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# Making Photographs

A **roundtable** of four Nigerian photographers - Jide Adeniyi-Jones, Don Barber, Chris Nwokedi and Sunday Tumo-Ojelabi - in discussion with Maurice Archibong (for GR) and Dapo Adeniyi (editor, GR). Recorded shortly after the second **annual exhibition** of the Photographers Association of Nigeria (PAN) in Lagos, the meeting reflected on the **current state of photography** in Nigeria with its **future directions**. Even though it was not a **PAN forum** and the **views** expressed belonged to the individual respondents, it brought the **objectives** of the young body to the fore, along with its **obligations** and immediate **challenges**. Interview recorded September 28, 1996 at PAN Secretariat, 57 Ogunlana Drive, Surulere, Lagos.

# G

**R:** I think we should just start off on a general note. First I want to congratulate you for the PAN exhibition which was successfully held. Let's have a general overview of the state of photography in Nigeria. In what direction can we say that photography in Nigeria is going at the moment in the light of current developments: increase in awareness, the problem of the electronic age encroaching on traditional ways of doing things? How do they affect photography in our own environment?

**ADENIYI-JONES:** Some people may hold the view that the photography profession in Nigeria has no direction but my view is that it is going in many different directions. Well the stage that it seems to have come to partly is evidenced by the recent PAN exhibition. It is one of a constantly increasing technical expertise. If the PAN exhibition is any barometer, this year's exhibition showed a lot more thought, a lot more care, in the presentation of the work.

What may very well be happening but what I have yet to see to any large extent is people going beyond mastering their medium and now using that medium to some end.

**NWOKEDI:** Coming to the question of the level of awareness as regards photography in this country, a lot of work still has to be done. As we must understand, most of the people practising photography in Nigeria - even though we're all Nigerians - but I can tell that many of us have been exposed through trainings abroad. So the level we are used to is not available here. If there is going to be some increase in the level of awareness then it is left for the clientele to start appreciating photography and photographers. One of the problems comes from people who take photographers for granted. They can't tell between a photographer and a camera totter. So when you look around and talk to many of the photographers in Nigeria, photography is no longer

what it used to be. There are people here who are talented, who are up to date.

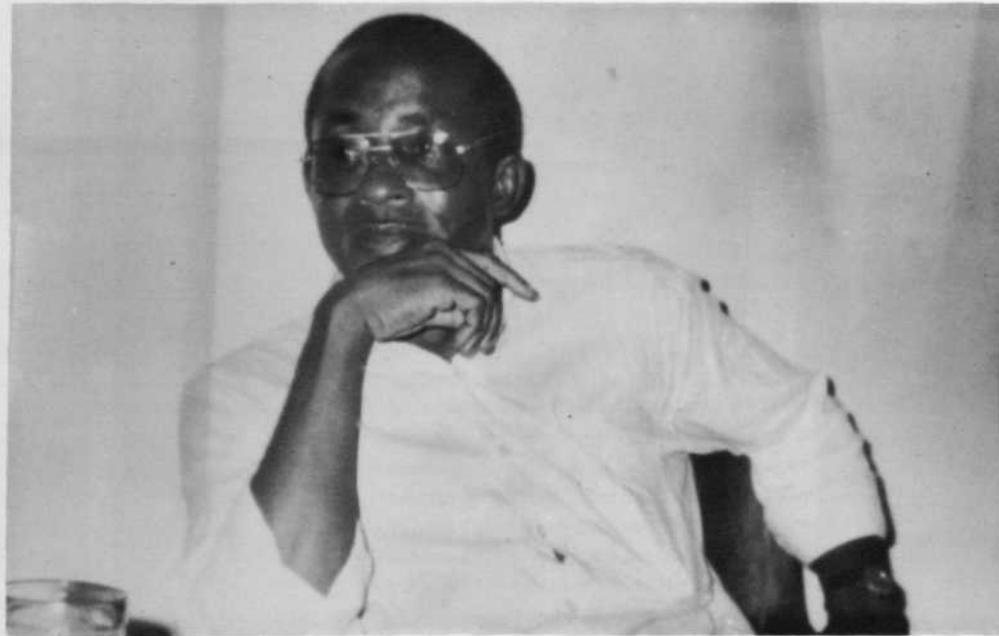
GR: It seems that this kind of awareness will have to be a double-edged thing. The clientele on one hand and some other professional colleagues who do not have the same benefit of professional exposure. Some members of the association should work hand in hand toward increasing awareness don't you think?

