I've been on jury on competitions. And I realized the fact you didn't win a prize doesn't mean your photograph is not good. There are so many interests, so many agendas. I've been on this thing. And that's why I'm not like, some people can win not because the photograph is just the best. It's just they fit into the agenda I told you about, you know, so that's why for me, I keep saying photography is the reflection of any competition is not necessarily the reflection of good photography.

RR 21:52
Tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be?.

BF 21:58
That is a big question, so everything…what I can say? I don't know. It's hard because I'm not in the West. But if I use my last experience, actually, I worked with a journalist from Washington Post, we just finished a shoot on Lagos. Actually, he's working on an African city tour. And I keep remembering you keep telling me like, "Man, Lagos makes New York feel like a village." Like for him like, it's like, it's like, I don't know how you guys live. The city is so crazy. Like, he is always shocked. Like, I can see these kind of specialists with the energy of the city. So I don't know, it's because I'm not in the head of the of the Western guy, I can only use the experience of this guy who was shocked at the level of intensity of the city. So I think he was no one maybe he was not expecting that. for him is always a big challenge going from New York to Lagos. The difference is incredible. Yeah.

RR 22:53
And if you were to make the perfect picture of life in Nigeria, what would it be?

BF 23:01
That's a difficult one. I think the thing is, it's hard because life in Nigeria is complex in the sense that I mean, I will say in life in Lagos, for instance, is so different from life in Abuja, Ibadan so it's, so to put all of them in one box is hard. I would say life in Nigeria is in layers. I'll just put, it's multi-layered. There's joy, there's sorrow. There's hope. There's chaos. There's despair. There's opportunities. There's inequalities. This massive spirituality, ethnicity, tribalism. It's complex. In all, I love being in Nigeria, I must tell you, you know, one thing I love about it? It gives you room for imagination. There's no, the system doesn't restrict you. Unlike in the west where everything is so regulated. You can like imagine you could go to anywhere here, there's this freedom for you to imagine. If you can imagine and if you can aspire, you can do it. So I will say in regardless of that, I still prefer to be in Nigeria.

RR 24:13
Do you think Western viewers understand that about Nigeria? Do you think that they understand what you're expressing as freedom? and layer a layered existence? Right? Do you think your average Westerner understands life in Nigeria or life in Africa like that?

BF 24:33
Depends. You mean, the average Westerner who has lived in Nigeria? or who sees Nigeria from afar?

RR 24:39
So when you use Nigeria from afar, we're right now we're talking about like your, your average American, like sitting in front of TV watching CNN.

BF 24:49
Yeah. I think No, there's no way they can really because I mean, the only thing what the media tells them and often is always that, you know, if it's not Boko Haram, it's gonna be End SARS, you know, but come on. In Lagos people party hard. People enjoy. I mean people like, love life. But, you don't see those nuances being reflected. Those are one of the reasons why I even did some projects in the past. You know, I did a project about parties in Lagos, because people really party hard in Lagos, but you never see CNN do like a big, you know, feature on that. Rather than well, I mean, what they say what they show is also part of the story, that's one issue. I mean, what the show is, is also part of the reality. But it is more complex than what we just show. I mean, how can you give the reality of the country in under 30 minutes or one hour? It's, it's massive. So it's hard for me to say what they see. But I only want to go by what the media present about Nigeria to the west, which is what I just said, you know, they're always excited to talk about most of the negative stories, you know. I find that in general it's the same bad stories that sells. And that's what I see them doing. I must say those stories are important. I'm not saying they're not important, because those stories helps to call our leaders to action--in speaking to the to the power, so I will say those stories are there to do the that work. But that's not the only thing. I mean, in as much as you want to show the problems. I wish it could also show stories that can give us solutions, or stories that can also give us ways to further our lives.

RR 26:28
So you sort of answered this but I do you need to ask how do you feel about that narrative, right, that Western narrative about Boko Haram and SARS, and, you know, like despair,

BF 26:38
like, again, like, I think maybe because I've come to realization like this media are not created for we, Africa, it's created for themselves. So as soon as I'm aware of that, I'm not bothered, they just want to satisfy their interest, and it's fine, if it works for them. But that will not change the way I see my work. I think it's more important for me to find the way I see my work, tell the story that can bring that change. And that's why I think the importance of why local media, well, photographer to really work hard to really project the complex story of the country, not just one side of the story. So to be honest, since I've come to realization, like, all these things are not meant for us. Why am I worrying? Why do I feel bad? I should not put my energy, channel my energy, in telling those gaps in their stories, or even telling those complex reality I see everyday.

RR 27:29
Thinking of the editors that you work with, most frequently have Do you think that they've visited Nigeria or West Africa to the best of your knowledge, right? Like, I'm going to be talking to people who know what's up, or you're talking to someone who has no idea?

BF 27:45
Yeah, but I think I'm sorry to say I'm always going from back this question was one of the major conversation I and journalists from Washington Post got talking a lot. He's been in Africa. And for him, he said, He's always frustrated when he files story when he sends picture to like, to Washington, and their choice of images shocks him, because it's so far away from you know what I mean? So, yes, I would say it's a tricky thing to be many of them-- And the reason he says why it's like that, because many of them don't get to have the chance to stay in Africa, which I think is important. I do not say you have to move the office into the continent, but at least do some kind of what I call sabbatical. To have a sense of, like, I talked about things like smell, you know, sound, the energy, those kinds of things is hard to convey, by, you know, aura, I think it could be a good way to help them have a grounded understanding or some sense of reality.

RR 28:47
Um, let's see here. And so that you sort of get to this. Do you think that those folks back in the, you know, the offices in New York and London and Paris and DC, do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

BF 29:01
I don't know, man. I mean, I mean, it's hard for me to talk about for them. I said, I think it's if you've lived on the continent, maybe that can give you a sense, or if not, it's hard, because like I said, it's like two parallel worlds. Even for me, when, when I'm coming to the Western world, I switch, you know, my mindset, everything changes entirely, because it's so different. It's not the same way. So I find myself because we're human, we are adaptable, I find myself adapting to the society here. So I will say it's a two parallel worlds. So it's difficult for you to imagine how it is when you are there when you've never been on the place. So you're lucky to have somebody that keeps you very updated with the daily realities going on there.

RR 29:45
So tell me a little bit about the difference between Nigeria and Western workstyles. You kind of got to this in your idea of your sort of like what we call an American English I don't know if you use this in Nigerian English, we call it ‘code switching’ when you have to sort of change the words you use and the way you address people and all of those kinds of things right between when you're talking to different people. In American English, we call it code switching. And you talked a little bit about that. But how does that do you feel that in workstyles, when you're working with Western editorial orgs?

BF 30:22

I think it's for me, it's going to be hard for me, because I think I've been lucky. My career has been, I've been used to working with Western media from the get-go of my career. So I've not found myself working a lot with local media, or local media. So I will say, I don't get to do that code switching, I understand what you mean. But I don't get to do that in my professional life. But of course, in my daily life between living in the UK and Nigeria, it's a different ballgame. Even when I'm talking with the guys back home, the way I would talk to them is so different with the way I will talk to the guys here [London].

RR 31:01
In your experience, and you sort of got to this, picture editors, the ones who are back at the desk, how do you think they shape what Westerners think of Africa?

BF 31:11
I think they're very important because they are like the gatekeeper. In pushing out the way we see, I mean, the western people see the world, I mean, their role is very important too. Because we might also, so first, I might be able to take the picture, take those great images, put the accordion data together, but you need somebody who can really put it in a manner, which can be also be understandable to the mass audience. And I think the editor plays a big role. I mean, I might be good in doing this picture. But I might not be the best person in terms of understanding what the audience will relate to. So they play that role. I mean, I cannot say that it wasn't important to be there to fulfill, that gap with a photographer.

RR 31:54
Do you ever try to influence the selection? Make your case?

BF 31:58
So the only thing i do i make sure any selection I make, it's a good representation of what I want to say. But also, I like to give room for options. But anytime I'm pushing out my image, I have to make sure it meets my standards, I always say every image that goes is a reflection of my identity. So if it goes out wrong, it's bad on my identity. So for every image that I supply, or deliver to, to say to my editor, I have to make sure it's a good representation of my identity.

RR 32:33
Have you ever covered a story that's given more importance abroad than it is at home?

BF 32:41
Like I said, most of them. Yeah, I mean, most of the images, I mean, I find, I find that, again, because I work a lot of time for the international media, clearly, always get more attention internationally.

RR 33:09
Can you hear me?

BF 33:10
Yeah, sorry, my battery's running down.

RR 33:13
That's okay. Just leave your camera off. Just leave your camera. Um, tell me about your relationship. With the people that you photograph, how do you gain access? How do you gain access to your subject, when you're planning to photograph someone?

BF 33:29
I think again, ourselves, by trying to make them trust me. And that comes in different ways. It could be just interacting with them. Before you start the process, be clear, be very transparent and honest with them. That helps. And sometimes you need a good level of patience, you know, because sometimes you come to people… you don't know, they don't trust you and they want to be sure that you want to tell their story in the right way. So, I will say the key thing that has worked for me is building trust, patience, and be clear and transparent as much as I can as I can.

RR 34:05
And how often are you working in that you face a language barrier?

BF 34:13
I face barrier like working with NGOs, for instance, often I'm being sent to communities where I do not belong, so then I will face language barrier. But I always have like maybe like a translator who helps me in, in, you know, in the translation, but you know, the beauty about photography is it's a universal language. Even if I have the challenges in getting like talking to them. It doesn't stop me visually to tell the story I see on the ground, what I've observed. So that's the beauty of photography. It's a global language, even though you cannot fully understand what people say --as long as you have a translator--you have a context of the story. I think you can get to tell your story in a nice way, photographically. Of course, not knowing the language, it's a challenge, but you can always overcome them. I always overcome them through the help of a translator even just talking to people around, you always find someone who's gonna help you out.

RR 35:08
Has there ever been a time when you were working and you really didn't fit in to the scene? And so gaining access was hard? Have you ever been in a place where it was just really difficult to get people to trust you?

BF 35:22
I've been so lucky. I mean, people always ask me how you get the buck? You know, I just go in. It's not happened to me. I mean, I don't think I can't remember anyone where you feel difficult, even when it's difficult. Like I said, patience is a very key factor even when I tried the first time, I find myself as soon as I go second full time, it does open.

RR 35:43

Do you think Western media values local photographers, photographers on the ground who are you know, African nationals as opposed to expats?

BF 35:51
I mean, that's a bit like, it's hard for me to tell what's in their head. If they really appreciate or not the only thing I will say I've seen recent and they've been more interested in hiring local photographer as instead of instead of the Western photographer, so for me, if, if, if it means them hiring more African photographers are local photography means they're having confidence in them or having respect for their work. That's what I will say.

RR 36:25
Um, do you think you're paid fairly for your work?

BF 36:30
Yes, I think so. I mean, of course, I have to haggle or negotiate like, just like Rotary Foundation, I will say they pay me fairly well. And for some other clients, they always give you the price you think doesn't work for you, but you always end up renegotiating. And, and it works well for me.

RR 36:46
Do you? You sort of answered this, but I have to ask, do you work with any expat journalists in Nigeria?

BF 36:54
Um, they most of them are the ones that I call the fly-in and fly out. But I don't work with those based in Nigeria. We don't have many.

RR 37:03
So tell me a little bit like what it is to work with someone who sort of drops in for an assignment.

BF 37:13
I mean, I mean, I mean, I think, for me, it's not that big of a deal, because I already understand if it's Nigeria, it's not a big deal, because I'm already aware of the context. So the only thing I mean, most times, I always like to orient them on how to the culturally interact with the people. And you know, thereby we just go on working. For often times might be a time where they don't like I said, sometimes it's lost in translation, I think that's what happened quite often. And that can be frustrating, you know, or sometimes they just wanted to barge into somebody's house, without understanding the need to be patient. They need to be to be respectful, because they are, they are just like, under pressure with deadlines and things like that. Sometimes the frustration would be like, you would love to go deeper in the story, but because the time is so short, they need to run. Then you find your story, kind of shortened, in a way with them.

RR 38:16

Let's go back to your relationships with picture editors. Do you work with anyone on a regular basis? Or a semi regular basis? Who really gets it? Right? Do you have favorite picture editors to work with?

BF 38:29
Oh, yeah, yeah, I mean, many I mean, like, [name redacted], I mean, what Okay, one thing I love about photo editors I love when you just trust me, give me the space, to use my discretion to tell my story, I find myself doing working best, you often you're going to give me guidelines, but I like what you just give me the freedom to be able to express myself creatively and that has worked. I've been lucky, like, for instance, the story I did with *Washington Post* editor. That was the case he just like, you know what, I just want to do something on Lagos. Just go out there and do a story. And I came up with something. I mean, like, a person like [name redacted], which I've worked is the same situation. Of course, she gives me guidance, she gives me that room to just go out there, you know tell the story with some level of support. Also, in total, I always enjoy working with editors that give me the liberty to just express or tell the story the way I see on the ground, rather than telling the story that meets their own interest, essentially.

RR 39:29
And how did you initially get connected to the folks that you're working with most successfully?

BF 39:36
I mean, all kinds of ways! Online, sometimes it could be recommendations. Sometimes it could like, "You know, we saw your work online and we like it. We want to work with you." If I use again, I'm going back the recent one which I just did for *Washington Post*, which I liked, which I think might be ended up with it. How did it happen? I introduced my recent body of work to the editor and I think that led him to check my website where he saw my project on Lagos called mutation. And through that he hired me. I will say, all different way, you know, recommendation online, publication. So it all varies. Sometimes I work with agencies, and they bring jobs to me. And you know what I find out some of the jobs I enjoy are not necessarily the highest paid jobs, you know?

RR 40:24
And do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

BF 40:28
Not every time, not every time, it depends on the story I'm working on, but not everybody.

RR 40:33
So when you're working with Western media organizations, so not NGOs, but when you're working on an editorial, do you get people's names?

BF 40:42

So if it's for like, a story that is focused on portrait of people like individuals, yes. where it's like, Okay, how the city works, I think are more focused on how the city works, which means the location of the place, what are the dynamics of it? So it depends, if it's about stories about people, 100% is important to get the names of the people, but if it's about the place, maybe not necessarily.

RR 41:05
Are there certain times of year or certain events that happen on a regular basis, where you know that Western media is going to be interested in photography, from what's happening in Nigeria?

BF 41:18
Think the elections are always attracting people, no? The general election in Nigeria always attract a lot of media attention to Nigeria.

RR 41:29
And let's see, we sort of answered that, but um, tell me about the process when you're working with Western editorial. From the beginning to the end, right? Like, someone can contact you they have an assignment, tell me a little bit about how that goes, what are the steps between you agreeing to take on the work and work running.

BF 41:55
So, if it's for an assignment, first of all, I need to know get a sense of the story you want to do many? Give me your brief. And after I study your brief, I could tell you my method of how to approach it. So again, like I said, if it's about people, my starting point is always trying to understand those people. That means I have to go through interviews, interviewing the people, based on the story they give me, I start thinking of the visuals to do and after taking the picture. My editing or my selection will also be defined by what I hear them telling me trying to make, like a story in a current way or in a serious way. After that, you know, like I said, do the captioning, which may include the name of the people the location, what they are doing. And thereafter, I file the pictures to the editor.

RR 42:43
And do you ever turn down assignments?

BF 42:47
If I've turned on assignment? I didn't get the question, sorry.

RR 42:51
Oh, yes. But do you ever turn down assignments? Do you ever say no?

BF 42:56
An assignment? I said no. Because time factor. I wasn't available, because sometimes it could be so busy. I cannot just maybe the assignment might overlap. And the client is pressed for time, I just have to say, I'm sorry, I can't do it. Because I've already been committed to something else. But yes, I have had cases like that.

RR 43:16
Are there any kinds of pictures you won't make?

BF 43:22
myself or for a client?

RR 43:24
for a client?

BF 43:28
You know what I mean, for me, the thing that I think I've defined myself is, and it's hard, but I've never been attempting of which one I can. That's what me photography is. My photography is in two ways, as a profession and as a way of life. So when is the one that fit into that profession? I rarely will think of something I was stop me not to do it. When I mean way of life that doing something that's personal to me, maybe I will, and what are my turn? That is something that doesn't align with my own interests or my own personality? Well, in terms of assignments, I'm not sure. There are projects I wouldn't do. I'm not sure.

RR 44:06
Okay. When picture editors talk to you about what they're looking for, right? Because you said you know, that give you sort of in your best relationships, they give you kind of an umbrella, and then they asked you for ideas, locations, those kinds of things. Are there any themes that come up frequently?

BF 44:24
Um, it depends. Like I said, I work for an array of clients today, so I will say it could be different. So. Some of them are humanitarian stories, you know, stories about, for instance, people in the northeast of Nigeria, in Lagos is mostly like business trending, Lagos like young tech industry, the green tech industry. Sometimes I find myself working in the agricultural sector so it's all varies you know. Sometimes I'll say in the in the entertainment moving those with it varies, you know, I will not say there's this one common path.

RR 45:01
Do you think that do you? I know you said you've worked with reporters who kind of come in and out. Do you ever see foreign photojournalists who come in and out for, you know, a week or a few weeks here and there for Western pubs?

BF 45:17
Yeah, yeah. I mean, they still exist if they still come for sure. But I just don't know. But I'm sure they still come and go.

RR 45:24
But you don't have much of a relationship with them?

BF
No, no, no, I don't.

RR
Okay. Um, is there anything? Oh, yep. Sorry, has a picture editor ever asked you for an image that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

BF 45:39
No. I don't think so

RR 45:44
you'd be surprised when people say that. Um, is there anything that you think I should know about the way you're working with Western media or NGOs? In terms of client work for photography? Is there anything that I didn't ask that you think I should know?
.
BF
No.

RR
Okay. So actually, I have two questions. First of all, I love watching everyday Africa. I'm a super fan. I check it twice a day. But it is interesting to me that everyday Africa wasn't actually founded by Africans. And if that's ever part of the conversation about how that cohort of photographers connect and share work.

BF 46:42
So I didn't get to so it's okay.

RR 46:44
Can you hear me now?

BF 46:45
Yeah. So you were saying that this kind of conversation comes up?

RR 46:50
Right. I'm wondering if you if you're ever having conversation, especially amongst the other African photographers about the president and founding nature of that being from ex-pats?

BF 47:01
Yeah, definitely. I mean, that kind conversation pops up very well, especially during informal conversation. Like, personal like, I mean, about the same thing. How come, you know, @everydayAfrica that is headed or spearheaded by, you know, by Western people? Yeah, that comes up quite often. I will not deny that.

RR 47:23

Do you think there's any appetite or opportunity to create something that's entirely run by Africans?

BF 47:33
I think there's always been a constant appetite for that. But the problem I find many times is structure platform that will make things like that come true and sustainable.

RR 47:48
Yeah. Okay.

BF 47:49
That's I think the big challenge has always been sustainability. I mean, I've known guys who set up like PR agencies locally, you know, form photo collectives, where they don't last, you know,

RR 48:02
is there so I know there are a couple of festivals that have come up like Lagos PhotoFest, and then there's one in Addis Ababa. Are there others that I don't know about?

BF 48:11
yeah, there's one in Abuja. There's a new one. Now growing it's called Abuja photo festival. It's growing slowly, there's another one called photo junction. I mean, again, it's always they don't have that strong platform like that of Lagos photo, then LagosPhoto. has been heavily Western influence, millions of funding coming from the Western world to support the festival.

RR 48:36
And then someone mentioned something called Foundry to me, but I don't know what Foundry is. Do you know what Foundry is?

BF 48:43
Yeah. So foundry is it's a kind of photo workshop, program a training photographers from developing countries. It was initiated or has been founded and run by agent seven. Maybe, you know, the photographic agency seven. Okay. Actually, I've been there too, to talk to be being one of the tutors there before.

RR 48:57

Oh, cool. Um, okay. And then my last question is, is there anything that I haven't asked you that you think I should know about the work of Nigerian photographers or the way that Nigerian photographers are showcasing life there? Is there anything you want to say that I didn't ask about?

BF 49:25
Well, no, no, but if I think of anything, I'll definitely reach out to you.

Appendix E
Interview with CL: August 16, 2021

Run time: 1:05:00
Years active as photographer: 7

RR 00:00
This, so I'm recording this call, I need you to acknowledge and accept that the call is going to be recorded. You won't be named in the thesis if you don't want to be.

CL
Okay. All right.

RR
Well, should we get started?

CL 00:17
Yeah, sure. It's interesting because.... So my wife finished her, did a thesis, this was last year. And it was it was funny because he had to do series of interviews, like this.

RR 00:37
Yes, you're on the other side of it. I actually was just on the other side of an interview earlier this morning for someone else. So yes, I understand. How long have you been photographing?

CL 00:51
Um, officially since 2014. That's about seven years. Unofficially, maybe? 2012-- 2011/ 2012? Yeah, well, I just say 2014 because it's when I decided to do it professionally.

RR 01:08
And tell me about how you got started.

CL 01:12
Um, so the journey wasn't particularly linear. I was in school at the time in 2012. I was rounding off my degree program. I did computer engineering. And before I finished, someone gifted me-- one of my aunties, gifted me point and shoot camera. And like, it was I decided, this is one of the best gifts I've gotten so far. And started, taking pictures of everything from lizards, to trees to sunset and everything. And when I finished from school, I just thought to myself instead of looking for the like, putting applications out and looking for the regular white-collar jobs. The idea to do photography, like fashion photography, as a career came up, and I just want to jump right in. And that was it.

RR 02:06
And who are your regular clients?

CL 02:10

So when I started, I did start as an event photographer, like I did a lot of weddings. I still do weddings now, but not as I used to. I started with weddings. At the onset it was just weddings, events. But as time went on, I decided to narrow down into what I really wanted to do-- what I thought I was passionate about, which was documentary photography, and street photography as well.

So I started getting my first my first documentary gig. It was for a friend, she relocated from the US and she had this NGO, she set up in Nigeria, in Lagos. And it was, um what do you call it-- I'm trying to remember the name, but what if I remember well, during the conversation, I'll bring it up. For what she did then had an NGO tp provide educational materials and food and stuff for Islamic community in Lagos. And she contracted me to take pictures for her at the time. Yeah, that was 2015... NBNL--No Boundaries, No Limits. That was the name.

RR 03:22
Okay. And do you speak languages in addition to English?

CL 03:29
Yes. I speak two other languages. I speak Yoruba language. I speak Ibo language. Okay.

RR 03:37
And do you think that photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

CL 03:47
So this question is particularly interesting, because there's no-- I feel it's the answer yes or no answer. Because there's some pictures that really tell--really does tell the story of the person in that photo and the way the subject the image…while there are some that-- just that's like an expression of what the photographer was feeling at the time, so so it's not a yes or no answer. It's not particularly--doesn't just mean on one side here.

RR 04:17
And do you think that the nationality or the ethnicity of a photographer plays a role?

CL 04:28
I think it... I don't I don't exactly think it does. I think it does not. Because I feel like we are all citizens of one planet -- one Earth. So as long as the artist or the photographer is interested in the people, and really like, not just like, you're not just like you, you're settled and you're really interested in the spirit and the people. It does show, like, that kind of interest shows in the In the work. So you don't necessarily have to be from that place or be a part of the people to be able to connect. I mean, empathy is everything. Anybody can have empathy here. So that's what I think.

RR 05:11
Do you have personal work that differs from paid assignments?

CL 05:16

Yes, sure. I do. Yes.

RR 05:20
And tell me, how are they distinct? How are they different?

CL 05:24
So um, so personal, my personal work mostly…Okay, let me just give the backstory of how I said, street photography. So you remember I said, I started as an event photographer as a wedding photographer?

RR 05:41
so did I!

CL 05:43
Yeah. Most people, yes, our weddings are usually weekends. They're weekends, and not even every other weekend. So you might just have maybe one weekend in a whole month booked. I mean, as a new, as a starter, a new photographer. So I wasn't really getting bookings at the time. So I had a lot of spare time. And I had pressure from my parents from you know, I mean, "dude, you just when it's cool, you should get a job" like, I was in that moment of my life. And so for some, like, just randomly, I saw some guy reached out to me that we wanted to sell a camera, mirrorless camera. So I bought the camera off him--a Fujifilm mirrorless camera. And as soon as I got that camera, I tried to just start, I started to walk around. So I didn't necessarily start street photography like, "Oh, I'm doing street photography." I didn't know, there was a thing, called street photography. It was just me, trying to kill boredom and just take pictures around my neighborhood. Interact with people. And so that thinking about like, recently, I said, like connecting the dots backwards, I realized that it was a street photography. So that photography, street photography started for me as a way-- to say it was, a psychological process. It was a mental process. For me, it wasn't just me creating work. It wasn't really about the pictures or the people. It was about me being creative, just so that my mental health was in check. So having said that, I think-- remind me of the question again... So that I can connect it

RR 07:17
Tell me how your personal work differs from your paid work.

CL 07:21
Yes, so my personal work--that was just me trying to keep myself in a in a proper in the frame of mind, not to like literally get into depression or anxiety or worries. So it was mostly about me connecting with people and connecting my story even as Lagosian, as a Nigerian. And literally just having been in a very proper good frame of mind. So that's what my personal work started as, Whereas the paid jobs are usually they come from briefs that they already tell you what they want, and you just deliver exactly what what they expect of you.

RR 08:03
Are there stories are people, places that are consistently overlooked by Western media?

CL 08:14
From my perspective, I think yes, because from time to time, there's always something that is big, big for the media. There's just, there's always the story that every media wants to tell. And nobody cares if it's overflow, they just want to stay there because they feel that's what's getting the attention. So when something happens it's difficult to bring in any other kind of work. It's difficult to direct the attention to any other story. For instance, there was a time Boko Haram was the crème de la crème. That was the top story. If you're not doing any story around insurgency you barely get any attention. So and even people that were not really interested in that just launch themselves in and do stuff like thajust so that they can get assignments So yeah, I think so. I think there are stories that they ignore

RR 09:12
Have you pitched those stories--the stories that are getting ignored--have you pitched them at all? Have you tried?

CL 09:18
Yes, I did. I did once. Okay, so I'm really interested I'm big on the environment and something I'm really interested in. My wife as well. She runs a social enterprise around mental stuff. So it's just something I'm big on. And there was a time, where we stayed, this landfill that just went up in flames and it was really bad. And I went to photograph the whole event and everything. The whole incident and I don't think I reached out to them. So then someone who is a mentor. His name is [name redacted]. I think an agency reached out to him to ask if he had any images of stories that were environmental- related stories. And he just pointed them my way. And that was how I got the gig. And so subsequently, any other environmental-related issue the like, something I'm really interested in that I got to do, I'll reach out to the editor and then they usually they publish the idea.

RR 10:26
And what media are you reading or watching or listening to? That feels most reflective of your lived experience?

CL 10:40
It's difficult to pinpoint one because…

RR 10:43
Sure, like, it doesn't have to be one.

CL 10:48
Like, because to be to be sincere, it's, it's maybe this this local one they call *Sahara Reporters*, those are the those, those ones, they just tell stories of what's happening in the country. But most of the other ones we follow on Twitter online, when Twitter was still active in Nigeria, on Instagram and others on the internet. Generally, there usually is just stories from around the world, it's difficult to have our own local stories up there here.

RR 11:21
You know, everyone has mentioned local media, everyone that I've talked to. Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly Africa-focused?

CL 11:35
Yes, yes, yes, I am. So because of how, like my entry into photography was like, it was difficult for me to have like, direct mentorship. Most people I reached out to... maybe they were busy or they were not just interested at the time. So because of that experience I had, I just thought wouldn't be nice for people that come after me not to have same experience?

So what I did was, create one of the seminars that gets in my work seen and like I said, like getting, like more clarity so when people reach out to me when I get messages and all--I tend to engage them and I decided to start a small collective. So it's so it's just a group or a community of young photographers and we just mostly share among ourselves. It's theme is street photography, even though we talk about every other forms of photography. So yeah, that's it so I run a run a small agency, it's more community.

RR 12:44
have you named it? does it have a name?

CL 12:46
Yeah. So it's, it's just called okay, so it's street photography. It started as a street photography workshop. So what is really street photography workshop with CL, but what is called the community I just did like an abbreviation of that street photography workshop. XSPWWBK. So, yeah.

RR 13:08
Um, and the kinds of conversations that you have in this collective? Is it different from the kinds of conversations you have with expats?

CL 13:18
Yeah,

RR 13:19
tell me about that.

CL 13:20
No, come again. Sorry.

RR 13:22
Is it different than the kinds of conversations you're having with Western media or editors or those kinds of things? What's unique about those conversations?

CL 13:30

Um, so the conversations I have with them… it's a bit it's a blend of both. Because their interests --most young people that come to you, they just want to know how to literally make it big. How to start shooting assignments for the big guys. So you still have to hold their interest by having some information in that regards for them. While you still bring the local perspective and try to tell them, "I know this is your goal, but maybe we can start from here and like do something among ourselves and like literally have something to show before we start trying to latch on or reach out to the guys outside?"

RR 14:11
So when you're working with Western media,

CL 14:14
yeah.

RR 14:15
Is there anything that gets lost? I'm thinking about conversations you may have with editors. Do you have to explain things differently to a Western editor than you would if you were working locally?

CL 14:39
Yeah, this like it's something I've never really thought about it. Until this question but. Yes, most times I have to explain. Because I feel even though it's one planet, it's one world, I feel I relate to that a bit different. So most times I have to like explain that. For instance, those time I did this, this story I shot for a magazine-- like a foreign magazine and I was trying to explain that.

Or there's a people there's a suburb of like a community in Lagos, where they do a lot of fish-smoking. So they traditionally smoke it, where they just have firewood. And most times they do it where they live. So there's that, like, pollution. Literally the kids are there and, and these guys, I mean, it's not. Even though we see from the outside, it looks like a problem. But for them, like it's how like how they know life and there's really no issue there. So I was trying to explain the whole, like, it was difficult for me to explain the whole, I remember I had to like be more, try to be more imaginative or try to give examples so that they get what I was trying to pitch to them at the time. Yeah. Okay.

RR 16:01
So this is an interesting question to follow up, because I'm asking everyone the same questions in the same order. But do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience?

CL 16:15
Do I? Maybe. I don't, maybe even like, even if I do, I don't think of myself as that. I think I am because this is this is my home, this is where I'm from. And for some reason I have contact with these other people that are not from here. So I just think automatically just makes me a form of liaison with them. Yeah.

RR 16:37
So what does it mean to take on that responsibility?

CL 16:44
What does it mean? To be sincere I try not to think of it as, as something I feel it's, it's not something to like..I'll feel bad if I think too much about it. Might become bothersome--like maybe restrict how I like …it's in my literally put some like chains on how I would normally communicate or how free I'll normally be. So as much as possible. I try to. I try to be free and be fluid and make sure I'm still sincere, because like, if I start thinking about myself as a liaison or something I might, I might be too conscious of how I communicate and just try so much to butter-up stories. I just tried so much to please. the people I'm trying to communicate to so and that's not particularly nice. Yeah.

RR 17:38
Interesting. So how do you share photography that you love, but that doesn't fulfill an assignment, right? Like, either maybe you went out on an assignment and you saw something along the way that's not relevant to the work you're being paid for, or your street photography and your personal work? How do you distribute that?

CL 17:56
Um, so I, I share my work mostly on Instagram. I used to post like daily and, it's funny because at the time, even now you always get that feedback from someone. I always get feedback from some colleagues or some people that "oh, you're sharing too much." Or, "these guys won't take you seriously" like, maybe the way the way you're capturing the pictures on on photos…but I'm just sharing by myself. There's always that. Or maybe you're not capturing too--I'm like these things are not exactly an assignment job. They're the kind of works that I'm endeared to. This is my own expression. I don't get to do assignments and do it how they want it. And then still when I share my own work I still have to be worried or to be burdened with presenting my own free work?

So yeah, I do social media most of the time. It's important to get work. I mean you have to get paid. You have to get get paid because I mean that's how you have resources to keep funding your desires or whatever. But I feel like if we lose that personal touch, everything just becomes like everything. It sort of loses its essence. So I don't want to get to that place where I just feel like a robot. I just have to keep shooting stories, so that like I should be I should be involved in the whole thing somehow. Yeah, sure. I still stay connected in it to it here.

RR 19:46
Do you enter contests?

CL 19:49
Ah, I used to, but I stopped.

RR 19:53
Okay.

CL 19:54
Yeah, so I, I entered a couple. Maybe two, three. And the one I think I stopped after-- it wasn't exactly a contest. It was a portfolio review/contest because they said the winner or the one who the most I don't know what it was what the best portfolio gets a prize money and something .

RR 20:21
So that's a contest

CL 20:23
Yes, even though it came as a portfolio review initially. So I was I was first runner up. I was in second position and really like messed with [inaudible]. Because the feedback I got wasn't exactly…was just the fact that "all your work was great" or "this work is better." It's not exactly a bad thing, but one thing I learned is…sometimes the kind of feedback people get-- especially artists or creatives-- matter because it's important to still understand that still understand the artist journey.

Even though you might not really connect to their work, you should still give them feedback based on the path they are on. Not exactly your own level of expertise on their work. I don't know if that makes sense. So it's something I tried to try to bring to conversations. I try to bring out when I'm talking to younger artists. You might go for some portfolio reviews and as much as it's good to get people's feedback on your work, make sure you don't lose the story you're trying to tell. Or lose your own perspective on the whole thing. Because you're the one, like, it's your you own experience. Whatever you photograph, even if someone is trying to show you a better way to do it. Just make sure you don't you don't just lose the essence of what you're trying to tell because there's always a possibility of it happening. Because like, yeah, I think that settles it.

RR 21:55
So that the that portfolio review. Yeah, what was that? What was that with African? Without an African portfolio review? Was it a European portfolio review?

CL
It was with National Geographic

RR
Oh, that's loaded. This is a great, next question, then. Tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be?

CL 22:22
Hmm. So this question is interesting, because some two years back, the answer I would have had then is different from what I have now.

RR 22:33

Oh, okay. Let's hear about that.

CL 22:35
Because some two years back, I think they just, they used to think that this place…was, it was all just Africa. "Africa is a country" mindset--where you just hear them say, "Oh, I'm going to Africa," or "Do you know any photographer in Africa?" We are, like, there are over 40 states-- 40 countries in this continent. How do you see the photographer in Africa. A photographer somewhere Botswana, it's over 10, almost 10 hours away from by air also to where a Nigerian photographer is. So they had--they didn't really know or didn't really understand the continent or the people the place.

But I feel over the recent times, it's sort of changed. Because I think we have social media to thank for a lot of the enlightenment that that they have now about the place. And I've found out that I've met a couple of genuine, genuine people, people that were really interested in, in like, interested in displays beyond the portrayals of "Oh, I'm going to Africa with African stories." People that were that genuinely genuine interested in the people. Yeah, so that's what I think.

RR 23:52
okay, so you think it's changing? Okay,

CL 23:54
Yeah. It's changing, changing. I think so.

RR 23:56
So if you were to make the perfect image or a series of images about life in Nigeria, tell me about them. What would it be?

CL 24:04
Hmm. Oh, so there's Nigeria and there's Lagos and Lagos and sometimes-- we live that in Lagos--We sort of forget that. When the bigger country like Lagos is just a city in the country.

RR 24:21
Yeah. Lagos is crazy. I've been there.

CL 24:26
Yeah, so I feel like there's this-- I feel like Lagos is a bubble of what the expectation of the country actually is. So if I should say, speak from just the Lagos perspective, this the, what I feel the story will be. There's the energy, this zest like you have. You have like this immense energy in this in this city. There's, the people are very aspirational, like they just this is they have strong desire, there's just always that desire for the next level. Thus, they're very driven. So, there's the hardship as well, because in as much as there's one thing to be driven, there's another thing to actually get what you're paying for you're driving yourself to get. So, most times the, the reward doesn't doesn't equal the efforts? Yeah, so so there's that part.

And for the other parts of the country, it's not, it might not be as as energetic as Lagos is but, I feel the story is almost a similar across board. So I will show the passion, the energy of the people how driven they are, the hardship, the friendship as well. We are very, how would I put it-- we're very, there's this there's this connection we have even we don't necessarily know somebody or you don't even you meet them for the first time. You can give a nod and you get a response, or people are just shaking hands, regardless of COVID or no COVID. Like people there's this there's this kindred spirits that we have as well in the end. So I'd show those things. Yeah.

RR 26:25
Okay. And where do you think that those images would be published or shared? The perfect images about life?

CL 26:35
Where I would like to be shared? Or where I think where I think it will be shared as it is now?

RR
Hmmm. That's an interesting distinction, where do you think they'd be? Where would you like them to be shared?

CL
Well, I would like them to be shared in like, the most same platforms, because like I mentioned, we're very aspirational. Like, the average Nigerian, even if he doesn't have so much he can dream. Like we can dream. Even photographers that just started yesterday, they already know the big platforms of media, they already know them. So even if let's say you get the work shared on a local platform, or the they'll be like "oh nice" but the reaction you get from if it's on a bigger platform, let's say in National Geographic, for instance, or a just any big platform like on Time Magazine, or like just any big platform because it's mostly it's not really about the size of the platform is about their reach. So as long as the reach is massive enough, that would be nice. That'd be good.

RR 27:59
Do you think Western viewers would look at these perfect images of life in Nigeria and garner the same understanding from the pictures? Do you think that they would see in them what Nigerians would see in them?

CL 28:12
I doubt they would. Might be 40% possibility. Because I feel, so what I'm looking for the best way to put this, even though I always say we're on the same planet, people have different realities. And sometimes even people that think they're open to new experiences-- open to learning about other people's culture--there's always that there's always that bias. Or that thing they need to break off from before they can really appreciate or understand the story. So I don't know that the percentage of people that might have dealt with that—seeing a story by us and just taking the story and

understanding it, they're very few. Maybe out of 100%? 40% which is different enough. But I doubt that you have majority understand anytime like connecting to it as as we would here. Yeah.

RR 29:16
So what do you think of Western viewers or media can do to better understand it? And here I'm using "Africa" in that Western sense right? Like "Africa!" What can Western--what can Western media do to help Westerners Understand?

CL 29:32
Um, so I think they should allow locals, to tell the story more. Like, I guess the fact that oh, I mean, it's always more reliable to send a photographer or a creative you've been working with for a long time because you know, they will get stories. But there's nothing as genuine as a local perspective to a place. It was understandable when—maybe--photographers in the continent or in the country, Nigeria, per se, weren't experienced enough to, to tell stories. Or they couldn't capture they couldn't send work that was coherent. But, now we have quite a number of creative photographers out there. And this is their place, so there's always that. There's always that insider's perspective. That fresh insider's perspective that would help. So there's that part.

And even if nobody's saying, I mean…it's open, like journalists should be able to go around the world to tell stories. So even if they decide to send somebody or still decide to send a person from them, or whatever, they should make sure the person works with, works with somebody here so that the view is not just one-sided. Because I always tell people, there was a time when I was in the office talking to a couple of my colleagues in like, in a sort of informal hangout. So a friend of mine was talking about, was complaining, about how about the white man's gaze of the continent, how, when you Google, Africa or Nigeria, and the series of the images that pop up are always very funny off. Like, you see a child or a naked child or child not wearing pants, with flies everywhere, that kind of thing. And how he was really pained about it. How we need to, like try to rewrite the narrative and share more works and like have our updated view of Africa on top of the search. And I said, "Well, the truth is this. I don't necessarily blame them"... because if, if you're sent to a place, and what I mean, we are, we're sensory beings, especially as photographers--like we use our senses a lot. Then your senses will be most attracted to the things that are not common to you. So even though there's always there's a thin line between the narrative, your senses will be attracted to things that normally are not exactly common to you, and things that you've heard of before. So I mean, the narrative on Africa is: Africa is the poor continent, people are suffering. So even in you get to Nigeria, even if you see the high rise buildings, you won't exactly like it. You won't know exactly accept your trade. You won't exactly want to photograph those things. You'll be looking at in labor, even when you see the maybe the child on the street [inaudible] or something, you just think, "Oh, this is Africa," and you start photographing that so. So it's just, it's I feel like we all need to educate ourselves and allow ourselves to grow.

RR 32:43

When you think of the editors that you work with, and by this I mean, the Westerners, have they ever been to the best of your knowledge? Have they ever visited Nigeria?

CL 32:57
Let me try to remember maybe that's say out of 10? Maybe two? Okay. That's a 20%. Yeah.

RR 33:05
And about and of this set of 10 that we're talking about? What about elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa? Do you think do you think that they've come to the continent at all?

CL 33:19
No. No I don't think so.

RR 33:22
Do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

CL 33:28
Maybe now they have like a mild or a simple understanding of it thanks to social media but, I doubt it, I doubt that they have a very grounded understanding of what daily life is about here.

RR 33:41
So of the little bit that you think they've garnered from social media, what do they get right? Or what do you think they understand?

CL 33:51
So that I feel the parallel in our you know, in our existence or like the parallel truth in our existence. The fact is that all these mental health issues in America is mental health issues in Nigeria. There's struggles in the Western world, there's struggles in the African continent. So to an extent I feel like these conversations--I've had with a couple of them they've drawn that parallel lines. Like "Oh, we're not exactly so different." I mean, it's still we see we encounter similar troubles or maybe different degrees of it, or we share like almost the same struggles Yeah.

RR 34:36
And what do you think they miss what don't what don't they understand about daily life?

CL 34:41
Um, what don't they understand about daily life? So, for instance, let me use an example. Even though like what I just said, prior to this very question about the parallels in our existence. How maybe there's a mental health issue that is suffering the struggle. Yet even so, I feel like the people might not get this even though like we might be going through stuff but the way the way we--our response is actually different from what they understand or what they would expect. For instance, on social media our like the country can be burning and people will be making jokes on social media. So it's actually

sickening if you think about...if you take a step back and look at it for inside. it's just how we respond like, it's like a coping mechanism. Things can be so bad. I mean, for instance, Twitter is banned in this country, a whole democratic nation! And there's a ban on Twitter. And everybody's it's like joking. Like everybody's just making different jokes about it. Even people are still on Twitter using a VPN so I feel like even though they might understand similarities, what they might not really get our differences. So they might get the similarities, but they might not get the differences here.