BARBER: I don't exactly remember the question but listening to my friends here I think I can make out where we're going; as regards the clientele and the photographers in this country, I would not blame the clientele, I would not blame the photographers either. The issue I keep trying to flog is that even the Nigerian photographer who practised photography in 1930 was 'Oyibo (European) trained' - that Nigerian who practised in 1930 stood out from the crowd and for

But now things have changed. We are now bringing photography to the people and that's the difference, so that what we're looking at is in the next few years 200,000 Nigerians would be at the Tafawa Balewa Square, (TBS in Lagos) 50,000 of them will be carrying cameras but there'll be ten professionals whose photographs would appear somewhere and that would not affect the photographic market.

GR: The question is how one distinguishes between the professional photographer and the camera totter as Chris has said. Is it possible to establish certain parameters by which one can immediately or ultimately distinguish between the two?

BARBER: If you go to a lawyer and engage his services to go to court and the guy cannot win an adjournment, no problem. So if you pick up a photographer and you drive a nine million naira



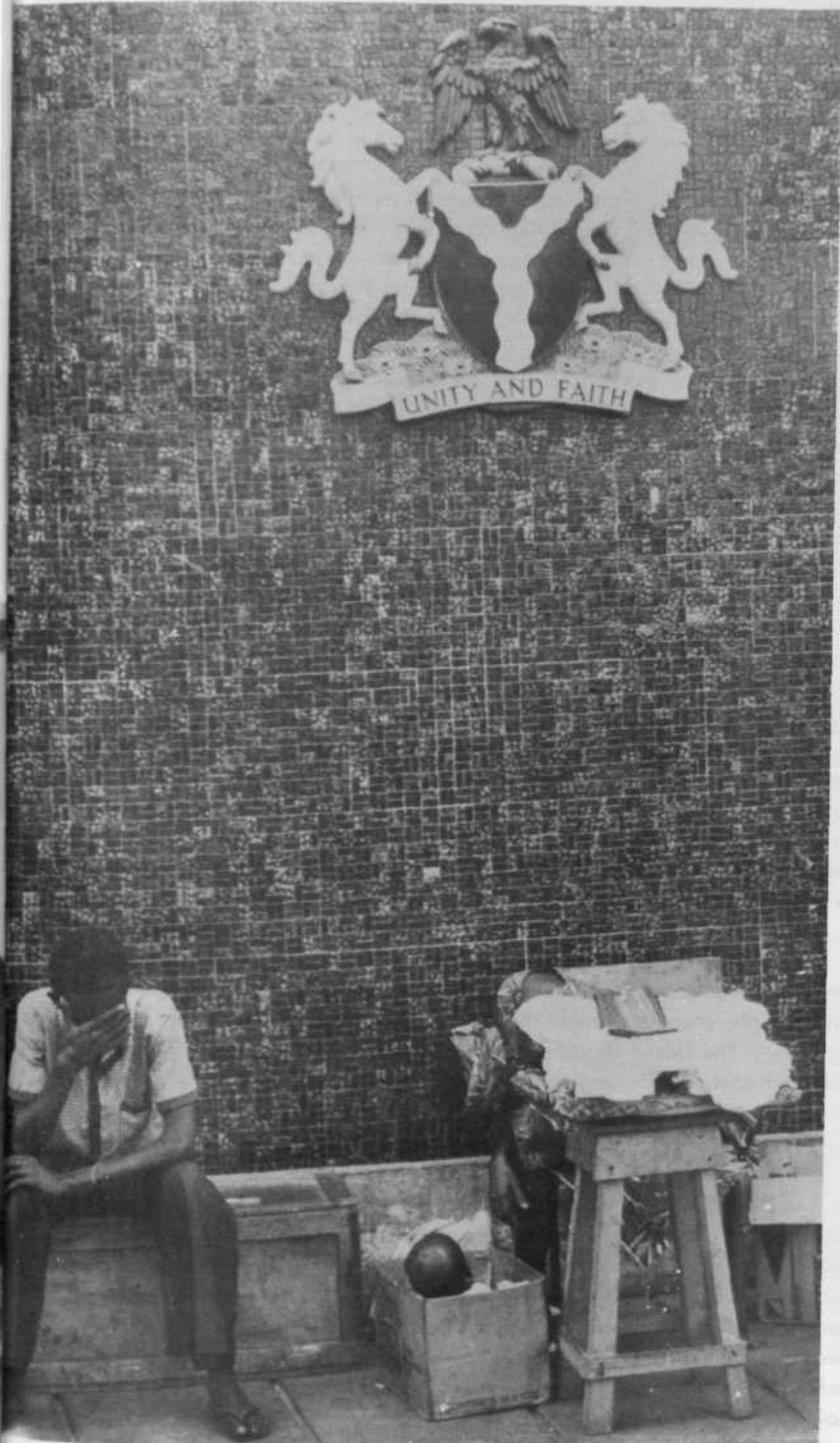
**Above: Barber  
Right: Nwokedi**

a long time other groups of people who went in as apprentices, not assistants, there's a difference. You don't have photographers' apprentice, you have photographers' assistants because your assistant would one day leave you and work in your style or even in your medium and command about the same fee with you though that's not the issue. So because that has not been laid down, the boys who tot cameras are professional colleagues by the Nigerian standard, well, Nothing Spoil (laughter). But the issue there is, since they are the ones people get to see most of the time, people who should appreciate photography have never really associated with the professional photographers because the photographers have always been, in our society, the one-in-a-million person who just stands by himself.

'Beast' and wear Hugo Buig suit and you think what is suitable for your personality is for a guy to stand there and shoot it for you and you pay him 80 naira, Nothing spoil! But if you want your car and yourself properly portrayed to show the nine million and the suit you're wearing, there's an eye and a technique to do that. And at what point in time it will be done to make it a photograph, not a picture, you're talking two different things. The camera totter takes pictures, he takes snaps, now if you want to make a photograph you get a photographer to do that and since most of the people who drive the nine million naira cars and wear 'Hugo Boss' suits are not exposed to such 'whatever' we've got to try and make them more aware.

This is why we have this grouping and at the last





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should happen soon.