RR 36:22
In your experience, how do you picture editors shape the West's view of Africa?

CL 36:27
How do what?

RR 36:28
How do picture editors shape what how the West views Africa?

CL 36:36
How they do it is by the decisions they make. I feel the bulk of the of everything stops at their desk, at their table because they get to they give the thumbs up to work--for what goes and thumbs down for what doesn't go. Whatever they allow through is what people believe Africa to be. And I feel, they need to, like most of them need to become more fluid, I feel most of them are very rigid with how they process the continent. Like the typical things are changing--you would expect that with the amount of information that is available to the whole world, no to everybody there. Unless you get to understand a few more things about this. But most of them are still stuck in their ways about it.

I mean, a friend of mine recently got a brief that listed some kind of pictures an editor wanted from him like it was really ridiculous. The brief said "a picture of a child crying on the road" and “a picture of the person with flies” like it was actually ridiculous. And the guy was like, “How is this even possible in 20-?” I think it was last year, 2019. Yeah it was before the pandemic? So I think many of them still need to get enlightened. Because literally whatever the West views this continent, as, they are the ones that make it happen. Yeah.

RR 38:16
When you're working with picture editors? Do you ever try to influence the edit? Or how's that process?

CL 38:24
Um, so what I do is this, I like, I mean, I'm the one on the ground. So even though you have your briefs or what you expect, I make sure I like I add images. I think work like that for are current for the story that you need, but you might not know you want. So I mean, and that's what for most cases, that's the most I can do, because I just I just give them the options, but at the end, they still do their selections. So I've never been in the place where I got to insist on the final calls.

RR 39:02
Have you ever covered a story that's given more importance abroad than it is at home?

CL 39:09
Yes, yes. Actually. There was something I shot for *The Lancet*. It was something about [inaudible] they call it soot, soot, black soot. So waste from illegal processing of crude products, crude oil. So because it's not done properly, you have like very tiny particles in the air. Black particles and people--they have been getting sick. There's been one or two, I think, just one protest about it. The government still didn't listen. And also, I think when *The Lancet* put it all up and became like it, like was like a big issue and I think the rest was a bit changed for a bit [inaudible]. That's just as that's the one I remember.

RR 40:15
Okay. Tell me about your relationships and interactions with the people that you photograph. How do you gain access?

CL 40:26
How would I gain access? Interesting question. So generally, I mean, maybe because I'm shooting at home I don't it a thought. I don't think I'm trying to get access. But most times were for the bookings I've gotten to do. If I'm shooting for let's say, a an organization, most times, they have their contact people there. So they just already point you in the direction they want you to go. Or "This is Mister so and so. This is our country rep or state rep. He will send you to Sudan, for people to photograph."

But if I'm given the liberty to just go tell the story and everything. What I do is, I get there, I introduce myself to a person of interest and just tell them what I'm working on. Tell them, like, give them the full scope of the story I'm trying to tell. And if they connect, if they're okay with it, they open up their answers. And most times, there's always the "Oh, where are you from?" And maybe because I am light- skinned, there's always that? Oh, like, there's always that initial shrug that "Oh, where are you from? Are you Nigerian? And are you da da da?" So I get to now explain to them what I mean, I was born in Lagos. Light skin is just melanin that is not as heavy on me-- a citizen. So yeah, so that's it. Um, so people are generally welcoming.

RR
It sounds like it. How often are you working and you face a language barrier? I mean, I know you speak three languages. But there's more than three languages in Nigeria. So where are you often working across languages?

CL 42:15
Yes. Because recently, I had to go to the north.

RR 42:14
Hausa.

CL 42:15
Yeah, they speak Hausa in the north here. And I definitely had language barriers. And it became one of my goals to learn some language. Because I usually don't like. I mean, there's always that there's always something you lose when there's that barrier, that gap. You want someone to translate, or you're trying to understand. So I always try to close that gap. But I mean, I couldn't help myself this time. So I had like, there were interpreters around. And that was how I navigated that. Yeah.

RR 42:46
Has there ever been a time when you were working that you really didn't fit in? It was really hard to, to make pictures?

CL 43:00
No, I don't I don't remember any situation like that.

RR 43:03
Okay. Let's talk..

CL 43:07
Okay, so before my earlier days, like, when I mentioned how my first gig was a friend, that relocated that had an NGO? No. So maybe at that time it was, it was difficult. Because I mean, the perception, I went to the community to shoot with because there's people telling you, "Oh these people. They're suffering. They're this. They're that." I get there with all those things in my head--thinking maybe I should be extra cautious or am I over-stepping? It wasn't empathy. It was just fear. It was just pity wasn't necessarily empathy. And pity is not exactly good for work, because I mean, it's not a good place to work from. So I had to rid myself of those and rid them myself of those earlier misinformation and literally engage with people and hear them. And think that was how I think I got rid of that fear. And did better. Yeah.

RR 44:16
Okay. That's helpful. Let's talk a little bit about workstyles. So you've worked in especially, I mean, if you've been through a portfolio review with geographic and those kinds of things.

CL 44:27
Yeah.

RR 44:28
Tell me a little bit about the difference between Nigerian work styles and Western work styles.

CL 44:38
So it's difficult to tell because the Nigerian workstyle in what sense? Let me see. Like, get the question before I answer.

RR 44:49
I mean. Like the manner in which you communicate with the editors or how you clarify, you know, here's, here's what we're gonna need or timelines or expectations of response. Those kinds of things.

CL 45:03
It's difficult to tell because the, what I would call a Nigerian workstyle is highly or hugely influenced by the western workstyles. Like, there's no like, there's exactly no Nigerian workstyle because anything that, especially with documentary photography assignments and other things, the templates or the format that we that that we use is this is massively influenced and massively determined by what's obtainable in the western scene, or Western world.

RR 45:39
Okay. So is it different when you're working with is when you work for Western media is it different than working with African media or local Nigerian media?

CL 45:53
Yeah. It's different.

RR 45:55
Tell me about that.

CL 45:56
It's different because local media, they're not as detailed as the western guys. And it's expected because you might think they can, they can… It's easy for local for those, like the local scene for them to, for the editors to, to cover the lapse. Like if there's something that is not clearly stated, or maybe your caption is inaccurate. They know the same day. We are all in this place. So they can easily just say, "oh, okay, fine." They just overlook it. And, like, correct it. But for Western media, it's understandable that they want more details because they are they are not on ground. So they just want to make sure they have the information as accurate as it can be. So, and I mean, most of them don't know this place exactly. So, they always insist on getting more details than the guys in the local scene would. Yeah.

RR 46:50
Does Western media or do Western media organizations value local photographers?

CL 46:58
Not as they should. Again, not as they should. The truth is, like, the facts is not exactly the truth. The fact is, that I don't think they do value our African photographers as they should, because there's always, there's so many things involved. Initially, the excuse was that, or maybe they were the guy, the local guys are not as skilled as the western photographers. But now, I mean, now that these, the internet is open to everything to everybody, like we see these days, we actually realize that the kind of work we create here, can stand with any creative from any part of the world. So that's falsehood, or that

line they've been peddling about how "oh, you guys are not as experienced" doesn't hold water anymore. So I really don't know what the what the excuse is.

I don't think the West values us as much because even when we do the stories, the pay isn't the same. The pay isn't the same and they will rather fly somebody from the US for instance, or from Europe and pay the person--let's say they pay the person say, maybe $800 daily rate. And because of course, the hotel and everything to do for that person. While those that live here, though, to still be haggling for, let's say $300 daily or 250 dollars daily. And you're wondering, you can't even mention the $500. So it's a bit--it's a bit sketchy. It's tricky. Yeah.

RR 48:26
That's interesting, because my next question was, are you paid fairly for your work?

CL 48:31
Not exactly. Not exactly. Because I feel it's just them taking advantage of the situation of, of, of where we are. Of our locality. So there's the belief that our current scenario isn't doing so great. So there's that believe that "Oh, even if you give them…." I think even though, I've not exactly heard from one of them, and suddenly had an editor make such comment it's more from the mannerism and everything that's what just comes to mind because, you know. I still don't understand how it's okay to pay someone else higher than somebody else when you're doing the same level of work. And even when the African photographer ends up getting more. Like that person gets, get a fresher perspective. You still think they shouldn't earn the same amount? So it's I don't think so.

RR 49:33
Um, do you work with any expats in Nigeria?

CL 49:38
At the moment, no, but I have worked with a couple of them before.

RR 49:44
Do you? Are they photographers?

CL 49:48
Nah, nah. He wasn't a photographer, but he was a media consultant. Yeah. Okay.

RR 49:52
So that's okay. Cuz I was gonna ask if you think the relationships with expats expat photographers or expat journalists with Western media is different than for African or Nigerian photographers or journalists with Western media?

CL
Come again?

RR

So I'm interested in the relationships between, you know, let's just say some editors-- sitting in like New York or London or Dusseldorf wherever they are, their relationship with journalists on the ground. I'm interested in whether or not you've, you've noticed the difference between the way expats communicate with the European and Western offices, and Nigerians communicate with the European and Western offices.

CL 50:37
So I am not, maybe I have-- but not, it's been a second degree interaction. I feel like they, they are more... I think it's because of our culture. I think they are more blunt, when they like, they don't for instance…For example, when I am communicating with an editor, I'm usually cautious because most times like, I just maybe even those I've worked with, for more than twice, more than three times, there's still that form of caution, like you're trying to be or not, you're just being cautious. But they they're always very the couple of people I've heard or have experienced they're always very, what's the word? No. Those just always very blunt. Like they're not as calm and collected as we will. So I think it's because I mean, like this the familiarity they have with their own people, and it's understandable here.

RR 51:40
Do you work with any picture editors Western who really get it? who really love working with?

CL 51:49
At the moment, maybe not. okay, maybe there's just someone like I just really, I just they're working with them. So that's what I'm gonna really add in there as to the narrative but. There's an agency I just said working with. The name is “Director, Artist Stories.” So, I think I think they understand they have a, a, like, they have some form of understanding that's good. But there's still other issues with the money with the other things more for professional relationship. Without the payment and money part. I think they have some left. They have some form for understanding how it's beneficial.

RR 52:40
Okay. Have you met any of the editors that you work with in person?

CL 52:48
No.

RR 52:50
So how do you communicate with them?

CL 52:53
emails, calls, like zoom calls, and WhatsApp

RR 52:59
Yeah, Whatsapp is a big one. How did you initially get connected to the editors that you're working with?

CL 53:11
Recommendations. The first one was I was recommended by one of my one of my mentors. [name redacted] he recommended me to an editor in *The Lancet*. I did a couple of outings with them, then it's just recommendations, mostly here.

RR 53:34
Okay. Have you ever worked with the rest of Western reporter together? Have you ever been on a team with a Western reporter?

CL 53:42
No.

RR 53:43
Okay. Are there certain times of year or certain events where Western media has a bigger appetite for imagery from Nigeria?

CL 53:53
I've not thought about it. But if it's about times of the year, I'm not sure but there are events that always get the attention so I did the work until most recently has been the insurgency in the country like anything Boko Haram and any insurgency related story as always, garnered more, a lot of attention.

RR 54:26
How do you get connected to publications you want to work for?

CL 54:33
So I may not be a very perfect person to answer that because for some weird reason I've been quite laid back with reaching out to a lot of these publications. Most times when, even if they're interested in your story, because you're not you know, you don't come recommended—there's this, I don't know… call it disregard. But it's just there's just this unlevel playing field you guys that you guys just have. So I just avoid that I just keep doing my work and hope, like hope, that I get recommended to, to someone. because the narrative or the conversation is just different when you're recommended than when you just try to reach out to them.

RR 55:25
So I'm this, I'm not sure this question is going to feel is going to hit right for you. But what helps you get noticed by Western picture editors?

CL 55:41
I would think maybe social media but I don't think it's as effective as we believe. We used to believe "oh your website! Make sure your website is good. Instagram is properly curated," I used to think it worked, but I just don't think it works. I think like I mentioned, is just usually recommendations. After your recommended, they might not check out your website and check all those more the first notice. I don't think editors actually scout. I

doubt they do. I think most of them are lazy. They'd rather just wait like, just maybe ask somebody they've worked with before and say "I'm looking for a photographer da da da da." And they just say "Oh, I know someone", and they just give your name. They maybe when they get your name they can now start going perusing your social media checking your Instagram or your website but normally they don't you don't get initially noticed on those platforms. Yeah.

RR 56:47
Okay. How often do you turn down assignments?

CL 56:50
How often? Initially, I initially I mean, I had to get enough assignments to start turning them down. So I rarely ever, I really, I don't think I've ever turned down. But most recently, I've had to turn down a couple of assignments because of dates like conflict like dates clashing, and price. When like you know your name and that this very price doesn't work. And they know it doesn't work, but they're just trying to take advantage of the fact that you need the money. So I'm just like, come on.

RR 57:34
Interesting. Was that? Was that media or an NGO?

CL
NGO

RR
You're not the first person to say that. Very interesting.

CL 57:45
Yeah

RR 57:46
I will say-- just diverging for our conversation for a second. That has been the most eye-opening part of these conversations I've been having, because everybody I've talked to has said that NGOs are a huge part of this problem.

CL 58:01
Actually, they are.

RR 58:03
Thank you

CL 58:05
And it's counter it's counterproductive because you think NGOs should get it. But they don't.

RR 58:10

Yeah. Interesting. I just have a few more questions. You've been super generous with your time this has been a great conversation. So let me just ask the last few in the question set and then I will let you continue with your evening. How often do you pitch projects to Western media?

CL 58:28
Not often. Not so often. It has to be something very like very strong in my opinion before I try to. I don't just go around giving a project to pitch here.

RR 58:43
And tell me about your work process with editors from the initial contact to the assignment to payment so tell me Just tell me how that goes.

CL 58:53
Okay, so um, normally you'd get an email saying that we have an assignment at so and place, for so and so time. Are you interested? This is what would pay this is ,what we'd normally pay. And that's the part the NGOs do that a lot. There's not that loop of you saying "oh how much?" They just cut it off and just say "this is what we pay normally." And if it works with me, I'm like "okay, fine" or "I'm free for those dates." I ask for the brief and I get the brief and get the terms of it to see what they call it something for me to sign and I head out. I do the work. I deliver the images, turn them in and sometimes for some of them it takes 30 days within 30 days for you to get the payments. So everything from the first email to the payments usually maybe a month plus maybe a month or two weeks or a month or two months.

RR 1:00:08
And you sort of got you answered this next question a little bit before, but maybe we can dig into it a little bit more in that whole process. And then when you're thinking about the coverage of the story, where is your influence most felt? How can you influence the story?

CL 1:00:25
Hmm. Sometimes it's in the cover, I try to engage the editor. Because especially like, I think I've had more success in this regard with the last set editors, because you get that they are not, they're like a magazine, like a news magazine. So it's not about having an agenda . They're not exactly insisting on their own agenda, like the NGOs would. NGOs already know that, "Oh, these are the kind of images we want, because we're trying to gather such and such traction from people." But this one's just exactly want to know what's happening. So for that, I have like, I have engaged in conversations with this editor saying, "Oh, this is what this is the like, this might be what you've seen online, but this is what is on ground. This is what's exactly happening." And I have that I get that in my images and still capturing them and explain to them. Yeah, so I've had a bit more success with *The Lancet* editors than the NGO editors I normally work with.

RR 1:01:41

Is there anything you wish picture editors had a deeper understanding of and I mean, Western picture editors?

CL 1:01:49
I'm not sure how to put that. Well, what I would generally want them to know about is, it's not so much about having more understanding, it's just about being more, be more open. Because first, for some weird reason. Any picture actor, sometimes they're busy. I think there's a form of superiority complex that comes with their job. So they just think, oh, like, because everything stops at their desks, they just think whatever they choose. It's final. But sometimes it pays to just stretch the conversation with the photographer and just try to get more perspective. Because you might be losing something. Might just be myopic about the story you're trying to curate or curate for publication or something. So I think they should just be more open-minded.

RR 1:02:45
Do you feel that Western picture editors understand your vision?

CL 1:02:54
Maybe the few I've have worked with to an extent they do. But this, they might understand your vision, your vision but, when it comes to the work, they want? Many of them don't compromise. They still tend to want to insist on the exact kind of work the want here. So regardless of whether your vision fits or not just actually give us that kind of pictures.

RR 1:03:21
Do they trust your judgment?

CL 1:03:25
To an extent I think they do.

RR 1:03:28
Do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

CL 1:03:32
Not everyone but this happens for when I work with NGOs, mostly. I don't get names of everybody, but I try. If let's say I photograph 10, I make sure I get at least three to four names. Names, I think that would people of interest. I think they would be interested into what I'm getting, like the content and everything I get the other details as well.

RR 1:03:58
Okay. When picture editors talk to you about what they're looking for, are there themes that come up frequently?

CL 1:04:11
So because of my, my, my own focus, because I'm quite focused on environmental and social stories. Most mostly, it's always about climate change climate action, like the usual

kind of assignments that I get and I look forward to getting but when I work with NGO, it's usually about…it's always about feeding, malnutrition, all those things around that that genre. Yeah.

RR 1:04:58
Has anyone ever asked you for something that surprised you. And by that I mean a picture editor. Not anyone in your entire life.

CL 1:05:09
Okay. Okay, so not directly but I mentioned someone that sent a brief to my friend. I never got that brief and I'm grateful I didn't get it. So yeah, it sometimes you just hear some nasty things. Yeah, yeah.

RR 1:05:24
Okay, so this question probably will have? Well, this is the last question. Has your editor ever asked you for an image that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

CL 1:05:38
No.

RR 1:05:41
Is there anything that I haven't asked you about the, you know, you like the work that you're doing and the work that you're providing to Western media? Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think I should know? Or that you want to share?

CL 1:05:55
Oh, so it's not exactly a question but. But generally, I just think there's a, there's a like, I mean, whether or not we want to admit it, there's a massive there's a huge influence Western media has on our media. Even how even how we consume stories, it's hugely influenced by these guys. But, there's something about real power. It's not just determining what people do-- it's allowing people to evolve, allowing people to express themselves. That's how to be truly powerful. So I feel like what I would hope the future brings, is first off this: these gatekeepers, or this case in Western media, should allow for more, more local expressions. They should engage more local talent and stop hiding behind the curtain of lack of experience or whatever, whatever excuses they have. Because really, speaking from my own perspective, I know at least for now, I knew at least 10, people, directly close to me, documentary photographers, hungry passionate about this and the stories. But sadly, many of them might not get the opportunity until maybe two years down the line or three years down the line just because you have the people you have-- even with the whole COVID restrictions-- and now you still find that you see how people flown around the world for stories, which shouldn't be so I just hope they because without giving people more chance. Yeah.

Appendix F

Interview with FB: August 17, 2021

Run time: 57:20
Years active as photographer: 4

FB 00:00
Yeah, that's okay with me. And it's okay. My name is also and it's fine.

RR 00:00
Second. All right, so we're now recording this conversation. And that's so I can have transcripts, which will later be analyzed. Your name will be kept out of it. But I do need you to approve the fact that we're recording this call. Is it okay with you?

FB
Okay.

RR
So we'll get started. How long have you been photographing? And how did you get started?

FB 00:14
yeah that's okay with me. And it's okay if my name is also in it. It's fine. Okay, so I've been photographing for four years, I started after my national service. So there's usually a national service after university graduation in Nigeria. And it was something I, I thought deeply about, I mean, I'd known about photography, while I was studying, I studied sociology in school. But then I wanted to, like Express so many thoughts and ideas I had in my head. And I was looking for like, an easier way to do that outside of writing outside of talking so much. And then photography was it for me. I had to look inward. So, I think I can do this, I can explore this part. And then luckily for me, when I started researching, I realized there's something called visual sociology, which was just one of my lectures that just mentioned it's you know, just passive in class. And then it was not like, it was a course or anything. And then I'm like, okay, so there's actually like, a course, people have PhDs in it. And it says nothing. I wish that they taught me in school, I probably would have done like this, isn't it?

You know, so I started learning photography and said to be self-taught, I decided to pick up knowledge here and there. I couldn't afford a photography school. Not like there's any serious, you know, photography institution in Nigeria. It's just workshops here and there. And just a few maybe private, you know, I'll call them institutes. Yeah. here and there. Yes. So for me, pretty much that was how I started and then I was able to get my first camera. Initially, I did not get enough support from my family from my friends, because people were confused as to what I was doing. Photography here in Nigeria is different. So when to be a photographer. It is attached to people in the lower income strata of the society. And so it is seen as so there's something we call 'pa pa pa' photographer in Nigeria, so 'Pa pa pa' photographer, Pa pa pa is from the--it's a-- Yoruba word. And it means fast, fast, like, quickly, quick photographs. So it's like the people who are at the

entrance of parties, and the photographers are at the entrance of parties. And then as they're coming in with your party outfit, just take your picture. And then they print it out really quickly. And then they give it to you. And they pay for it for let's say, like, 100, Naira, or 200 Naira, or you know, any amount, they want to sell it. So you have your picture to take home. You know, it's like, it's a souvenir. And it's something that a lot of people want to do and go for parties here.
So when I said I was going to be a photographer, that was what my mom thought I was going to do. And a number of people told me so that, Oh, this is belittling this. And I'm like, Okay, I know what else to do. And I just leave me to do what I want to do. I know where I'm going, I know what I'm going to do. Just trust me. So, yeah, so I think over time, you know, I gained that trust, and I've just been able to do things myself and really explore photography. Yes. And I'm still exploring it, and I'm enjoying it.

RR 03:51
Who are your regular clients?

FB 03:55
Okay, yes. So as a documentary photographer, and a photojournalist, my regular clients, most times, are NGOs, or news agencies, and sometimes they are like, um, curators. So sometimes I have to I get to work with curators, because maybe there's an exhibition, and then I'm like, Oh, I think I'd like to put in for this exhibition, I'd like to apply for this open call, or let's create work that can, you know, resonate with this theme and then gets, you know, shown in this exhibition, so pretty much that's how my that's how my, you know, clients. Yeah, come.

RR 04:40
And just so I know which languages do you speak in addition to English?

FB 04:45
I speak Yoruba. Yeah, yeah. I'm a Yoruba girl.

RR 04:50
Okay. And, okay, so do you think photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

FB 04:59
So, I think that photographs of people tell their stories, the photographers are just, they just have the tools. And they understand the medium--do you understand what storytelling is? They understand how to use the camera. But the photographs, you know, tell the story of the people. So, for instance, and the photographs, you know, it's a show what it is, for me. So, if I have to say, Oh, I want to say someone, someone is sleeping, if the person's eyes are closed, and I take that picture, I can say the person is sleeping if that's what it shows, you know but how do I prove that person is just closing their eyes and not sleeping? So, it's the photograph? For me? It's the photograph, actually. Yeah. Not the photographer.

RR 05:46
Do you think the relate? Do you think the nationality or the ethnicity of a photographer plays a role in that, in whether or not the story is about the person or about the photographer?

FB 05:59
Okay, yeah. So I would say to an extent, because, for instance, there was a story I did one time for a news agency. And the, the subject in question is Yoruba, and she doesn't understand English so well. And I had to, I mean, I was hired to do that story. Now I can imagine if it was an Ibo person, or a Western person, or even still within Nigeria, let's say a Hausa person. The person, may not, really relate, you know, may not be able to connect, because this, the subject doesn't even understand English so well. But the subject speaks Yoruba well, so how do I first of all connect to my subjects? In order for my camera to connect, you know, so my subjects, so? Yeah, so I think it's, it's both, they, they work hand in hand. Yeah. Except, I mean, in cases where you have fixers. Most times, photographers have to work with fixers. But I always say that, you know, even if you're going to work with a fixer, there should still be a language, whether it is verbal, whether it is nonverbal, that you can communicate with the subjects just to gain trust and just to connect, you know, whichever you want to connect, but just connect.

RR 07:27
Do you have personal work that differs from paid work?

FB 07:31
Yes, I do. So, me saying I work with curators, is most times my personal work. I wanted to create personal bodies of work, because I see them as my passions, I see them as work that would, you know, live after me. I see these works in my career as a whole. There are times where you want to really show your work and say, yes, this is my work, and you don't want to bother about copyrights about, you know, usage rights, and all of those agreements, that you've signed, you know, just to collect some money, just make money, and you just want to show your work. So, for me, I take it as a responsibility to create personal bodies of work every year.

RR 08:23
And how does it differ? I mean, I understand that you know, that you own it, right. But is there is there a distinction between the kinds of things you photograph personally then paid?

FB 08:33
Yes. So, the difference for me is that I get to express my creativity 100% on my work, and then time as well. I get to give it time to mature. I get to invest so much time in it. For most times, paid work assignments is like one week and then you're expected to, you know, turnout images. And for me, it's not enough. It's just so little time to spend with your subjects, to get to know people, you know, so for me, I think that's the difference between my own personal work.

RR 09:10
Are there stories or people that you feel are consistently overlooked by your clients?

FB 09:18
Yes. There's always the, the media agenda, and you just have to flow with it. For instance, there was a time--I'll just give an example to answer this question. So, there was a time I was working on one, like history of Lagos. And I was exploring it visually, and I was looking Lagos and all of that. And then the next thing was okay, so when I, when I tried to like pitch it, send it to editors or something. The first thing you hear is, it is not, maybe, like editorial or artistic, it is more institutional. So, there's so many filters, actually. And these filters makes it look like certain stories are overlooked. Yes. So there are a lot of days for stories being overlooked. Yes, they are. And for me, what I just do is, the stories that I feel like have been overlooked, but then I have interest in them. I want to explore them as my personal projects.

RR 10:32
Why do you think you know, Western editors say that that's not editorial? Why do you think they're not interested?

FB 10:39
Yes. So, I just feel that they're not interested because it is not in their agenda. That's, that's my own conclusion. Because for a long time, when I started photography, I always felt really sad. I always feel like "Oh, so it means that I'm not going to get clients." But there are different ways to get clients. So I'm like, Okay, let me do restaurant kitchens, or let me pitch an idea have and then it looks cool. Nobody's buying your idea. Nobody's interested in what you're saying. Nobody's listening to you. You know, for a long time, I felt like I was in the wrong profession. But over time, when I understood the agenda of the media, then I knew there was a time someone was saying--you have to play the politics of the media. You have to show that yes, this agenda is what you're interested in. That you have to so that you get the jobs at the end of the day. But then I'm like, okay, yes, you know, as much as you have to play the politics, or whatever it is, how do you still hone your voice? As a photographer? As an artist? So for me, it is in doing my work. Yeah.

RR 11:51
Well, that's an interesting question. What media are you reading or watching on a, you know, on a regular semi regular basis that feels authentic to your lived experiences? Like what do you think is relevant?

FB 12:07
Okay, so what I think is relevant for me is--I think the BBC is doing that already. And I sort of enjoy is it. They try to bring in, like, sort of like everyday kind of narratives, like stories. That... they look very mundane. Like, it's not there, but it's there actually so and they are very humanistic. They're very, you know, so in like Nigeria, they call it like BBC Pidgin. So BBC Pidgin, as in the pidgin English. And then it's very relatable where they just show stories, or maybe like everyday life of everyday people, of random people

of people with talents and skills that are unique or, you know, people that are, you know, that are actually, like, making ways for themselves, despite, you know, it's just, it's not for me, it's not like a diamond in the rough kind of story. Yeah. So I think for me, BBC is actually doing this and I watch them. I watch them. Yeah.

RR 13:12
Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly Africa or Nigeria focused?

FB 13:19
Yes, yes, I am. So, there's this Black woman photographers that was founded last year by Polly Irungu, yeah. So, I, yeah, I'm on that page. And it's for black women photographers, and I actually benefitted a lot. I was actually very excited when I saw that. And then there's also African photojournalism database that I belong. And then I just see updates and gets newsletters of what's happening there. And then there are still a few of them that are out there coming up. There's the African women photographers, there's the Black Gaze that I feel like yes, celebrates black photographers, and it makes me feel it makes me feel, you know, counted. Actually, I'm proud to be a black photographer, because over time when I started and you know, I was always looking at the, you know, awards and, I'm like, "Where are Nigerians? Okay, where are Africans? Okay, where are here? Okay, just one photo, one Africa photographer, one category. How?" you know, so those were my concerns. But when I understood the whole narrative around agenda I knew that yeah, we need it. So, like I'm, I'm a preacher of, if you are not being celebrated on the stage, create your own stage and celebrate yourselves. And I think this is what I really appreciate that these black communities are doing. Yes. For the black photographers. Yeah.

RR 14:54
And the conversations that you're having in these communities do they differ from the kinds of conversations that you have with your Western editors when you're talking about work?

FB 15:07
Yes, they do. So, there's a there's a collective that a few of my friend's formed called eternity for collective for here in Nigeria. And the kind of stories that we think of doing, you know, stories of history of photography in Nigeria. The Western media will not come and do that kind of story. Stories on rice farming. Why is Nigeria still importing rice when we can when we actually grow rice? What's wrong? Let's visually explore these stories, you know, and investigate. These are stories that the Western media is not going to come for. They would rather you know, work with their agenda, okay, what's sellable? What is, you know, what can we push, you know, but with my black community with my, like, my collective, for instance, I enjoy having those conversations. I enjoy critically, reviewing my images with them. Like, “Oh, is this a poverty porn image?” Is this an image that's, you know, that is dignified enough of the subjects? You know? So yeah, so I enjoy those kind of conversations I have with my black community that I don't get to have with a Western editor.

RR 16:24
Do you have conversations with other photographers in these collectives or your colleagues? About the expectations from Western media?

FB 16:35
Yes. Yes, we do. So there are times where we have such conversations, and sometimes it is around or don't, don't allow them. Like some, maybe someone has an issue, for instance. And then it's like, oh, this Western editor wants me to do this, and do this and do this, and this for this XYZ amount. And, you know, it doesn't make sense, or it's not worth it. I feel like the person is trying to use me as cheap labor or something. So, I mean, this, these are the kind of conversations we have. Sometimes, you know, we just encourage ourselves, because I mean, I keep saying, we should create our stage. Well, if we create our stage, if we create our media, if we create all of these things, How well did they sell? How far did they go? We still need the Western media. We just need maybe, maybe some modification here. But in as much as we need those modifications, we also still need to create a stage and still push our own news. Do stories that really we want to do and, you know, and still put them out there, even for the west to see it.

RR 17:51
Is there anything that gets lost when you're working with Western media?

FB 17:57
So how do you mean? Can you explain?

RR 17:59
Sure. Do you ever have to explain to a Western editor what's happening in a photo? Or what's really happening on the ground?

FB 18:10
Yes, yes, yes. Okay. So you know the way, the way I think Lagos, and way Lagos is, Lagos is very, can be very, it's an organized chaos. And so it's an organized chaos.

RR 18:26
It's got a lot of energy, though. It's pretty cool.

FB 18:29
Yeah. So many times, like maybe something is there's an image and maybe like, there's a cultural activity or whatever, and someone sees it, it could even be anybody from the west and like, oh, what's happening here? I have to explain it, you know, I have to, because I mean, you're not in my space, you don't know what is happening in that space. You're not from this part of the world, I have to explain. And it's also vice versa. Because if I see an image from your end, you know, like, let's say an Halloween image, and that's my first time I've seen it, and I don't know what it is. I have to ask, because I could just think, like in in Lagos, we have something like the Kalimba festival. I could think that Kalimba festival. I mean, in Nigeria, we have the Kalimba festival, I could think that

Kalimba festival, meanwhile, is just an allusion to Kalimba festival. So I have to ask and they have to ask as well. I think clarification is important, as opposed to just generalization or just conclusion concluding on your own, you know, vague understanding, yeah.

RR 19:34
Do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience?

FB 19:42
Say that again.

RR 19:43
Do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience?

FB 19:49
Yes, yes, yes. I think of myself as that because I mean, it's part of the work of a photographer. So you're doing photography or doing Yeah, I mean, you, you just have to explain you have to talk about your work, you have to explain it, you have to make them explain me, you have to make them understand it's Yeah. And it's...I see myself as that 100%. Yeah.

RR 20:15
What does it mean to take on that role? Does that ever feel like a lot of weight to carry?

FB 20:20
I know, personally, I enjoy that kind of role. Because I, I want to be sure that you know it and I appreciate when, you know, you ask, I appreciate that you want to get clarified. I do not appreciate when you just assume Yeah. So I always like that, you know, you want to want to understand, yeah, so I enjoyed doing it. Actually, it's not a lot of work for me at all.

RR 20:49
How do you share photography that you love, but doesn't it's not part of a paid assignment? Or it just doesn't fulfill the assignment? Like maybe you see something on the way and you you know, you stop and make some pictures? Or it's just personal work? Where do you share that? What's your platform?

FB 21:08
Yes. So I put it up on my website. I put it up on Instagram, social media. Then I also like, I also put it out if I see some open calls, and it resonates with it put it out for it. And then so many, and then I mean, sometimes I think of doing a solo show. So I'm like, "Okay, if I have to wait for an open call and the open call never comes can I you know, do a solo show?" And you know, pull resources together and show my work. Yes. So that's how I do it.

RR 21:46

Do you enter contests?

FB 21:51
Yes, I enter contests. Yeah.

RR 21:53
Which ones?

FB 21:55
So I enter locally, local contests actually, like contests in Nigeria. I've entered I think just a few contests internationally. But I mean, so it meant that I'm not going to be selected. Even if I know that my work is good. I'm like, Okay, I know you already have your agenda. I know who you are going to pick. But I'm just applying as a Nigerian. So it ticks that box when you're like, oh, how many Nigerians applied or how many people from Africa applied? That's actually what's usually at the back of my mind. And I'm like, Okay, let's just apply. Yeah, so that the credit as an African or in Nigeria and applied here.

RR 22:38
How do you choose what imagery to send? How do you select your images for that-- for contests?

FB 22:45
Okay, yes. So I mean, I look at what they want. And then I look at what I have. So if it's something I have, I put it. If I don't have it, I don't put in for it. But in selecting my images, I can be very critical in my images and make sure everything in my frame counts and make sure everything in my frame has a meaning to what's in focus of the image here. And yeah, carefully selecting the images, actually. Yeah.

RR 23:19
I'm going to change course, a little bit. You talked, you've mentioned a few times, you know, the media agenda. And I think that's a very, I think that's a very apt thing to say. So, tell me a little bit about what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be.

FB 23:37
Good question. So, with the whole crisis, in the northeast of Nigeria, I have seen--I have seen some Western people think that it is all over Nigeria, and they are all scared of communities in Nigeria. The same people that would say that when they come into Nigeria, because they are you know, Nigerians call white people "oyibo", because they are oyibo, they will get kidnapped. And then they have to pay ransom. And then, you know, maybe the US Government or what, whatever, would have to come and rescue them. I know that yes. So there's a lot of you know, stereotypes and it is valid 100% it is valid, to an extent, honestly. But I'm also of the opinion that-- so if you cannot come and see for yourself, right? Why not use the photographers there? If you can't see it for yourself. Let the photographer see how it is. And then when they show you what it is like do not switch it. Take it like that because because it is what it is. It is what--it is what I

am seeing is what I've experienced that I'm showing you. So, accept it, you know. Yeah. So for me I just think that you know, there's a lot of stereotype about crisis, Boko Haram issues many times, you know, corruption, a lot of things and yes, it's true. But if you can't come and see it for yourself, then use the people here. I've had a few even friends that are, you know, from the west. Even when they come into Nigeria, they told me Oh, okay, I'm in Nigeria, but I can't come to Lagos, Lagos is different. Lagos is crazy. I rather go to Abuja, that is a bit calm. I can't go to the north east. I can't go to this. I can't go to that. And it's okay. It's, it's absolutely fine. Yes. But do not generalize, you know, do not just conclude, you know, people who are in those places are still human beings. Yeah.

RR 25:52
If you were to make the perfect image or series of images about life in Nigeria, what would it be? Tell me about them.

FB 26:01
Good. So if I make a series of images of life in Nigeria, I would show the lives of people who still live very rural. I'll show every aspect of Nigeria, I'll show the rural aspects, I'll show the urban aspects. And then I'll actually, like balance it, I will not just show the skyscrapers in Lagos. I'll go to the north east, and show the people who are also like surviving Boko Haram. I will go to the people who, who, who are the cattle-rearers, and then who supply a large percent of meat consumption in Nigeria, and even imports. I mean, and even export them, and, you know, their products, and all of that I'll go to, to the east. I'll make these images portray how I see my Nigeria and I want to see it, you know. I'll show women who have, you know, done a lot of good stuffs for the country who have, you know, helped to hone the voices of the voiceless, I'll celebrate heroines. I'll celebrate heroes in Nigeria. Or I'll put them out. I'll portray them, you know, these and many more is how I'm going to tell my Nigerian story--if I have the opportunity. If I have the funding, not the opposite, like, Yeah, because I mean, this, I do these kind of things. I had to do a story last year on portraying heroines, you know, and it's, it's, it's different. That's not to meet the Western media wants, obviously, no, but I did it. And I'm happy that you did it. Yeah.

RR 27:52
What can Western viewers or media do to better understand? And when I say this word, I mean it in quotes Africa, right? Because there is this idea of like African life, from a Western perspective, what do you think the West can do to better understand?

FB 28:08
Okay, so I think what can be done better? What they can do better to understand better is to understand the African map. When you understand the African map, you will see that there are different countries in Africa. And all the maps, all the different countries in Africa do not have the-- they are like-- so the African map, you know, that this shape is not the same map in all the African countries. They're all different. They all just come together to create the bigger map. So study the African map. And then you understand we are all different. Study the climate. Study the climates. I mean, we do these things. We study Europe, we look at Europe, we look at, we are taught these things. And maybe,

maybe we should actually even start from the foundation. Maybe it should be taught in, in schools. Maybe it should, they should understand that. Okay. Yeah. So, if we're going to, if you're going to know about the world, you have to understand Africa, okay, at least 10 countries in Africa, at least, you know, from the foundation level. Yeah. So it's the same that, I want to know all 10 countries in America, in Europe, 10 countries in North America, you know, tell me 10 countries in Africa, though we from the foundation, you can't know that. So it's about the map of Africa. As far as I'm concerned, yeah.

RR 29:42
Um, thinking of the editors or the organizations that you work with most frequently. Have they ever visited Nigeria to the best of your knowledge, your clients?

FB 29:55
No, no, not all of them. It's just, just a very few of them. I mean, that's just one. But most of them haven't visited Nigeria at all. Yeah.

RR 30:15
What do you think they've visited elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa? Do they have any Sub Saharan African?

FB 30:20
Yes. Yes. Yes. So, some of them have visited, maybe Ghana, you know, other African countries that quote unquote, they think is accommodating. Nigeria is actually very accommodating. Maybe we're just very scared and aggressive, but we are nice people. Yeah, actually nice people. We're just very expressive, I think. Yes. And I mean, I think the the onus is still on Nigerian photographers to portray, to portray Nigeria in the most beautiful way. You know, that's to attract, I mean, the Western media will portray the West, in the most beautiful way to attract. Yeah.

RR 31:10
Do you think your clients understand what daily life looks like? In Lagos? or elsewhere in Nigeria, depending on where the assignment is?

FB 31:19
No way! I'll use Lagos as an example. They do not understand. Because daily life in Lagos is totally different. There's traffic in Lagos. So you're waking up--people wake up as early as 4am to resume work at 9am in Lagos at 8am/9am. And what are they doing? They're in traffic! So you tell me to wake up, you tell me, "Oh, I need a sunrise like an early morning, you know, dusk of people going to work." I will show you traffic. How do I get that image for you? It's a different experience. It's a different reality. It's totally different, you know, totally, totally different. Usually there are times when you have an assignment in Lagos. And you can't... you have to lodge in a hotel close to the location--when you live in Lagos! So you can't just drive to your location, you'll be stuck in traffic. So the reality of Lagos for instance, which I live in is totally different. And most of my you know, most of these guys don't know the reality like I've seen where it cleanses. Okay, we need night shots of this particular scene at night. And I'm like, you need night

shots. Do you know how not so safe it is for me as a female--even as a male-- to work to be with the camera?

RR 32:51
Yeah, the cameras are so expensive.

FB 32:53
You know the “aggros” as we call them, that's the area boys. It's it's a lot to deal with. But I mean, why you sweet we know how to we know how to deal with it. But I'm just saying that the reality is different. And you know, don't come and sound like you've lived in Lagos or you understand what it is or it's like New York or it's like London so it should be this way. No it's a different reality. It's totally different. I mean, here in Lagos you have to pay the aggros sometimes to shoot just to hold your camera and film or photograph you they will tell you, "You can't we are the owners of this space." So you have to pay us. Your editor is not factoring that in the cost. So it's your cost to bear because you want to work.

RR 33:41
In your experience. How would you picture editors shape the West's view of Africa?

FB 33:48
Okay, good. So yeah, so I mean editors, editors for me, are like script writers. So, they know what they know the storyline already. So, they know how the storyline wants to go. And most of them are biased. Yes, sure. We're all biased so that's how you'll need to come in. So, editors control. Like they shape the storyline and sometimes, you know, they do not really carry you know, photographers along like the people who executed this story along. They do not really engage that. "Okay. What do you think about this?" and even when you suggest or they're like okay, "can't you make it work?" Well how do you want to make it work? Okay, make you work in your own way you know, and then the default to this. So yes, I think editors you know, shape these narratives as well.

RR 34:46
Do you ever try to influence that?

FB 34:49
Yes, I do. I try to sometimes. I try my best to make them understand that. Like one of the jobs I did a I just politely told the editor, "okay. So yeah, trying to achieve that. This, this person takes, for instance, a, a BRT bus that is like the big busses that we use here. That are like the government busses where you have to pay with your card. But the truth is, that in as much as that bus, you know, this lesson like the persons living with disabilities can use the vehicle. The reality is different. That bus yes, they can use it. But the reality is, they don't want to take it. They want to rather hop on the smaller yellow buses. So I'm explaining to you that, yes, you may have seen it on online that this is what it is. But in reality, this is not what it is. So what do you choose to believe? Do you want to go with all you’ve seen online? Or what do you think is happening in New York or London, and then see, the reality is totally different. So sometimes, I try to influence I will let you

know, if you choose to take it, fine. If you choose not to take it is left to you, but I will let them know

RR 36:09
tell me about your relationships with the people that you photograph. How do you gain access and build rapport?

FB 36:15
Yeah, so for some reason I don't know how it works like magic for me, because some of my subjects, I have a particular kind of vibe. That's what they call it, my friends say I have a vibe. I don't know what it is, but I just easily connect to my subjects. I do not want to, yeah, I want to believe that sociology, my background played a role, but also want to believe that my personality also plays a role, you know, so I'm that person who is open or can relate to anybody. Funny enough. All my subjects, I still have a relationship with them. All my subjects that I photographed four years ago, three years ago, I still have a relationship with them, we still talk I still say hello, once in a while.

I have a subject of the time I went to Rwanda to work. And I still say hello to. The girl still even messages me on Facebook. So I think it's about me not presenting myself as a god. The fact that I carry camera does not mean I'm a celebrity at all. I'm just a human being like them. So, what stops me from interacting with them and coming down to their level? And this is not just young people? I'm also talking about old people, as well. So, I think for me, it's about understanding pain and listening, listening carefully to my subject making their voice count, making them know that yes, their opinion counts, making them understand I always make my subjects understand that it's a collaboration without you giving me your attention, I can't tell the story. I can't photograph you without you being in the right state of mind. I can't do it. So, most times, when I'm working, I'm asking them like, "Are you Okay? Do you feel good? Are you? Are you okay about yourself? Do you feel good about this image I just took?" Sometimes when I go to work in the north in Nigeria, because some people, some subjects get carried away, they're excited about the image. They're excited about pictures. And then I'm very careful to say, "Oh, you're not putting on your hijab? Can you put it on? You know, I want to represent you in the best manner." They say "Oh, I forgot. Oh, don't worry, take the picture." But for me, I can't take the picture like that. You need to put on your hijab, because your religion says this. So you shouldn't say because I'm a female, and then you got give me access into your personal space, I will not represent you. Except you signed your release form. And you say yes, this is what I should, I should feel free. But I always try my best to represent the subjects. You know, in the best way. Give them proper representation. Give them dignity, give them enough respect. Give them... let them know that I'm trustworthy. Yeah. And then I think it just works like magic.

RR 38:58
You got to this a little bit because you were talking about working the North. How often are you working and you face a language barrier?

FB 39:07

Okay. I think quite often because, yeah, I work. I've worked in the north, I don't speak Hausa. I don't speak Fulani. But I get to work with a fixer. So I mean, maybe I'm working with a group of people. And then I get to work with a fixer, like a production team. There's a video guy, I'm doing photography, and then there's a fixer for us. But besides the fixer, just speaking the language and then the subjects responding. What am I going to leave behind? So, I pick up the basic language first, like the greetings. Good morning. Hello, how are you? You know, I pick up these things. And then that's all what I'm communicating with. Till I leave there. You know, just "Hello. How are you?" in their language? "Good morning. Good afternoon. Good evening. Good night. You look good. You look beautiful. I love your dress." I just learned those basic things, you know? And then I think it works for me. Yeah. Yeah.

RR 40:09
Um, tell me a little bit about. Let's talk a little bit about your work with NGOs and Western media. Do you think they value local photographers?

FB 40:22
Yes, NGOs value local photographers, because they want-- they know the local photographers can give them can get the access they want. But then when they have it all figured out. Then they just use their own photographers, but I still think that they value local photographers in the initial stage. But over the period of time, they just bring in their own people, you know, when they've gained enough access, they have enough grounds and they're okay. Yeah. But I am a preacher of just using local photographers. And, you know, let's look at how photographers, just do the job. They know, they know this stuff. Yeah. That's, that's what I just think.

RR 41:17
Are you paid fairly for your work?

FB 41:21
Hmm. So yes, I'm actually paid fairly for my work. I am paid fairly for my work. Because I know that I have. I have an opportunity to bargain, but so much so many times. There's just the fixed rates, sometimes this and they're like, okay, does this fixed rate? Am I satisfied with it or not? You know, but then for someone like me, I still struggle with it, to try to filter Okay, do I get carried away with the, with the excitement? Is the kind of work I want to do. And I'm happy to on this project? And they strike a balance, okay? I'm happy to do this work. I'm also not happy to make this amount, or I'll be much more happier if you can pay XYZ amount. So, for me as an emerging photographer, that I am, I think I'm at that stage where I'm still trying to, you know, figure it out. And I'm like, Okay, if I don't want to accept job, what do i shoot eventually? And how do I, you know, grow to that level… to say, "oh, okay, so my daily rate is not this, I can't accept this anymore." So, I have to do the work, I have to gather something in my portfolio. So, I would say that I am at that stage where what I'm getting now is fair for me.

RR 42:56

Do you work with any clients or picture editors? Who really get it? Who are the best to work with? Or do you have favorites?

FB 43:06
Oh, yes. So, I've worked with I've had, I've had one terrible experience, and then I've had good, other good experiences. So, my own terrible experience was working for one particular NGO in the north east. And while on the job, the, you know, the editor was looking at shots. Because the editor was in was in, let's say, Germany. And she was just controlling online. She had already sent the brief. We had already looked at the brief. We understood what we are going to do, shall we were already, you know, sending images, reports, daily reports, and then it was the last day and then the editor goes, Okay, so we need a cover image. And we want it to look this certain way. And they we're like, okay, fine, then she's like, "Oh, we wanted to look like a mother, protective over her child, and she'll do anything to protect a child from, you know, the crisis and everything happening in that space and all of that." Okay, good. And then I mean, the onus is on the photographer to execute, and then I'm executing on the spot. And then I'm sharing images, if I'm taking portraits of the woman and her two daughters, and you're like, "oh, the girls, they shouldn't smile" and "I'm like, yes, they're not smiling." I mean their faces, are straight should they like move the other daughter's face looks like a face is not so stern. It is a child, she could be saying she does not have the problems of this world on her head. She said a child and then you're like, No, okay, and then the next thing just conclude. Okay, let's kick her out of the of the image. Let's only work with the other child whose face looks a bit you know, very melancholic. And, you know, with the mother's face, and I just felt really bad doing that job. I felt really bad doing it. And in my mind, I'm like, Okay, how and I mean, that just came up on the job. It's not like it was in the brief or anything, you know.

And then I've also worked with a client that just loved everything I was doing, you know, the issues there were so confident that they will need to tell me anything. Whatever I give them, in their mind, Oh, no, you're just you're overdoing like you are, you are exceeding your brief, and you're exceeding our expectations and we're happy about this, you know, so I always hope, pray and wish to work with editors that gets it like, but what I do is, if you are coming to me, it means you love what I do you love my style. So cooperate, let us cooperate, let's work together. Let's make it make sense, you know, as opposed to coming to me, and then it looks like oh, there's this this, that it just makes work really difficult sometimes.

RR 46:07
And with the editors that you really are like, the organization that you've liked working with, or the editors that you'd like working with, how do you how did you initially get connected?

FB 46:18
Okay, so I personally get connected from referrals, number one referrals. Then from email marketing. I do email marketing, and then social media. Instagram. Yeah, so Instagram is a big tool. For me. It's a big marketing tool for me, email marketing and

referrals. Referrals is a bigger marketing is a bigger one for me, because oh, people, do you know, anyone who can do this and this, you know, you just refer? Sometimes it hasn't worked for me anyways. It works for some other people, but like, online communities of let's say like, black photographers do not work for me in that sense of getting the jobs, but they work for me in terms of resources that can help me as a photographer. But to get me jobs. They haven't worked for me yet. And yeah, so I can't really say, well, and communities and all of those other things, but for referrals, but for email marketing, and for Instagram, so they just link to my email to my website, see what I do see what I have. And then if they like what they see, then

RR 47:39
let's get let's go back one second, you said that those online communities that you're part of they haven't been helpful in getting new jobs, but they have provided you with resources? What resources are those?

FB 47:52
Okay, so resources as in, let's say, there's a book to read, or discounts for let's say an application? Yeah, or let's say there's like open calls, I probably wouldn't have gotten to see if they had not seen accumulated an email. It's in the newsletter. Yeah. Or maybe there's a material or an article that or you should read this. Oh, yeah. So resources in that sense.

RR 48:24
I see. That's very helpful. Thank you. Um, tell me about your work process with editors. You got to this a little bit, but I just want to make sure I understand from the initial contact for an assignment to payment, how does that go?

FB 48:41
Okay, so initial contacts for me is maybe email most times email, then some of them wants to take it closer. So there's a seamless flow of communication that's what's up. And then we get talking understand what you want you understand, you know what I'm going to deliver to you. I've made sure I get the brief clearly. I ask for a brief. Then I ask for agreement. Once you are satisfied that once you're convinced that you're ready to work with me, ask for an agreement and then we sign it and then I get to work. And then after working, I deliver the work. after delivering the work. Most times while working I am giving you updates on the work so I give them daily reports on the work whenever I work with my own clients. I give them a daily reports at the end of the shoot day of the work I give them a few images low res to see and to correct whatever it is that needs to be corrected. And then I yeah it will report and then that up until to the end of the shoots. And then if the work is large, very large. I DHL the work to them in your hard drive in two hard drives actually for backups. You case of, in case any hard drive gets corrupt. If the work is not so much, I send the we transfer link or a Google Drive link. I just sent it to them online and it's through cloud. Then after I've confirmed delivery of the work, I send them an invoice. And then I wait for the longest or shortest period of time, and then I get my payments. And then yeah, and as most times when work comes to me, I'm always asking for who referred me, or how did you get to know about me? So I can, you

know, channel more energy in that spot. If it's a referral, I hit up the person that referred me, and, you know, tell them thank you for the referral. Yes.

RR 50:48
Okay. When pictures when editors talk to you about what they're looking for, are there common themes?

FB 50:58
Yeah, actually, sometimes, maybe. For Lagos, maybe things on, let's say. Most times, I don't want to call them things I want to call them. gendered gender-focused kind of narrative. So most times is always female is always women. Yeah. That I know that I've done is always women. You know, kind of stories if it's in the north it's women. If it's in Lagos, it's women. you know. So yeah.

RR 51:36
Has anyone ever asked you for an image that surprised you?

FB 51:42
Sorry.

RR 51:43
Okay.

FB 51:45
Okay. Well, yeah, so, no, I haven't gotten that. Actually. I haven't. I haven't been I've been asked for an image, though. Just surprised me. No.

RR 51:56
Has a picture editor ever asked for an image that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

FB 52:05
Yeah, me for that experience I shared with you that I was really frustrated on the job. And then there's another one I did one time and then the editor was not just communicating. So I don't like it when I'm working with an editor. And then there's no flow of communication because you're not here. I'm here. I know that yes, you will need to hire someone who can who can get done you who can work without supervision? Yes, it is important that you have just kind of depend Yes, I can do that.

But when contingencies arise, and I need to communicate with you ASAP, so that we are on the same page that I you know, that yes, I'm making a change, or making a twist or the story is going a certain way. I need to be able to reach you at that moment, you know, whether or not there are timezone differences, or whatever it is. Yeah. So, so sometimes, I make sure I make sure I clear, actually, before I accept the job.

RR 53:04

Okay, um, is there anything that anything you think I should know, or anything you want to add about your experience working with NGOs and Western Editors?

FB 53:17
Yeah, I think, one, one of the experiences that, sorry, my background is a bit noisy, but one of the experiences that so NGOs do the same stories. So I can see that I photograph the subjects, the let's say I photograph Person A, and then I go on another NGO's page, and then I scroll down, and I've seen that they done the same. They've worked with that same subjects, you know, maybe two months ago, and I'm confused. I'm like, Is there a competition here? There are other people to photograph there are other people with the same story. Why are you not focusing on them? Why is it only this person? What exactly is happening? And when I begin to compare, okay, the write ups, or the storyline it's indifferent. And another thing about NGOs is that okay, your photograph for them, then they don't give you credits, and then they put your name, it's fine that you put your name so that you can make, you know, you can get more more GoFundMe, you can get more funds from the public and more support. But it's also important that you credit the photographer, because I have seen where especially the home photographer, the black photographer, because I have seen situations where I think credit to the to the Western photographer, that took the image for the NGO in Nigeria. But the Nigerian photographer that also works for them never go to the credit. I mean, that's like, Listen, that photographer I should actually ask. You know So like, those are some of my concerns.

And I'm like, these NGOs are not serious. Sometimes. They're just not serious sometimes, you know, I'm just confused. And then I also don't like the fact that yes, I know there's a control. They want to look sometimes they want Oh, we want the face to be this, I will once I get those kind of jobs, I just tell the the subjects please can you just kind of look your best. Okay, just wear your best clothes. And you know, let me just take you with portraits. I don't want to photograph you maybe barefooted, or whatever it is, because I can send as much as you know Nigerians Africans, it's our way of life. When I was growing up with all this English, I'm speaking, Rebekah, we would not wear clothes we wear our pants and running in the rain and play. It's our culture. It is our culture. And to do simple, you just come and then you know, you have a picture of it, or make a picture of it. And then it looks like oh, why is this child playing without pants in the rain? Is everything okay? You know, and then make it look like maybe like some sort of poverty porn or something. So, so yeah, I just think that these are many more are like some of my concerns that I hope. Can, you know, over time be modified, you know? Yeah. Yeah.

RR 56:27
Well, I agree with you. And my daughter is three, and she loves to run naked. So imagine, you know, people taking pictures of her naked.

FB 56:42
Yes, exactly. Because do Western media has bastardized the narrative. So imagine that if the this this story is all children are run around naked, have a better self-esteem when they grow old? right? You will want me to put the photograph the child running naked. Yes. So that your child will make the front cover of the TIMES magazine, and they tell

you that Yes. You can have a better self-esteem when you grow old. You know. So it's is there's a lot there's actually a whole lot around it. There's a whole other factors as well,

RR 57:20
thank you so much for your time. I also learned this word that I didn't know. Oyibo, so thanks for that.
All right. Well, thank you so much for your generosity with your thoughts and your time. I really appreciate it.

Appendix G
Interview with FQ: July 23, 2021

Run time: 56:00
Years active as photographer: 4

RR 00:00
Just to be clear, I'm recording this so that I can use the conversation for my thesis research.

FQ00:06
okay.

RR 00:07
Okay, that's good. Um, we'll start with a few questions. So, tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing.

FQ00:17
Ah, I started. Well, I first like, you know, discover photographing in 2015. But I'd say I started in 2017. I started learning about photography. More in 2017. Yeah, yeah, 2017 I started, I started, I resigned from my job, I used to work in as a working as a PR a PR-O, a social media marketer, in 2015. I somehow got tired of the job, then I decided I was going to just like, you know, resign and see what life has to offer. But then, I said, I wanted to start a travel blog. But that didn't work out.

But in the period of traveling, I -- I bought a small camera, so I could take pictures of the places that I was going to. And then I found that, you know, I liked the fact that I was taking pictures but I have to work. So, I stopped traveling, and I went back to work. And then in 2017, I made up my mind that, you know, I was going to quit my job. And then maybe explore photography. And if it doesn't work, then I'll find something else. So, in 2017, I started to learn more about photography, you know, learn about composition, all of that. And then I'll say that my career sort of picked up in 2018. Where I started to understand more about photography, learning how to do projects, and all of that. Well, yeah, I think it's been since like, 2017. When I first started learning, I've been using a lot of YouTube videos, reading articles and all of that to learn.

RR 02:15
And who are your most common subjects?

FQ02:19
So, I do a lot of work on social issues. I'm really inspired by my environment. So, I think that, for me, one of the things that pushed me into photography was 2015, when I started, when I was working, I worked for an organization, which was a health organization. And then I saw I went into a work community, I think that was the first time in my adult life I went into a rural community, like, you know, when you're there to, like do a, an assessment of the community. And then I saw how it was, you know, there was a

disparity between the rural areas, and the urban spaces. And that's one of the things that made me say, you know, what, I'm going to figure out photography. So, since then, I remember in 2018, I went for a workshop, they spoke about-- the facilitator at the workshop, the way he spoke about photography, made me know that, you know, photography was much more than just taking images, what, and just more than telling stories, but you could use it as a call to action and all of that. So I will say, , I don't refer to the people that I work with as subjects. But the subject matters that I look-- ahhh, the topics that I look are mostly social issues. For me, photography is a means by which I use to focus my lens on social issues. Question my society. Question norms. Also, it's been a way for me to just express myself, basically. So it's me looking at people looking at objects. Yeah.

RR 04:10
Okay. And just quickly, so I have a better understanding. Do you speak any languages in addition to English?

FQ04:18
Yes, I do speak English. I speak English. I speak Yoruba. I speak. I speak a bit of, I mean, Hausa, I wouldn't say I'm 100%, in Hausa, but at least I'm beginning to understand and speak Pidgin. Pidgin is also sort of like an official language in Nigeria. Yeah.

RR 04:41
Okay. And when you do you think that photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

FQ04:51
Well, it depends. I don't know. I think that that question depends on the relationship with the photographer. And the person or the people being photographed. So for me, I'm going to use myself as an example, I think I was just having a discussion with a friend, where I will say one of the reasons why I tried to fuse, putting text in my work, at least two of the projects I'm currently working on, where I showed the excerpts of interviews and the people I work with, is because the projects I'm doing, I'm questioning society. I'm raising awareness about issues, I'm interested in. But I also want people to hear from the people that are spoken to. So I think it depends, if you are a collaborative person, you know, I have a background in theater. And one of the things that we're taught, when I took a course in, I think, acting and directing, if I'm not mistaken, there are different types of directors: there's the director, the auteur director, there's the collaborative director... me I consider myself more as like, a collaborative director, because I don't just do things. For example, as a photographer, I don't just do things based on what I want. But most of my-- I would say two of my projects are more collaboration with the people that I'm photographing. So my major projects, you know, it's me, I presented my work, where I'm doing my residency. And then I said to them that, you know, I'm not I don't, I don't call what I do with the people in the studio, or when we are going for the grant. I don't call it interviews, I say conversation, because that's what I'm doing. I'm not having interviews, I'm actually having a conversation with the people. So, I think it really depends, I don't think there's one answer to that question depends on the type of photographer, and the

relationship photographer has with the people that, you know, he or she works with. For me, I would say it's more collaborative, especially when I'm working on my personal projects, where you know, and then also, I would say, sometimes your works are sort of like a reflection of your views on your society. But then if you allow yourself to look at things from different perspectives to be flexible, when you're doing your research, then sometimes you realize that, you know, you learn so much by just doing that. So it's more of a collaboration. Rather than just, you know, then that will I have just thought I want to share this, thought. But I think it's also depends on the photographer and the way the person works.

RR 07:31
That actually is a nice segue into my next question. So tell me about your personal work. And how does that differ from paid assignments?

FQ07:41
My personal works…I mean, my personal works are based on things that I'm genuinely interested in. My personal works. So I see my passion project, my personal works are the other projects that allow me to, that have allowed me to grow as an artist. Paid assignments are good. Paid assignments, allow me to work on different subject matter, maybe subject matter that I probably would never have thought of working on. Paid assignments, increase my networks with, you know, in terms of like commissions, meeting new editors, and all of that. Paid assignments, of course, would give you money to be able to take care of yourself.

Some of my personal projects so far are solid, long-term projects where I take my time. I like my personal project, because it allows me to express myself to take my time to understand the subject matter. For example, my first project, which I started in 2018, which I'm still working on in 2021, which I'll continue to work on. I started in 2018. And I remember when I started getting asked questions about the project, I couldn't really explain it because at that time, I was just starting. But now, I'm not just understanding but I'm seeing different aspects of it. It has helped me grow as a human being--as an artist. It's even helping me learn. I'm taking my time to also figure out the way that I'm presenting the work. I started the work as you know, layered picture layered images. Continued to introduce a bit of motion, sound. Now I'm looking at exploring the sculptures very soon. I also look at VR projects. And this is just one project. Hopefully, I'll also put together a book. I don't know the other forms that will come out of it, but it has allowed me to grow because I spent time on it.

I've been able to also review the things that…Initially when I started the project, I was only looking at people who…have my project, it's all in my head. It used to focus on just people who are exploiting the coping mechanism. People who have survived terrorism and violent conflict. But in the last year, I've also incorporated you know, people who have been victims of instances of cruelty, whether it's torture or gender-based violence. And that's because it's my personal project. So, I can allow myself, you know, from the, from the information I've gathered from other people, I can see where there's a reason to

expand the scope of the project. And that's because I've stayed on the subject matter. I'm understanding it in different ways. And I'm like, okay, I can explain.

But you see, with paid assignments, you rarely get a paid assignment where you have two years, three years, four years to work on. You know, it's mostly five days, 10 days, 10 days, one month, that sort of thing, or maybe six months. But with this one, there's good, there's good for you, as an artist is also you are given chance for the projects to go? Well, it also depends, you want to do like short form projects, which sometimes I do. But yeah, I really like personal work. For me, it's just an avenue for me to say things. And also give, you know, the people that I'm working with... you know, tell stories about things I'm genuinely interested in.

RR 11:02
Do you think Have you ever pitched those things that you're genuinely interested in? Have you pitch them to clients or to Western media?

FQ11:10
Um, no, like, my personal projects, I prefer to just work on them by myself. Because you see, the thing about pitching is, it reduces the... the project, you know, they will say, "Oh, yeah, but we don't…" I mean, who would fund your project for five, six years consecutively? Who would fund your project, for it to go from being just 2d images to 3d to all of these different forms? You know, I rarely pitch and also because I don't want an editor's thoughts to influence what I'm doing. I didn't start the project because of what they had to say today, because of what I felt needs to be said what I'm saying. So, I rather just take my time and be on the project, stay on it. I remember there's a project I started in 2019, I started and I was working in people's houses. And I used to go into people's houses. And the men's houses we are photographing, but I didn't like the presentation. So I decided to I think in 2020, I decided to rework it. And I liked it. And now I'm doing it in a studio. But if that was my personal, a pitched assignment, that opportunity will not exist for me to go back. Think about it after one year and come back to it, you know, so I rather take my time, there's no pressure that comes in from, you know, an editor Oh, you know, yeah.

RR 12:35
as a as a Nigerian woman, is there a media that you're reading or watching or listening to that you feel like most reflects your lived experience? Where are you getting your information that feels authentic?

FQ12:49
As a Nigerian woman... what did you say? I didnt hear that.

RR 12:51
As a Nigerian woman what media are you listening to or watching or reading that feels most authentic to your lived experience?

FQ13:04

Um, I don't think that I mean, when I'm in Nigeria, I tried to keep up in Nigerian news but sometimes it can be overwhelming, so I don't stay with the news. I think that I mostly maybe because I also practice as a photojournalist. And then we go into the field, you see a lot of things. So I don't really keep up with news, it can be very depressing, especially at the time when our consistently keeping up in Nigerian news. Before I left, Nigeria it was really bad. So, I wouldn't say that I really immerse myself in news. I think my environment is enough news for me. When, you're in Nigeria, live in Nigeria, you can't really be away from the news because you are surrounded by people who would always somehow remind you of the realities of Nigeria. So yeah, I don't think I don't have any particular thing. I'm looking at or reading to look at for new honestly, since I came here, I dont even read news. I think I'm, I'm like, I just want to be in this bubble. When I go back to Nigeria, actually in Nigeria as well,

RR 14:04
how long are you? Are you in London now? Is that where you are?

FQ14:07
Yes. Yes, I'm in London.

RR 14:09
How long will you stay there?

FQ14:11
I'll be here ‘til September.

RR 14:12
Okay. Now, it's a nice time of year to be in London.

FQ14:15
Yeah, yeah. Sure.

RR 14:18
Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly Africa-focused?

FQ14:25
Um, I mean, I'm a part of the Africa photojournalism database. I'm also a part of the African women photograph. I think it's African women photograph. It's a new one--[inaudible]. Well, yeah, I mean, it's just a database of women online. African photojournalism database is well, yes. It's also a database. But it's run by the World Press Photo where they try to promote African artists. Yeah, I think those are the two that are ...I'm also a part of the photographic collective, which was founded by someone here in London, but it's also, you know, consists of people from different parts of Africa. Although I haven't, to be honest, I'm not always very active on some of these platforms, I'm sort of like pushing my work--I'm part of these communities, which are sort of like, you know, when there's a need, you can reach out to them that type of thing.

RR 15:29
So you're mostly using that as a resource and less as a community? Is that? Is that a fair assessment?

FQ15:36
I mean, they're individual communities, but they're not like live, they don't have [inaudible] They don't have names like I'm in touch with my colleagues on the continent. I'm in touch with my colleagues from Nigeria, you know, so that one I feel a sense of community, because we can easily reach out to each other when there are issues also, are you available for a call? So we don't have that platform. Maybe a Whatspp group. But we don't have like this registered platform, recognized platform. But yes, there's this sense of community there, because you can easily reach out to people and say, "What's up, I need to speak to somebody, are you available?" And that happens a lot. It's just not maybe a community in terms of all we have organized this database.

RR 16:18
So in those in these communities, that you're building these they're unnamed, it sounds like right there groups of people who have common interests.

FQ16:26
Yeah,

RR 16:26
Are the conversations that you're having, with your colleagues in those groups, and in those communities, are they different than the kinds of conversations you're having with Westerners?

FQ16:37
I'm not sure what you mean, like, can you break it down?

RR 16:40
Sure. I'm interested sort of in how African photographers are supporting each other. And so I'm wondering if the conversations that you have with your colleagues help to bridge the gap between the work that you're doing in Africa and the work that you may be doing in Europe or with Europeans or with North Americans?

FQ17:00
Um, yeah, I mean, even before these communities are formed, a lot of African photographers now use social media to speak and educate other people, which has been really helpful. Where we table issues on social media, we debate about it, we share our thoughts and people share their thoughts. Sometimes in some of these groups, we talk about things or look at what this has happened, what has happened, what are your thoughts? And then we'll debate about it. So yes, we have this type of conversations where we speak about the maybe talk about in terms of money payments, in terms of ethics, I think so Western journalist and or the lack of ethics of Western journalists, and

all of these things, we have all these debates, especially, you know, like having like, via social media, whether openly or privately or to WhatsApp or whatever.

RR 17:53
And that's really interesting. So the conversations that you're having with other photographers, do you ever talk about the expectations of Western media for assignments in Africa? Like, are there particular expectations that Western media puts on you when you have paid work?

FQ18:08
I mean, for me personally, when maybe when I started out, I didn't understand some of these things, but now there's more awareness. So sometimes, when a client would, you know, send me links of images they saw, and maybe they thought it was maybe images of some people in Africa that they thought, if I could replicate. I just say straight... I tell them to their face, "I don't do this type of images. The sad-looking ones. I don't have time for those things. You can call your Western photographer." Me I will not photograph people like that, you know? And also, yes, it's that knowledge. And that sense of awareness has come from these debates and these discussions that I've been having, where you're looking at something you're like, "Why do we always have to be portrayed in a certain way?" And it's because of this kind of conversation, you know, understanding that. Because initially, when I started, you look at somebody who I see as icons, I no longer see them as icons. Because now I'm seeing that they are problematic, because now I understand that I'm like, "Oh, no, that's not how we should portrayed." In fact, coming here, I remember looking at the TV the other day, and I saw this campaign or adverts, for water by an organization, I was just like, "they use all of these things to come and make us look like, you know, everybody in Africa has no access to water." That type of thing. Yeah, there's a sense of awareness. And, you know, when a client... I've had clients say this type of thing where they show you image, and I'm like, "No, that I don't do those type of pictures." You know, I don't even need to debate it. I don't need to ask for anybody's opinions. I just knew that I would never photograph someone looking like that.

RR 19:52
So do you think of yourself at all as a cultural liaison to Westerners who have never been to Africa?

FQ20:00
I think that's too much burden to put on one person, because what I find is, and I'm having that experience a lot now that I'm having more conversations with Westerners. The way that we educate ourselves about the west--I find that there's a lot of imbalance. A lot of Westerners don't take the time to educate themselves about us. So, there are so many assumptions. They come, they come. And, you know, I remember talking to a friend and she was saying she educates, but I don't have time to educate anybody. There's the internet. The internet, has made it like really easy and accessible. So if anybody is ignorant, if I have time, I could talk to you, if I don't have time, I leave you to bask in your ignorance. But I think I would not consider myself that. I would talk when there is need to. They also feel like that might sound like a very fancy name. But it's also

important, because like I said, I see a lot of conversations. Sometimes people from the west…they're just so ignorant about a lot of things. It's like it's too much of a burden to stay and keep educating people. It's unpaid work, I don't have time for it.

RR 21:08
I appreciate you giving me this hour for my thesis, too. Thank you. And so I had a couple of follow up questions, but you really kind of answered them. But my last question around that, is do you have a support system to help you? Right? I mean, you talked a little bit about it's a huge burden, right to have to explain to a lot of people who've never been to an entire continent who think it's basically just like full of elephants and giraffes.

FQ
Right.

RR
Do you have a support system to help you? Because I imagine it's quite it can it can be a lot to be managing those relationships with Westerners. How do you how do you unburden that stress? Or like the emotional work that you're doing?

FQ21:51
Oh, I don't know. I'm not sure that I've experienced that yet. Where I'm having so much stress from from Westerners. I think most of my relationship with Westerners is mostly about my work. I don't think I really get meet like tourists or [inaudible] or people who say, "oh I want to visit Africa and all of that." I have not been overwhelmed. So, I don't think I have an answer to that.

RR 22:17
Okay. Um, how do you share photography, your own work, or wait-- when I say photography, in your case, you're doing a lot of sort of multimedia work. So how do you share work that you love, but doesn't fulfill an assignment or wasn't paid to begin with? Well, what's your platform for sharing?

FQ22:37
My website? And then I just maybe post one picture from it, or some pictures from it on my social media.

RR 22:45
And are you do you enter contests? Are you active in that realm?

FQ22:50
Yeah, I mean, I apply for opportunities. I apply for grants, I apply for contests, I guess. I apply for exhibitions. I mean, I have seasons when I apply. Especially when I feel like, okay, there's something new, but there are times when I just slow down. Yeah, I mean, a lot of recognition I've gotten is by applying for some of these opportunities. Yeah, and

just sort of like, also helped me to get my name out there and get my work, actually--which is more important--out there.

RR 23:26
So of the contests are there ones that you're entering on an annual basis? Is there like a set that you know that you're going to enter every year?

FQ23:34
No, I don't do like every year, the same thing?

RR 23:37
Okay.

FQ23:38
I think the more you know, the more like for me, I'm also like, at this point where I'm asking myself, you know, which world do I fit in? Is it photojournalism? Is it the art world? Is it this, is it that? So as you start to ask yourself, that question, then you start to look at the opportunities that you want to get to? So I don't think that there are some that apply for every year. I mean, also, if I apply for one, and I get it this year, then that's it. Other people should apply for it. I don't need to apply for it again.

RR 24:09
Yep, that makes sense. Tell me, you started to get to this a little bit. Tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be?

FQ24:20
I don't think I have an answer to the question. Because it's really a lot. You just never can tell. I remember the first time I was in the US. And somebody asked me "Oh, how it's life in Nigeria, do you have cars?" Yeah, you know, you should come see it for yourself, you know, because it was just like, I just couldn't imagine that in 2018. Somebody assumed that we don't have cars in Nigeria. It's a lot of imagination. My friend is currently in Wales. And, you know, I remember she said a few months after she went to school for her masters, and people will tell her things like oh, they're surprised She could speak so well, because, you know, they didn't know people speak English in Nigeria. So it's a lot of really like some people are sort of aware.

I remember I worked with a journalist a few years ago, which wasn't a very good experience. But there was something she said that how people, they know the things. I mean, they have more knowledge about Nigeria, because they live in Nigeria, but one of the things they do is not to tell people not to educate their people about what is happening in Nigeria, because they don't want all the people they don't want. So many people from their country coming in and taking the opportunity to, you know, as part expatriates have, it good. You know, in Nigeria, they have access to security, they get the best jobs, they get well paid, cost of living is lower, so they can live like, really, you know, like celebrity type of life, because, you know, you live in a low-income country to an extent. And then she said, what she noticed is that the people don't say anything. They make it look like

everything that the West projects about Nigeria and other parts of Africa is true, just so that people continue to live in fear of Nigeria and Africa, so they don't come and take the opportunities away from them. So you see, it's, a lot of these things are very, very deliberate. For me, the perception people have it's just a wide range. Some people know that things are not the way they are made the same.

Some people know, there's a balance, you know, there is some dysfunctionality. But there's also progress, people are not going naked on the streets. We have technology. Lagos is the hub for people in the tech sector. You know, it's our own Silicon Valley. Not even our own Silicon Valley, because it's our own hub, which might not be called Silicon Valley. We have Nollywood, which is doing so well. we're exporting entertainment. I come to London, and I'm hearing people you know, in, in shops, listening to Nigerian Afrobeat music. But you know, if anything goes wrong they're first to label Nigerians a certain way. So it's a lot. You know, a lot of assumptions are made. Sometimes I ignore it. Sometimes. I'm just like, you know, you guys should educate yourself better. It's not for me to come and manage.

RR 27:20
Yeah, I understand. And if you were to make the perfect image, or do like the perfect project about life in Nigeria, what would it be?

FQ27:32
There are so many perfect images. Nigeria, is a multicultural, it's a very diverse society. But for some of our hiccups here and there, it's really interesting people interesting languages, very colorful. I don't think there's a perfect, image, there are so many images that would depict Nigeria. Maybe it might be I don't know, I can't think of anything right now. Because there are just so many scenarios that depicts the perfect image, you know, there will be a perfect image. Because we just have so much so much. And there's so much, you know, coming here looking at what is here, and then thinking back home, I'm like, wow, we're really, really beautiful set of people. And maybe we just don't see. Yeah, I don't think I have an answer to that.

RR 28:25
thinking of the editors that you work with most frequently. And the ones who are the non African editors. So North American, European, South American Asian editors, to the best of your knowledge, have they ever visited Nigeria? Do you think?

FQ28:46
I'm not sure. I don't think I know. And I mean, I don't think I have that type of conversation. But I'm not sure that editors I've worked with have visited. Maybe some have visited some parts of Africa, maybe a few, but not much have visited Nigeria.

RR 29:04
Do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

FQ29:11

Sometimes I don't know. I can't say for everyone, you know, you know, sometimes a lot of challenges are not appreciated. A friend of mine did an assignment that.. for at least two to three days couldn't upload the assignment because he was having internet issues because of the type of files she was trying to upload, which are raw files. And I said, "Look, you know, our internet is not strong, we better send this assignment via via DHL." You know, just put it in a hard drive, which is normally what I do, because I've had this experience before. So I tell clients, "Our internet is not strong. I don't have this data to waste," you know, because sometimes you just see that you're on one assignment for two to three days meanwhile while you're editing fee is just a day or two. I've had this experience to this. Sometimes some people might understand a lot of times looks like an excuse but it's the littlest things like [inaudible] Not all of them have an idea of daily life, some of them, the idea of daily life is everybody's living in the village. On the dirt road or mud, I think it's you have to be here to experience it. It's just like, I have to come to London to understand how it is. So I think it's applies for everyone where you have to have been there to experience it, to understand it, to appreciate it, you know?

RR 30:39
So do you ever have to help the editors that you're working with understand the situation on the ground, right? When they say, oh, when you send them things, or they talk about what they're looking for? Do you ever have to say, well, I wouldn't expect that because, you know, Lagos, yeah,

FQ30:53
yeah, I'm done it. I've done that a lot, where I tell people that I'm sorry, you just have to be, I have to let you know that I'm going to be as flexible as possible, because things will not always go as planned. I don't know what will happen. It's something that I've learned to do over time where, you know, the editor, assigning officer, whatever communicates what they want. And I'm saying, well, my goal I've planned, but it might not go as planned, we might have access, we might not have access, I left a clear the cast down, you know, this might happen, this might happen, this might happen. You know, let them know how it goes. Yeah, it's one of the things I do. So that nobody is uh, raising objections because to me…what you need to understand that a part of this is also running a business. So, you want to keep the expectations really low. So they don't express so much. And then you disappoint and it looks like you are the one who is incompetent.

RR 31:48
Based on your conversations with your Western clients, what do you think the West values the most about Africa?

FQ32:04
Oh, my God, I don't know. I can't say. I think it's just a lot. You know, they say they always say that there are so many stories in Africa. Although sometimes it looks like yeah, I can't answer that question.

RR 32:24

Okay. Have you ever covered a story that's given much more importance abroad than it is at home?

FQ32:29
Um, when I started my project, and I just had this discussion with my friend, when I started my project, it was there were two Nigerians who really-- one encouraged me to open a website. Like to get a website because I didn't have a website. At the time. They were the one--who is[name redacted]...he was like, "Well, why don't you apply for a grant?" And I was like, Okay. And then I applied for a grant and I got the grant. And that was when you know, Nigerians some Nigerians started to like, pay attention to the project. So yeah, I say that. Sometimes I feel like, yeah, I mean, I've seen that happen, not just to me, but also to a few colleagues away feels like, Oh, it's when they had some sort of international recognition that people back home started to take them serious.

RR 33:23
Interesting, why do you think the West was more interested in it, then the Then why do you think a Western audience or Western organization was more interested in the beginning than an African one?

FQ33:37
Um, I don't know maybe the subject matter? I have no idea. I? I should, I think I should know. But because that was the judge, one of the judge said something about the work, which I do remember now as far back as 2018, this editor from NPR, who I think was one who selected the work, but I remember what she said now, but yeah, I can't really, you know, I mean, the work has been shown-- there's different feedback that I get, so I really can't say maybe it's the subject matter, I think is also the portrayal of the subject matter, because the West is used to seeing, issues around violence conflict portrayed in a very, you know, very sad way you know, people who are the victims, always depicted are sad, looking hopeless, and all of that, but maybe with this was sort of different, you know, maybe, you know, like, one of the recurring themes I hear is, oh the images are really beautiful. maybe it was the way that the subject matter was presented, apart from the fact that you will getting to know, you know, I'm focusing on mirroring the thoughts of the people who listen to me at images, but it's also the fact that when you look at the images, they're actually really beautiful. So, you almost forget the experiences of the people. And which is sort of like refreshing to see. The portrayals of victims are always looking like they are suffering and they are hopeless, like their life revolves around their experiences, you know?

RR 35:18
Tell me about your relationships in the interactions with people that you've photographed. So how do you gain access when you when you begin a new project?

FQ35:28
Well I, normally have to travel to different places, depending on where I'm going to work. And I do a lot of research. Ask a lot of questions. When I travel, I introduce myself in the communities. I work in different communities. I've been fortunate to work in

different parts of Nigeria, because of my projects, I've had the opportunity to travel. To redefine Nigeria because of my project. But I think it's all about understanding how to work especially when you're working in places where there's a language barrier. One of the things I always do is, if I'm working in an area, I ask about, you know, I say "who is the chief here? Who is the community leader?", and introduce myself, I try as much as possible to be as transparent.

I remember my last trip in Kaduna, I took images, some printed images of the work and I showed them. “This is how my project looks. This is what I'm doing this and what I've done so far.” And then, you know, access can take time, sometimes I think my last trip in Kaduna, I spent three weeks because and in three weeks, I only got to interview a few people because it took a while for me to get access. It's very unpredictable, but you have to be patient. And then you also need to understand, I don't force people in my projects. The minute that somebody says no, I don't even bother myself. I just say “okay, that's okay.” Because I also like to put myself in the shoes of the people who I'm photographing, I don't like people to be coerced, or to be persuaded to be interviewed, I want to make sure that you're genuinely interested, you're ready to share your story. And if you're not ready, that's okay. You know. But yeah, it's very tricky, actually, sometimes. There's never really a time I go into place and everything is ready, I always have to spend time. And then when you get to speak to the people, it's so interesting. Sometimes you go to community, and when one person hears that you have spoken, and everybody wants to come around and speak, you know, it's very unpredictable. Sometimes it was, you know, like straightforward. Most times you have to spend time, you know. And that's where I started to learn a bit of Hausa because we need to like just, at least introduce yourself in the local language, even if you don't speak it. But there's something about language where--language is so powerful, it's really very powerful. But when people see you even make an effort to speak their language, drink their water to, you know, like, you accept them, then they also accept you. So it's a lot It takes a lot of navigating.

RR 38:18
Has there ever been a time when you were working, and you that you really didn't fit in? And that gaining access was hard? It seems like you know, you talked a little bit about Kaduna state, and it took a while maybe you could tell me a little bit more about that.

FQ38:35
Um, well, I think the challenge that I had in Kaduna was the subject matter. I was looking at torture and people who had been victims of torture, people who had gone to private correctional facilities. Now on like, what aspects of my own my project where, most of the people were maybe victims of a conflict in the community. So you know, that when you go to that community once you get access, you're gonna see them. But this was different. People who had been to that private correctional facility come from different parts of the North. So it wasn't, you're not gonna see them in just one place. Some of them had gone back home. Some of them have stayed in different parts. So identifying where all of them were--where different people--It was a lot. It was it was very challenging. And that took time. It took days and days of doing nothing, but just trying to make contacts and ask questions. And, you know, yeah, it took a while took a while.

RR 39:32
Tell me a little bit about when you're working with Westerners. Is the work style different than when you're working with African media or with African clients? Are your relationships with Western clients different?