GR: Is it possible to go to some of the objectives of PAN? To begin with is it possible to discuss some of the criteria for registration?

ADENIYI-JONES: Being a member of PAN isn't what makes you a photographer.

GR: But the body is the - Photographers Association

of Nigeria.

ADENIYI-JONES: But there will be photographers who do not choose to belong in the association. I don't think that registering with the association is a prerequisite for being a photographer, certainly not. Its more of a platform for photographers to met and exchange ideas.

BARBER: Its more of an umbrella organisation for photographers. You could be into sports, fashion, whatever and be a member of PAN provided you could prove you are a photographer by having trained for at least three years under somebody, by yourself with evidence to show for your practice, then you write an application which must be seconded by someone and you're on. If you come on board and you can match up with what you see in PAN good, if you cannot match it, the door is open.

GR: It would be interesting then to, in a nutshell, tell us how you became photographers yourselves

ADENIYI-JONES: My own story is not necessarily the way to become a photographer. I think that it sounded almost flippant and we all laughed when Don said 'pick up the camera' but you see, that is the way to begin. Of course the beginning for a lot of people is-seeing pictures. And we are in a largely semi-literate society but the level of visual literacy, I think, is very, very, high.

So what happens? somebody sees and recognises that this is the way in which they can perhaps communicate the ideas that they have and so what you do is pick up what you can get and you try. Where the art may then come in is when you're not succeeding in what you set out to do and then you ask, 'this is what I set out to do and its not working like that', but then that is not peculiar to here; because now certainly there are parts of the world where you can go and get degrees to very high levels in photography but still certainly a lot of the people who are well-known photographers all over the world today, began by picking up the camera in some circumstance where there was no opportunity for any kind of formal study. And it is the few that persevered, that had an eye, that developed it and continued who became accepted as established photographers.

Here, I know that a lot of people will start the journey in that way. They may become apprenticed to a photographer. The problem is, the apprentice usually inherits the limitations of the photographer whom he studied under. Again, because our level of written literacy is not all that high and two,

because of various economic situations, even the access to the kind of publications that could trigger the person's imagination are very limited.

So you may find a little child who has interest in photography, who grew up looking at LIFE magazine or grew up looking at the NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC and thinking wow! this is what I can do; this is what I would love to do to go and expose the problems people face in other parts of the world.