FQ
In what sense? Sorry.

RR
Oh, well, I mean, I think you started to get to it a little bit in terms of when you talked about having to deliver a hard drive right via DHL. Instead of just shooting something off via Dropbox or electronic, I'm interested in sort of the how you bridge like Nigerian workstyles and European workstyles or North American workstyles. Because you know, the Americans have a very particular way of doing things. And it took me a long time and travel and to work abroad for a long time to realize like how indoctrinated I was by that and to become, and to be more flexible in terms of my work style. And I'm interested if you've had a similar experience

FQ40:30
Most of my work, mostly with international organizations. So I think it's the same workflow for everybody, I don't think that I rarely have most, maybe 99.9% of my clients, are foreign media, foreign organizations. So it's the same thing. I don't know what you mean by workstyle. But it's just the same delivery. Plus, you go into the field, you photograph, you follow the photos, maybe you agree on a particular day, when you need to share the edited images, did the images send if we transfer? Or if they have provided a hard drive? Or if you agree to send it to them directly via you know, shipping to them? Send it to them directly to that? So yeah, that's been it?

RR 41:25
How do you get connected to your, your foreign media clients? How do you start those relationships that result in paid assignments?

FQ41:32
So I'm basically in a number of platforms. African Photojournalism database, Blink media, Women photograph, African women photographers. These are tools that people use to find photographers. And I think, sometimes some of these awards too, help. I remember there was a client that said that they were looking for an African-- for a photographer from Nigeria. And then they saw something on World Press for the way I was named a Six by Six talents. And so they saw that and that was how they found me. So it comes on different platforms. And then also some of this profiling, I've gotten. For example, Iast year, I was profiled by the BBC, I did a job for an NGO. And then part of it was like getting press coverage. And then some of the BBC preferred me were not for the it wasn't really about the NGO, was profiling me. And that's how I got more clients, because they saw my interview on the BBC. So it comes from different ways, you know,

when you get some of these awards, people start to follow you. And then at some point, they reach out to you to say, “I would like to work with you.”

RR 42:54
Do you think Western media values, African photographers and African journalists?

FQ43:01
Yeah, I mean, I think they do. Now there's, they've been there's so much there's still a lot of I wouldn't say 100%. Because we're still seeing how, even with the cost to hire, local photographer, for example, with what are what is happening in Ethiopia. They are still flying in white people to photograph what is happening in Tigray, when there are so many Ethiopian photographers who would write a story that would do it in a more dignified way. They do, but I think is a very selective so they would call you for this assignment. When they feel they have like a major feature story, then they fly in the Big Boys club, or the Big Girls Club or whatever. So we're still seeing that bias, I don't think it's 100%. Maybe we're seeing 30%. We still have a long way to go. Because there's still an influx of you know, Western journalists flying into the continent to cover stories but they still, like assign the local photographer to do smaller stories.

And when they have maybe what they call a big story, they will fly in an expert, maybe because we're not expert enough. I don't know what that means. But I've had an editor tell me that there will be times when they'll fly in an expert to cover in the biggest stories. And it didn't make sense to me. Because if the local photographer can do the smaller stories what is the difference with the bigger stories? It's the same thing. It's the same photography. It's the same writing. There’s still a lot… they feel like we are good for the smaller jobs and Westerners are better off for the bigger jobs to tell a story of a continent they know nothing about. They just want to spend how many days or maybe you have a biased mindset? Some of them are my friends, they have been working here for years, but they still don't understand us. Because when they come in, they already have that mindset of who we are and they stick with that mindset they don't allow themselves to learn. So it's still the same thing. [inaudible]

RR 45:11
Do you think you're paid fairly for your work by Western media?

FQ45:16
I think that that that they are calls by people to--No, we're not. I mean, when I find out what some of my peers earn and the fact that they actually do pay. No, we're not paid fairly because one of the things I find it is I find is that when they are flying in people from the west, they sort paid them like double, sometimes triple the amount. Even sometimes when you're working in high-risk zone. There's so many times I worked in high risk zone where there's an opportunity of being kidnapped, like, and I'm still paid basic money, no insurance, nothing. So it means that if I die in the field that I will die for nothing, you know, and that will never happen to a white person. They would never fly-in somebody outside of from, you know, from London or from America without giving

them two basics. The insurance at least and hazard pay. And so of course, we're still not having fair pay. Yeah,

RR 46:14
That gets sort of to my question here. Do you work with any expats in Nigeria?

FQ46:20
What do you mean by expats?

RR 46:21
Oh, you know, there are a fair number of Western journalists living on the continent. And I'm just wondering if you work with any of them on a regular basis?

FQ46:29
No, I don't.

RR 46:31
Um, tell me about do you work with any picture editors who you feel like really get it for your favorite people to work with?

FQ46:41
I mean, there are some that are really, you know, good. I happen to have met with one, but she wasn't like the assigning editor, but she was somebody who works with a nonprofit. But she suddenly they started like championing the fact that we need more women photographing, and she's all about hiring local photographers and it was really nice to hear her speak. Like it's different from when you see the person or listen or read what the person has to say via email but hear them speak and know that okay, this one really gets it. Like these are not these are not being performative allies, but like for real they're genuinely interested in seeing more local photographers telling their stories--not flying in people.

RR 47:34
Have you met any of the editors that you work with in person?

FQ47:38
Yeah, I've met. I remember the first time I worked with the *Wall Street Journal*, I met the editor when I went to the US. Now last week, I met with one of the she wasn't one that assigned me, but she was somehow the one that is in charge of the project. I met her last week. Yeah. Let me see, who else have I met with? I'm supposed to meet with another editor who I worked with some years ago--in 2019. I'm working here... she works in the UK, I'm supposed to meet her at some point. Yeah.

RR 48:19
Are there certain times of year or events where Western media has a bigger appetite for imagery from Nigeria? Like are there things that happened that you know, the *Wall Street Journal* is going to call because x is happening? Those kinds of things?

FQ48:34
Like for example, when there was the protest last year, there was everyone reaching out for images. When there are elections, too. In fact, it's so infuriating, because with the amount of photographers that were covering the protests last year, we still had, you know, some of these platforms bringing in white people-- It was so stupid to me, because we had so many people photographing in different parts of Nigeria. So many talented, I'm not talking about people who are just documenting, but people who are passionate because a lot of us who went to the protests didn't just go there as photographers. For me, I didn't go there as a photographer, I went there, as a protester and a photographer. You know, we had people that were doing the job and then to hear that they were flying in people--flying in their photographers to cover a protest rather than hire several talented, you know, people who are quite deeply connected to the subject matter. It was just stupid to me. But yes, you see that during elections, because sometimes they anticipate violence, you know. Elections is the oldest, I mean, Nigeria, it's not just violence, actually. Nigeria is one of the largest populations of Black people, Africa's largest population. So of course, you know that there's always eyes on Nigeria for certain things...elections, protests. There's gonna be some of these like, major things happening. [inaudible] Which is just, to me, it's just makes sense.

RR 50:20
Tell me a little bit about your work process with editors from your initial contact for an assignment to payments.

FQ50:29
Okay, what exactly do you want to know?

RR 50:31
Well, I'm just interested in Okay, so you and you. Let's say it's a, an editor you have a relationship with So you mentioned the *Wall Street Journal*. So the *Wall Street Journal* calls and says, okay, FQ, so we would like to cover this, like, we want to cover the election straight, we're talking about the elections. So, then what would happen between like the initial conversation, how much flexibility is there in terms of the way that you cover it? the length of time? Do you have set rates? Do you negotiate them, all of those kinds of things.

FQ51:06
So different, different media houses have different rates, some people have standard rates, which are non-negotiable. Some, you know, you could negotiate some will tell you, especially with a pandemic. But I think the bulk of my work from last year came in for I think there's only one news agency I worked for this year, it's a British organization. But a lot of thinking from nonprofits. It's a straightforward process. You guys will have meetings where it's necessary to talk about the assignments. Sometimes it will be series of meetings, depending on people schedules, especially the photographers schedule, you can talk. you agree. If there are terms that need to be cleared out to clear them out, then you with news, it can go different ways with news agencies, you could, you know, fund

your expenses, and then you'll be reimbursed. Go to the field, you file the images, they tell you, okay, we've received them, send your invoice. And that's it, you get your money, and maybe one month or two, with NGOs, they will take care of your logistics, your hotel, your everything dependent, sometimes they have gotten their story, sometimes you have to go to the field and look for the story. And then when you get that, keep communicating, keep them in the loop of things. give them feedback by the end of the day. Put together the story, come back. Depending on when you agree to send it over, take your time, edit it, send it over. send your invoice. That's it.

RR 52:54
So where in that whole process. Where do you think your influence is most felt? Where do you feel most in control of the work?

FQ53:03
I mean, I think pre-pro...is everything, especially before. Before and when you're on the shoot because both of need to agree on a lot of things. Especially when it's flexible, where you're like, Okay, well, this might not happen the way you think it'll happen. I've seen this before--this is not going to happen like that. Like I said, I only like to let people know that. You know, I hear you. But let's see how it goes. You know? So you don't keep your expectations too high.

RR 53:42
Is there anything you wish picture editors, Western picture editors had a deeper understanding of? It seems like you've already sort of answered that question. But I have a set that I need to ask everyone. Sorry for being redundant.

FQ53:54
So yeah, I'm going to start to go for a meeting soon.

RR 53:59
Okay, so let me let me just do the last two questions, then. When Western picture editors talk to you about what they're looking for, are there themes that come up very frequently?

FQ54:12
No, it depends on the story they're working on. So, it's not they're not they're not. There's no recurring theme, except the editor is working on just one type of subject matter, which is very rare. Most editors work on different subject matter. So yeah

RR 54:29
And has a picture editor ever asked you for an image that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

FQ54:38
Not that I know of, actually. I don't think I can think of anyone now. A picture editor. I mean, some guy has reached out to me, but he's not an editor, I don't know who he is. One time asking me...he needs a picture of people looking poor, people looking dirty.

Some of the things that he said... but, he's not an editor. I don't know who he is. And I was like, “Nope. You know, I don't do that type of work.” But yeah, I don't know. I can't think of anyone who has asked me for a picture that sort of problematic or something. I can't think maybe that's happened. I don't remember but I doubt.

RR 55:20
the only thing I have left for you, and I just want to say thank you so much. This has been really helpful. You're, you're incredibly bright. I'm a great admirer of your work. So thank you. Is there anything that I didn't ask that you think I should know?
FQ
I don't think I can think of anything.

RR
Yeah. Okay, well, thank you so much.

Appendix H
Interview with GP: August 2, 2021

Run time: 56:33
Years active as photographer: 3

RR 00:00
I just need to tell you that we're recording this interview, and I need you to accept that we're recording so I can do the research.

GP00:08
All right

RR 00:09
Okay, all right, let's good with you. I'm going to ask you a series of questions everyone's getting asked the same questions. So even if you may have answered something earlier in the conversation, because that's how the conversation went, I may ask you a similar question later on. And if you want to skip it, or you feel like you've already answered it, that's fine. I just want to make sure that everyone is given the same opportunity to answer the same questions. Okay?

GP 00:35
yeah, sure.

RR 00:37
Can you tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing?

GP00:46
I kind of like started photographing on my phone, which started from street photography, however, I started shooting documentary photography professionally, around late 2018. And, I mean, it's but overall, I think the whole interest in photography kind of like started from in my mid-teenage years. I used to look at the 1994 Guinness book of record from my dad's library. And I think the book kind of like focused on so many breaking human and animal brilliance of that period. And I was just impressed with the record keeping aspect of it and that kind of like laid the groundwork by granting my urge to like document stuff. Well, yeah. 2018, I started professionally.

RR 01:42
And what do you photograph most commonly? Like? Do you photograph people? Do you photograph your family? Do you photograph your neighborhood? Tell me about who you're photographing regularly.

GP 01:54
People. It's usually communities. To be honest, it's an even more than that --communities in the form of a social group. And these days I've been I've been kind of like looking at how power relates to human activity. Because yeah, like, I think in a culture or society

power does not like purely work as a repressive mechanism, but also as an active one, which can be found in various levels or instances of social formation, like social class institutions and some events. So, I think power kind of like, for this reality and it creates role for people, in a sense, creates certain kind of people too and certain kind of narratives for these people. Yeah.

RR 02:51
And tell me, do you what languages do you speak in addition to English? Do you speak Yoruba?

GP02:59
Yeah, Yoruba and Pidgin English.

RR 03:07
Okay, now, do you think photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

GP 03:17
I feel photographs tell more of the people's story than the photographer's. Because, in essence, I think photojournalism itself is meant to, like fill in the gap between the people's story first, and then what the photographer understands about the people. So, I would consider a photograph to tell more of the people story than the photographer's.

RR 03:42
Do you think the nationality of the photographer plays a role in that? Or the background of the photographer?

GP 03:50
Yeah, it does. He does.

RR 03:52
Tell me more.

GP 03:55
What that does, in the sense that background of the photographer, kind of determines what the what the photographer knows about the subject itself and how he looks at the subject. That would determine the side of the person's story he's trying to analyze, if I should put it that way. So yeah. But the people's story comes first before the photographer-- the reason why I'm saying that is because I feel there won't be there won't be something for photographer's to learn about the subject if, if the person's story doesn't exist in the first place. So, I'd put the person's story first before the photographer's knowledge.

RR 04:42
Okay. Do you have personal work that differs from paid assignments?

GP 04:48

Yes, I do.

RR 04:49
And how are they different? How are they distinct?

GP 04:51
I think personal work comes from personal experience and personal um how would I put it, personal connections. Access you've made before, before assignment so yeah, it differs, it differs because your personal and it differs in the sense again that your personal work, -- (speaking off camera)--you just told me---(returning to interview)--Sorry about that,

RR 05:21
That's okay, I have little ones in my house too, I understand.

GP 05:27
So, I think personal work differs again, in the sense in the sense, your personal work does not necessarily have to be like, the most important thing right now in the country to talk about--your personal work could just be something you personally are interested about, it doesn't necessarily have to be what the bigger audience are interested about. So that kind of differs from the assignment, which is, which is probably being done to be to be broadcasted to a wide range of audience. So, I mean, it has to be relatable and very important, very timely at the periods. So, personal work might not be timely, it could just be something you've always been interested and you're taking your time with.

RR 06:17
And who are your regular clients? Who are you? Who's paying you most often for photographs?

GP 06:23
Currently, I would say NGOs, NGOs. Yeah, I would put NGOs at the top and, and I've gotten a few, a few payments from licensing my photographs too---to media houses. I don't have too much experience getting direct assignments from media houses, I mean, because this year has been very wild to me. And I've had like four different cancellations in the past, in the past five, six months from different media houses that I was supposed to work with, but probably some differences in something else. And we had to like cancel the assignment. So, I don't have much, much experience documenting for media houses. But I mean, I have experienced licensing my photos to them. And I mean, I've shot a lot for NGO photo editors from NGOs, too.

RR 07:23
And when you think about the media that you're listening to viewing, reading at home in Lagos, because you're in Lagos, right, you're in Lagos. Yep. So, when you think about the media that you're consuming, what feels most relevant and authentic to you like to your daily life? What news makes sense for you?

GP 07:45
I think I'm more I'm more exposed to the to the internet first, then maybe time to time when I get in front of the TV. I could watch some broadcasting some news that have been broadcasted too. So yeah, I'll put that as like the top two the internet and the broadcasting from the TV. I hardly come across print I hardly buy print these days.

RR 08:15
which news organizations? Are they local? Are they international? Who are you paying attention to?

GP 08:22
I would, I would say, I would say mostly local. Well, almost both. If it's the internet, it's likely likely local because maybe I'm just trying to read some new develop some new political developments in the country. And so yeah if it's the internet it's likely that it's, local, but if it's international, it's likely that I'm watching broadcasting probably news channel like CNN and all that. But I mean, sometimes on the internet, too. I do. I go on a few international publications like *New York Times*, *The Guardian* and *The Republic*. So many more like that. So I would definitely put local first because I'm more exposed on the internet with local then I would put international second.

RR 09:27
Okay. Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are Africa-focused?

GP09:33
Yep. The African Photojournalism Database and the African Artist Foundation. I don't know if you know of those?

RR 09:48
I do. Can you tell me about, tell me about your experiences with them?

GP09:55
With the with the African photojournalism database, I think it's the first thing with this database. It's kind of like a database where you have your name in which people who are employees like checkout and that kind of like solidifies you more as a photojournalist. And I mean, it gives people...the members opportunities to, to apply for contests like the, like the World Press photo, and some contests being a part of the African photojournalism database. When you need to apply for some contests, some usually come with like a waiver for members of this organization where you don't, where you do have to pay the contest fee sometimes. So that I think that that comes in handy.

And we have Facebook groups where we can like get in, keep in touch and keep updated on the latest contest and latest ethical developments in the industry and all this kind of stuff. Yeah, that's the African Photojournalism Database. The African Artists Foundation, that is more like a physical relationship with them, because they are based here in Nigeria, in Lagos. So it's kind of like a place where I started, I started bringing myself up with photojournalism and I went to a few workshops there. And I mean, most of my

friends in my community these days, I met them there because they were also there for a bit different reason or similar. Similar reason rather. So yeah, with the African Artists Foundation, it creates an opportunity where you can have direct contact with your community, and also meet new people and all that.

RR
And the kinds of conversations that you're having with your fellow African artists and photographers, are they different than the kinds of conversations you're having with your Western clients?

GP
Yes, I think it will be because, even if I'm going to be speaking with my fellow photographer, and I'm--I'm probably in my experience, because we're in the same profession-- we have similar experiences. So it's easier. It's easier to be understood by them, then a photo editor from another Western company, Who, I mean, all that concerns the photo editor is "Oh, this is some story. And, I want you to and I want go after it." But like, I mean, the conversation wouldn't pass that. With photographers, it could go deeper, and you guys could be more open with each other about prices, and how you want to how you should go about the project you're trying to embark on. And details you probably wouldn't want to talk to with your client, or you probably don't even have time to talk with your client. But I mean, having a photographer face to face or that, that you can call directly, you could easily just add them, ask them those little questions that will help you perform your job better.

RR 13:52
Okay, when you're working with your Western clients, so it sounds like those are mostly NGOs. And I'm guessing that the NGOs you work you're working with are Western, or are they? Are they Western? Are they Asian?

GP14:04
Western

RR 14:05
They're Western? Okay. Um, is there anything that gets lost? When you're working with them? Are there things that they don't understand or expectations that they have that you have to help them? Do you have to clarify for them?

GP14:23
No, no, no, I can't remember now.

RR 14:26
Um, when you think about your Western audience, right, and you're the organizations that you're working for, do you think you're and this goes a little bit to the note that we were talking about where the background of the photographer matters? Do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience? Does that feel like a role you take on?

GP14:50
Yeah, yeah.

RR 14:52
What does it mean to you to take on that role?

GP14:59
To me means it means it means making images with no biases, making, embarking on stories and trying to try to put aside my personal, my personal feelings and making sure I'm photographing just facts. And the way I'm saying things. So yeah, I try to keep that mentality as much as possible when, when I'm shooting, especially when it's a story that is, that it's a bit touchy, and that would be seen somewhere outside of Nigeria. I try to make sure I'm photographing fact, and not trying to be in favor of, of somebody else. Yeah,

RR 15:46
um, do you share photography that you love, but either, you know, maybe you were out on an assignment and you shot some images that weren't really perfect for it? So you don't send them to the client? Or maybe it's personal work? How do you share that photography? What are your platforms?

GP16:05
Usually, it's choose social media, like Instagram, and Twitter. And sometimes I, I try to take advantage of applications. I'm doing applications for grants and some contests. I mean, having my picture distributed by these by these grants and contest platform when you when you win them is kind of like a plus. Because, yeah, my main, method of doing that will be my social media, and Instagram and Twitter. But then I take advantage of going about applications and grants and contests sometimes. Yeah.

RR 16:48
that's actually perfect, because my next question was about contests. So which contests do you enter?

GP16:53
See, that's a hard question, because I enter a lot but-- are you trying to say, which contests have you won? or which ones do you enter?

RR 17:06
Ah, well, both I'm interested in …Let me tell you a little bit about what I'm interested in. And maybe that will help you answer. I'm interested in how or if photographers are using contests as a way to help build their careers. Like, do contests feel important to you? Do you think they're influential in the trajectory of a career? I'm interested in sort of that perspective, from Nigerian photojournalists because I know how Western photographers feel about them.

GP17:38
Okay, okay. Yeah, I do enter contests. And I feel they are actually quite important for so many aspects for a photographer trying to build a career. I actually mentioned a few of them, I won. They just made student grants from 2019. I've had a couple of recognition from, from platforms such as the Alexia foundation student grants. The Six times Six talent program from World Press. I was a nominee from was it a year back or two years back? I can't remember and there's been a couple of more the Fashula (sp?) photo contest, which was, which was a local competition. It wasn't an international one. And that was a long time ago, about 2018 when I started documentary, photography professionally. There was one with the with the Bronx documentary Center in New York. And that was a grant late last was it last year. It was like a COVID relief grant. So there was helpful to me. Besides that I just register, for some other ones and you just never get it because some reason or other which, which I'm fine with.

RR 19:18
When you think about the big international contests and grants, because you especially for how early you are in your career, you have really done quite well. I mean, the Alexia Foundation and Eugene Smith, those are big international photography organizations. Tell me how you select which photographs and which kinds of stories to send with your application.

GP19:43
Okay. I think what usually helps with my decision making when I need to when I need to register for this grant is that I know the kind of work I have. So I kind of know which one which one is the strongest and which one fits well with the platform in which I'm putting it and, and which one I want to work on more. You know? Some grants are just awards and some are grants which you need to continue working on the project. So those kind of those kind of elements will help with the decision. If I'm trying to apply for something, am I putting in a project in which I still want to continue working on? Am I putting in a project in which I think I'm done with and I don't see it going any further anymore? But, yeah, over all it depends on the project in which I'm passionate more about and it depends on like a self-reflection on how strong I think my projects are. So I would definitely am more likely to put to put my strongest project in a more competitive competition. Because I need to be putting my best definitely to be able to go over all the other contestants in the contest here.

RR 21:21
Tell me a little bit about what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be

GP21:32
I would say insecurity poverty, corruption, bad governance. And I think of, I think at the same time, they are well aware that Nigeria is a powerful people and Nigerians are achievers too, I mean. Because it seems you can almost find a Nigerian in almost all demographics. On this planet you can always find a Nigerian somewhere, so many countries. I would say powerful and achievers but the same time insecurity, poverty, corruption, bad governance, and all this sort of stuff.

RR 22:18
how do you feel about that narrative?

GP22:20
It is, to some extent, those narratives are true, to be honest. And to some extent, it's not like the only thing that constitutes the whole country. There are so many other good things and brighter things that are going on in so many other places. So I think the Western media needs to…[inaudible]…both Western media and contests and anything that involves crediting some pictures in a big platform, I think they should give more recognitions to people who want to work on story that that are not necessarily on the bad things in the country and stories that they should they should try to like publicize stories, that are light. That highlight the good things about the country and I mean, yeah, I don't know if you get my point?

RR 23:24
I do. Trust me. I've been to Lagos. I think it's a pretty cool place. If you were to make a perfect image about life in Nigeria, what would it be? Tell me about it?

GP23:35
That question. I'm glad you gave me time to think about it. Well, did you did you ever go accident of Nigeria this seems almost impossible to think about. Because although our similarity supersedes, but still, it will be impossible to mention Nigeria, without acknowledging the unidentical realities and situation in every region of the country. And to be honest, I couldn't even think of this one. And the only way I could imagine would be to generate an image like this--is if all it's on the map. And it's kind of like classifying each region with the label that kind of like represents that region. That's the only way I could think of because like so many different realities out here. I'm from the South, and the North has like, has like different kind of law. They have Sharia in some places. So what is normal there, could be imprisonment and could be. Yeah. So, it's quite different.

RR 24:51
That's a really, I think that's a very interesting answer. And I wonder what do you think Western media can do to better understand Africa? I when I say "Africa", right, it's in quotation marks, because I think the West likes to think of Africa as it's like one giant block. But tell me a little bit about how you think the West can better understand authentic life in Africa?

GP25:20
Authentic life? I would say, have more conversations with your photographers and your writers, the local ones. And I think talking through email won't do the trick and maybe Western photo editors, should get more used to calling photographers and having voice to voice conversations, which kind of allows the photographer or writer space to tell them what they think about the story before it needs to, be published. Or before you need to go further with the story. So I think it's important for these conversations to happen before the photo editor just comes from somewhere. And is like, "Oh, we want you to report, the

story wants is this." I think it's important for conversations to happen first on, "What do you think about this story? And, and how does it look like from your end?" And aside from that I think they should they should accept pitches more, too. Well, I don't know. Because there are so many things going on in the country. And I mean, places like *NY Times* or some big publication, they usually easily neglect those stories, because it's not it's not, it's not I mean, the whole world probably is not really interested in those stuff. The whole world is probably looking for something that is more in the spotlight at the moment. So I think we need to work on that. I think there are some little local stories that are quite important.

RR 27:14
Tell me a little bit about the pitching again, are there stories or themes that you think places like *The Times*, *Washington Post, CNN, BBC*, just consistently overlook?

GP
When you're thinking from a life in Nigeria, okay, that I say this with the perspective…There's this friend, I have who is a writer. And I've seen a couple of stories he has done for some few international publications. I mean from the look of the story it feels likely to be a pitch because I feel anyone working on this type of story--the ideas are definitely coming from someone, in Nigeria. I don't think, like, for example, the one that is like sticking to my brain right now was one a story about how our bankers in Nigeria receive low payments and basically some stuffs about the banking world and your payment and order. So I think stories like that are very easily to be neglected by someone there. It's only someone here who goes to the bank regularly and sees how things are, who knows people in the bank personally that could that could easily bring that kind of stories up. So I think the Western media are always looking for more bigger stories like End SARS something basically big guys, they that the whole-- they think the whole world wants to know about. So yeah, I think the reason why this might be is because a lot of pitches are being ignored and because I've done a few pitches myself and the kind of--how would I put it? The kind of response I get...Usually are about how this story isn't like timely or isn't like a major thing the publication wants to talk about right now. So, they need something more bigger and more shocking to engage their audience. So, I'm not…I don't blame them though. I don't blame them. They need to get their views up to keep the publication running.

RR
When you think of the picture editors you work with most frequently--have they, to the best of your knowledge, have they visited Nigeria?

GP 30:09
Very few, very, very, very few. Because most people just have correspondents these days, or they just have some sort of basically correspondent or some representative there, which they just keep in touch with. That gives them most of the information. So yeah, I'll say very, very few of them.

RR 30:34
So do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

GP 30:40
Hmm. Well, to an extent, they might, because since they're getting information from their correspondents. I would like to assume that they have like, just a little bit picture of what it feels like to be in this place. But they necessarily might not be at the mercy of the experience of being at a place and seeing how it all goes to the fullest there. There are some things our correspondents will miss too, not mention. So, I really want say they are quite experienced, that they get everything, that they get all it takes to be in here but, I would say they just have like, maybe just a few ideas, but it's it definitely won't be like someone who stays here. Yeah.

RR 31:39
And what do they get right of their few ideas, the things that they do get right, or the things that they do seem to understand, what is it that they seem to understand?

GP 31:53
Okay. Lemme see, I think ...I would say they seem to understand that things are not really good. They seem to understand that part of it. They seem to understand that insecurity. The bad police, the bad police side of it. The corruption side of it. I think they seem to understand this side world. And I mean, they I think, they are always fully well aware that "oh, this is how we're going. And this is how we're going to go about this story. And this is what we want. And this is what we want to talk about. This particular topic on insecurity or indiscriminate shooting from policemen."

RR 32:50
And what do they miss?

GP 32:53
What do they miss? I would say, the, the average, none I can think of now but I think photo editors should um have more, should have more sympathies towards the people which we are going to be documenting. That is they should kind of understand-- these people are people, too. Like they have lives, wives and all that. And I mean, the issue of photographing them should not be taken lightly. And then too forward and going like, it shouldn't be too forward. And it should be taken not lightly, especially when it's a touchy subject. But in my experience, like I said before, I've worked mostly with NGOs. So NGOs, most of the time they have made all plans beforehand and so all you just have to do is go to the place and photograph these people. I'm guessing these people have had some sort of benefit from the NGO beforehand. So yeah, that kind of like makes it easier for you to photograph them.

RR 34:25

In your experience, how do you picture editors shape what Western viewers think of Africa?

GP34:34
I didn't get that, please.

RR 34:36
You want me say that again? In your experience when you're working with picture editors, how do they shape what the West thinks about Africa? Does that make sense?

GP34:50
When I'm working with photo editor, how do they shape what to think about Africa? I think they play like the major role, like the most role to be very honest. Because they are, they're like at the forefront of the decision-making. Yeah, like, the gate openers themselves. So, I mean, if they don't accept a decision, it's the story isn't going out. So they are kind of like the like the gate to be very honest. I mean, they make the final decision. So if the if the editor themselves feels the story, won't... they don't see the trajection of the story in, pulling people in to read the newspaper or other. I think that might stop them from recording it and they would rather go with the stories that are much better, much more shocking, and something that will get people's attention real quick. But a few times I've seen a news company highlighting, happy stories too. A few times, but to be very honest, the stories about the insecurities and bad things are more prominent than that.

RR 36:22
Tell me about the people that you photograph. How do you gain access to someone's life? How do you get permission?

GP 36:33
I think people react differently when confronted with a thought and an expectation of being in the news. And when they see a camera, the first thing that comes to their head, "oh, I'm going to be in news" so people can react differently. Usually when I when I tell people, I'm photographing them for myself, because I work on a lot of personal projects. So usually when I tell people I'm photographing for myself, something natural and pure kind of opens up and it becomes a bit more intimate experience about me, them and the camera. And I think telling a story of how I see the world must be an intentional pursuit. So I'm very mindful of my message before I even pick up the camera. And without doing this I would basically just be taking photos in which anybody with a camera can make. So sometimes it takes years, sometimes months to build up relationships with the people I'm photographing. Other times, I might just have a few moments to make this connection. But usually I just take my time and observe the situation and consider how best I can make the connection at that moment. And I think this this takes practice. To be honest, I think it takes time and practice to be familiar with this side of the job and to know how to best go about it.

RR 38:05

And how often are you working and you're facing a language barrier?

GP 38:14
Very less often, very less often. Because I have Yoruba. And if that doesn't work, it's more likely that the person understands pidgin English. So yeah, I'll say very less likely.

RR 38:31
Okay. Has there Have you ever been working...or has there ever been a time when you were out working that you really didn't fit in? And that gaining access to photograph was hard?

GP 38:49
Yeah, yeah.

RR 38:50
Can you tell me about that?

GP 38:54
The one that the one that comes to mind was, was I think three years ago, when I was trying to work on a story in Rwanda, which wasn't Nigeria. It wasn't Nigeria, so it was in Rwanda. And I mean, it's a new environment so I was still trying to navigate and trying to get my connection and access. I think it was hard because besides language… language might have been a barrier to some extent, but besides that I think me not being me not being from that environment, kind of like kind of played a role in which I approached the person I want to photograph. I don't know if you get me? If I'm going to be shooting in Nigeria now and I need to talk to someone, I know how best I should approach this person and ways in which Nigerians like to be referred to and other sort of little things that somebody outside would probably miss out, because they haven't been in the environment enough. So yeah, I think that sort of stuff happened to me. To me shooting in Rwanda and border...over time, I was able to get some of the access. And also, so I think I was able to find my way at the end of the day, which is really all that matters. Because in this industry, you get no. For some people, if you need to photograph people, it's not that everyone that was there wants their pictures to be taken. So that necessarily might not be incompetency for my side, that could just be the person being plain about not wanting their photographs taken. It could be because of the person. It necessarily might not be because of me.

RR 41:01
Absolutely. Um, have you? Have you ever photographed an assignment for Western media for Western publication?

GP 41:11
No, no.

RR 41:12

Okay. Um, what about with your relationships that you have with other Nigerian photographers and conversations that you're having? Do you think that Western media or Western NGOs value local photographers in Nigeria?

GP 41:35
I feel it wasn't totally and entirely like that before. But with the advent of COVID. With the advent of COVID, I think local photographers have been valued more compared to before.

RR 41:51
Interesting. Do you think you're paid fairly for your work?

GP 42:01
Fairly? But fairly. And I think fairly is the word fairly is a fine word. Yeah. But I think I could settle for better. But fairly is fine.

RR 42:14
Settle for better. I like that. I like that phrase. So do you. And I know, in COVID times, this might be a little different. Do you work with any expats in Lagos? Do you have any foreign journalist friends that you hang out with? or work with?

GP 42:36
No, no.

RR 42:38
Okay.

GP 42:38
Um, tell me about the ones I hang out with. I don't work with them.

RR 42:45
Okay. So do you think their relationships to clients are similar to yours? Or the way that they work with clients is different? Do you know?

GP 42:55
I don't. I don't know.

RR 42:58
And when you think about the picture editors that you work with, at these NGOs, do you have any who are your favorite? Who are the best to work with?

GP 43:14
Yeah, yeah, I mean, it depends. I think, the best people to work with those editors, which we just reach a fine payment, and the workload isn't that too much because, cuz I've worked with NGOs before, in which their payments, the workload kind of like supersedes the payments a lot. I don't want to do jobs like that anymore. And I just want something

in which the workload…I mean, the contract says, I'm doing this. So, I'm doing this. Not while in the field, you're like, trying to tell me to add some extra, some extra stuff. So, after the assignment, you're like, trying to tell me I need to submit this, which wasn't in the in the contract before? So I think I want to avoid just like that, which I've come across a couple of times before. Yeah.

RR 44:24
How do you get how did you initially get connected to the Western clients that you have-- to the NGOs?

GP 44:33
Well usually it's me reaching out to reaching out to me introduce myself...OK, for NGOs. I think at first it started to come through recommendations. So later on, it just started going from me reaching out plainly via email to make like the first connection. And yeah, and I think sometimes I've seen a few of them reaching out to me via mail after coming across my work on Instagram. And I think for photo editors, which, I don't know, I've been I've been in contact with a lot of photo editors where, like from media publications, but I just, we just don't I just don't seem to have done assignment currently for some of them. I think for photo editors, it's usually me reintroducing myself after, after a portfolio review or after meeting at community like events. So this reaching out to introduce myself is just a way to establish and secure the connections we've already made before. And sometimes I've had photo editors reach out to me via email after coming across my Instagram, to kind of like license images and all that. So yeah, it works that way, too.

RR 46:10
Are there certain times of year or events where you know that Western media is going to have a bigger appetite for news from Nigeria?

GP 46:23
I can't say entirely. I think it depends on what's happening in the in the country. If there's something very big happening in the country that doesn't that isn't regular at all. I think there's more likely to be influx of Western media asking for photographs, but on a normal plain or regular Nigerian year. And I wouldn't say entirely for different photographers, but from my own point of view, I think I seem to be getting more requests for assignments during the mid-year. Yeah, I'm likely to get more assignment requests in the middle of the year and towards the ending, at least in my experience, I know.

RR 47:12
You talked about this a little bit, but let's go back, what helps you get noticed by Western picture editors?

GP 47:23
Personally, everyone, I think everybody has their strengths, some social media, some this, some that. Personally, it's usually true applying for contests. I think I'm good with writing. So I kind of like maximise on that or try to, like apply for stuff to get my pictures out there in front of in front of people to like, know about it. And, yeah, that's pretty

much it. I would say I use social media, too. But I wouldn't say I'm much of a social media person, because I just, I just go on and off. And sometimes I'm fully active. Sometimes I'm less active, depending on my mental health, and depending on trying to relate to like a lot of people and all that so. But yeah, we just say contest. And that seems to be that seems to be my most consistent method so far. I would say contests and grants. Yeah.

RR 48:24
And how often do you turn down assignments?

GP 48:29
How often? How often? Not often unless I mean, unless the payment seems just too ridiculous to accept. So, maybe out of out of six offer calls for assignment, it could probably be just one that seems very ridiculous payment. And also, it's quite less often to me, to be honest.

RR 48:59
Okay. We talked about this a little bit before, but you know, I want to go back cuz it's on the list. How often do you pitch projects or stories to Western picture editors, either for your NGO, the NGOs that you're working with, or news?

GP 49:19
I haven't pitch to NGOs. I haven't pitched to NGOs before. But for Western? It's really hard to pinpoint. Well, I would just put the statistics at maybe once in a year, something like that was probably somewhere around there.

RR 49:40
So not too often.

GP49:42
Yeah, not that often.

RR 49:46
Tell me about your work process when you're working with your Western clients from initial content or initial contact, right. So they say either you connect with them or they connect with you and say we have a story. And you know Kaduna state, here's what we need. So starting from the initial contact, all the way to payments, what is that process look like?

GP 50:11
It's usually like, back and forth. Email. So it starts from, it starts from Oh, we want you to shoot, blah, blah, blah, and this is our payments. And I mean, if the payment is fine, oh, yeah, sure, let's go froward with it. And so I think after that, they'll probably they probably put you with, I mean, in the first email, they probably tell you, okay, if you find with it, I will, I will introduce you to my colleague in or maybe my representative in Nigeria, and she's going to brief you further and how you would go further with these

particular assignments or what you'll be shooting, and probably after that they make the connection with the other person and, and in conversating with the other person, you, you're kind of like getting more briefed on the assignment and how you're going to go about it. And I think at the same time, when it's getting close to the assignment date, then you start to like, probably get in touch with financial, their financial agents, or the person that ended for finance, and all that so probably sign the contracts. And in this contract, should have your bank details, your payment details, and also your deliverables. And I mean, all every information that has to deal with that has to deal with this particular interaction between both parties. So it's usually in the contracts, and probably you submitted that to the financial agents of the company. And maybe after the assignment, maybe really, after shooting the assignment, you can send the invoice, maybe a day or two after shooting. And from there, and most most people I've worked with, usually have like, a 30 days, or 30 days, net period before payment, I would say almost I've worked with very few people that pay before 30 days, but most people usually have like that 30 days net period. And so during that period, during up to 30 days, you get to like, get your payments. And I've had I've had occasions in which in which clients then didn't pay after that. 30 days. And I'm very strict, I'm very strict with my payments, because I try to like keep the same energy in which the clients was disturbing me for work. I try to keep the same energy to disturb the clients for my payments. So So yeah, I mean, if you don't pay me after 30 days, I'll probably be sending like a reminder every every one week to you. Yeah. So it's usually it's usually goes like that. Well, yeah. Until payments is done. And I guess thats the end of that.

RR 53:10
do you think when you're working with these clients, do you feel they understand your vision? Especially people who haven't been to wherever you're going? Do you think they understand what you bring to them?

GP 53:27
To an extent, yes. And to an extent no, too. Because I would say I think shooting for other people is finding a way to put both their vision and yours together. So, I think that hopefully they already know this but still, they want to make sure that they are getting the kind of pictures they want. So it's kind of like up to you to, to probably instill a little bit of your own style in the in the photographs. And I mean, you just send me demos, and then they can just they just sit there I guess because it's looking nice.

RR 54:20
Um, has anyone ever asked you for—Sorry! that was my dog in the background… Has anyone ever asked you for a photograph that surprised you or to shoot something that surprised you?

GP 54:41
Almost, I think almost all assignments comes with it's one surprise To be honest, because you don't know the nature. I mean, it's always like different nature of assignments. I mean, every new experience kind of like differs from the from the face. So you're always surprised but, I think the most recent was, was *The Washington Post* reaching out for me

to shoot some, the parents of some victims of police brutality, in which their child was dead from in the hands of police. And so they wanted me to like visit some of their parents and photograph them. I think that was-- I wouldn't say shocking, but, I mean, I wasn't expecting an assignment of that nature and I wasn't used to. I'm not used to an assignment of that nature. I didn't end up doing it based on some other reasons. But well, yeah, I mean, when they reached out, I was quite shocked at first that

RR 55:53
Oh, interesting. That's actually a great segue. Has anyone ever asked you for an image that made you feel uncomfortable? or frustrated?

GP 56:02
No, no.

RR 56:05
All right, well, um, is there anything that I haven't asked that you think you want to tell me about or that feels relevant to this conversation? Is there something that I'm missing?

GP 56:21
Nothing. I'm just I'm just curious to hear more about your own project. To be very honest. I'm just curious to hear more about the nature of the of the old version of it's been going so far.

RR 56:33
Yeah, sure. Just a second. I'm going to turn off the recording so that it doesn't get lost. Okay, because

Appendix I
Interview with LO: August 6, 2021

Run time: 75:23
Years active as photographer: 3

RR 00:00
So, for the record, I've started recording this call and I need you to accept the fact that this call is being recorded.

LO 00:10
Okay.

RR 05:21
Okay, and how did you get started?

LO 05:25
Um, I started off when I was in my final year in the university, and I, you know, basically started off in photography, because I was studying biology at the time, BSc biology. But I didn't see career prospects in that because, you know, COVID, for instance, we are all looking at the west to get the vaccines. So what our, what our researchers doing? There aren't a lot of job opportunities for people in that space. So I was kind of looking for, you know, I want to provide for my family, I want to be gainfully employed. So that's when I started looking around, I tried a couple of things, but then also bumped into photography, because I had a friend that was already doing photography, photographing people for weddings, events and stuff. And, I saved up. I didn't borrow money to buy my first camera. I started taking pictures of weddings, events. So that's how I started, but at some point, I wasn't really, you know, I was getting bored of it, because I see myself as an intellectual person. So I get really bored really fast, the wedding was very repetitive, you know, it was basically the same thing. So I kind of started getting bored. And I'm like, What next? You know, like, and my mom asked me one question is, like, are you doing this photography and to get a proper job?

RR 07:06
You know, I want you to know, my mom asked me that, too.

LO 07:12
So, I started asking myself, like, really? Is this what I want to do with my life, you know, and that's when I bumped into documentary photography, and photojournalism. And, and I love it, you know, because every story is different. And my knowledge in biology also helps. Sometimes I work around health. And, you know, it helps me to kind of take a more informed aspect of the story, as opposed to someone that doesn't understand the health aspect of things. Um, so yeah, that's how I started documentary photography. And I stopped doing events and weddings, you know, I don't do them anymore. Yeah.

RR 07:57

So, tell me who are your regular clients?

LO 08:01
Um, my clients, basically, of two groups, mostly development organizations, slash non governmental organizations, and publications. And some of them publications I've shot for *New York Times*, numerous times. I would say I'm *New York Times* photog in Abuja region, you know, like, the whole north east and stuff. I've also shot for *Bloomberg*. And a lot of times as well. I've shot for *CNN*, I've shot for *Financial Times*. Then for NGOs. I've shot for a lot of NGOs, UNICEF, World Food Program, Sightsavers…which others? USAID, Global Citizen. A lot of them is on my website. Yeah. So a lot of them so yeah.

RR 09:11
So, tell me, do you think photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

LO 09:18
I think is a bit of both. And why I look at it that way is… First of all, if you were to commission 2,3,4 photographers to tell a specific story, the pictures will come out differently. So, I think my pictures come out the way they do come out because of my own lived experiences and my own perspective to life. No matter how much people pretend that you know, this bias does not affect your work it still does. But I also think is about the story of the person you're photographing. And that's why for me, I tried to have conversation with the person. I don't do street photography. When I travel, like all the pictures I took in New York, when I was there, was on my phone. Unless I'm doing a story, that means I've spent more time to talk with the person and I know who the person is to an extent. So aside from just taking pictures, for beauty sake, I like to use my phone. For me, I think it's a bit of both in the sense that like, I tried to capture the person's story, based on what they have said, but I also know that my own lived experiences and biases also play a part in the final outputs I have.

RR
So do you think when you think about your own lived experiences and your output, do you think the nationality of a photographer plays a role? Like or depending on who they're photographing? How much do you think that changes the relationship to the subject?

LO
Um, I don't think nationality does so much. But I think race does a lot. Because you know, my wife is a British citizen, but she's still a Nigerian, she's still African, you know? So in that sense, if I'm to twist your question a little bit, I think I'll go towards more about race than nationality. And I think, yeah, race has a lot of it impact in terms of the output that people produce in their work. Because the rules are kind of different. So the way people photograph Black bodies is different from the way people photograph white bodies. You know, there are lots of... down to Google, like, if if I use my mostly called VPN, and it shows, I mean, Europe, for instance, the more data protection laws for people in Europe, you know, so obviously, we, there is this inequality that exists as a result of more, and I'm not blaming anyone for it, necessarily. Because I also think, you

know, Nigeria, I wouldn't talk for the whole of African countries. But I would say Nigeria, also don't do a lot enough to protect their own citizens. So you know, you can't photograph children, naked children in the West. But here, people do that, you know? Well, I think there is a lot of down, my wife, I'm using my wife as an example, because she's a Nigerian, but she lived all her life in the UK. She has only been in Nigeria for like two years. And she had a lot of bias about, you know, how Nigerians live despite growing in a predominantly Nigerian family in the UK, she still had this perception of what Nigeria is from the Western perspective. So what this means is, you know, that there is already a pre-designed idea of what Africa is. So people, or mostly Western people would also take pictures based on that standard. And it's not just white people doing this. It's also our own people doing it, because we learned photojournalism from, you know, the people I admire in photography also, like from the west. So what are they doing? How are they doing it? You know, so all those things can really contribute. So I think yeah, it has... race has a lot of impact on how we process stories and present pictures, you know, so the way Yeah, I already said that. Yeah, yeah.

RR 14:18
Do you have personal work that differs from paid assignments?

LO 14:26
Um, no, not really. At all times, I am grateful to be you know, to be a photojournalist at this time, because there is more flexibility in me being myself. Most of the editors that hire me, literally hire me based on like, I saw your personal work, you know, I would want you to replicate similar style. So basically, I have a style. If you don't want my style, then you shouldn't hire me. My personal stories are very, very similar to the work I do for clients.

But the only work that is different is NGO work. So that's why I don't like to call myself like an NGO photographer. Because the way NGOs are approach their story is different, because most of the time they are trying to raise money. So there are typical pictures that they would use for those type of things. But I'm more into.. I enjoy the story. I do more with publications because it's more objective and more more expository, if that makes sense. So yeah, yes. Because I've been on both sides of that too, right?. Understand?

RR
Do you think there are, you know, for someone like you, who has a lot of experience working with large scale Western media, right, marquee publications? Do you think there are stories or people or places that are consistently overlooked by Western media?

LO
Um, yes, and no. Because you know, no matter how we look at it, media is business. Journalism is business, someone is investing money, you know, in this publication to stay alive, because people are subscribing or buying their papers. So once there is a capitalism network behind everything, I think it will always tilt to one direction. So for instance, globally, the story of Nigeria, would hinge around terrorism, Boko Haram it will hinge around hunger, you know, like, stories in Congo would hinge around war, or, ethnic

fights around gold or whatever. So I think there are stories that will come out of Nigeria, and people who want to read it, like because they, it's not the type of perception they have of Nigeria.

It's down to this whole marketing stuff, right? So as a photojournalist, for instance, or a documentary photographer, I know that if I do a story around Boko Haram, it will have global acceptance, so people will be more interested, if I do story around how rich Nigeria is, maybe people are not so interested in that, you know, or if I want to do story around how our big musicians? People don't want to see that. You know, because this is different from the whole idea--from what the readership would want to read, You get me? So I think those inequalities will be there.

For instance, the *New York Times Magazine*, we have our own publications and newspaper in Nigeria, why are we not producing stories from New York? So there is already a huge inequality that goes back to years and years of advancement that happened. And then also colonialism that also set back this region. So that inequality is there, but I understand how it works, because it's basically supply and demand, really. So if, for instance, *New York Times* is producing stories that most of, most of the Western readers or the subscribers can't relate to, then they will start losing subscribers. For me, that's what I think. There are lots of stories that are that are being neglected here.

But I also think, like for me, I didn't say why I started photography. I also started documentary photography, because, you know, I wanted to use my pictures to talk about issues. So already that thematic area itself puts me in a place where I'm doing stuff that already the Western media wants to talk about, because most of the things they talk about is the negative stuff. I'm interested in this part because I'm frustrated with everything that is going on. So for me, I feel like the only way I can speak or the only way I can solve this situation is probably using my camera to tell the stories. I feel especially the positive stories are usually overlooked. But I also think it's because you know, I've been to London and people are asking me "Oh, you guys have washing machines-- washing machines in Nigeria?" People are surprised that I'm using an iPhone. I'm also careful with like, oh, talking about positive stories. I'm also careful with, you know, like the Wakanda story, for instance, you don't need to make Africa look more oriental or whatever. Like, don't make it like, it's so powerful. They have this special, you get me like, just leave it how it is. You know, and it's very difficult for the West do. Yeah?

RR
Yes. Tell me a little bit about the media that you read or view or listen to that feels like most relevant to your life in Abuja, what feels authentic in terms of your news that you're consuming?

LO
In terms of Western media?

RR 20:59
No. Really, whatever. I'm interested in what you feel like is authentically representing.

LO 21:08
I don't think there's anyone that can truly represent fully because it's all about interest. You know, that's why i don't think…so i read a variety of news. So for instance, something is happening in Nigeria, I look at the local media as well, but they all have their own biases. You get me so if like, for instance, the Palestinian Israeli problem, or war going on, if you read news from *Al Jazeera* is different from news from like *CNN*, you get me. So I think, no matter how objective, so I try to get a balance of both, if that makes sense. So if is something about something I want to read the local media from that place--How they would say it themselves? So yeah, I don't I don't really trust fully any publication. I just know that they are saying their own perspective, or they are being as objective as they can be. But they also are speaking from a specific point of view. So I would want to look at that side and look at the other side. That is not so that has more bias to that part. So yes, I get a variety from the news. It differs. So if I'm talking about news in America, you know, it's different news in Nigeria is I don't have any specific news media. Yeah, but I know I will not listen to *Fox News*, for instance, I know that stuff is messed up! But I I tried to get a mix of everything. Yeah. I hope I answered your question without answering it.

RR 23:02
No, no, this No, this is all very helpful! Okay. Are you engaged to any photographic community communities that are specifically Nigeria focused or Africa-focused?

LO 23:15
I'm with one--Africa Photojournalism Database. Well, quite frankly, I don't think there is much going on apart from you know, the whole creating a list of photographers from various African countries on their website. And sometimes they promote the work on World Press photos website. Then I'm also part of Diversify photo, which is like for BI-POC lens-based storytellers. But yeah, these spaces are basically just for more visibility. And I think it has helped because, you know, people used to claim "oh I want to do story in Nigeria, but I don't know where to find a Nigerian photographer". That's about it, or something like Google, but now there are databases that you can't say you don't know if you are in the photography space. So yeah, I think that's basically what it serves. But I've never really felt like that there is a real community. I've had disputes with clients sometimes and you know, in terms of rates and stuff, and the next one, one when they're giving it to someone else, and the person happily takes it because there is no union and there is no representation, you know, as a group, so obviously, I think there is that space. And I also understand like the ending capacity is different. Every ne there is no benchmark. So, so it's difficult to navigate. That's basically most of the spaces. I mean, it's just for visibility. And it's really helpful. Diversify photo is also very nice, because they share a lot. I've had my frustrations and I go on that platform and I vent and other colleagues from different parts of the world, you know, people of color in general, you know, give you a "we are with you". So it's really helpful. I feel like I have a community of people that I can always speak to. They are not necessarily Nigerians. Yeah.

RR 25:45

When you're working with Western media, do you feel like there's anything that gets lost between you and the picture editors, or the journalists that you're working with?

LO 25:59
I haven't had that experience myself, but I've had colleagues that, you know, they feel a story should have been told in a certain way. But personally, I've not heard because I'm going to definitely read, especially in stories where, I'm working with a writer from the publication, that is a staff writer. Most of the time, I've seen them report for my own personal experiences, they have reported based on what we experienced. But also I understand, and I've had some of them, tell me, "Hey, what do you think? This is what I'm going to write", but I've had colleagues that say, “Oh, this is not true. What you're saying, is not very representative of what happened.” And another thing that I think happens with everyone is, especially people from the west, is semantics-- the way you present. So, for instance, recently, a footballer, somewhere, he used to play for Barcelona, was asked recently, how was it playing with the Lionel Messi? And he said, “No, I didn't play with Lionel Messi. Lionel Messi played with me.” You get me? When he was in his prime Lionel Messi was a small boy, like, was looking up to him, and he was a global star. But then yeah, it means the same thing. But it doesn't *really* mean the same thing. It’s like saying that my dad looks like me. But, its more true that *I look like* my dad. Yeah. So. And that's what I've seen in terms of storytelling. Just the semantics, and I can't really blame anyone for it. So basically, that's what I've seen. But yeah, I've not I've not been in a case where I feel like they took away a lot of facts, or they just tried to highlight a specific angle or whatever. It's interesting. From personal experience.

RR 28:16
Interesting that you mentioned semantics, because the next question is, do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison for an unfamiliar Western audience? Um, do you navigate that space for them?

LO 28:29
It depends. I feel like my pictures… First of all, I try to take pictures of people in a dignified way. So first of all, at least at this time, we're having more empowered Africans shown in Western media. That's why it's the situation being very difficult or sad. So I try as much as I can to take pictures of people in a dignified way. I wouldn't take picture of a child that is naked or that has flies on his face, you know, I would just ignore it totally, you know, then there are some pictures, I feel terrible about that. I feel it's not relevant for the story. Or maybe let's say I'm photographing and someone dies, I probably wouldn't take the picture of the dead person. I can just take a picture of the coffin with someone’s hands, you know? So I'm in a place where I watch the type of content I release. So whichever way I try as much as I can to represent the people I photograph in a very dignified way.

But in the end, there are so many layers to this stuff. I only contribute in terms of pictures. There is always there is also a writer, that is going to write the story and prioritize who is the primary characters. who is the secondary character, and this decides what pictures who will flow, you get me. And then you have the editor that also says,

“Okay, this is the, the aspect of story that we are going to show.” There are multi-level layers with it. So I can't in my own capacity… I try as much as I can to show more of what the reality is, but also showing that these people are human beings, and that you can relate with them. There is not much difference there. They're just victim of circumstances. And, you know, that recently, there has been a lot of floods in Germany. A lot of people that have been interviewed and say “We didn't expect this to happen in a rich country like Germany, we thought this happens in poor countries.” But climate change can happen to any country! So these are the types of things I try to show. It can be you. You can be a victim of war. Any of this can happen to anyone. So that's the way I try to approach my pictures.

RR
How do you share photography that you love, but doesn't fulfill the assignment? Or wasn't part of a paid shoot to begin with? How do I share pictures that you love or favorite images? But maybe they weren't relevant to the assignment? So you didn't send them? Or you shot them separately? Like, maybe you saw something on your way? And it's not relevant? How do you showcase your photography with the world?

LO
Um, primarily through social media, Instagram. My Instagram is linked to my Facebook. So when I post on Instagram, it goes on Facebook as well. Um, then for work, I don't share single random images on my website. So most of the pictures on my websites are usually part of a series or like part of an assignment. Yeah, so primarily Instagram. Yeah, and my Facebook, I hardly use Twitter. Because it's, I think it's for text. So doesn't really interest me that much.

RR 32:15
Do you enter contests?

LO 32:18
Hardly. I hardly enter contests. I'm very terrible with applying for stuff . I feel contests sometimes doesn't really, I don't know how to put it like, I feel is too short a time for [inaudible], I don't know how to put it. I feel like, I need to develop more of my work than this. I don't care about the whole accolades. And the validation that comes with contests. Because, you know, I could apply for grants, I could apply for awards, I hardly do at the moment, because I kind of feel like I've not made the type of project that should be representative. Because the problem with these are awards is if it's very big, or you win it, everyone kind of tags you with that type of story. So I'm very careful with that. And then some of these contests, too, you know, the payments involved, and I'm not interested in paying. I'm just more interested in producing my work shown on my website and getting paid for assignments, I'm not really the contest type.

RR
Tell me, you sort of got you started to answer this question a little earlier in our conversation. But tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be?

LO
I think a lot of them, apart from the ones that are very exposed, because, for instance, in the US, you know, a lot of people are very local. In the US, they don't even know the continent that US is in? Before I came to the US, I knew how many states the US had, you know, people barely knew anything about Nigeria, they don't even know the languages that are spoken there. It might be colonialism, but it's also education. You know, I've had friends that are American citizens that say, "Hey, I don't want my kids to go school in the US for their primary school or so because they feel they don't teach much." You know, so, I think for, the media in the West is not really the local media, because there is a crop of people that listen to most of these globalized media platforms, but I think the local media is it's not really giving people the full picture. I remember I was in a taxi in New York, I was heading to Staten Island. And Uber driver, just say, "Hey, where are you from?" I think he's from Pakistan or something. But he's living in the US. And it's I said, "I'm from Nigeria." And he's like, "oh, Boko Haram!" That's what he said. I'm like, "okay, but that's not the only thing Nigeria is made of." But that's what they see Nigeria pop up on in terms of international media. And now, like, the representation of Nigeria is terrorism, fraud. What else? Crime, you know, this type of image of what Nigeria is, and I know Nigeria is way more than that. We have a lot of Nigerians that, you know, are doing a lot of positive things. We have criminals. It's true. But it's not. It's just one part of the story is a single story. I think a lot of people in the West does not really know. That's why my wife will be scared that she will die of malaria, for being a nurse. She's a Nigerian and she was terrified. I'm like, "if you would die of malaria, then all of us would have died off." When you have malaria in Nigeria, it's not a big deal. You just go to the drugstore and get malaria tablets, and you're fine. You know, but the Western media says 100 million…but what is killing in these people is really poverty. Because the medications are not--it's cheap for me --but for the average Nigerian that is in this 1000-1500 Naira is a lot of money. You get me. So that's what is really killing them, because the drugs are easily available, but it's expensive. So it's people that can afford it. So I think is not very representative of the realities of Nigeria. And it's not just Nigeria. When you watch the Western media, you see countries like Syria or countries like Ukraine, you know, you would think like, there is full blown war in those. Yeah, there is full blown war in Syria, but also there is life going on, you get me. I think the media is not really showing the whole part, they're just showing one part that will interest the global audience. I think it's not fully representative of the realities here.

RR 37:55
If you were to make the perfect image or series of images about life in Nigeria, what would it be,

LO 38:04
it would be a mix of a lot of things, it will be more sad than, than happy. You know, because that's my own personal experience and, and how I feel about Nigeria, and also about the type of pictures I take, because I focus on issues. So if things are good, I probably wouldn't be doing photography, I probably wouldn't be motivated enough to do

work in a very organized, typical, perfect country, if there's anything like that. So for me, it would be a mix of, you know, the hardship. To be a mix of the insecurity that is affecting some parts of the country. But it'd also be the richness of culture. Would also be the music, the art scene. It will be about the young people that are like myself. That's kind of what way to where we are without necessarily having any support from our government or our local environment, if that makes sense. So, for me, when I look at that, it inspires me because a lot of young people in other parts of life, I was at New York portfolio review. And most of the colleagues that I was with, probably studied photojournalism in school for four years in one of the best schools. I don't have that type of formal education apart from a course I did on New York at New York Institute of photography to study photojournalism. So I kind of see that resilience, that the hard work, that diligence. But I also see people that get into fraud, is real. A lot of people are into fraud like so when I, when people kind of like for instance, I'll give you an example. There was a time I did an assignment for *Bloomberg*. And they trusted me to give me their credit card. And I was confused, why did they trust me? To a white person or someone in the West, it's normal, they could do that. But for me, like, knowing that I knew a lot of people that are doing fraud and stuff, why did they still trust me to do that? So, um, I think it's a mix of everything. And I think that's the same way. Anybody that is realistic, well-traveled would tell the story of their own country. The US is not perfect, they have their own issues, as well. I saw a lot of homeless people in New York, I rarely see homeless people in Nigeria. It's also because of the culture not necessarily because of lack of poverty. But even when you are poor, you have someone who can let you live in their house. You have an uncle, an Auntie? So yeah, it would be, it would be a mix of a lot of things. the good, the bad, the ugly, but it wouldn't be perfect. I think it will be more sad. Because Nigeria is in a sad state at the moment. And that's my personal opinion, my own understanding of the things I've seen. It's going to be 30% 20% 25%. Good. And 70%. Bad.

RR 41:55
Thinking of the editors that you work with most frequently.

LO
Yeah.

RR
To the best of your knowledge. Have they ever visited Nigeria?

LO 42:06
Um, no, rarely, rarely, they rarely they haven't. Because photo editors mostly work in front of a computer. So they hire the photographer, and then the photographer is matched with a writer that is from that publication, so they rarely need to travel. But like, you are the eyes on the ground. You know, so? Yeah, they hardly travel they usually based in, the London office or new York office or something. Yeah.

RR 42:46
And do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

LO 42:52
I don't think they have the full picture, but also they read stories. But primarily, the editors I have worked with, kind of utilize my own experience. You know, they also ask me questions. So it's not like an instruction, "Go and do this!" No, the editors will usually give you advice. But there is a form of collaboration and respect between me and the editors, I've been very lucky, all the editors I have worked with are very sweet, and up to date, even if I'm not an assignment, I can reach out to them. You know, they are super nice. When I'm in London, or when I'm in New York, you know, they take me out to lunch, or dinner, or whatever. So I have a very good relationship with the editors, most of the editors I've worked with. The only people that I think gives problems sometimes is the NGOs. Because, you know, they have an idea, you know, they have to raise money. So whether or not is the reality, you have to find the minute parts of that environment and just show it so that they can raise the money they need to raise. And that's why--I work with NGOs--I need to work with them to, to pay my bills and to survive, but I try to find that balance. It's really more with NGOs. But I also have a lot of NGOs. I've worked with that want more realistic, more empowering stories. So yeah, so it's two ways. Yeah.

RR 44:37
Um, in your experience, how do you picture editors shaped the West view of Africa or Nigeria?

LO 44:47
They have immense power, especially with photography, because who the photo editor hires determines the type of pictures that person would capture So if a photo editor decides to hire a Western photographer to come and tell a story in let's say Nigeria or Africa, then it's likely that person's perspective. And understanding. And sometimes those persons probably would take the will not take the pictures considering the nuances of that story, if that makes sense. So photo editors are very, very powerful, because they can determine the image or the representation of a country of a continent on that publication, especially if they have a huge readership. So they're very, very powerful.

RR 45:50
Have you ever covered a story that's given more importance abroad than it was at home? Those give him more. So have you ever covered something for international media? Not Nigerian? It was given more play internationally than like, at home? Everyone's like, Who cares?

LO 46:11
Yeah, that's how it is almost the truth is, like, I've since I started working as a photojournalist, I've never been commissioned by a local publication. In fact, most local publications don't even hire photo journalists, they just pull pictures off Google and put it on their newspaper. So for me, I think journalism is almost dead in this region. Almost dead. There are a few people that are really trying, but also they don't have the resources to hire, they can't even pay my daily rate for photography. Who are people subscribing to their publications? You know, who will subscribe? You know, there is poverty, people

don't have, how much are people earning? Why would they pay for journalism, when they can get fake news or whatever, off social media or WhatsApp? You know, so, I think primarily when I'm photographing for Western media, I understand their audience is the West, so, most of the things that, I've documented isn't seen much as a problem locally, because we have too many problems to deal with. For instance, yeah, I have access to water, but there are lots of people that don't have access to water. And it's normal to them. If you say that, or if you say that some children are sitting on the floor to go to school to attend classes, it's pretty much normal for a lot of people. But in the West, there is protection for children. Regardless whether your parents are poor, there is social services. There is none here, so there are layers to this stuff. I understand the type of poverty or suffering people in the West are exposed to is very limited to the type of suffering and poverty people in Nigeria for instance are exposed to. For instance, my wife can't stand when you are killing a chicken but she likes to eat chicken. But in the West they are protected from all this stuff. You just see chicken frozen packaged, But it was it was a live chicken that was killed. But here, I started killing chicken when I was small. As a baby, I would see when they will kill a chicken, I will see the blood. It was normal. So I yeah, I think a lot of the stories that the West, that goes that bothers in the West. Sometimes it's pretty much normal here because we've seen too many suffering, that we've become numb, you know, to that type of suffering. You know, now children are getting kidnapped from schools. People are not worried anymore. We've seen too many of it. If there was to be an auto crash in New York, for instance, it would be a news. It's not news anymore in Nigeria. It's almost it happens is what it is. You get what I mean. So yeah, it's happened a lot but I understand is as a result of this people, the West being so protected, or living in a country where there are laws and, you know, there is some level of protection, whereas here there isn't, you can just bump into anything. Yeah.

RR 50:17
Tell me about your relationships and interactions with the people that you've photograph. How do you gain access with people?

LO 50:27
Um, if it's for NGO, the NGO does their stuff because they're already working in the community. So they have their staff or their contacts person that would sort that out. I would have case studies to understand what their story is based on what the organization has provided. Then when I get to the field, I try to have a conversation. I kind of interview them first, just the chit chat, understanding what their work is. What they are doing. And also making sure that there is informed consent-that they are happy to be photographed and they understand how their pictures will be used. From my own end, as well, because it would also impact the outputs in the work. It also impacts how the pictures will pan out.

If it's for publications, there is usually the fixer, that would kind of connect us and we start having this conversation. And you know, we get there by [inaudible]. It's basically having a conversation, introducing yourself, being real. Sometimes I don't speak the local language, because I'm Ebo by tribe. But sometimes I most times I work in the north, which is predominantly Hausas and Fulanis. And I don't know how to speak the

language. So I usually have, a local person that can translate. But they know I'm a Nigerian, so there is that openness to an extent. But yeah, I try to have a conversation, and I try to make you understand why what I'm doing is important. So if it's for an NGO, I will tell you, "With your stories, people would be able to support more for you to get the kind of support you're getting. Right? You got this thing free, right? With this, this NGO is able to get this money because they tell stories of people like you." But I also make it clear that whether or not you approve, it won't stop the kind of benefits you get. Then if it's for publication, it's more about let the world know what's going on. Most times, when I explain that, you know, things are fine, and they open up. But I think primarily it's because they can see through. I'm very open and they can see I'm real. They also see me as someone that is like part of them just because I'm a Nigerian. I think there are layers to being an insider or an outsider, you know, I'm Ebo, so being seen as an insider in terms of Ebo people. But then there is also a level of acceptance, I would get it from working with people in the not. Yeah.

RR 53:39
Has there ever been a time when you were working? That you really didn't fit in? and gaining access was hard?

LO 53:48
Um, no, hardly, because, you know, money is involved for every single day I'm on the trip. I'm being paid my daily rate. So usually, if it's an NGO, they would have done the groundwork. They're sure that I'm not that wasting my time. You know, because they will pay me if they don't do the ground work well. For publications, it can i happen. Because publication is not really doing anything for you. They are not giving you money or any form of support, because this is unethical. So I've been in places where I'm doing story and I have to leave a day before because, you know, the confusion was coming up, you know, and that was in like in the Niger Delta, and they were, you know, the people I was photographing, were okay. They understood what I was doing. But then every single day, someone from another compound comes into their house to say, "who are these people with camera?" I'm not photographing you--you have no business with this. But because it's an oil company region, people are so sensitive that once they see a new face, they assume that money is exchanging hands. So whether or not is your compound or not, they want to know "Who are these people? What is happening?" It's really rare. I don't rush the process. So I try to make it very clear, and make you understand what I'm doing. I make it clear, I'm not giving you anything. You know, I'm just basically trying to tell the story. So if you're not into it, it's fine. I would respect that I'll find someone else. So yeah, it rarely happens. I think if you do your groundwork well, and you communicate clearly, and you're an honest person, or you're with a trusted face from the community, it gives you more credibility.

RR 56:00
Do Western media organizations value local photographers?

LO 56:06
Um, I can't speak for everyone, but all the Western media publications I've worked with value me. Even when I work with the writers, it's like working with my colleague, basically. And I've seen that play out. I've heard stories of people that said that they were kind of a bit brought down, kind of, the writer saying, "Oh, that's my photographer." I've never experienced that. But I think if it happens, I'm going to put you out, I'm going to explain how it works to you so that you understand. And I think also is because I'm very exposed, so I understand what is what is at play at all time. So, I think for me, for publications I've worked with, I think I'm valued, and I'm respected. But I also think, you know, respect is also like, can be as a result of your branding. Not all white photographers are respected the same way. Some have more, a bigger audience, some have a bigger brand. I understand all these things are at play, but I never feel disrespected, apart from the fact that I don't feel disrespected easily as a person because, like, I know who I am. So it's hard for me to feel disrespected. But if they cross a line, I make it clear, “Hey, you shouldn't do this.” You know, I've never had that. Most of the writers I have worked with most of the editors, there has been 100% respect for my time. And for my skill set. Yeah.

RR 58:04
Are you paid fairly for your work?

LO 58:07
Yes, I think I'm paid fairly. For my work, because some publications have a set rates for their photographers, so I can't really debate that. And then some you negotiate. But yeah, I think I'm paid fairly. Because I, the thing is, I'm in a global network, so I could easily chat with someone in the USA . "You work for this publication? How much do they pay you?" So most of the time it's usually the same stuff. So I think, maybe is because they know, I don't know, or they just offer it flat. So everyone, but I've also seen people say that they were paid peanuts. I would never be that person, though. You know? I'm always paid fairly for my work. where it gets a bit tricky is with NGOs. Because, you know, they can tweak the budget. And it's basically based on your own negotiation, you know? But if you don't pay me fairly, I wouldn't do the job. You know, you find someone else do it. Yeah.

RR 59:21
Um, you talked before about how much power picture editors have. Yeah. Have you worked with any picture editors who really get it? Like, who were you had a great experience working with?

LO 59:35
All the photo editors I have worked with, they, collaborate with me if that makes sense. Most of the photo editors I work with in publications, they don't even write a shot list or they just tell you get a variety of shots, but they trust your vision and how you process spaces and stories. So honestly, I think I've been lucky. All the editors have worked with want to once wants you to be yourself and capture the story, the way you see it.

RR 1:00:14
How do you communicate with most of the picture editors you work with?

LO 1:00:19
Usually email, but sometimes for quick interaction we use WhatsApp, or Signal.

RR 1:00:29
and how did you initially get connected to them?

LO 1:00:33
I don't know, sometimes I don't even get to ask. But I think, you know, I'm visible as a photographer photojournalist in this region, once you type in on Google that you're looking unlikely going to pop up. So my SEO is good, but I think primarily, because I have attended and a lot of portfolio reviews. You know, like the New York portfolio review, I met a lot of editors from different places. And, you know, they passed on my name to other publications, you know, it's a is a close-knit network. I think it's usually from this networks, attending these portfolio reviews. I've also attended Foundry portfolio review and workshop. In all these places, you get to meet someone that knows someone and someone. And then also the photo editors also have lists where they go to look for photographers. And there are lots of platforms as well, where there are photographers, platforms like Visura. Like, Blink, you know, there are lots of them. And I'm, I'm present in most of these spaces. Yes, I think and then recommendation also. And sometimes these photo editors also read other publications. So if they see my pictures, in *New York Times*, they can reach out to me if they want to do another stuff, because they liked the way I photographed. Yeah, others could be recommendation from other photographers. Sometimes I've recommended photographers in other countries, I've had editors I worked with in Nigeria saying, "Oh, do you know, photographers in Ghana? Blah, blah, blah." And I recommend some people I know as well. So yeah, I think those are like the primary ways you get visible and be hired by these editors.

RR 1:02:38
Do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

LO 1:02:41
Yes. Yeah, most people I photograph, I get their names. But if the picture is not about the person, that I wouldn't bother about the name. So let's say they are in a group or in a crowd of people. But the focal person that I'm photographing, I need the name, the age and information because I usually have to embed the caption in my metadata. So if you don't have that information, then you don't have anything to write in the metadata.

RR 1:03:15
Does Western media use those names when they run the photos?

LO 1:03:20
Yes, yes, they do. Yeah, they do most of the time. But in the end, the editor would, you know would be the ones to, choose how to write. They won't automatically use the exact

description you gave, they will have to write it in a way that it would match the what the story is about.

RR 1:03:50
Are there certain times of year or events when Western media has a bigger appetite for imagery from Nigeria, certain events for you know that Bloomberg is going to call or New York Times is going to call because something's going on?

LO 1:04:06
Elections! Elections is one interesting time, I think because Nigeria is like, you know, the largest democracies in the region. So elections are usually very interesting for publications to cover. Other stuff is when there is a… I think elections then other things it's basically how it happens and how interesting it could be. If it's other things could be specific stories around specific things, but I think election is one moment, you know, okay, you know, there is likely going to be a lot of media presence. Yeah.

RR 1:05:01
How often do you turn down assignments?

LO 1:05:05
No, not very often, because I don't, I don't get a lot of assignments. I get a lot of assignments to be honest, like, compared to my colleagues in Nigeria, because there's only so much stories that this Western media can really tell about Nigeria, you know? I hardly turn down assignments, unless I have another assignment I'm doing, so I can't do both. But yeah, I hardly turn down assignments, but I've also turned down assignments because of rates, especially with some NGOs. When their rates are not so good, I clearly tell you, "Hey, I can't work with this rate I'm sorry. Find someone else." I rather stay at home, than work at a rate that doesn't make sense to me, a rate that doesn't match my experience and my output. Yeah.

RR 1:06:09
Tell me about your work process with editors from initial contact to like furnace or new assignment to payment. What does that what does that timeline? How does it go?

LO 1:06:23
Um, it varies, depending on publication and editor. But basically, you know, they write you an email saying, Hey, are you available for an assignment? You know, they give you an idea of what the story's about, tell you the area where the story would happen. Then if you're interested or available then you reply, maybe at that time, they also email in other photographers that they have worked with in the region, they reply, I'm available, blah, blah, blah, then they say okay, then they give you more information about what the story would be and give you more concrete detail about your travel, you know, who you need to connect with. Sometimes they would want to discuss the brief with you. Well, yeah, like, after that you do the assignment. They stay in contact, sometimes every day, they will say, Well, you know, can I see some of the pictures you took? I usually send like a contact sheet showing the type of pictures I've captured. Then when you're done with the

assignment, you get back, you edit, you know, put your caption material, upload and send. Then once they confirm receipt, I'm talking about my own process. Once they confirm receipt, I send my invoice. *New York Times* is the sweetest in terms of paying freelancers because they have a platform you know that is very automatic. So I don't even need to you know send an invoice directly to my editor I just am signed up on a platform I just put in my information and you'll be seeing your invoice move usually New York Times doesn't wait for more than one week and I get my payment then for some publications based on based on the contract, you know, it will determine how long I've worked for a publication that paid me 90 days. Yeah, so you literally forget you do earn that money. Then some but like the basic typical is 30 days usually some of them pay in 30 days. I've worked with one in France that pays for for 45 days. But the *New York Times* is the sweetest I love working for *New York Times* they they value they value their freelancers a lot yeah, *New York Times* they value their freelancers a lot

RR 1:09:09
When you're working let's talk about the times then since the you had such a good experience there when you're working on assignments for them. Where is your influence and your vision most felt?

LO 1:09:24
Where is what?

RR 1:09:25
Your influence or your vision is it in the initial conversations is that in the editing process…Tell me sort of where you feel like you have the strongest voice as to how the assignment will go.

LO 1:09:39
It's in my pictures the pictures I produce you know? I think that's where my, you know, the type of pictures I choose to include in my edit. Because I there is no way I will file all the pictures I shot. So, the pictures I choose to include, which ones I choose to exclude. And then the final decision maker is basically the editor that chooses what runs and what doesn't. But I think me as a photographer, I produce the raw materials that that is needed for, for anything to be done, visually.

RR 1:10:29
When picture editors talk to you about what they're looking for, do any themes come up frequently?

LO 1:10:38
This, the theme that comes up frequently is editors want to see human connection. I mean, that's what brings pictures to life. They want to see you capture some emotions, to capture real moments. I think that most of the editors I have worked with are very progressive, so they are not there saying, capture a suffering child or whatever. I've never had that before. The editors I work with, they just want you to capture the story in a very authentic way. But not just authentic, that is just typical. If it's typical, then there is

nothing new. They want you to capture things as they unfold or things that pushes the story forward. And this is things that are usually candid, not posed, and things that have an emotional context to it.

RR 1:11:48
Okay, is there anything, I didn't ask that you want to tell me about your experience working with Western media? Or the way you feel the West thinks about imagery from Nigeria and the narrative surrounding Nigeria? Is there anything I missed?

LO 1:12:07
No, I can't, I can't think of anything. I can't think of anything. But yeah, I think things are better now. Some years back, you will hardly see local photographers in *New York Times* or something like that, or in any of these publications. But the truth also remains that there are some big projects and they will still bring in western photographers. And honestly, I don't think there's anything wrong with it. Because even the Western photographers that are bringing in are people I admire, like they have way better skills set than I do. So there has been a lot of arguments around white people shouldn't come to Africa to take pictures. You know, I think that's, I think is rubbish. Personally speaking, I think white people anybody should be able to tell story anywhere. But the ethics or the rules that we play by in the West, let us use it also in Africa, even if the laws are not there to protect us. So that's, that's basically what I think. I think we need different views. You know, I wouldn't be comfortable with people in the North saying, "Oh, we don't want an Ibo person to come here to take pictures. " It makes no sense. Because really, how many how many people from the north you know, are photojournalists or documentary photographers, you know, so I am not one of the people that think white people shouldn't come to Africa to tell stories, I feel anyone should go to anywhere to tell stories, I feel Nigerians should be hired to go to the west to tell stories, you know, but I think we should all be human beings. And you know, get educated about the people we are photographing, know what is their cultural norms. Playing against rules in ethics, like othering, you know, making Africans look like the others, you know, like white, others. Understanding that the realities are different, but survival is the same everywhere. Every living thing anywhere in the world primarily wants to eat, mate, and have a shelter. These three basic needs is the same anywhere. I think anybody should be able to tell stories anywhere. But you know, they should be educated on the topic they are working on. And I understand when sometimes, but I will also want to see the Western media take more risk, or even commercial clients also take more risk with like, local photographers. You know, with, like their big projects, that has big budget, I would want to see that. But I can understand when they're done, because sometimes, commercial clients also think about the, the commercial value the photographer brings. So for instance, I'm bidding for a job. I have 10,000 followers, for instance, and most of my followers are primarily Nigerians, and a white Western photographer, in let's say New York, has 2 million followers, and most of his clients are in the West. And the photography work is for, let's say, [inaudible]. How many? Where would the clients come from? Where would the customers come? So when you think about it from a very capitalistic, very commercial point of view, you can understand why it's a good business decision? Well, you know, I'm also grateful to a lot of editors, or commissioning staff that are taking risks with local

photographers to do this big project. And there isn't a better time to be a photographer than now.

RR
One more follow up, you sort of answered this before, but I'd love to just get real specific. Yeah, said, you know, it's not that, you know, white photographers, Western photographers shouldn't be, shouldn't come to Africa to photograph and set we want them to play by the same rules that we've already established that, you know, Europe has sort of established. Tell me what those rules are. Tell me about those rules.

LO 1:17:19
So I mean, studying photojournalism, they're like basic ethics. I think sometimes those ethics does not reflect our own realities. That's a conversation for another day. because growing up, I was taught A is for Apple, and in Nigeria, Apple is literally an elitist fruit. Like it's not very common, so why can't we find like, I didn't see an apple physically, until I was in like, secondary school. But I've been learning A is for Apple from, you know, from a very young age. And this is because our curriculum is designed by the West, we copy, everything from the west, I pronounce some words, like an American. I pronounce some words like British, you get me and I spell them as well.

So going back to your question, I think, already photojournalism itself is it was started. And the rules were designed by West, but haven't seen anyone that like for instance, let me give you an example. In photojournalism, they will say, "Don't give people stuff." You know, because it's unethical. But it's difficult to photograph people that are in need, you know, and you can't do anything for them. I've done stories that are very touching. And I felt like these were my Auntie's. I provide for my mom. I have the culture of providing for extended family. One of my cousins could just call me up and say, "Please, I need money for this, blah, blah, blah," if I have it, I'll give them. Then you're doing a story where someone is stranded, and that person speaks your language. You're done taking pictures and stuff. Why can't I just give them a little stuff to get back home? You get what I mean? Like, I don't believe you should do that before you take the picture because it will now seem like they're performing for you. Or it will look like they are now actors. You don't want to influence that. You know, but why can't I do that? The West wouldn't do that, but social protection for everyone in the West. Children have you know whether or not your parents stable or not? There is social services. People there, people get unemployment benefits. We don't have that here. Some of those rules are like how you photograph children. Using the Ebola crisis? How many dead bodies did we see in the Western media?

And a lot of people died of COVID in the West? Well, Ebola, for instance, you start seeing a lot of black dead bodies. So this is common sense, you made these rules you think people should be, you know, there should be protection for people bla bla, bla, don't do what you wouldn't do in the West in Nigeria! How many times have you seen a random child in, in the streets of New York. If I start taking picture of the child and you tell someone else to take a picture of you showing the children, like the picture like that

you took, you get what I mean? Like, these are like, I was on assignment for an organization. And we're in a village in an African country, I don't want to mention the country, because I've done a lot of work with that organization in that country. So if I mentioned it, they would likely know. And we were traveling down into some communities, and we got to a place. And we stopped for a break, you know, to just grab coffee and stuff when we set up stuff. And some of the children from the community came. And these guys white guys, basically, they gave doughnuts to the children and say, "Hey, [name redacted] come and take a picture of us!" I didn't want to say, "No." I didn't want to because these people hired me as a photographer to be there in the first place. So I don't want to embarrass them. So I just took the pictures, but they never saw it. I never give them those pictures. But it's things like this. If you saw a child in New York, will you hand him over food? And take a picture with it? No. You know, like, so. So that's basically what I'm saying. Like those things. Okay. For instance, there are tribal people in some, in some places in Nigeria, other places where women don't wear bra. Women just go bare chested, it's their culture. So why would you take those pictures and present those pictures to a Western audience? Where it's not normal for people to show their breast? Why would you take a picture of a small child that is underage and unclad? Then you're publishing it? Why do you even need to take the picture in the first place? You get what I mean, so it's just this common sense. If you see this person as a human being equal to you, then you should treat them the same way you would treat your child. It's basically that simple. You get me? So when I want to take pictures of people, I ask myself, if this was my child, if this was my mom, if this was my sister, how would I want her to be photographed? That doesn't mean I have to lie. That doesn't mean I have to show that things are perfect when they are not. But I have to care. Are their breasts showing? Are their breasts really relevant to the story? Are they sitting properly? Are the flies on their faces? You know, are they too exposed? These are common sense things that I see white photographers or Western photographers do in the West, because there are consequences if you don't do it. You know, there will be consequences. But then you come to Nigeria--(off camera) who is that? Sorry, I'm coming I'm in a meeting. –(returning to interview)--Yeah. So someone was knocking at the house. So yeah, that's basically what I'm saying. Those rules that we respect in the West --just apply it here, whether or not there are legislations and protections for those people. Tell your story but also don't try to overly sensationalize.

You know, it's not a big deal. I saw a story that was saying Africans are making a spiky hairstyle to teach people about Coronavirus from *The Guardian*, I'm telling you, like a hairstyle that I grew up before I knew I didn't like Corona. But people were making this. So then they say people are making it to inform people about COVID. Why do you think, you know, Africa needs to be special? Just what it is? You know, why do you need to show it to them? Why do you think it needs to be exotic? You get what I mean? Yeah, yeah, that's just what I'm saying. Anybody can tell stories from anywhere, I like to see different perspectives. I like to see when how white people and really is what it is, you know, the kind of pictures you get also, is as a result of how you perceive the people you're photographing. We need more white people to be educated on the nuances of the type of story they are doing. And to be educated that they don't need to photograph like this. And I'm sure there are lots and lots of white Western photographers that are like, my

mentors. And I look at their work. And I'm like, this is lovely. And some of them is like, [name redacted] you know, actually give a, there are lots of them, that know what they're doing. And I'm learning a lot of stuff from them. You know? So yeah, the ethics doesn't change. Just copy and paste. Do the same thing.. Your trade. You studied it in school, right? Do it the same? Yeah.

RR
Thank you very much. Yeah. And that's really all I have for you. This has been a great conversation. I am happy if you're interested. Once the thesis is complete, I am happy to share it with you.

LO
Yeah, please do share with me.

Appendix J
Interview with NP: August 24, 2021

Run time: 66:28
Years active as photographer: 5

RR 00:00
I do have to tell you, I have, as of this moment recording this call, I need to be able to record it so that I can do the analysis later. But I also need your approval.

NP 00:11
No problem.

RR 03:57
Okay. So can you tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing?

NP 04:05
Okay, I think I started professionally in 2016. Like October 2016, October, November 2016. About then... then I wasn't really, really like a documentary photography. Because where I come from, like, I'm from the south part of Nigeria. Where I come from a lot of people are not able to see photography, they are not into documentary photography it's just always wedding portrait and events, you understand. So half of what I could actually look up to like your What do you guys do and all of that. And at that point in time internet was quite pricey. So I wouldn't have used YouTube to learn a few things. I realized that I have great affinity to the street. I'm always drawn to street to photograph. And maybe because I used to be in the evangelism team of my church, I miss a lot of people. I thought I had a camera in my hand, so I was like, "What if I actually tell the stories of these people?" So that's how I started 2016. So by 2017 a few of my images were selected for an exhibition at Abuja international photo festival. So I think that was like the, the turning point in all of this, because having people that do not know you, they are not family. They are not your parents. And saying that your work is good. And they connect to your work, not just because they know you but because your work is good. That was like a turning point for me. And I realized that maybe I could do this for a living and not just jump to weddings and do other stuff here. So that is that.

RR 06:13
Yes, that's actually very similar to how I got started. I started with weddings and those kinds of things. And almost everyone I've talked to about this project has as well. Can you tell me which languages do you speak in addition to English?

NP 06:30
I'm telling you, with the very bad with it. So I think I can only communicate fluently in English. Maybe I know in Nigeria. So we have Pidgin I understand it just a little bit. Because I have actually lived in another part of Nigeria for like in Hausa a bit. Yeah. My local language here,

RR 07:03
which is your local language?

NP 07:08
Efik. Okay.

RR 07:10
Yeah, that one I don't know. How do you spell that? Just so I know. I am not familiar with that one. Is that E-F-I-K? Right?

NP 07:18
You got it.

RR 07:22
Okay. Yeah. I'm just asking everyone because you know, Nigeria, since there are so many local languages, you could go to North and really, you know, despite the fact that everyone is the same nationality, it's very different, right, in terms of language and conversation, between a photographer, people they're photographing. Okay, so do you think photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

NP 07:51
I believe in this, the story is that of the person in front of my camera. It's not mine. So basically, what I do, I don't photograph anybody I don't, I don't talk to. I've never photographed anybody, I don't know. Sometimes I would need like a translator to make the conversation easier. So if there are people Or maybe you understand pidgin English, or Yeah, I used Pidgin, and speak to them about what I want to achieve, and all of that, because I actually believe that, for my photographs to have the impact, I want--especially as a portrait photographer doing documentary work, I would actually--I believe that the strongest opportunities are created in people's moments of vulnerability. And it is not my duty, to make them vulnerable. It's my duty to actually have conversations with them that will actually bring them to that state. So this, I very strongly believe that stories are not mine. But there are sometimes you want to maybe give the person like a direction, kind of, but, I would say that if you if you do not listen to them, first, you actually give them the wrong direction. So you need to listen to them first. And then guide them in such a way that they will actually give you an impactful story. Not you coming with maybe a stereotype in your head, or these certain people behave a certain way. When you've not spoken to this person, you do not know this person, how they will want you to represent them. So for me, it's about representation. And it's not my story. It's always their story. I try as much as I can to make sure that I hear their story and find a way to visually represent what they're about. Not just what how they look and their physical appearances and all of that. But who they really are in my representation of them.

RR 10:04
Do you have personal work that differs from your paid assignments?

NP 10:12

When I started, I think I had a personal work that was different from my paid work. Because when you're starting, you don't have, you don't have a lot of personal work. So your portfolio is actually limited. But over time, I realized that people hire me for what I do. So when they, the gigs that I have, the projects I work on, is specifically the kind of projects I put out there. So I do work that represents what I stand for. Because as a person, as a photographer, I have my sense of the image. So I want to create this kind of work. And before I can make this kind of work, I need to create this kind of personal work. That's how I get it--so right now. And yes, they hire me to have this kind of personal work--but before when I started, [inaudible] because I didn't have a lot of personal work in my portfolio.

RR 11:18
And tell me a little bit, how do you treat--you're saying that your paid work now sort of follows your personal work, right? Because people see the work that you're doing, they hire you for that specifically? Is there any distinction between the personal work and the paid work? Are they different in any way in terms of where like the client voice? Or do you feel like those two things are always aligned?

NP 11:46
Most of the time the alliance, I don't want to cross. So if a client comes to me with a brief, this is what they want. And it doesn't sit well with what I stand for. I would politely decline. I'll tell them, I'm sorry, I will not be able to do that. I think I had a project one time. So we start coming to create some portraits of kids looking poor. But I'm not about adding to that narrative. So it was a lot of money. And I remember, it was like a few weeks, before my wedding, so I needed money--you understand. The money was good, but it was against what I believe in. So I told the person, I would not do it. She had to call me on the phone and said, "Did you just turn down the money?" And I had to clarify that I did not turn down the money. I only turned down the project. If you have another project that looks like this one, please don't let me know. I don't want to be a part of it. We don't align with those type of things. I want to do what you want, but I have--as a Black photographer and as a young photographer, I, it's my duty to represent my people well. So, once we have a clash in that representation, I think the job is not for me. I would politely say it's not for me. Because I would not do anything with the knowledge I have now, to add to what we're actually trying to battle against. The idea that people are represented not the way they are-- just to suit a certain narrative. So that's the only time that we have this issue because the real issues at the end of the day, so I'll just blindly say no, I wouldn't do it.

RR 13:56
Are there stories or people or places that are consistently overlooked or ignored by Western media and Western NGOs? Are there things you wish would get covered that don't?

NP 14:08
I think so. Let's start with the issue of water. So when you look at the people always feel that there are a lot of communities that Nigeria is okay with the level of whatever the

development we have. So we actually believe that, "Oh people are not suffering from waterborne diseases, or lack access to clean drinking water," but that's not true. The fact remains that we have over 90 million people don't have access to clean drinking water. So that's a lot and at this time, I don't see people talk about it. I don't see projects done about it. I actually have like, okay, I did a project, a personal project, that got some communities water--like two communities water. I crowdfunded on Twitter, and all of that. But after that, it showed me that there's a serious problem because other people from other communities started sending me messages, emails, asking when I could come to their community, and photograph so that just maybe, maybe they would have access to clean drinking water and all of that. So I realized that there's a lot to do, because the pictures and the videos they sent me, it's really [inaudible], but nobody's talking about it. The other day, they talked about the outbreak of cholera. But nobody's talking about the issue of drinking water. In the last couple of months, going past a year now with COVID-19, a lot of people don't have access to clean water, you could actually see that is a problem, even with rural medical centers, like all these clinics, in the rural communities. Most of these communities do not have access to clean water. It's difficult.

So when I look at it, I realized that there are things that are trendy things that maybe get more funding, or maybe [inaudible] accepted or it gets a lot of attention, and people like to support this kind of projects. That means we'll have more funding for. But there are other things like this water would affect everybody. So if a community does not have water, and they have a healthcare facility that does not have water, and in this same health care facility, where people are supposed to give birth, imagine what happens when they don't have clean water in the delivery rooms. Imagine what happens when you don't have clean water in the [surgical] theater. Imagine you don't have clean water for people to drink. So it's something that people don't talk about, and I really wish that more people could talk about it, I think I applied for a grant one time just to help me tell more stories about rural medical centers that don't have access to clean water. I didn't get it. I knew that. Though I did not get it, I've done crowdfunding on Twitter, or my Instagram page. That means I could do the same thing. But right now, I talked to a few people that could help and they said I can only register an NGO. So I tried, I wanted to start an NGO, it took a long time. Somebody said was like, you know, I don't make money from the NGO, it's just something I'm interested in. But then you might see people that are interested in maybe saying, "Tell me more these kind of stories." Yes, that would be fine. And apart from water-- it's like the major thing I think about like, I've been to 26 states in Nigeria. And I can tell you for sure that water is a problem.

RR 18:34
what media are you reading or watching or listening to that feels most reflective of your life that feels authentic to your experience on a daily basis?

NP 18:46
Oh, I tried to listen to podcasts more, I don't. I tried to cut myself off a lot of mainstream media and all of that. Because of mental health issues related to depression and [inaudible] underlie so I want to listen to podcasts that are curated. So maybe people that are knowledgeable in this specific genre, not necessarily photography by putting specific

subject matters that could just share, I listened to Akimbo by Seth Godin. I listened to they think the irresistible podcast our check real affinity via email to send you a list of the things I listen to. Yeah.

RR 19:55
Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are Nigeria-focused or African - ocused? Are you participating in any mentoring groups or those kinds of things?

NP 20:08
The only group I think I'm in is the African photojournalism database-- by World Press. Yeah, so that's, that's--- they do a lot of mentoring, finding people to mentor you many projects to work on. There are many of us have not been lucky enough to get a mentor from the platform, but yet I'm on that platform, too. The [inaudible] Nigeria, its difficult to get that kind of set up, that would help people. Just like me, personally, I have created like a platform that really [inaudible] on my Twitter my, my other newsletter, where I share the things I've learned over time, in my journey, to also help people that I mentor, young street and documentary photographers, so that they don't make the mistake that most of us did, especially when it comes to the stereotypes. So if you are trying to tell people that photographing poor looking people is not documentary photography, and we are not telling the younger ones that are coming into the industry. When they see the the pictures that are available everywhere, they just believe that that's what it's all about. So I think, if you have the kind of platforms that can actually help us tell more stories and give context to our stories, too--yes, that would fine. They have [inaudible] one that I could join... I am in that--the one by World Press.

RR 22:03
How often do you work with Western media or Western NGOs?

NP 22:12
Sometimes, once maybe twice a year. Most times it comes towards the end of the year.

RR 22:20
And is there anything that gets lost when you're talking to them? Right? Or when you're when you're talking to those clients, the western clients? Is there anything that you feel like you have to explain to them that they don't understand?

NP 22:35
The issue of representation. Like I've mentioned, that's like our biggest issue. For example, you want me to you have like an NGO, and you're trying to raise funds for malnourished kids. I don't really need to photograph them to look malnourished for them for you to use that photograph and get money or sponsors, or whatever it is. So it's about me trying to have that conversation about empathy, and pity-- that they are two different things. People have the idea that, “Oh, just give us a photograph that will make people look at them, and have pity for them.” But I'll volunteer to make a photograph that when you look at it, you have empathy, and compassion, not necessarily pity. If that communication--blah, blah--we're trying to get you on the same page, we are trying to do

the same thing. We all want to help these people. But it's just your way of doing it is not this other way. So I'm trying to make sure that yes, I know you want to help my people but I also want my people to be represented in such a way that their dignity is not ripped off them. [inaudible] between sympathy and empathy. [inaudible]

RR 24:17
Do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to the west? Are you telling the West--are you telling you know, an unfamiliar Western audience with life is like in in Lagos? Or you travel a lot in Nigeria, it sounds like elsewhere in Nigeria.

NP 24:40
Yeah. So I believe that I actually give a perspective to my stories. The people that follow me the people that actually digest my work. [inaudible] These people may not be able to come here, these people may not be able to visit here, it is important to represent the people here--so that they have, like a balanced view of the place, I shouldn't just focus on the negative, and leave the positive side, I shouldn't just focus on the things that everybody's talking about and leave the things that make them unique. So I try as much as I can to create displays that if you look at this picture, so because I have conversations, I like the stories to have a caption on my each of my photographs to give context to my photograph. So that you get to know the person or what the community's about. So you don't just say "Oh they are doing this kind in this kind of place." But I want to show people actually surviving and doing this.

RR 26:13
What does it mean to take on that role? That that's, that's kind of heavy, that feels important. Does it feel important to you?

NP 26:24
Everybody has a role to play. Some people say that pictures are just pictures. They are not just pictures. So I always tell people as a documentary photographer, my job is to add to the conversation. I must be able to add to the conversation that is happening all the time, I don't just want my pictures to be my picture, I want to say we are talking about climate change. I want my photographs, the project I work on to actually be something people can have a discussion over. I'm putting, like, one of the scientists is bringing their own paper when the people with the weather commission and being able to visually show you what are the effects of this thing. It's not easy, but it's something we should consciously do. Because we owe it to ourselves to add to this conversation, so that there'll be a balanced view to this thing. If you look at it, like, "Oh, I need to be this big, I need to maybe be in government, I need to have an office" before you can actually join the conversation, you might actually wait a lifetime, and that will not happen. It's just about doing your own thoughts in your own little corner and understanding that you are adding to what is happening in the world. So what better way for you to add than to give a context to any discussion that is happening? So maybe when you are long gone, your children are long gone, your grandchildren-- when they look at your work and be like, this is how we love our culture. Because what we do is to change the culture. The things the culture, we do, like, we try to change that culture. And it means that then just like

that, it takes time. So it is about us consciously putting out this kind of work, or this kind of content, putting out those kind of materials that will actually aid people to see things in a different light and thereby breeding a new culture. So that's how I look at it.

RR 28:57
how do you share photography that you love, but it doesn't fulfill the assignment? Or, you know, it might be something that you see on the way to your assignment? Is there a venue for that work? How do you share it?

NP 29:10
Well, I put it on my Instagram on my social media sites. So I just like yesterday, I did a story. I went to the National Stadium in Lagos because I'm currently working on a project an open project there. So as I was heading into the stadium, I saw a boy who was playing the guitar and singing, I'm like, in my head, I'm like, "What if I miss my subject?" Because I have someone I'm documenting--but if I go and come back, I won't find this boy again. What are the chances that I ever see him again, so I decided to go talk to him first. And so I shared that on my Insta today and you If you [inaudible], I look at it, like, the things that might not make, like maybe magazines but maybe if I want to make a book, it might not make the book, but I can actually shape like, my daily diary after I use my social media handles like my diary. So the things that appeal to me, I share them. The things, I want people to see my perspective. So I'm not trying to make an argument, I'm just trying to show you my perspective. When I'm, when you see the choices I make, you might actually get to understand why I made those kind of choices. So I spoke to him. We talked about how he started and all of that people actually donated to help him [inaudible], based on all of that, [inaudible] why I share this kind of work that might not make it too big. Because this needs to be told.

RR 31:03
Do you enter contests?

NP 31:06
Nope.

RR 31:09
Why not?

NP 31:14
Well, I think it's because I think the judges or the organizers of this contest should do more. I don't [inaudible] than they should do more, than just saying, you didn't make the the context of our program in our paragraph, maybe a collection of five images, to talk about sequencing. If it was the problem with the sequencing, all of a sudden, with the choice of photographs, you understand, we actually have an opportunity to learn in the process, not just use ego, and like, "Oh, you put all your work out there." But the question as to [inaudible]. This is the context. And this is really what you have done here. Can you show us more about, maybe we can help you with the sequencing, we can help you with editing down to the images that would tell a better story and all of that. I think that the

criticism is not helping me build. I don't want to do that. But if I actually find, maybe other than competition that will actually get back to helping us grow because that is the essence. It's not it's not like using the school stuff all the rest of you guys can go to hell. Pardon my English so we are used to, when we're growing up because like I said, For the rest of you guys, we don't care about you. But it doesn't necessarily mean that these people are starting the first official second and third are more intelligent than us. It might just be that last round, so I would actually love them maybe just help maybe a lot because there are a lot of people that register for it but also help so we have context for this thing. That's why I don't partake in it.

RR 33:38
Tell me what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be

NP 33:46
I'll give you a typical story. I think in 2017 there are about the US rapper J Cole came to Lagos and the concert was massive. [inaudible] that's how I knew how people feel about Nigeria. So in the online conversation you had comments like, "so do you guys have electricity? Do you have good sound equipment? Do you even have internet?" Once I read the comments, I realized that they actually believe that somehow somehow Nigeria is this is this jungle. That things... That things good things in life cannot be found there. And it goes down to the fact of that stereotype. [inaudible] enjoy the first class treatment. So they would fly them for a concert in Lagos-- fly them in private jets into Nigeria. And they would drive them from the airport in maybe 100 million Naira SUV with good security. They would sleep in a five-star hotel.

RR 35:41
Hey, can you hear me?

NP 35:46
Yeah can hear you? Yeah. Sleep in a five-star hotel. Eat quality food from great chefs. They drink expensive wine. The go to the best clubs-- nightclubs, you have all the beaches. And when they're about to leave Nigeria, they look for a slum. They ask somebody to show them a slum. They go to the slum. Take a picture of the slum, maybe [inaudible]. Then when they go back, they post the picture of the slum. None of the pictures of their expensive SUV that took them to the airport, not the picture of the private jet flew them to Nigeria, not a picture of the five-star hotel they slept in, their breakfast in bed. The beautiful sand beaches in Lagos. Do you get it? And also when our people travel abroad, they show the most beautiful part of New York. Nobody believes you went to New York. So you want to show yourself in Times Square where things are so beautiful. You know, to come back home, and show people in Lagos a picture of Times Square. So that's the problem.

RR 37:19
Yeah. If you were to make the perfect image or series of images about life in Nigeria, what would it be?

NP 37:29
Happy people. Happy people. We don't have the best facilities. We don't have the best government support. We don't have the best social amenities. The economy's not good. The health care is terrible, like right now I'm talking to medical doctors--who are on strike. It's a terrible situation. But then--the typical Nigerian is hopeful. They have so [inaudible] that sometimes you're afraid for them. We are happy. We are content. With the little they, they are content. I would want to show that resilient part of Nigeria and that they are happy. They will do their work with all diligence. They will give their best each time and they are happy doing it. So that would be a perfect portrayal of Nigeria. Happy people.

RR 38:40
Do you think Western viewers would see the same messages from those pictures? Do you think you know your average North American or European would see photographs of happy Nigerians and understand that sense that you're talking about that resilience, that strength?

NP 38:59
So that's where the kind of portraits you make, comes in. So if I make environmental portraits of these people, it will add more impact than just headshots of them. Alright, right. So if I go to a poor community and making an environmental portrait, you actually see that environment. The floor is dirty. [inaudible] They are living in poverty. But the person-- the eyes of the person is glowing. The smiles are genuine. You can understand that things are not going well with environmental portraits, but deep in their faces with you realize that they're not just being held down by their situation. Because there's a difference between posing a smile and people smiling genuinely. Nigerians are great when you tell them stories. They laugh loud. They're happy. Even when they don't know when, where-- dinner would come from. It doesn't actually stop them from being happy. So, I give context with the kind of photographs that I make. Instead of doing the headshots like I mentioned earlier, I'll do environmental portraits. And style of photography that always tells stories about it. I actually add text for context, too.

RR 40:19
I see... thinking of the clients that you work with most frequently-- the Western ones, have they ever visited Nigeria, to the best of your knowledge?

NP 40:35
Only one of the ones I've worked for have ever visited Nigeria. Only one.

RR 40:41
What about elsewhere in Sub-Saharan Africa? Do they have any Sub-Saharan African experience? Do you think?

NP 40:49

I'm not sure. Because when we have these conversations, we usually realize that they actually don't. [inaudible], they have just the general idea. They've not been on the ground.

RR 41:09
So do you think...go ahead...

NP 41:13
Most of them, that really want to do impactful work. Do actually try as much as they can either to come down, or actually have these conversations. That also have context, before they can know how to help the people. [inaudible]

RR 41:46
Do you think they understand what daily life looks like?

NP 41:54
They do not.

RR 41:59
Do you ever have to help them understand what's actually happening? Like, do they ever come in with ideas that you're on the phone? And they're like, here's what we need and you have to say, well, that's not really what's going on? Do you ever have conversations like that?

NP 42:12
Well yes. Besides the project, I talk about all of these things. I need to know what you are about. How you work with people. And I also need to know that people are...so when I work in these places, I have, like, I have my fixer who understands the people and all of that. So I'll work with the fixer first and figure out what's really going on before I can actually agree. Before now, earlier, I used to just take the job. But when I get on the ground, I realized that this is a different ballgame, right? So you dropped the plan, because like, this is not happening. I've learned that, I really need to have the conversation. You need to have [inaudible] You need to have who people visited this place. What are you really looking to achieve with this? Because there's always going to be something you want to achieve with whenever you want to use. Whether it's motion picture or just still photographs. So what is your end goal? What do you seek to achieve? Then I can actually figure out how I can help.

I really think, um, for my clients that worked best with me are the ones that I kind of consult with them. Not the ones who just come and hire me. I actually think that because it often makes the work easier. So, we get the kind of impact that we want, because I remember someone hiring me because I did a photo project on my Instagram. And we raised like 15 million Naira for a woman who was suffering from fibroids from the Instagram. So the people saw that and like, "Oh, so my pictures can raise money." So they wanted to hire me for it. But they had their own agency that was in charge of their media plan and all of that. So the agency [inaudible]. When we did, after the first day, we

went back to the hotel. The man that actually hired me, which was the owner of the NGO directly. When he looked through the pictures, he said this is not why he hired me. So, I had to explain to him that it is the people that you put someone like me, it is the agency that you put in charge of me that actually stopped me from creating In the work you hired me for. I was creating to feed their templates. So the man called the meeting the next morning and told the agency people to allow me to create the images I want to create because that was why he hired me in the first place. They say the first set of images is accurate. And better one I created because it was like a four-day kind of trip. At the end of the day, they realized that the ones I created, like me, had the most impact. More than the ones they created this template-- that I created for them with the template they came with. So I think that having those conversations that we can actually, because I as a photographer want to help you, my job is to help you, but I really need to know the full story. I need to be 'in'. I need to be submerged. To be able to see how best to help you not just stereotype kind of pictures or "this is how we do it." Most of the time, it doesn't work.

RR 46:15
Based on your conversations with NGOs and your Western clients, what do you think the West values most in Africa? And I use Africa in quotes there, right? Like, because of the sort of Western view of Africa as a country? Do you ever get a sense of what their looking for?

NP 46:41
I think what they value most... Unfortunately, is images that would... No. Okay, let me use this word...they always give aid to developing countries rather than do partnerships on projects that would help the developing countries. So when we are looking for images, they are looking for images speak to aid, not for the partnership. I think that is the problem.

RR 47:19
In your experience, how do picture editors shape the West view of Africa?

NP 47:28
They are like the final stop. Whatever you photograph goes through them. When the editor of a magazine or a journalist, you have a conversation like this--like me and you. Then they use some parts of the conversation that would suit what the person wants--not really in the context of what I said. I think that that's the thing . The editors they have a prescribed job to do. They are doing their job. So I think you hire them because they know you would deliver on that set job. But if we have more of them that wants to really do more, then they lose a few clients, of course they will, because we will actually fight that kind of stuff at first. But at the end of the day, they are the ones that--because I am doing a photo story--the person plucks out one piece. Because the photo story is not like a portfolio. A portfolio is your best set of images. But in the photo story, there are pictures that I'm not really pleasing as a photograph, but it adds to the narrative. But if the photo editor feels that is scrappy and picks another one, it gives a different context to the photograph.

RR 49:19
Interesting.

NP 49:20
So they have to find out stuff or whatever to create all these things in a particular way, because it changes the narrative. Because there's a narrative and, beyond the narrative, there's a mission. We're meant to achieve a certain thing. That's why they have to edit it down a certain way. So it might not necessarily be a representation of what the photographer wanted. But they are doing their job.

RR 50:05
Tell me about your relationships with the people that you photograph. How do you gain access? How do you how do you navigate that?

NP 50:17
I think I learned really quick that what we do as documentary photographers, key things help us a lot: access and permission. And these are different. They're not the same thing. So you can have access but I won't give you permission, or you can have permission and not have access. Let's use an example. I go to a community and I talked to the district head, the chief there, that are in charge of the people. The chief gives me the permission to photograph in this community. But that does not mean that he has given the access into the lives of these people, so I still need to find ways to get access to actually get the story done. [inaudible] People are going to stare at you. I don't blame them. They are not used to photographers...most people are don't go there. That makes some photographers uncomfortable, so they make promises that they know they will not be able to keep.

RR 51:39
Interesting. Like what?

NP 51:45
Like the community I gave water to--I never told them, I never promised them I would get them access to clean water. I just told them, I will do my best as a photographer, I will tell the story the best I can. I will do that. But people have the money to give you water. I'm just hoping that people will be drawn to your story and give you this water. But other people-- just to take the photograph--will tell them, "We'll give you water". Then what happens if you cannot give them the water? They don't trust photographers anymore. So it will be harder for someone else that wants to go there to do work. They're like "the first person that came here. He didn't keep promises. So why are you here? I don't want you to photograph me. I don't want to talk to you. I don't want you to talk to my children," and all of that. So for me the one thing I do is I use my [inaudible].

I have done personal project that have actually been an impact to people, communities and their lives. So I use that to tell you, "This is what I do. I did this, this happened. I did this, this happened. I did this happen. I'm not sure it will happen. But I just hope that the thing that I did for these people, will happen to you." So when they feel that you

genuinely care, the people see that you're not just about the picture, they will actually trust you more. It's about the trust. So I'll tell you that I'm not here to punish you. I'm not a politician. I'm not trying to tell you I'll change your life. I might not be able to change your life, but I'll do my best. And I've done this over time. And I have a storytelling structure I work with. I'm hopeful it will work for you, too. Once I'm able to show them--and they believe me, so the trust now happen. I do not rush into taking the photographs. So that they don't just believe it about the pictures. [inaudible] So, they'd like, "this community, what happened to them?" And I'll tell them my story. "Oh, I went to this community. I remember I didn't even have money, I just funded myself. It was a self-funded trip, so they start learning about me as a person. [inaudible] telling me about them, because that's how we want to communicate. So once I'm able to build up ways that me and the person can communicate, they trust me more. That's the only time I'll bring out of my camera. Like I told you earlier, I do not photograph people I don't talk to. So I was talking to them. And sometimes I finish talking to them and they don't want their photograph taken. I'll smile. I'll be cheerful. Because I know that maybe [inaudible] and I have not been able to find that out at the moment. Maybe somehow in the future might be able to do that. And they will change their mind. And if they don't change their mind, I'll find some other person, I've tried to have the conversation. Because you want to show that you really care. Outside taking pictures outside raising money for the people are sponsoring you and all of that, people want to know that you care. And that's how I get the access. But for permission I talk to my fixer before, I even get there. My fixer gets the details of the people I'm supposed to meet and talks to them about what I want to come and do. And then I get permission from there. I think it's about how much we're willing to spend. It's about how much they're willing to spend, that's the truth. That brings me to my next question. So...

RR 55:57
Can you tell me what's different about working with Western clients than African clients? Is there a difference between those relationships for you?

NP 56:05
Ah, no, not, really? Why, I would say that is because the African clients, over time, have been influenced by the kind of pictures they see from the western clients. So if you're, if you're working with an NGO person that is into education for children, and there is an NGO in the US or the UK does the same thing. You will realize that the person would want the pictures defined on the people, the NGO in the UK or the US to [inaudible]. It's the same problem we're trying to convince them why they shouldn't do that.

RR 57:09
Do Western clients value local photographers?

NP 57:19
I think it's about how much we're willing to spend. It's about how much they're willing to spend, that's the truth.

RR 57:31

That brings me to my next question. So...

NP 57:34
If they are willing to pay a lot of money, they want to fly-in their photographer. But if they don't want to spend a lot of money, they want to hire a local photographer that would be cheaper.

RR 57:48
That brings me to a question are you paid fairly for your work?

NP 58:11
So... So my dad always told me that you don't get paid what you deserve. You get paid what you asked for, or what you bargained for. So, I would say I'm fairly paid because of what I bargained for. Maybe I should learn how to bargain better. Try to deal with the [inaudible] bargain. It's not very easy for you to be in a better position to bargain. When they are other options for them--maybe more photographers are, cheaper, cheaper, cheaper, and just will do what they want, and all of that. We would love to be paid the same way they are paying Western photographers. Because the work we are doing is the same work. The quality of my work is at the same quality of the person in the UK, in the US, in any place in Europe. I should be paid the same, and I should be paid in the same currency too. You are willing to pay the Western photographers in dollars. It doesn't make sense. Because when we are trying to buy our gear, we are paying in dollars, we don't buy the gear in Naira. So why do we have to be paid in Naira? I think we should be judged by the quality of our work. Not really where we come from. It should be the quality of the work.

RR 1:00:10
Absolutely. Do you work with any clients who really get it? Do you have like clients you really like working with?

NP 1:00:18
Yeah, I do. They make it easier because they genuinely care. Like they genuinely care. And [inaudible] a good person, deep inside, they really care. So when you talk to these kind of people, you realize that, "oh you guys are in the center, you guys want to change the world." There are a lot of photographers, who want to change the world and there are nonprofits that want to change the world. So it's like finding the right team member and you just get it done. Everything works. I would say it's always difficult projects, but they are interesting. The clients that are like that, their jobs, their projects, are difficult. Challenging. It's way out of you normally do. It challenges you to learn more, read more...not just about photography. Become a better listener. Have good communication, too. Learn about emotional intelligence. Learn about psychology. So that you seek more than just pictures. It challenges me as a photographer. And I know that I wouldn't be same person after the end of the project, because they challenged me to actually do better. Not just myself, I'll do the normal pictures, but they want more. They also [inaudible] and challenged me the most. So yes, I have those kinds of clients and I enjoy working with them.

RR 1:02:11
How did you...

NP 1:02:12
not necessarily because of the monetary value, not because of the monetary value. It's because they genuinely care about the outcome.

RR 1:02:23
How do you get an actually connected to your favorite clients? How did you meet them?

NP 1:02:28
I believe my personal work. Projects from helping a girl that had one... an amputee. So she was using wooden crutches to work. And she's like great. I lived in a very poor environment so I took a picture of her. Corresponded with quite a few scholarships for her school, get her school supplies. I did this project that helped out women living with fibroids.[inaudible]. I really want to help people do these things. So when this mission aligns with theirs, they just come. I say you when you're doing I thought the comments by [name redacted] supporting the walk, not really like hiring me about this project, how can we support it? And what is it supported? And most people feel bad because to anybody that supports what I do, I send them feedback via email. So I update you on the progress. So you know how your money was being spent. You know, the idea is not for me to just take your money and be rich. Now aside from that, I break down everything that you said in your email. So you feel like you're part of something. Well, I think when they realize that and I make them feel like they're part of something...and when they have an opening (because most of the time they have photographers out on retainer ship with them.) So they can't just bring a photographer on when you have a retainer ship with another photographer, so maybe at that point the retainership is over and we're going to try a new one. [inaudible]. And then once you come on a project and look at our success with it, and then they now say okay, let's do the bigger project.

RR 1:04:39
Do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

NP 1:04:43
I didn't hear that.

RR 1:04:45
Do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

NP 1:04:48
Every single one of them.

RR 1:04:52
How do you...

NP 1:04:53
I have a story to remind of that name because I have to place--I'm terrible with names. For me to always remember that I need to find maybe a place, a location, a story, to wrap all of those things together. Once I'm in that place, and that location, and with that story, I'll also remember your name. And of course, I record the interviews with my phone or recording device. So that I have a recording of our conversation so that I won't forget their name. Most of the time, it's nonprofits. And nonprofits, their goal is to make money. So the pictures will always be pictures of poor-looking people. That always comes up.

RR 1:05:31
Let's go back to, I just have a few more questions. You sort of already answered this, but I want to get a little more specific. When clients talk to you about what their looking for, do any themes come up frequently? And has anyone ever asked you for something that surprised you?

NP 1:06:55
Remember, I told you about, it was when I was about to get married—I turned down the job? I think it was like, almost $7000. It was a weeklong project. They had a specific kind of photograph. Malnourished, poor-looking, wretched children. And the pictures had flies on their faces, [inaudible] mouth and all of that stuff. I couldn't see myself doing it.

RR 1:07:09
Yep.

NP 1:07:10
the money was good, but nah

RR 1:07:15
How often do you turn down assignments?

NP 1:07:22
Maybe five or ten?

RR 1:07:25
That's a lot. Yeah. You mean, like, a year? Or like ever?

NP 1:07:31
Like, I have like--inquiries, like ten in a year Then I'd put turn down, like 5, 6 Because they don't suit what I want to create. Yeah.

RR 1:07:43
Right. Okay, so it's about they don't align to your values. Okay.

NP 1:07:48
Yes, exactly.

RR 1:07:49
And okay, so is there anything that I didn't ask that you think I should know about? What it's like to do this work and work with Westerners? Anything you want me to- make sure to include?

NP 1:08:05
Yeah, I think you should include the fact that like, they should trust African photographers, they should trust that we know, our work, they should trust that we are intelligent enough to make good decisions. They should trust that we are in a position to help them--that our suggestions *do* matter. So it shouldn't just be about, "This is what I want. This what I want." It should be more of "How can we achieve this?"

Because most times it comes off like we are not intelligent, which is far from the truth. Most people are far more intelligent than people give them credit for. So I'm not just talking about African photographers alone. I'm talking about every other photographer so if you're working with them, you should trust that they are good enough to think for themselves, especially for themselves. Good enough to have knowledge about what they are doing. Good enough to deliver on what they said they would deliver. It's about that trust and not making people look like they do not know anything. And thereby in the course of doing work for someone else, someone who does not have trust in your abilities, it thereby diminishes you in seeing in your value for yourself and for your craft and discipline.

RR 1:10:18
Well, thank you so much. I mean, this has been a really wonderful conversation. I'm really grateful that you took the time I know that everyone's super busy so thank you very much.

Appendix K
Interview with OP: July 21, 2021

Run time: 66:12
Years active as photographer: 6

RR 00:00
to it, and in order to do that, I just want to tell you that I'm recording and get your approval to record this conversation.

OP 00:08
Alright, great.

RR 01:03
Okay. All right. So I'm going to take some notes as we go. Um, so let's start. I have a few questions, just to get some general background information. How long have you been photographing?

OP 01:19
professionally, I started in 2017.

RR 01:26
Okay.

OP 01:27
Yes.

RR 01:28
And tell me about how that started for you.

OP 01:32
Okay, so when I was a kid, I wanted a camera. My mom bought me a small film camera. When I was a kid. Then while I was in university, I had a digital camera that I have a small point and shoot that I was using. So, I got my first camera around... I was 13,14. And then the university while I was 19,20 or thereabouts. I had a digital camera that I use just taking random pictures. But in 2014, I was in India for a course. I then I used all my savings to buy an entry level camera a Nikon d 5200. I just started photographing randomly. Not thinking I was going to do it as a career. By 2015, there was an opening...in 2016 an opening at UNICEF in Nigeria. My fiancée then, who's my wife now, put together some of the photos taken from India and Nigeria. And somehow out of the many people that applied for the job, I was called. And I got, I got it. ---(off camera)--One moment!

RR 03:04
no problem.

OP 03:06
Yeah, so out of that many people that were sent in the application I was selected. That was in 2016. And but the process took like a year later. So in February 2017. I went on my first assignment for UNICEF and I got contracted. So my contract last year was a long term agreement. So I was engaged with them for from 2017 up until this year. I mean, okay, so yeah, that's how I got started. So I don't need to go into all the details. Maybe we'll get to that question later. Yeah. So that's how I got started, professionally.

RR 03:47
And so tell me who you're about your regular clients, who do you work for regularly?

OP 03:54
Yeah. So I started working for UNICEF, and I discovered that one point in time, I had, you know, a number of times, I had droughts and all of that. So I was thinking, how can I expand the work I was doing to get more people? So I started writing cold calls to a lot of NGOs. I wrote over 100 emails to people telling them, this is what I do. I shoot for UNICEF. You can hire me and all of that. Fortunately, I found a lady on LinkedIn, that worked for Getty. And at that time they were looking for a photographer to work in Nigeria…Can you hear me?

RR 04:45
I can hear you.

OP 04:47
Okay, good. So they got through to me. I did my first job for Getty in 2018, no 2019, I but afterwards, I've been able to get jobs, mostly NGOs. I've not done many news jobs I work majorly for nonprofits. But I've also increased my skills so I work as a sometimes as a communications then I work full time now for as a field communications officer for CBN Christian Blind Mission global. But I freelance for nonprofits, such as Water Aid, I've done jobs for Water Aid, WHO, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Getty Images and a host of other organizations. Yeah.

RR 05:44
What languages do you speak? Or which languages do you speak in addition to English?

OP 05:53
I speak my local dialect. I speak Idoma.

RR 05:57
Idoma. OK.

OP 05:58
Yeah, so. But I don't I don't necessarily speak. I don't speak Hausa. But I worked a lot in that space. And I use services of translator Plus, I just have one or two words that I know in the language.

RR 06:17
Okay, that's very helpful. So when you're when you make pictures, do you think that the photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's? Did I lose you?

OP 06:40
Yeah, I'm right here. Yeah.

RR 06:42
Okay.

OP 06:47
Yeah, Can you hear me?

RR 06:48
I can hear you now.

OP 06:50
Okay. Yeah, so you're saying?

RR 06:55
Do you think that photographs of people tell their story or the photographer's?

OP 07:04
I think for the work that I do, I think photographs tell part of the story photographers tell their story. Because we shape narratives. So, the bulk of the work is in our hands to tell the story. So, largely, the story is told by us. The story, there is a story, but it is shaped by us, we can weave it wherever it goes and I speak particularly in telling stories for humanitarian organizations, there is usually an outcome in mind. So, largely there's an expected outcome. So your story is tilted towards the expected outcome. Sometimes they are very objective, because the outcome is what you what you have. But other times, they can also be for what I say manipulated to fit that end objective.

RR 08:18
Okay. That's very interesting. And do you how do you reconcile? How do you reconcile that? Is that is that something that you do consider that just the business? Or what does that mean to you with this idea that you can drive the narrative?

OP 08:37
What I try to do with my with my clients, usually, is to be as objective as possible I work I give constant feedback to my clients and the people I work with this about the situation on ground. And I oftentimes avoid taking some kind of pictures that would drive some kind of narrative. But largely, because the right projects are objective based, I design the story in such a way that I find people that fit such objectives, so that the stories are told accurately, almost accurately, yes. But in doing the work that we do, you also understand that sometimes the events have passed. So there's some formal recreation of such events in order to get the desired outcome. So it's not a personal project, my projects, the work

that I do are usually not personal projects. I mean, I've done a couple of personal projects. And I'll get to that in a bit. But in the objectivity of photographs, as in working for clients who have certain outcomes in mind, you usually work with the set objective. And the best you can do is to find stories that are strong enough to fit the objective. So before I go to the field, I tell them to give me a list of clients or beneficiaries that fit the objective of this story. And then we profile them and some, I interview them. And the stories don't get used because they don't speak to the outcome of the project. And there's something I also do at the end of every assignment is to debrief the client, on the lapses I see in the project. So I say you say that this is what we're going to see. But we didn't quite see that, although we are going to tell a story of a part of the project. There's a gap, I think that is missing in your programs. So I do a debrief usually most of my most of my clients, and even my organizations, I do a debrief and tell them the gaps that needs to be covered. So I play an oversight role. And also a storyteller.

RR 11:16
Interesting. So you mentioned your personal work a little bit, does that differ from your work you do for clients?

OP 11:24
It does, because there's a lever--you have a leverage of the scope of what you want to tell there is no, sometimes there's no end game in mind. So you just tell the story. As a story leads, with an open mind, I try to use that type of approach. Sometimes when I'm telling the story for client... But, it's more of you exploring an idea. So there's a story I told about an amputee child-- how she's an inspiration, because she doesn't see herself as a liability or someone living with disability. But the story is just exploring her day-to-day activities. What she does. How she challenges the status quo by just standing up for herself, and all of that. That takes more time. It takes a more relaxed approach. When I'm telling a story for a client, for example, they say part of me... the schedule is usually rushed. arrangements can be poor. So one thing I've learned, and that's why I got the job that I'm doing now is also is also I've learned the back end of working on a project. So I learned how to pre... how to plan my project, so that I get the desired outcome because most times, a lot of people that hire you also do not, they know, they have an idea what they want, but they don't know how to get it or how to process it. So I learned how to do that. So as to be able to deliver on time. And have less excuses. I mean, I've said too many times to get done.

RR 13:16
And are there stories or people or places that are, you know, that you feel like are consistently overlooked by your clients? By the by Western organizations?

OP 13:30
Yeah, it's so so can I speak about my personal organization, for example, okay. So I have I have a company called Reclaim Media. And we're working on a project called the Reclaim Media project. And the idea is to train storytellers from the margins of the society, so that they can tell their stories by themselves. Last year I ordered like 10

cameras from China. And the goal was to also train people how to use these things to tell their stories, and we create a platform for them to share it.

So a story has been overlooked, yes. And why is because most people have an end game in mind. Or they go they go for a story when the story is hot. They go for the story because they've put in money in that particular project, but there are stories that lie fallow, like festivals and cultures and all of this is important to people, but are not being shared because they're not important to the people that have the money.

In the space that we operate, it is that we are paid to do the work because a lot of local media organizations here will not pay photographers the kind of fee that will be needed for them to do a certain job. So the people that are able to pay have biases. They have things that they want to fund. And I give you an example. And I mean, this is something that happens a whole lot. There are projects that get funded now, because there's an LGBTQ angle to it, for example. It's because they, the founders of the project, have an agenda. And ordinarily, certain people might not tell that story. But they will be compelled to tell that story. Because they feel that there is a cultural fund available for it. And many people are inclined to listen to such voices because they also, you know, want to drive the idea of inclusion and all of that. But there are stories about us, about Africa, about the way we live, about our successes, our culture, our identities, our songs, our dance... music, not the mainstream music, our local music and that are not being told because there are no marked funds for it. They are not projects going on right now. So that's what we're doing with the Reclaim Media project, we're hoping that we're able to tell share some of these stories, through photographs, writing, sound, as the case may be.

RR 16:25
What media are you listening to? or reading or watching Do you feel is most reflective of your lived experiences in Lagos? Because you're in Legos, I think, right?

OP 16:37
I'm in Abuja,

RR 16:38
Oh! you're up in Abuja, okay, sorry, but what do you What are you watching? or reading or viewing that feels? The most reflective of your lived experiences?

OP 16:48
In what sense? Like, let me let me get context on that.

RR 16:52
Sure, absolutely. So, you know, I've been doing a fair amount of reading around like indigenous media, or indigenous language media, in Nigeria, European media, in Nigeria, American media in Nigeria. So there's a lot of options, right for where you might be getting your news or your information on a regular basis. And I'm just wondering if you feel more connected to one source rather than another or another one feels more authentic to you.

OP 17:23
So right now, I think I'm really very averse to the media, I mean, things a lot of things being shared in the media. And I could watch CNN sometimes. But I, I have, I am off a lot of social media, and I hardly listen to news, because it also shapes the idea of how my country is functioning. But I have a deeper understanding for a lot of things that have been projected in the media on social media, for example, is there this big gorge in Nigeria that we are at the brink of breaking up and but in reality, there's a whole lot of dynamics going on a collaboration between people from all the regions that is different from what has been propagated in the media. So to guide my objectivity, I have also been trying to disconnect from mainstream media and social media. Because one, it slows down my process of work. Two, it doesn't allow me to do deep work. And three, it affects my perception of the world as it is around me. So media consumption for me is very little. So once in a while, the social media like maybe Instagram or Facebook, but I've been off Twitter for a couple of weeks now, and all of that, so yeah.

RR 18:56
Okay. Are you engaged in any and I think we you started to answer this question. But are you engaged in any photographic communities that are Africa focused?

OP 19:06
Can you give me one minutes? Let me just set to something. I don't know how I'll get back to you on that question. All right.

RR 19:35
Welcome back.

OP 19:37
Yeah, I'm back,

RR 19:40
Are you engaged in any photographic communities or groups that are Africa focused?

OP 19:52
Okay, so, last year, I joined Foundry. Well, we had a, we had a workshop in Rwanda. So I was in Foundry. And then I think it created a community that will, if we did a community that's been part of, but I'm not part of any, I'm trying to think. I'm not part of any indigenous photography organization, as we speak, but though, I think it's beneficial. But I'm not part of any one right now actively.

RR 20:43
Okay, um, tell me a little bit about when you're working with your Western clients. So it sounds like those are mostly NGOs? And do you? Do you think we talked about an end game right, in small that you've your clients have? And do you think that there are expectations from your clients? Or on how you're, like, how, let me rephrase, how do you think there are the expectations from your clients change the way you photograph?

OP 21:21
Um, so I tell people before now that I'm, first of all, a worker, in the form of photographer, so my kind of photograph is usually objective based, and it's been like that, and because of the way I came into the industry. Does it I mean, I reconstruct most of the projects they bring for me, like I said earlier, because I understand local context. So a lot of times I tell them that okay, this cannot work in this context, I will have to do it this way. So, usually, they have an expectation, but because they are not here, I reconstruct how the story is being told a lot of times. So there are projects that are straightforward, there are others that I have to replan. Because the clients that they think are available are unavailable and other people that I need to work with. And all of those things changes with time. So largely, it is a fluid situation, and most times they have to now see the project from my eyes, because situations on ground are usually different from what they had imagined as ideal.

RR 22:51
Yes. That's actually a nice segue. So do you think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western client?

OP 23:03
I, I, you have to rephrase that question. So that I have more context.

RR 23:07
Sure. Do you? Do you find yourself translating what things really mean to a Western audience or to a Western client?

OP 23:19
Yes, I think largely that's what I do and have, especially for nonprofit projects that are specifically for fundraising, for example. You find yourself recreating an idea that that there is a need to be met. And so your projects tend to create that, that need, you know that there's a need to be met, and how it can be met. So yes, so a culturally, a cultural. So yeah, I thinkI can maybe consider that like, I don't know how, how, how, how objective that is. But yeah, so I think the answer is yes.

RR 24:16
And how do you share photography that you love, but isn't paid? It's not a paid assignment, or it doesn't or it might have been part of a paid assignment, but it wasn't selected for the final edit. Do you have a way of sharing or distributing that work?

OP 24:34
Okay. I, I hardly share photos.

RR 24:41
Really? Interesting.

OP 24:43

I think I'm one of the few photographers that do not share. Reason because my work is usually-- I feel like I'm in this as a career, not as an artist first. So a lot of the work I've been doing since 2017, I've not shared up to 0.5% of it. Yes, so I, I can reshare the work when posted by clients sometimes. But most times I have, I haven't been sharing. I don't feel comfortable sharing. I also feel that for marketing purposes, it's not very useful, because most of my clients are not getting directly for social media. So, I mean, these are my personal decisions.

RR 25:41
So this, I mean, I think that answer probably also answers this question. But I'm just going to ask, do you enter contests?

OP 25:52
I've done a few. I've entered a few. They didn't turn out well, and more so because I've not done personal projects. So my mind is very focused. Okay, so my process really, is very focused. So I'm very much career-focused as a photographer where I am. So my objective right now is getting more clients, increasing my income, my track record, my CV. Because the truth is, I have bills to pay, I have a family to cater for. I cannot engage in this for an artistic purpose. So for me, it is more a job than it is a hobby or artistic. I used to enter contests. It's something that I used to strive for before but right now, I like [inaudible] in the things that you choose not to do. So I have chosen not to do a contest and a lot of things. I'm more focused on getting more corporate clients and getting more clients that can pay.

RR 27:16
Yeah. That's, that's the in the in American English, we say like, that's the golden ring. I don't know if that makes sense. But there used to be this game where you would, you would win it if you got the golden ring, right. And that's, that's what corporate clients are, I think, in photography.

OP 27:36
I've entered a few before being published. Not contests, I've been also published in some magazines. My best project, I've been publishing some magazines, but it's also a journey. It's not something that I engage in very often.

RR 27:52
Okay. Let's talk a little bit now about sort of Westerners and when I use the phrase Westerners, I really mean North Americans and Europeans. So tell me a little bit in your experience from your conversations with clients or movies that you've seen or those kinds of things? What do you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be like?

OP 28:22
Largely, I think people perceive that we are under-developed more than we are. A lot of people also imagine that they had because in my experience with people when I relate with certain clients there are certain times that they feel that I do not know what I know. But I do know, so it comes as a shock. So, they also imagine our level of exposure and

education to be sort of low have. And regard us as unintelligent. And they also imagine that the people that we that we work with, that are photographed, may be living in some constant form of misery. But I have, I have also tend to, you know, reimagine my, my perception, because I also think a lot of things are done for profit. So the sadder the story, the more-- one minute, one minute--. All right, so I've also imagined that largely the sadder the story, the more the more money it brings in. So people want the story to have a link to what you're doing. And I give a number of examples. So if I'm focused on a disability story, for example, and I say the guy is no longer interested in receiving grants, because he has a job now and all of that, there are two ways to look…One is to say that our project is working. And we have saved this guy. The other is don't publish the story at all. It doesn't fit into the narrative that we want to publish. So I also feel like there's a narrative that we constantly, absolutely push-- that we need more.

RR 31:05
I lost you. Are you there?

OP31:10
[inaudible] Yes, I am. Can you hear me?

RR 31:16
I can hear you now. But I lost you. You said there's a narrative that people push. And then and then I didn't hear much more.

OP 31:25
Yeah, I said, there's a narrative that we push, which is not a balanced narrative. We, I mean, I'm putting myself in there because I think that my work also is part of that narrative--an unbalanced narrative. But since its objective basis is to go on and define the story will have to be told.

RR 31:48
And how do you feel about that narrative? About this vision of Nigeria as underdeveloped and under educated?

OP 31:57
...tell stories about how people will have a funny answer. Hello?

RR 32:03
Yep. Can you hear me now? I can hear you now.

OP 32:07
Okay, I was saying that if you want to tell culturally relevant stories, and all of that, we'll have to fund it ourselves.

RR 32:18

Because my question was, how do you feel about this narrative? Right. The sadder the story, the more effective it is Nigeria's underdeveloped, Nigeria is under educated. How do you feel about that?

OP 32:30
I mean, I have a sort of balanced view to it. It's it because I, it is our truth. And sadly, it is our truths. I mean, some truths can be over amplified by these attributes. Are we a underdeveloped? Yes. Is corruption endemic? Yes. Do we have children out of school? Yes. This is our reality. It's our story.

RR 33:08
Okay, if you were to make the perfect image,

OP 33:11
the balance I speak about is striving to do. Can you hear me?

RR 33:16
I can hear you now. Yes.

OP 33:18
Yeah, I said that despite this reality, inside all of this, we are still happy people. People who are striving to do better to live better. And that oftentimes do not get highlighted because of all the reality... of the reality sad stories sell. I mean, it's a selling point for most big media organizations. So I, I feel some sort of conflict. But it's a healthy conflict. The story needs to be told. Because it's a reality. Most of the things we talk about are our realities, sometimes even less, less [inaudible] less severe way that it is on the ground. Can you hear me?

RR 34:17
Yes. If you were to make the perfect picture image about life in Abuja, or in Nigeria broadly, what would it be? What would feel really authentic to your life experience in Abuja?

OP 34:38
Oh, so in Abuja, for example, it's a mixture of everything. I mean, Abuja is one of the most beautiful cities in Nigeria. So there's, there's life on the high side and life on the low side. I say this because despite being the seat of government, it also has, I think, the highest number of unemployed people in Nigeria. So yesterday I was somewhere and I see, I saw people living under the bridge. So there are people in abject poverty. And there are people in affluence. There are people employed, and people are unemployed.

RR 35:23
Yeah.

OP 35:23

We have good roads, and we have bad roads. My issue is not telling the story for one area. My issue is create a balance. That tension arises in every society-- that we are here, but there's still a place to go to. So I think...[inaudible] I'd create..picture, I'll show people living the best of their lives here. I'd also show people who have the hardest as well…that summarizes our lived experiences as humans, and as Nigerians that although, we are close to the seat of power, we are not in power.

RR 36:09
Interesting. When you think of the clients that you work with the picture editors, NGOs, or the marketing directors, I don't know who your creative directors do to your knowledge, have they ever visited Nigeria?

OP 36:30
So for NGOs, this most of them, a number of them actually live here, and they were part of the projects. But a couple of people like Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation that sometimes they are here, but a major person I report to at Getty Images, for example, have not been to Nigeria, the person I report to at CBM also hasn't been to Nigeria. So, I am a bridge between...you were talking about liaison just now. I think of a bridge between her and this country, not just not just as a photographer, but as a person. So the image I shape about.. about who we are, about the work that I do…Therefore, that I put into it, how I reorganize the project that I'm out for also forms an impression of her that although we are supporting a group of people in this country, we are not all that people. So I try to represent myself as well as an individual that I photograph as people.

RR 37:44
Yes. Um, I don't know, I know, you're not doing a ton of work with Western media, because it's mostly with NGOs, but have so this question may not be relevant. But have you ever covered a story or a project that's given more importance abroad than it is at home? Like do you think that what what the NGOs are trying to cover feels more important to a Western audience than to a Nigerian one ever?

OP 38:16
Oh, yeah, but no, so there's a numbness on this end, that I acknowledge a lot of times that we have gotten to, especially when it relates to the kind of story is some kind of story we have come to a level where people are also numb. And people will rather be more outraged outside Nigeria than in Nigeria, because it's a shock to them. So as a people, I mean, it's like being in a place for a long while, your humanity is tested, your sensitivity gets numbed because certain things happen over and over. And it's also a large problem in progress. Because sometimes our, objectivity, gets blurry, because we tend to start understanding things from a very warped perspective. So, of course, stories sometimes will be valued more outside Nigeria, than in Nigeria, because we've lived in some of this situation for so long, that people can no longer distinguish it and some people have been born into it. So it will take sometimes an external intervention. External amplification to get the needed feedback that we have in the country. So yes, there are stories that are more, that will be shocking to people in the US and in more it would be to us here because of it our lived experiences and things that we see every day. So if your stories get

picked up people like, Oh, this is happening here. And they, it's because it's a shock to them. And it can lead to amplification. And we can stop our stuff in the truck and say, Okay, hold on a minute, what we've been doing is actually, you know, not, right. So, yeah, so, of course, there were stories that were important to people in the West. And I also mentioned stuff like things like agenda setting for things like LGBTQ and certain cultural exports, that are supposed to come in into Nigeria. I mean, it's not it doesn't exist yet. It's because there's an agenda set, and that the media is the right tool to set such agenda. So there are certain stories that will be relevant, because the narrative from Nigeria will be that, Oh, this is gonna exist, and all of that. And so modified history, I say, of course, they do exist, they and they are beating and they are killed, you know, and it's shocking to them, and they can raise more supports and raise more voices from the other side to support these minorities that are here. And so it's all context. Yeah. So I think the answer to the question is yes. Am I supposed to be saying yes or no?

RR 41:43
This is wonderful. I'm learning so much. Thank you. Tell me a little about your relationships and interactions with the people that you photograph, how do you generally build rapport and gain access to them get their permission, those kinds of things.

OP 41:59
So, for me, it's a little bit different, because most of my clients are pre-arranged by partners and people that are on the ground. But also, when I go in there, I don't photograph until I get the context or understand the people and let it one or two words about them. And then I like, make a lot of jokes as well. In the field, I empathize with them. Some people that I have the ability to refer, I do refer. Others that I have the ability to support, I support. But it's kind of a relationship. For me, it's deep understanding, knowing where I'm coming from as a person. Because I myself have lived in a place of poverty, have lived in a place of need, and once I have needed, so it's more of empathy for me that I am. I'm trying to help them. Because I've been helped. I'm trying to show some form of kindness, because I've been shown kindness. So reason from that place. So I know, somehow, I might not understand that particular situation, but I understand what it is to be in need, to be want, to be in poverty, to have somebody coming to you to try to want to help you. So I've been in that situation. I don't take it for granted. So

RR 43:29
you mentioned this a little bit earlier. How often are you working with a language barrier?

OP 43:37
Every other week!

RR 43:39
Really? Okay. How do you manage that?

OP 43:44

I use translators, I pick up words that are used to re-emphasize certain things, like say it again, or nice, or thank you. But I use, translators. But a smile is a universal language. And a lot of times people do not need a lot of things to get through. But when it comes to interview, I use translators to understand context. And I try to re-emphasize to get the exact point that is being conveyed. So yeah, lately thats what worked

RR 44:23
and has there ever been a time when you were working that you really didn't like fit into the situation and getting permission or access to photograph is hard?

OP 44:34
Yeah, I have. I mean, a number of times. There are that people that do not want to be photographed. I was in Chad three years ago and it was like the most difficult. Chad is like the most difficult country to to work as a photographer right now. Because you have to get a lot of permission. You cannot bring out your camera. You know, until, you go to the location where you received permission to work. And they know that you are an outsider, by the way you look, the way you dress. And they, they you need a foreigner to bring down some of those walls before you gain access. So this creates a limitation of what you can do, because you cannot take too many photographs, because there's a scope, geographical scope that has been assigned to you. And there's also the allotment of time based on what you can do. So it reduces your efficiency as a storyteller, yeah.

RR 45:41
Absolutely. Um, tell me a little bit about your relationship with the Western organizations that you're working with. Are there any work styles that are different that you've, you know, you've had to adapt to, when working with your Western clients?

OP 46:01
Largely, I took charge of most of my projects, I don't know how it happens. But the clients I've worked with, have been able to trust me with their processes. So most times, I am given the task of reorganizing trips, stories. So I don't tell stories, because you tell me to I tell them, I make sure they come out the best way that they can come out. For most of them, I'm very much in charge of the way that I that I photograph. I don't know if that's other people's experiences. But a lot of people that I work with, sort of give me the new way of doing things, there might be a price point like what do we want this, we want that, but with constant communication or feedback, or if the impossibility of the institution on grant, I sort of, a lot of times I propose how I think the story should be told. And I think something that has worked for me over and over again.

Sometimes I go to the field, I come back with a video. And I tell them that the story would have been told best in a video, I come up with the video plus photo. And I said that to get the depth of this, we, you know, we need we need both. And so I come back with a recorded sound for the video and photo I mean, so my style is quite dynamic. And I also do this because I am I am a student of communication, I want to understand how this work, the impact of my work has. And I'm looking at getting involved not just going into the field, but also getting involved in the idea of international development. So I put

much more effort into the whole broad spectrum of creation, from of creation and consumption of images.

RR 48:15
Okay. When you're working for these Western organizations, do you feel like they value local photographers?

OP 48:30
That I've worked with? So I'll give two examples. I work for Getty images, and there, my editor always tells me, “We know you can pull this through.” I mean, I pulled one of the hardest jobs through in Chad. They had no contact, nobody. I knew nobody too, but I got through to the Minister, one of the closest person to the President, just by pulling a number of strings, and I pulled the job through. And since then I've settled. So does that is also why I talk about representing myself. Since then, I've also I've had a reputation with them, of being able to deliver on complex on jobs. So I luckily I can speak from my experience as an individual. I think the people that I work with value me or the organization that I work with currently is a nonprofit that I work with, currently. Today, we had a chat, and she was telling me that, oh, my contract ends in December. So she was telling me that “Oh, I think we're going to retain you. And I also want you to consider doing this doing that.” You know, she values the work that I do the time I the time and efforts that I put in into doing what they do.

RR 50:04
And you feel like your p.. Are you do you feel like you're paid fairly for your work by Western organizations?

OP 50:11
I am paid up by some organizations that I work with I mean, so I got into the industry not knowing exactly how much the rates were because I also didn't plan on doing this work. It was just, I was just fortunate. But Getty Images, when they reach out to me, they give me a rate that this is how much they pay. It's like the highest I've ever received as a photographer. But I started we awarded our $50 with the UNICEF on contract, which is a long term contract. But Getty Images, were paying me $800 per day. But I've worked with other people that pay 350, or that people have down to 500- 550. And I also weigh, I am not very rigid on prices, I weigh the complexity of the situation sometimes. And I oftentimes try to establish relationship because for me, it's a long term approach, because I intend to build a career in this in international within communication, media and international development, to understand broadly the impact of the work that I do. So I do this as a career, but also having the long, longer goal in mind of how to do all of this, my current organization, I am hired as a full time staff. So of course, I don't expect to be paid my daily rate, so I earn a salary. But I also have the leverage of sometimes taking time off to do freelance work, which most which most employers will not allow you to. So the work is beneficial for me. It comes with benefits, like health insurance, and insurance for my camera and all of that, which I think it's accumulatively I'll be anymore because I work a paid every, every other month. So I think I am valued. And also it is a value that I communicate to these people that that and I make them understand that I know what I

ought to do. I know how to do it. And I understand local context. So it is about representing myself first. And so. So projects, we have a lot of back and forth. And I tried to explain to them that this might not turn out well. This is how I can work. So I tried to represent myself as an individual that I know the job not just photography, the idea of the consumption end of it can be communicated and have it, they use it. I know that part too. And if you're hiring me, you're hiring all of these experiences together. So largely I think I'm valued. That's what I think. I don't know what they think.

RR 53:05
I think that's wonderful. You know, do you have any expat friends in Abuja, like any expat photographers that you spend time with? There are a fair number of expat photographers living in Nigeria, I don't know, if they're mostly located in Lagos or up in Abuja.

OP 53:27
No expat photographers, no, no. So, my journey as a photographer is quite strange. I know very few people. I sort of learned a lot of things on my own. And so. So now I'm trying to get more people into it. Plus, I don't have a lot of time on my hands. I work away. I've been traveling for the past four or five weeks every week on the road. So yeah, so probably I don't have I don't have that. Building that kind of relationship is something I've invested time into. Perhaps in the future. I should.

RR 53:32
Okay. Yeah, well, you have little ones too. I have little kids, they take up a lot of time. Do you have of your clients or your picture editors or the folks that you're working with... do you have any in particular who feel like really get it like that you really like working with?

OP 54:29
My first objective of communication, the first person I worked with at UNICEF, was somebody that really, I mean, she saw me that I was raw talent. She said that I had the eyes, and I could make good photos and she took me in. I'd never worked for any person before that. Working for this industry was a big deal. So she is someone I always made reference to and when she writes recommendation for me, she writes very strong things of how valuable I am so, but largely looking back thinking about most everybody that I've worked with, and maybe it's me, maybe it's that I'm lucky enough to have those clients, but, we've been good. Like, they, they just they, they, when we have debates, they come to see my point of my professional point of view, and work with me. Maybe it's me, it's I've just been fortunate here.

RR 55:36
Do you get the names of everyone you photograph? When you're taking pictures do you do you have notebooks where you keep everyone's name down?

OP 55:45
I go with consent forms,

RR 55:47
consent forms--okay.

OP 55:48
I go with consent forms because my pictures will not be used if they are not consented to. So I get the names of everybody or less as a crowd. And I'm not particularly focused on a person. So but largely, all my photos come with stories. So I don't work with 10 people a day, I work with one or two people because of the limited ability to take names, take stories, and all of that. So I do, a lot of times I do both, both ends . And so I work as a photographer, and also as a writer in our current organization. So it's not, it's not about the speed, it's the efficiency of delivering on the stories that you've collected.

RR 56:34
So you you touched on this a little bit, and I just have a few more questions, and I'll let you go. You've been very generous with your time. So thank you. Tell me about the way the work process for a project because it sounds like you're doing a fair amount of project management and, and discovery and pre reporting on the ground beforehand. And then I'm interested in if I called you and said, You know, like, so the organization that I work for is Rotary International, and Rotary's big issue, the things that we photograph the most in Nigeria, are polio vaccination campaigns, if I said, Okay, you know, we have a national immunization day and we'd like to have it photographed. And you know, it's, I don't know, we do a fair amount of them in Borno State, because there's a because that's where there are a lot of unvaccinated children. Tell me how that process might go. Like, what's the beginning, the middle and the end of how an assignment becomes a project becomes photographs.

OP 57:31
Alright, so first thing I ask is what I what, what do you want to use this for? And I asked that in to understand the output I'm trying to create. So if you're using this for reports for social media, I then I then create, like a small proposal for you of the kind of images that I want to create. So I will, I will. So I'll say okay, for example, first outputs, who can focus on an individual story, that that that summarizes the impact of the work that you do. So first outcome, so someone does be new. So I've done this before in jobs, and 4111 polio ambassador. So polio survivor that is a polio ambassador, so he now provides wheelchairs and also supports other people that survived polio. So what I did for WHO-AFRO was to create a story around him, and the impact that he's creating and the entrepreneur entrepreneurship, and all of that. So that's, that's one story. The next story, which I created on the field was to take him to a health center to talk to other women about polio vaccines, which I made a video--that was not part of the contract. But it was an add-on that I did for them is on my website, actually. I and and so we created another set of images there that showed him interacting. So that's preventive. So we spoken about his own triumph. We then spoke about his his interaction, the intervention that he has in the community, and the larger concept of these in their meetings that he has and all of the way I created, I create a flow of story from an individual to a larger community so that way, people can connect with the story as a person because he of the things that he does

and how he's and how he works with the community and how he's been able to triumph over the you know, the challenges that he has faced, and then they kind of see the larger impact is making in the community so we can then lay out the story and what. For other stories, I can then look at it and see the objective or do I do series of portraits with individual stories? If you are going to be immunizing 100 people today, and we and we are working in a primary health center, do I then say, okay, as a woman is coming out with a child, I photograph her with her with a child and take a quote from her, so that you can have like a broad understanding of different people. So that's like a research now of different people, how they feel about this process. So when I know your end objective, we create this packet, this packet of approach by packet of avenues that we can approach the story, then I go to the field. And I always tell my clients, the reality on the ground more often times is different from the plan. So when we have this

RR 1:01:01
Did I lose you? I think I might have lost you that time. Can you hear me? Give you another minute.

OP 1:01:25
Plan of individuals and situations change. Alright, so I was shown [inaudible] not everyone. Yeah, so I okay, so when did you stop hearing me?

RR 1:01:45
When you said that, you feel like they trust you?

OP 1:01:51
Oh, really?

RR 1:01:52
Yeah. Can you hear me? I always thought I thought maybe you would like that. Maybe your phone had run out of charge or something. But I could still see you on the side as being connected. But I couldn't hear you. How about I ask you. How about I ask you that question again?

OP 1:02:12
Oh, I ran through my entire process. I okay. Did I did I, I spoke about layering of stories add? Yes, you

RR 1:02:23
said the layering. That's about right, where I lost you when you were getting into the layering. Yes,

OP 1:02:28
that would have been serious! Anyways. So when I'm in the field, stories change, and I also change. I change the approach of layering, but there's always a reference point, individual, how the stories are functioning in an individual, in an individual day to bigger community to family, and then to so we start from in/out. And then if it changes I'll let

you know, and, and then when I photograph that, I come back in. For some clients, they want a screenshot of all the photos you've made, so that they can make sense of it. But other people trust me, to do a selection. So there's for Getty Images, for example, there's a, there's a first selection, which is like the good images, then all the other rushes are also sent, they get as digital negatives to them. But the other people trust me to select maybe a particular number of photos, covering certain areas for them. And I process that through with Lightroom. Caption them, put comments in the comment section, if it's needed. If I'm supposed to write up the story, I write it up and match them with photos. But I still put the photos in the comments in the metadata, export, share and get paid if I'm not paid.

RR 1:04:12
Good. Just two more questions. And then we're done. Has anyone ever asked you for something specific? In terms of photography that surprised you- a client?

OP 1:04:29
No. And then when nothing surprising really, I mean, telling me to focus on girls. It's not surprising because sometimes I know. I read I read up about the organization. I know where they're going with a particular project and all of that. So I mean, it's not surprising. Yeah.

RR 1:04:56
Has an organization ever asked you for an image that made you uncomfortable? Anything you found frustrating?

OP 1:05:07
No, I'm usually that I lay my cards on the table, what actions I cannot do. And most of the organizations I work with also very ethical in the images that they receive. So there are certain images I will not make. It's a given for me, you will not get it from me. So I would say, maybe I'm fortunate enough to have people that understand this point of view when I say them. But fortunately, like all my images are made to respond to dignity of people. And one thing I've done for myself is to study photo.... ethics of photography. I did a course at near future photography, and documentary photography, I did a course in Nigeria. In Nigeria, it was my diploma in journalism. And I've done a number of courses on Thomson Reuters, from ethics to [inaudible]. And it's just to better myself to be able to understand how this craft works, and how to deliver the best to the people that I work with. So yeah.

RR 1:06:23
Well, is there anything that I didn't ask you that you want to add? Can you hear me? Did I lose you?

OP 1:06:49
Oh, yeah. I couldn't hear you. You were about to respond to what I said. Then you froze.

RR 1:06:57

Sorry. So really, I mean, that was the last question. Is there anything I didn't ask that you would like to add?

OP 1:07:06
I think you've pretty much covered everything. And I hope I responded to the question and to your satisfaction.

RR 1:07:12
Oh, thank you so much. I really appreciate the time. I know how busy you are. This is really helpful for my thesis so i i hope you stay safe during this time crazy time of Coronavirus, safe and healthy to you and your family and I really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

Appendix L
Interview with WB: August 11, 2021

Run time: 73:19
Years active as photographer: 3

RR 00:01
Okay, it's recording, I just need to tell you on the recording that we're recording it. Okay, do you accept?

WB 00:08
Yeah.

RR 00:08
Alright, so I'm gonna start, I haven't the set of interview questions that I'm asking everyone. Some of them, you might feel a little redundant. You'd like you might answer something. And then I'll ask you a question. 10 minutes later, and you'll think clarity answered that. And that's just because I need to ask everyone the same set of questions. Okay, so tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing and how you got started.

WB 00:35
Yeah, I've been photographing now actively since 2018, I got my first camera in December of 2017. Before then, I was enthusiastic about photography. And I was just taking random photographs that translated my, my worldview, and how I grew up and how I felt about the world around, I was taking photos with my mobile phone. And I was documenting things that I saw around me. Then in university, I was taking photos of the school. Girls, boys just things around the community in where I went to university in [inaudible]. And I went on like that until 2017. And then I did a trip in 2017, early 2017, I traveled to the northern part of Nigeria for two weeks by train, I spent five days on a train, and I was taking photos of my transits. By that time, I had no idea of what photography can offer me. Or the potential opportunities, or whether it can be a full-time career, because in Nigeria, then, even earlier than then if you're a photographer, you're shooting events and weddings, and making money every weekend, to sustain yourself because the financial situation is difficult. And I was I went to school, I studied philosophy, studying philosophy... If I if it's not a thinking job, I will not be employed. So either as an employee at work as HR, or work in the embassies, so my employment opportunities were limited. But I was I loved the course because it opened my eyes to a different world and made me really start to see the world in an open-ended way, where I'm not dogmatic. Can I go on?

RR 02:46
you for a second? I the last word I heard was dogmatic, not dogmatic.

WB02:51

Yeah. So in photography, then I didn't see a career opportunity. Beside that, in 2016 I was taking photos on my phone. So then I traveled to the northeast in 2017. I spent two weeks on that trip, I took a lot of photos. And I was just thinking about how to put the photos-- that I had been reading online about submitting for festivals. And my work was not really really intentional, then it was just based off what I found visually interesting. So I applied for a couple of these awards, but I didn't get any, because my work was not defined. Now that I look at it in retrospect, I was not really. And the industry requires that you have to try *say something*. And so I traveled, the photos that I got from the trip, since they did not get me any recognition. I tried to sell them as prints. On social media, I had a fair amount of following on Facebook then. And then I put out the word that I was selling prints from my trip, even though I had updated people on my Facebook that was on that trip. So it felt interesting to them, my colleagues and friends, because prior to photograph, they had built a strong community in the literary industry. I was writing poems, writing small essays and stories, even though I still don't get to do that professionally, because I don't know maybe I'm not just cut out for to organize or define stuff. I was doing it and people said my writing was good.

So I delved into photography, and I loved it, but I found expression better in photography than literature. Because writing requires you to stare at a blank page and turn out something whereas photography requires you to just exist in the world. And it communicates to you and then you photograph. So it was easier to express myself through photography. So when I delved into photography, the audience that I had, from the literary side, were my first supporters. So I got people who bought prints of my work . [inaudible] did buy prints from my work, I was able to get out the money and buy my first camera if you need support from family. So I got a Fujifilm XT 20 because I was inspired by the work of another Nigerian photographer. His name is [inaudible]. He was using a Fuji film and I saw how it was easy for him to shoot at night. Aside from that in 2017. He shared a lot of outstanding images that were surreal. So you can photograph in Lagos like this was my first inspiration to say, “Oh, I can also photograph in Lagos”. Or do I have been making photographs before then [inaudible]. Yeah, I can tell stories because I connected to the stories too. And I grew up in a part of Lagos, mostly where there's a lot of stories, things happen everyday. So I was inspired by [inaudible] work. And then I and I think you should interview [inaudible] anyway.

RR 06:00
I'd love to hear. Yeah. Do you know him? Can you introduce me?

WB06:04
I can introduce you to him?

RR 06:05
Oh, that would be wonderful.

WB 06:07
Yeah, so he was one who made me. He didn't, he didn't mentor me in any way. I didn't learn anything from him. But the fact that I could share his work on Instagram, made me

believe that I could also do it. And then I started, I started to take photos with my new camera that was what it was, because of him I got the Fuji film. It was because of him that when I was thinking of what camera to get, I thought of getting a Fujifilm camera. So I bought the Fujifilm XT 20. And in four months, the Fuji film camera, I took it to the beach--salt water got in-- was not weatherproof. It was damaged. For four months or five months that I use it for different, I did not get the hang of it. Because I was transitioning from shooting with my phone to shooting with a camera. It was very difficult. And it felt like a waste of money because I spent 474,000 Naira which is about $1,000.

RR 06:59
Yeah. It's a lot of money

WB 07:02
So I regret that. I wished I wish I had somebody who advised me to buy Canon. But as fate would have it, when my camera was packed up, I was privileged to attend the workshop African Artists Foundation. And at that workshop, that was where I learned what the industry required as regard that you have to be saying something with your work, you have to be telling a cohesive story. You have to be more intentional, even though I have not been able to do all of those things that I learned I don't know why it has been difficult. But at least I became aware of what I needed to move forward in industry. And then success started to change for me from making money to being relevant as an artist.

My definition of success, I decided to change. And I struggled to say something with my work particularly, it was proving difficult. And this is me being honest with you. But I was still able to tell simple stories, like take images that are outstanding. So after that workshop, I got hired to do a project for a film company. It's on Netflix now. I was supposed to make portraits that would be featured in the film and also exhibited and I took the job. I didn't have a camera. But I got support from one of the tutors at the Canon workshop at African Artists foundation. He gave me one of the cameras that we used to learn at the workshop. And I used the camera to shoot the project. And it was one of the travel map projects with a couple with the seven days of training I got in it. I understood well how a DSLR worked. And that should have been the first thing I should have been introduced to before I got my Fuji that I did not use well and then I damaged. So the Fuji I sent it to the US anyway, through the person that I bought it from. And it spent like two years before coming back to me. It was working anyway. But during those two years, I learned how to use a DSLR well, I was shooting for ... from from that project--that travel map-- project I shot. I under charged for it because I didn't understand what how the industry works for assignments. I should have charged for each day that I worked. But the person that employed me capitalized on my ignorance. and gave me a lump sum of 500,000 Naira which is like roughly $1,000 now and I worked for 14 to 15 days. I was shooting although they cover transport but the amount I made--that was my first money from doing documentary project. It was good money for me then. But, unfortunately, I signed off my rights--everything in a contract, because I was ignorant. So even now today, I cannot use the portraits as my work, because it was there. I didn't read any contracts First, the contract says, I cannot. I cannot show this contract to anyone, which

means I cannot even show a lawyer who now eventually debate I had signed, like, I'm not sure anyone. Secondly, the contract says that I'm on work for hire, which means that the money I was paid was supposed to be for hiring me. So I don't have any rights. And so it was so painful to me when I discovered what I had done, because I made some portraits that I'm really proud of, then, and it was about travel map, a very, very strong phenomenon in Nigeria.

So moving on from the after doing that project, I can't remember what happened next, but I knew that I traveled to northern part of Nigeria again. Now for my National Youth Service corps is a compulsory program that you go for as a Nigerian after you finish uni and it's supposed to take a year, I initially chose the northern part of Nigeria, because I felt now that I know what the industry requires. Let me travel to the north and see if I can connect to any story that I will be able to tell. And then I spent like, my first several months northern part of Nigeria, in between then... before then, a Nigerian musician-- a popular one-- his management hired me to photograph him. That was another opportunity for storytelling, which I did when I photograph, some of his most iconic photographs were made by me. And then that was how the music industry people recognized me. And then I started to get gigs some gigs in the music industry. So but I never got published, although publishing was not important to me, because I didn't know that it was something that photographers like myself aspire to, you know, they get paid. And I've seen that get recognition. So I never looked for opportunities to get published. I was just doing my thing and sharing my work on social media. And then when I realized that publishing was important, I started to aspire to it. And because I didn't just know how it worked. I didn't know how to get it. So I've continued to share my work on social media. And I was getting small, small gigs. Some people will say, Oh, come and portraits of me. I'm doing my birthday. I'll do it. Even though most of the work I shared on my Instagram we'll call documentary style images. I still got hired to shoot weddings, they'd say Oh, it's exactly your style I want for my wedding. No problem, I will do it for a little money. And I was trying to survive. I didn't know what direction My life was going. I didn't know what I wanted to really do. I just now started to write . I could make photographs. I was thinking maybe I'll go back to writing. But maybe one day I'll publish a book and add some writing inside.

Well, it just.. The way the whole thing was for me mentally and I was like what I saw the reason why I wanted to do this interview, I I was happy to be a part because I've it's a subject that connects me deeply because I've experienced it well. And that was why I knew I was meant to be a part of your interview because I was looking for opportunity to talk about my to share my story. And for a long time, I was beating myself up over a why, or how I could just get some exposure and get money at the same time. But money was more important because without money I would not even be able to go out to [inaudible]. So I shared my works on Instagram I got hired, I got I hired by another musician entirely. He came to the North when I was spending my six months in the northern part of Nigeria to meet me so I have to shoot a music video for him because he says that my photographs looked exactly like what he would like to see in his videos and he even though he has never seen any video work like that don't he doesn't mind he

would like for me to shoot his video and I did. And it came out. I can send you the links of some of the stuff I've done after this call. And while in the north, I encountered some stories that connected to me and I was photographing them like I encountered religious practices like the Sufis-- I encountered. I met people when I was just shooting single images making portraits that may open up one day it will all make sense to me when I reassess my journey as a photographer. I was backing up. I have them properly backed up and safe. Safe. In my hard drive all the stuff I did. But, it didn't just occurred to me. Like I didn't have previous I didn't have any--how do I put it? This, you know, I always thought that everybody who told one story or the other? (off camera) No, you can plug in a plug the laptop...

RR 15:36
I'm listening and listening! I apologize. Sorry, I just looked over and realized I had forgotten to plug it in. And I didn't want that to go badly. Sorry. I'm here.

WB 15:50
Yeah. So it has always occurred to me, it has always I've always felt that most people who told strong stories knew what they were doing from the start, because they have experience, but I am lacking this experience. So I have to shoot first and see if there's anything and then I get bored, because I don't even know what I'm trying to do. And because I've never had any formal education in this, even the workshop I attended, I was assuming that we have first knowledge. And then we spent seven days shooting and coming back to assess to... somebody who looked at our portfolio and looked at what we have shot and selected images and tell us why one image is strong and why others may not be strong enough. So there was no, we didn't really do any theoretical knowledge. And so I aspire to probably

RR 16:53
did I lose you? There you are!

WB 16:55
I was asking why I've talked too much.

RR 16:58
Oh, no, no, no, this is good. I do I just want to get a little bit more background quickly. Do you speak languages in addition to English? I know there are several official languages in Nigeria and I'm interested in when everyone speaks.

WB17:13
I only speak English. English is the official language in Nigeria.

RR 17:18
I know yes. But there's also there. There are lots of languages in Nigeria more so perhaps then you see in the US.

WB17:24

I speak Yoruba.

RR 17:25
You do speak Yoruba. okay.

WB 17:26
My native language. And I speak a little bit of Hausa because I spent some time in the northern part of Nigeria.

RR 17:34
Yeah. And when you..it's interesting, because you, you're taking a lot of pictures of people. And I'm wondering, when you photograph people, do you think it tells their story or the photographers?

WB 17:48
I think, like, this question is very important. Because I've never stopped to ask myself this question. And so when you sent me the questions, I thought that your interview is your interview is going to give room for a lot of introspection, and which is great, and [inaudible]. Now I might be wrong. I might have another opinion tomorrow. But as I see it now, and relating it to my personal experience, I think that the photographs are actually telling the photographer's story. Because it always says to me now right now I work in a tech company as a photographer telling stories for them. And each time I go to the field to make photographs and bring back they can't relate. And they tell me that these photographs. They are looking too crude. They want me to tell more aspirational stories, stories that show people in more comfortable experience. When I am a young boy that grew up in an average family grew up in[inaudible], and Lagos, one of the most cramped spaces in Lagos. My everyday reality is to see traders on the roadside, traffic, fights, violence... My definition of happiness is different. Because when I see people I care about-- the things that I've seen make them happy is different from the things that other people are happy about. The kind of jokes that is shared in the community that I grew up with, that makes us laugh and lose our minds. You might crack it in another space, and nobody finds anything funny, and the kind of things or make them laugh. You wonder what is funny about it ? And then I start to realize that we're actually shaped by our lived experiences. And most times what we see is what is already in our mind, we're only looking for a reflection of our reality. And I realized that when I moved to some spaces, that's why I think that as a photographer, recognizing that this is a photo worthy situation is a function of what you have consumed, what you are. If I go to Europe, I might not make, unless I unless I spent some time in Europe enough time to understand. To meet people, I might not be able to take photographs as someone who has lived in Europe all their lives. Because it's a different reality. And now my subconscious will keep looking for something familiar. So, I believe that photographs reflect the photographer more than the people photographed. Although there may be a bit of the people photographed in it. Maybe like ask them questions. But mostly recognizing what to photograph is based off your familiarity or your how you connect.

RR 20:55

do you have personal work that differs from your paid work?

WB 21:00
Right now, I have a creative person I work. But, most times, the way the industry is setup is if you have never won a prize for exciting work, right? Teach, or if you've never gotten a grant to make work, then you cannot call it personal work, because it's just for you. Maybe you share it on Instagram. In fact, there is a theory, that if you share work too much on Instagram, maybe it loses value, because museums cannot exhibit it. Curators think that it has lost value. And so I'm 26 I'm still trying to figure out the industry. Well, I'm trying to survive first. Maybe when I survive enough, I plan to get education in photography next year, if I get the grant I applied for. I plan to travel to South Africa to study at the Market photo workshop.

RR 21:59
Which photo workshop?

WB 22:01
Market photo workshop.

RR 22:02
The market photo workshop. Yeah, I've heard really good things about it.

WB 22:05
Yeah, so I look forward to studying there. So I can understand my personal work so that I can go back into my archive. and define my personal work because I have photographed a lot. I have even photographed, what you might call a series of work. But I don't feel strongly about them. Because probably I photographed them accidentally and started to see potential afterwards. Of which I know that people who are experienced in industry know what they are going to usually know what they are going for. It might change into another thing, but they usually like have, "Oh I'm going to this place to photograph this, or for the next 10 years of my life, I want to photograph this." Because this just this feeling this this strong feeling. Maybe if I get one or two recognitions, I'll start feeling strongly about my ideas. Yeah, well, now I cannot necessarily say I have personal work because I haven't shared any cohesive body of work in that sense.

RR 23:03
For the media, or news that you're reading, watching listening to when you're at home in Nigeria, what are you what feels most reflective of your lived experiences? What media are you consuming?

WB 23:21
I don't I think that I don't know if I'm programmed to think about it this way. Or if that is what it is. But, I just think that the local media in Nigeria is full of crap. And the journalism is for I have witnessed things that I witnessed as a regular citizen, and the reportage is totally different from what I witnessed, then it starts to bother me about much more than that I've consumed that I know what it is. Like recently at the end SARS

protests and reportage of it was totally different from what I experienced. Even though the only place I published was "Okay Africa", where they paid me $200 to publish 10 of my photos. No other media company commissioned me or paid me for it. But the local media reported in different ways, highly politicized, publishing fake untrue stories. So I don't really have much trust in the local media. But I also acknowledge that there is a lot of deception in the international media as well. But it doesn't feel like that because maybe they have been well branded. Such anything coming from *New York Times* is taken as true. Yeah, so I don't want to say it's it's unique to to our local media, but I I don't really-- I have a lot of doubt about local media.

RR 25:02
Okay. Are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly Africa focused? And can you tell me about them?

WB 25:15
Currently, I am not engaged a lot of communities, except communities that are not necessarily defined as communities like community of friends, where we share ideas. Because we have almost the same experience. We grew up saying, we were all photographers, and then we reach out to each other hang out, talk share each other's works. That's one, then I'm a member of the Africa Photojournalism Database. Although I have never been published there before, maybe because I have not necessarily made any active steps to send them cohesive work that is publishable, you know? Yeah, that's pretty much about communities... Africa Photojournalism database is a subsidiary of World Press, I hope you know.

RR 26:09
And the kinds of conversations that you're having with your friends in this sort of, sort of loose aggregate of professionals, right. That's what it sounds like. Right? You're friends, you work in the same industry, you share tips and knowledge and maybe contacts, those kinds of things. Are the kinds of conversations that you're having in that community different from the kinds of conversations you might be having with expats or Western media publications that you're working with?

WB 26:37
Yes, yes. Because when I'm talking to my friends, I'm not afraid to be wrong. I'm not afraid to sound dumb. There's just this feeling of safety, like you can share ideas. Yeah, pretty much. And we are all-- so another challenge is that we all of us are all using acquired knowledge. We're using informal knowledge. Because I don't have any friends in my circle, who has been professionally trained to be a photographer. We're all inspired by work that we have seen in magazines, stories that we have seen published one place or the other. So we're all like, just the same. But there's this feeling of safety to just talk about what you're doing.

RR 27:42
Do you have conversations with photographers, other photographers, either African or not about the expectations from Western media for assignments on the continent?

WB 27:54
Can you rephrase the question?

RR 27:56
Sure. So we, what I'm interested in here is whether there is a feeling amongst photographers, that Western media has a particular kind of story they're always looking for, or a particular angle on a story that you find, you find people them asking for again, or on a repeated basis. And I'm interested if that's a conversation that's happening amongst photographers, if scholars, because there's a lot of conversation from scholars as to how Western media media covers that, and I'm interested in the experience from the photographer side.

WB 28:32
Yeah. So I think that the kind of conversations that we have had about stuff like this, is that naturally, nobody necessarily needs to tell you that. There's a certain a certain type of story they're looking for, you know, all they do is, when you look at the stories that have been published, you know that if your story is not like this, it necessarily it might not be published, you understand?

So they don't necessarily communicate that these are the kind of stories they're looking for. But, you just feel like you need to tell it kind of certain kind of story, based off stories that you have seen published, your friends who have been published. You know that "Oh, if your story doesn't, doesn't look like this, or if narrative doesn't feel like this". You may not be published. Yeah, that's what I've noticed.

RR 29:27
Can you tell me a lot? Can you be a little more specific about what this is-- right? When you take your narrative visit like this, or your story doesn't look like this? Can you tell me what this is?

WB 29:37
Yeah, I don't want to mention I will not be mentioning a particular project because I don't want to. But, I know that stories that show Africans as victims would definitely be published. Stories that show us in vulnerable situations, even though we can use language to garnish it and say, oh, we're only spotlighting the problems. And to be fair, there's a lot of problems here that we see everyday. But there's also a lot of beautiful things. You know, we have people who are into fashion, and a lot of things. And I don't get to see stories like that every time, I see stories that are accusing old women of witchcraft, stories, showing trauma of bombings. I drove almost around Lagos today, there's no bomb anywhere. But people want to see stories like this, that, that situate us in a situation of crisis, to make themselves feel better about themselves, you understand.

And I've noticed it, and subconsciously, we don't know but we are now, beginning to look for those stories. To us young photographers, because when something has been said, a lot of times, it begins to be what your brain is looking for. So, you're naturally just

thinking of, because we all want to be spotlighted. We want to win awards. We want to be financially sustainable. We want to win grants. You know, I just lost a grant recently. And I know it's not because of the quality of my work. I'm sure it's because of the quality of my narrative. I'm even afraid that if I go to a photography school, I will be indoctrinated into a certain kind of narrative, because there's a language you see a lot of art creators use that, you know, this is not organic, this feels just like, it feels created, you know, and it's exhausting. And because I study philosophy, I'm usually very critical. And I think is part of what contributed to that has not made me gone so far in the industry, because I'm always questioning everything. I'm always questioning the genuineness of everything. And I just think if we just do things, but I'm unable to do the same thing, because I want to ask myself, is this happening because I'm involved or it is happening because it is how it is supposed to be understood? So basically, that's been my experience.

RR 32:27
When you're working with Western media, do you think there's anything that gets lost? Right, when you're when you're trying to explain to Western media what the situation on the ground is? Maybe for someone who's never been to Lagos before? Do you? Do you think that there's something Lost in Translation and those conversations?

WB 32:47
Yes, something is lost, maybe not in translation, but in context. Because lived experiences are different. So you might not even understand the gravity of something. Or you might exaggerate the gravity of something. When a shooting happens in, say, place like Oshodi--have you heard of Oshodi?

RR 33:12
no, but I live in Chicago, and we have shootings all the time here.

WB 33:16
Yes, we're also these in place in Lagos. If a shooting happens there, it could just be one violent exchange between two people. And there's like maybe up to 200,000 people that they will not be affected in any way. And it's still going to be one event, that will not be escalated. In fact, some people will not know that any such thing happened. The media might not even be report it, because it's so trivial. Compared to in the West, if one shooting happens, even if it's one person that was shot, it's going to be escalated, and it's going to be taken as something very serious. So that's to show you context, you know.

RR 34:11
So when you talk about this context that you're creating, do you ever think of yourself as a cultural liaison to an unfamiliar Western audience? Is that a role that you take on when you're working with the West?

WB 34:25
I am not actually worked with the West, except on some commission projects. I did a project for a recycling company Netherlands, they were shipping used phone batteries

from Nigeria to the Netherlands. And I worked on that project for them. Liquid petroleum waste. I told the Nigerian story photographed. Some of the people who sold these used batteries, a computer at a place called computer village in Keda, and I mean, if someone who is not from here, photographs the same thing, they might, they might, there would be something, there would be they're looking for, you know, photography, there's a theoretical part where everybody understands angles and good composition. But there's also the, the ideological and the idea is informing how you're going to photograph a person, then you know, who is important to photograph and what's the important photograph? So in terms of getting commissioned by news journals and getting permission to project I have not necessarily worked with the West. I've also not been commissioned, I've not received any grants to work on any projects before. So I don't think that question wouldn't necessarily apply to me in terms of cultural liaison, because most of my work has been shared on social media, mostly here.

RR 36:02
Okay. Do you enter contests?

WB 36:07
Yes, I recently started this year. And I got one whole rejection. I entered for the environmental category of forgot the name of this contest. I saw that two Africans were judging it. And I entered, and it's free. And I will only enter for free contest anyway.

RR 36:31
Why is that?

WB 36:33
Yeah. Because if I don't win, then I have not lost anything. You know, I enter contest because I want money. So.

RR 36:42
Yep. And how do you select which imagery to submit to these contests?

WB 36:50
Based on the theme, I look for work that I have already done at aligns with the theme. This year, I, because I worked for nine, nine to 10 months, documenting in Lagos. And I have like a very robust portfolio of work that I photographed within that 10 months that was 2019 through 2020. And so before I started working, where I work now, I've only been using that portfolio to apply for things-- grant opportunities. And that was why I applied for that contest, using one of my some of my works for the contest, which I didn't.

RR 37:40
You talked about that a little bit before when we talked about the sort of I love this phrase, you use sort of this “curated narrative” coming out of the West, I think that's a very interesting way to explain it.

WB 37:50
What did you say?

RR 37:51
when you talked about how, you know, the near the West kind of curates a narrative around and I thought that was a very interesting way to phrase that. I've never heard anyone say it that way before, but I think it's very apt. So can you tell me a little bit about what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be?

WB 38:11
I think it's too generic to say to West imagines life in a Nigeria a certain way. Because most times these are subjective opinions of journalists, of politicians of, of minorities. And I have I haven't met enough people from the west to understand how they see Nigeria. But, based off the kind of news they're always reporting, you know, that they still see us as weakling who always needing help. Maybe we are contributing to the narrative by always being needy, also. But I wouldn't say the West sees that us way. Because that would be disrespectful to some of the enlightened people that I have also met who, who have taken the time to maybe probably travel here and see what's going on for themselves or read more, or ask questions.

RR 39:08
And if you were to make the perfect image or a perfect series of images about life in Nigeria, what would it be?

WB 39:18
It will be of the of my friends who have been going to the beach almost every Sunday now since November last year. That's, I mean, I have a series of photographs of friends at the beach. If you check my Instagram, you'll see some of them. We go to parties, we do games nights in our houses. I'd make portraits of my friends who are in the tech space, who are creating solutions through tech. I have series of portrait of a lot of my friends who work in the tech space--developers, brilliant guys. And women, brilliant women. I would make photographs of, of all of these and more like there is more. And now that we have this conversation I am in I think this, this interview is really important. And also I said your interview is really introspective for me. Because it allows me to, to be conscious of some things and ask deeper questions. Yeah. So those will be the kind of images you will see you will not see images...

RR 40:44
where would you share? I mean, you've talked a little bit about this, but because I have to ask, tell me where you'd share or publish those sorts of images? How would you How would you distribute that vision?

WB 40:56
I think that's one perfect way to share it is to use to publish a book. To do exhibitions. If I get buddies, we're happy to publish, to share to help. Sorry, I'm moving away from noise.

RR
It's okay. Where are you? Are you in an office right now? It looks like an office building?

WB
Yes, I'm in an office, I am shooting on events today at the office.

RR 41:34
I see.

WB 41:39
So I'm going on always happy to publish. I mean, I'd be happy to get published in a book or place that has wider reach, you know.

RR 42:00
What do you think that Western media can do to better understand Africa? And when I say I know that Africa is a really big place and a billion people live there. And you know, there's hundreds of languages. But there is a sort of sense around the way that in the West, we conceive of Africa as this like giant block. And I don't mean that from a personal perspective. I mean, just the way that people talk about Africa, in the West is different than the way they talk about Europe, right? When they talk about Europe, they talk about Spain and France and Germany and Greece and these sorts of things. What do you think Western viewers can do to better understand what an African experience is?

WB 42:45
First thing is, to, decongest your mind? Or how do I put it? I'm going to say a couple of phrases to me. If you want to understand Africa, first and foremost, that narrative that Africa is one giant....Hello?

RR 43:14
I lost you for a second you said that narrative that Africa is one giant and then I lost you

WB 43:19
That narrative that Africa is one giant Black space where there's a lot of poor people needs to first be eradicated. To understand Africa, you have to ask yourself, "What part of Africa you want to understand. Is it the fashion? Is it the Is it the theater? Is it the art? Is it the literature in Africa?" So you have to be specific about what about Africa, you want... then look for places in Africa that can feed you with the information you need to understand that. So if you want to understand African filmmaking industry, then watch Nigerian movies, watch Kenyan movies, watch Ghanaian movies. And use that to form an opinion as opposed to saying you want to understand Africa. It's too broad for me to say I want to understand Europe, I would only try to understand Spain, understand Netherlands. So like that. So if you can't do that to these countries, why do you want to understand Africa? So it might take a lifetime for you? So see that something you keep learning? See, that's something that you can understand. What's something that you can keep learning about? And the best way to do it is to not fragment the things you want to learn about. Do you want to learn about the photography space? Do you want to learn

about the literature? It means you do a lot of research. Historically as well. Not just what is presenting itself to you now.

RR 45:05
Absolutely. Thinking of the editors that you work with most frequently or clients organizations, because I know you have a fair number you said you meant you mentioned that Dutch client and others, the communications professionals that you're working with, have they ever visited Nigeria? Do you think to the best of your knowledge,

WB 45:26
The Dutch clients, I was working with visited, Nigeria, and that was how they met me and hired me to work for them. So they've come frequently as often as they can. The way they have been around this year as well. Even though the work I was supposed to do for them, they have postponed and postponed or postponed and I don't know if it's ever coming again. Yeah. Yeah, but this was come the continent. Like my major, the only major client I've had internationally.

RR 46:01
Okay. Let me think so some of this doesn't, I'm not sure that this totally based on your experience, I'm not sure this question is relevant. But let me ask just to be sure. In your experience, how do you picture editors shaped the West's view of Africa?

WB 46:19
How, do I?

RR 46:21
So picture editors, you know, because a lot of folks when I was talking to Andrew, for example,

WB 46:26
Can you come again? I lost you for a bit.

RR 46:31
How do picture editors...? Picture editors, the folks who are working on the photo desk, this may... and [name redacted] and I talked about this in the context of the *Washington Post* who he's done some work for. I don't know if this question is totally relevant to your career thus far. But I want to ask it just to make sure so I don't miss anything.

WB 46:38
Oh, the picture editors, I know a little about photo editors. And I think that we are all in the same. We are all. We're all in this we're all affected by whatever is going on. And we can change it together. Because photo editors are also looking for what they are socialized to look for. So it's not their fault that they are looking for a certain kind of story. Or they're asking your story to look like this before they can publish it? Well, fact is they have people who is paying them to work. So they cannot just be revolutionary and change things overnight. So until there is a unanimous agreement to change things.

And I don't know if I'm cynical. But I don't think anything is going to change. Because the next thing we're going to do, it's going to need to be changed too at some point. So, I mean, just to we just have to keep asking ourselves questions. How we can make the world fairer? We cannot be underrepresented. At some point when we are fed, some other people will be disadvantaged. But we have to be conscious enough to know "Okay, these people are had enough. Let's give these people some chance too."

RR 48:28
Tell me about the relationships and interactions with the people you photograph. So when you're working, either paid or for yourself, how do you gain access? How do you get people to let you in?

WB 48:39
First, I'm a very emotional person. I'm very emotive. And that's why gaining access is quite easy for me even for paid work or personal. I understand my people. I live here. Once we have been paid and access has been created, I still try to request a second access. So that there is a connection, I don't just assume that these people are specimens that I have been given access to photograph. I try to connect to make comfortable as much as possible, to make them happy to be photographed. To make them give me permission to photograph because it's important to me that people are happy to be photographed, or they are they have no problem with being photographed. You know. It gives me this humanity. It gives me this human-to-human connection as opposed to just photographing people like they are some lab rats. Like I want to them talk to me I want to, I want to I want them to know that I care about them. I want to connect with them beyond. Did I photograph them, I try as much as possible to still maintain communications with a lot of people that I have photographed in the past. I still have people who call me from the northern part of Nigeria since last year. And we still share conversations. Occasionally, it can be overwhelming but it's part of the price for this job. Like if someone I'm photographing is sad, I'm likely to be sad Picture editors, the folks who are working on the photo desk, this may... and Andrew and I talked about this in the context of the Washington Post who he's done some work for. I don't know if this question is totally relevant to your career thus far. But I want to ask it just to make sure so I don't miss anything. Maybe not to the level that they are sad but I will feel it. So I'm emotionally invested in this work as much as I am physically.

RR 50:33
How often are you working that there's a language barrier? Because you said you speak some Hausa? But I don't know like how comfortable you are in Hausa.

WB 50:43
I've had situations where I've had to call my friend to translate when a Hausa person is speaking to me. But I always encounter language barrier most times when I'm working, and I have to interact with Hausa people. Well, you know, there's one language that you know, that everybody speaks the language of yes and no. That's the language of permission. And when we have consents, most times, and I use that to guide, when

someone is feeling what they can feel it in the tone of your voice in the expression on your face in their gesture. So and because I'm in Nigeria. I use that to bridge the gap. And then I use the little Hausa that I understand to pick up some of the phrases. Yeah.

RR 51:34
Has there been a time when you were working and you really didn't fit in, and you had to work hard to gain the access?

WB 51:44
I think I'm usually very intentional about where I photograph and who I photograph to the point that most times it's hard for my subject. I'm sorry for using what subjects but I'm because I think that subject is somewhat not appropriate to use to describe people that are actively participating in making a photograph. But it's hard for people that I photograph to, to think that I am socially or economically above them, because I make sure not to look like I don't belong there, they may feel like I'm a little bit advantaged than them. Because it takes some sort of privilege to carry a camera and photograph someone else.

RR 52:32
Yeah, I was gonna, I was gonna mention, no matter how you present, those cameras are expensive.

WB 52:38
Yes. But most times, people connect with me first before they even realize that I have a camera to photograph. So I've been to communities where I don't know anymore. And I eventually end up eating there, living there. And that's one of the things that interests me about this work. The fact that I'm able to go to places I probably will not have any business going to in my lifetime. And spend time there and interact with people there and live their lives to an extent, maybe not fully. So it's a reason why I continue this work.

But most times I try my best so as not to appear socially or economically above my subject. I communicate with them in the language they understand. They're using the lingua. Everyday lingua are they are familiar with. In a certain community in Nigeria, there's the language of people who live in these communities, but are not so advantaged. You know, the way we measure food, the way we measure money, this is language, I don't know how to explain without the lingua. So I try as much as possible to communicate using that new word assembly. And at some point, I have declined the presence of security. When I was doing a project for the Travel Maps projects. One of the people I photographed is the one of the people like that the person that owned the project has influential parents and was worried about our safety. And I told her that if you want to make this type of portraits or tell this type of story, it's inappropriate to walk up to people with police officers carrying guns. Are you trying to force the story out of them even though you're not threatening them? The heavy presence of security is threatening enough. And even though I don't know much about the ethics of documentary photography-- I've read a little bit of the World Press guidelines. And they are logical, it makes sense. You should in no way coerce people to share their story. I learned it is even unethical to offer people money before sharing their story, photographing them or

whatnot. And you can actually appreciate them or tip them after you are done, but it should not be a motivation, because you could have caused them using their vulnerable situation to share what they are not interested in sharing. So there are a lot of gray areas where I try as much as possible not to appear socially above my subjects.

RR 55:36
That's really that's very interesting note, and do you think especially where you're talking about so up in the north, there have been a fair number of Western photographers sent to the north because I think the media is particularly interested in northern Nigeria, Borno State in particular. Do you think that's possible for photographers who look like me who come from the west? Do you think that do you use it when expats come to Nigeria to photograph for big media organizations? Do you think they're able to meet people at the same level?

WB 56:14
It's difficult. And here's why. In fact, it is almost impossible. Because it will not be your fault. By socialization, an average Nigerian sees the white skin as a sort of savior somebody who's coming to change the situation or the other extreme-- somebody who's coming to exploit you because of the the horrible experiences that people have had in the past. But there is just this special privilege. As a white photographer if you enter into the most dangerous part of Lagos, it's funny how you almost be safer than I carrying the camera. Because it is believed that not harming you allows more for more opportunity to make money off you. But me? Well, me I am Black and people in those communities don't assume... They don't believe that I have lots of a lot to offer them. So you might be scared because of the stories you have heard where it will be funny how you can enter a community like that. And all that will happen, the only thing you need is a fixer who understands the language. And you will realize that what is being told is that they're asking you questions on how you're going to compensate them for your presence? So it already takes away the part of connecting because you already placed placed on a certain pedestal, maybe of the left extreme of the Messiah, or the very far extreme of you're an exploiter because of the color. You're profiled that way because of the color of your skin and the virtue of carrying a camera. So it's going to be it's going to always be difficult.

So, in my own case, I'm seen as maybe a journalist, a poor journalist looking for stories. And then people who are interested, most times people even profile me as a student. And in my experience as a photographer, Nigerians have had more empathy for Nigerian students who are making photographs, it has rescued a lot of us from trouble, even in the most extreme situations, and you're caught taking photographs on the street or anywhere, and you want to be and then you say, you're a student who is trying to do a project from school. There is this level of compassion. And then the older people were like, "Oh, it's a student, can you, can you just let him do what he has to do...And leave?" Even in Nigeria-- only in quotes-- the "uneducated," and when I say uneducated, you know what I mean? People who don't have formal education.

RR 59:31

Do you want your Western clients in it? Or do you think they value local photographers, Nigerian photographers?

WB 59:41
Things are changing. I have friends who are getting commissioned by *New York Times* or friends who are getting comissioned by WFP, but they don't usually need a lot of us because they have enough photographers who are from what are from other places. Who are usually white. So the opportunities are very limited. I have two friends who have been photographing for WFP since last year. And me, I have not gotten one single commission from any of these people. And I have friends who have worked for both WFP and *New York Times* and they are repeated faces. Of course they need the money for survival. Well, the opportunities are so limited because there a lot of talented photographers

RR 1:00:32
When you said double WFP, what's that?

WB1:00:40
World Food Program.

RR 1:00:41
Interesting. I didn't know that they were a big client. That's good to know. Do you work? Do you work with any expats in Nigeria? Do you have any friends or professional colleagues? Who are European or North American expats reside? Or do you have any friends or colleagues residing in Nigeria most are some of the time during the year who are expats from either Europe or North America is there.

WB 1:01:14
I have friends who I have connected to who I thought I have someone who can say like he's my mentor in the US. His name is [name redacted]. He has supported me a lot. He personally reviewed my waste management projects, that consisted for the National Director of nine months, he went through them advised me recommended me to realize and when they saw my work, they were asking me for more context that makes my work important. Makes it consumable in other parts of the world that is not Nigeria-- makes you relatable. If that makes sense. And so having someone like that, who can do that it's really important. And I yeah, so basically, and then I have some colleagues like [name redacted]. He looks out for a lot of young people. I mean, that was why I was one of the names that came to mind--when he asked for my email address. I at first thought he wanted to refer me for a commission project. I was excited. And then I saw was an interview. But when I saw what the interview was about, I was not discouraged because I, I kind of like resonated with the with the with the subject of and then I have [name redacted]. He is one of the most important photographers out of Nigeria. And he collects a lot of young photographers, in many ways, he is always there to support. After my camera, I came back from the US, he gave me an extra battery from one of his Fuji. Gave me a backpack when I went to visit him. So you know, just having someone who has succeeded like that still connect with you and support you in ways that you can. It means something to young, photographers like me. I'm learning to pay it forward. Even though I

am not necessarily successful internationally, but I'm learning to also support people in ways that I can people who are trying to do something that I probably have done before and tried to do it.

RR 1:03:43
Well. I mean, you're also very early in your career, I have no doubt that you have a lot of really interesting international work ahead of you. When you talk about commissions from *New York Times* or a World Food Program, how is it that you get connected to those organizations when you're trying to when you're trying to build your base of clients? How do you grow those relationships that result in paid work

WB 1:04:10
is I haven't been able to grow any such relationships. But I strongly believe that recommendations go a long way. Because there was a time I was really low on cash. And I told [name redacted] for instance, and he was telling me he was actively looking for people wanted wanting one thing or the other so he could recommend me to do the work. And also recommendations are tricky because you have to look for somebody who would not--somebody who is really strong in the area that is required. Because for your recommendations to be valued, then it has to repeatedly yield excellent results. They need to always be fairly valued every time we recommend. So, we have a lot of photographers in Nigeria, who are really doing well. So recognitions go along with, in fact, your friend who is being hired by some of these people, to recommend you if they believe that your work will match the level of quality they're looking for. And if they recommend you, from there, you get some presence in international media, or that people see the kind of work you have created. And might reach out to you internationally as well to work. Well, it's, it's so much based on probability. And it's not something to really...It's getting difficult and difficult because more people are getting into the industry. Now, you know, in the times when, like 15-20 years ago, there was a lot of difficulty because there was not a lot of platforms. One friend was telling us stories of how we would have to print these photos. Develop them, put it in envelopes and send it to magazines who now in turn publish, you know, there was no digital way of even putting photos on social media. Yeah, but then if you excelled, you were easily noticeable. Now you have to explain why you're excellent. Even if you are brilliant, you have to be able to back it with a lot of words that shows that you are convinced about your own excellence. It's not just enough to be good and be remain in obscurity in Nigeria. And then you will need to be lucky to have reasonable connections that would put in word for you. I'm sure if [name redacted] puts my name anywhere, says that this guy can do this too. It will be received to be received with enthusiasm. You know, the same way he told me about you. And I do not argue with him. Like I can't do it. If he told me somebody needed something. I will I'll do it because I respect him. So that goes a long, long way for us to get clients. And to answer your question about how to build these connections. Yeah.

RR 1:07:30
Do you think you're paid fairly for your work?

WB 1:07:37

Now that I know what the work can pay? I think that right now the amount --my friends who do international work, and that's like, around this time that I used to to charge my private client. I mean clients, like my international clients who are not necessarily magazines. And I think it's a fair amount for a photographer of my level. If I go higher because mostly you compare it to what other people are earning.

RR 1:08:17
Okay, just a few more questions.

WB1:08:27
but give me one second.

RR 1:08:28
Okay.

WB1:08:36
Sorry one second-- okay, Hello. Good to see you again.

RR 1:08:47
I like getting a tour of the office. It actually looks a lot like my office, but I haven't been there in a long time.

WB1:08:57
Oh. Yeah. Are you there? Are you? cameras?

RR 1:09:13
I can hear you. Yes. Sorry. I didn't know if you're talking to me or someone else in the room.

WB 1:09:17
Yeah, we can go along. What do we have?

RR 1:09:20
About five minutes?

WB 1:09:22
Oh, great.

RR 1:09:27
When you're talking to clients about what they're looking for, are there any themes that come up frequently?

WB 1:09:38
Most client want to just tell emotive stories of what they are doing. Mostly to show how they're solving certain problems to show what is existing and to show the importance of the intervention. So the one and only major clients I've had in my career, the Dutch

clients, they wanted to tell stories of how they're trying to solve an age-long problem and now and the prospect of solving that problem, which is moving used batteries and mobile phones from Africa, because the problem statement was how tons of mobile phone batteries are shipped to Nigeria. How new mobile phones are being shipped. And there is a lot of reuse practice in Nigeria, where this mobile phone I'm using is an iPhone, iPhone x, and I'm not the first user of this mobile phone but it feels new. And after I use it, it's sent in and maybe another Nigerian will use it, it is still as like maybe two or three more lifetimes. But, every day, used phone from the UK, have been shipped to Nigeria. And they generate a lot of waste, because eventually, where are we going to dump them? So this company is trying to solve a problem by shipping damaged phones and batteries back to Europe to recycle. So my work was to tell stories of this work that they are doing. What the brief was even easier, because I'm just supposed to photograph staff members who are working at the facility. So I don't need to meet new people that I need to convince to photograph do you get? So it was really easy to photograph that? Yeah. Okay.

RR 1:11:55
Has a client ever asked you for a picture that made you uncomfortable or frustrated?

WB 1:12:26
Yeah. photographs.

(off camera) Okay. I know there are people using the arrows. No worries. Okay.

So, most times when NGOs asked you to photograph hungry children, poor children, children that naked... It's ridiculous to me. I think it does obviously try with me most times. I turn it down. Sometimes I shoot, but I'm very uncomfortable. Sometimes I try to strike a balance and shoot images in such a way that maybe they still tell the story, but not as explicit as. Yeah. I'm uncomfortable with photos that portray poverty porn.

RR 1:13:07
Alright, well, um, is there anything that I haven't asked you or that you haven't told me yet that you think is important for me to know or understand about your experiences?

WB 1:13:19
Yeah, I'm looking for more work. And I want to give up. So if you have, if you have opportunities to get commissioned, tell one story or the other. I'm really interested in environmental related stories, stories or stories that show the situation. And I have a robust body of work that I did about pure mammals. He was a cobblestone project anyway. Well, I ended up shooting a lot for myself, because I treated it as a personal project. Yeah, so I'm really interested in that. And I'm also interested in human interest stories. Stories that show situations and maybe not not victim stories anyway.

Appendix M
Interview with UB: August 1, 2021

Run time: 23:04
Years active as photographer: 3

RR 00:01
Okay, I am now recording this call, because part of the way that thesis research works is that the calls need to be recorded. So I do need you to approve the fact that I'm recording this call so that we can proceed. Is that okay with you to record? Alright, so then I'll, I'll get started. Can you tell me a little bit about how long you've been photographing

UB00:26
Professionally, two years.

RR 00:29
And how did you get started?

UB00:30
It was in my high school days, with enterpreneurship subjects in school, were asked to choose one subject and I thought photographing was interesting, and I went for it. So I was doing it as a hobby. But 2019 January, I took it seriously. Then, I went online, met my mentor, so I began photographing.

RR 00:59
And do you speak any languages in addition to English?

UB01:05
Just my local dialect, Yoruba,

RR 01:07
Just Yoruba. OK.

UB 01:11
But, I want to learn French because I feel it's important in my field of work. Yeah.

RR 01:21
And tell me about your who you're working for. Like, who's paying you to photograph Who are your clients?

UB 01:31
Okay, firstly, I don't know if I'm the best person for this interview, because here in Nigeria it's quite hard. Because people here, they don't want to share, share the business part with people that are just coming up. So it's just all by doing personal projects hoping to get an assignment. So I'm a freelancer. I do just a little bit of commercial work. So I've never really done assignments before-- an assignment before. I've just [inaudible],

international paid assignments, those pictures in common with anyone just for publicity. So I guess, the best lesson for this is it works after you get on to focus.

RR 02:23
Okay, so well, I'll ask you the questions and then we'll, we'll keep going. And then if it feels like you just it doesn't feel right, then we can stop. Does that sound okay? When you take photographs of people, do you think it tells their story or the photographers?

UB 02:43
I think it's, it's, well, it's both sides, because people want--people care about history and photographers point of view. The reason why the photographs I've taken, taken that picture, because at the end of the day, it comes down to why you're taking the picture. So I feel both is important.

RR 03:05
Do you think the nationality or the ethnicity of the photographer plays a role? Or changes whose story is being told?

UB 03:19
Not really. Not really. Because it depends on the communication of the photographer with the subject. Even if you try the person might sign or to open up to you while we communicate. Well, of course, you get some photographs.

RR 03:37
Tell me about your personal work? Where do you how do you showcase it? How do you share it with the world?

UB 03:46
I have a lot of ongoing projects that I hope to like make it more standard, I hope to, like completely become internationally recognized but for now it's on my website. I have some that I show mainly online, hoping to do, to publish it. Because it probably has been submitted for contests and grants.

RR 04:18
When you're thinking about the work that you're you know, these projects that you're developing, are there do you pitch them to media at all? Or are you they just for you? Like what's your drive? Where do you think that you might be able to like place them? What's your driving force there?

UB 04:37
Allow me to like get funds to complete the project at the end of the day, these projects, they are capital intensive, so I applied to a couple of grants. Hoping I get a response. So So and when I'm done with them, I'll probably pitch them to some publication to like publish [inaudible]

RR 05:07

At home, or, are you in Abuja? Where are you? Are you in Lagos or Abuja? I can't remember.

UB05:14
I'm quite close to Lagos.

RR 05:16
Okay. And what media are you reading or watching? Like? Are you the that feels most authentic to your daily life? Like is it local news? Is it international news? What? stations or newspapers what radio? Are you listening to?

UB 05:35
For my work like, local media share some bias because of political issues? So I it's mostly international publications. Yeah. most genuine Yeah, no compromise, like the local stations we have here. So I read more international news because I also like to work with them. So I follow them.

RR 06:00
Which news any any in particular news, orgs,

UB06:05
At the moment, New York Times. AP news Vanguard, CNN, BBC, (speaking off camera) yeah, five months?

RR 06:23
And are you engaged in any photographic communities that are particularly locally focused, or like supporting other Nigerian or even broadly, African photographers?

UB 06:37
Like, I belong to many photographic communities, just like a group. I currently joined Storyhunters last month. So we travel interstates through fourth quarter as tourists. So that's one. I belong to others, like groups that can't be counted, we just develop ourselves share links share helpful links and stories that you can learn from.

RR 07:13
So these groups that you develop yourselves, how do you find the people to join

UB 07:18
Through social media. Mostly through Instagram, Instagram, is one of the helpful social media [inaudible] I have. If they want to brush off all the people I know today, even Now seeing a new students [inaudible]

RR 07:51
and do you enter contests? Or you do Which ones?

UB 07:59

I use Pixel. If you know about Pixel,

It's a contest. contest site. It helps you to like, see a list of contests. It tells you the deadline, the application. You can save your entry there. You can also contact. I use same projects applied. I use Pixel. And I get links from the groups we photograph in, groups I belong to. So I see some process and grant application there. So applied for them.

RR 08:03
I don't know that one And how do you tell me about how you select which imagery you submit to those contests and grants

UB 08:40
If I see that I don't have what they're looking for, I don't stress myself by applying to their to their competition. If I see that I have photos that relate. Yes, I will apply to the project, I know that it will work and select the best five

RR 09:12
Sorry, I have to put my page um, tell me a little bit about what you think the West imagines life in Nigeria to be

UB 09:24
That's a big question. Well, I'll try to break it down. There's a lot I can say about it. I want to work with these guys really. But I think, with the pictures I see people doing, it, though white people come and tell our stories. So I feel we are the best people to tell our story. [inaudible] COVID COVID Many people weren't able to come down to tell stories about . So while a lot of people here photograph, Nigerian, Africans, documenting the story. So I feel we're best to tell our story. I'm not saying they can't help us in telling our story, but when it comes to like, research and originality, well, we get to tell our story.

RR 10:19
So tell me a little bit about AI. This is very interesting. So I agree with you, I think that Nigerian and local photographers are absolutely best positioned to tell those stories. I'm interested in, tell me more about that, like, what is it about, you know, like white photographers coming to Nigeria to work or coming to Western Africa or the continent broadly? What is it that you think makes them less prepared to tell those stories authentically?

UB 10:55
Oh, there's a way White photographers take , our picture. They will show Africa like they are suffering. And oh, and of course, a nigerian photographer, for the most part, can never take a picture like that. So they'll just go they photograph Nigeria in such a way that's Nigeria is suffering. [inaudible] So I think that's their approach. It's mainly what White people do. When they are talking about--like-- an NGO story, they are looking for to reality for ones and also the topic of researching with us, to show that people are suffering in Nigeria and there are a lot of bright sides to Nigeria.

RR 11:39
Tell me what you love about life in Nigeria

UB 11:44
is not for political itches. Manga is about great service police. No, I love it. I love it. I love it. Just that's how I got my album. Our government need to do more in terms, the level, I mean, the level of insecurity and to develop the economic...the economy generally. Because right now the rest of the last year either in person their job to work to $1, which is totally bad. So I feel our government is doing a lot more to develop the country in terms of the national level, financial is very, very good place to kick off always for me.

RR 12:27
I really loved Lagos. It was so crazy. I mean, like good, crazy. There's so much energy there. It's it's really wild. So nightclubs, and parties and music. And yeah, it's it's a really cool place. Um, if you were to make a perfect picture or series of pictures about life in Nigeria, what would it be?

UB 12:54
So I'll talk about rising use making use of the internet, to level up their skills...so I'd tell that story. [inaudible] Because education level of job level to get job is getting low. All the way we did our president said that he will need to graduate first class, mostly a job. So we are our own. So kids are coming out like me now. I got to say it's a good degree. I studied agricultural science, but I'm doing photography and I got this cute. So I will document the story which Nigerian graduates coming up with skills to create greener pastures for themselves. Because there's no [inaudible] job anymore for people to work with.

RR 13:56
What do you think Western viewers, let's talk a little bit about you. You said that you watch international news. So you read international news. What do you think Western viewers misunderstand about life in Africa?

UB 14:16
If you are suffering for the right side, it's because... When you live here, when you spend a lot of time here you see that there's a bright side to everything here. People are really enjoy themselves, just because we have problems with insecurity, I mean there's no country which people don't pay which have a poor class of people.

RR 14:44
tell me about your relationships and interactions with the people that you photograph. How do you gain access? How do you how do you negotiate that with them?

UB 15:00

When I have a subject I want to photograph, I'll keep my camera. I won't bring my camera out first. So first look for a way to like communicate with them or be their friend. So that they will kind of open up more to me. They won't see me as a photographer, they see me as their friend, so they wil be friends with me and they will tell their sotry andI wil start photographing.

RR 15:24
And are people generally welcoming?

UB 15:30
I can't say. It's 50/50. Depends. Some people will tell you no, they're not interested in taking their picture. Without very, very desert without it to be looked at as caused by us, then what's your to do? Open up? So if you see people tell you in regards to the photographs that his mother had?

RR 15:56
And how often are you working? And across a language barrier? Like I don't know, if you work with that you you're ever photographing in the north where they speak, you know? How so are evil? Like, do you ever? Are you ever working in a place where you cannot communicate? Because you don't speak the same language?

UB 16:17
I can say yes. But I work with my group of friends. So we are going to present a new language to work on an assignment, I'll get a fixer or a translator for the language. Okay.

RR 16:33
And has Have you ever been working with and you just really didn't fit in where it was very hard to gain access to the scene? Not true. Let's see. So I know you said that you haven't worked with Western media. But I do think this is interesting. Do you think Western media values local photographers?

UB 17:11
But I can't say I'm sure. First of all within what I think they do when it comes to stories that study by us thing. Photographers spending a lot of time with the subjects can't quite do it. Your dad knows more about the story or read. So if you do go follow photographs at that level?

RR 17:35
And do you get the names of everyone you photograph?

UB17:41
No, it's not possible. I try my best to use my notepad to get some This is a project Amish I get their news for when it comes to like sheep, or random portra is not possible to get on them. Okay, so that's about them. I'm sorry, what did you say? who lied about your name? Yeah, because the streets. Okay, so it's only up to date, I tend to get their name. Hmm. More details.

RR 18:18
Tell me a little bit about your process trying to get connected to Western media. I know you haven't worked for them yet. But have you spoken with editors or tried to speak with editors?

UB18:31
Okay, so I haven't pitched on it. Because I don't want to rush the process. I'm trying to like, develop myself more I work on my past my projects traveling more, please. Well, it's time to work. So I'm just putting the word nadie to myself to develop my personal projects, put them out there for people to see.

RR 18:54
And so tell me about the travel. How does the travel? How does the travel support your personal work?

UB19:04
So the travel it makes me see live in another life. So not only not when I say story, in contrast to know that I like to get to know about the culture is as part of just the culture. So I learn more about people and our people. And if coursework I'll get a new story for the particular travel. I went for eval mostly on people tend to like follow my story when I'm traveling, Manchester so it helps my just my work daily to work in a big word.

RR 19:53
Okay, so what so when you say people are Following your travel, you mean, are you sort of you mean on social? I want to make sure I understand. When you said, Did you say people are following your travel? Is that what you said? Sorry, the connection drops.

UB20:14
I do post on my Instagram stories about the trip. Okay, so people can follow my activity while I'm traveling. People are viewing my page on my website. I think it helps my work. And I get to create new content for each location.

RR 20:34
So you're using Instagram to market yourself? It sounds like

UB20:39
yeah, if I were on LinkedIn, and my website, Okay,

RR 20:46
so these are the rest of the questions are pretty specific to interactions with Western media. And it doesn't sound like those are super relevant for you. But do you have anything that I didn't ask that you that feels relevant to this in terms of your relationship to either Western journalists who are working in Nigeria or Western? Your what you see

Western media talking about Nigeria? Is there anything I didn't ask that you think I should know?

UB 21:19
So I think some media, I am more look to photographers to go to shows like this. I have to be a part of bringing people I'm not saying they shouldn't bring people. Sometimes when we have a loss of strength, photojournalism and documentation to that process. I think they should I think COVID did a lot, but that should't be the issue. They should employ more local photographers to tell stories because they are in the best position. We have people that come in not knowing how to tell the story. So they should employ more local photographers in African countries.

RR 21:57
And have you ever been to Legos? photo fest?

UB22:02
No, no, no, no, I was supposed to be the last bit recorded. So I think it was cancer cancelled, which was done online. Okay.

RR 22:10
Because I was just interested if that was, if that had been successful. I've read a little bit about it. I've never been to it. So I was wondering from a photographer's perspective, if that seemed like a successful way to connect with people. Maybe I'll try and go in a non COVID world. Well, thank you. Thank you very much. It's really nice to meet you. Feel free to connect with me on LinkedIn. I'm always I always like to meet photographers, we hire a lot of photographers for my work. So connect with me on LinkedIn and we'll go from there. Oh, hello. Yep, I'm here. Okay, all right. Thank you so much. Have a good evening.

UB 23:04
If you need any help, for me, I'll be assignment so you know, I'm available. Okay. Thank you.