But here, you don't have that tradition, none of them exist locally and the expense of them coming down here is so high that you find people who have the talent, who have the eye, who have the heart, but because you're not in a society that encourages art and exposes it and I have come across this even among people who you try to do work with. For example, there's a project that I have partly done on the guys selling on the streets - street traders on the bridges etc. Now, I want to do a proper study, say stay with them for a long time, a number of days perhaps but, there's the problem of people identifying with it. There's no such tradition established as yet, you are regarded with extreme suspicion because I cannot conceive of what you are taking my photograph for that could not be harmful to me or be for my good. What it is, is basically you are either of the government that need to know us or maybe you are somebody who has found a way to make money by looking at how we are.

I only came to talk about this because it works on both sides. Its the same society from which people, young kids are going to become photographers. The kids have those limitations too. So you don't sit down and think yes this is what I can do....

Imagine somebody who goes into Law because they have a burning desire to address injustice although you don't find much of that now rather you find a lot of people going into it because they think its going to bring in some money but you can imagine a child going into Law for the noble reason. Now somebody with the same kind of feeling would not go into photography no matter what eye he has because there are no examples for him to see how he can use this medium in a positive way to impact on the society.

GR: We'll come back to the point which you raised about a photographer having both an eye and a heart after Chris has told us how he got into photography.

NWOKEDI: I became interested in photography just by looking at photographs even before I was eight years old. Studying photographs, looking at them and trying to ... ehm you know photographs were taking a lot of my interest.

GR: What triggered this interest? Where did you have access to these photographs?

NWOKEDI: I grew up in Onitsha (Anambra State). Just down the street one photographer had a box camera, I am talking about the 1950s, a box camera, a Brownie, that sort of thing. The photographer was going past our house one day and he took our photographs, myself and my younger brother, and brought us the picture. Not just that, he took us to his studio, which was also his residence. At a stage he brought out his lantern, electricity wasn't even available at Onitsha then but he made do with what he had. He produced some images which people paid for so we watched as he processed his film and plates, the print-making stage. I remember he had a red filter which covered the material to change the colour of the light to suit the paper. That experience triggered my interest. So when I got into secondary school I went to my uncle and cried that I needed a camera and he got me one. I think that was a turning-point in my life and since then I never looked back.

After school certificate, I won't lie to you I made money even as a student, taking pictures of my school mates and footballers from my school and elsewhere. As soon as I got my school certificate I got a scholarship to study biological science in the United States. But I couldn't come back to Nigeria immediately because there was civil war so I got a job with a pharmaceutical company, GDCL. We were into research work. At that time we were using outside photographers to give us electron micrographs, that is, photographs of what we were looking at under electron microscope. Even though those guys were quite knowledgeable in their own field they were not members of the research team and a lot of time they weren't giving us what we needed. They would emphasise on important features while downplaying the key things so the company just thought that it was proper for an insider to be sent for a two-year course at Brooks Institute of Photography to do what is called Medical and Scientific Photography. I became the natural choice because virtually everyone knew me with my camera.

GR: What year are we talking about?

NWOKEDI: This was in 1972. Then when I got to Brooks - as I said I was sent for Medical and Scientific photography, that is the kind of photography that could be applied to my field. The intention was to send me there so I could return and continue working for GDCL. But when I got over there, I just told you that photography is a creative art right? The force that motivates an artist sometimes can be overwhelming and not easy to overcome. So when I got into school, I looked at other departments and noticed first of all

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**KSA**

Commercial Illustration where they teach photography for advertising and all that, I realised then that that was the type of photography that I'd been thinking about. I would pick up a copy of Vogue magazine and look at a pack shot and wonder what type of camera could the person have used, I would wonder while also studying the lighting system and analyse these and all.

So when I got to Brooks I saw everything demystified. I made arrangements with the school authorities to switch from medical and scientific photography to commercial illustration. I was taking a big chance. By the way I was being sponsored by my employer; once the change-over was complete I picked up the phone, called my employer back in Maryland, outside Washington DC - I was now in California - and told them I was sorry I was resigning. Luckily

they let me go.

From then I went into the school. Two years later, in the State of Illinois I was required to do an 18-month apprenticeship in an already established studio.

ADENIYI-JONES: Pardon me for cutting in but while you were talking I remembered that the kind of obstacles and problems are certainly not peculiar to Nigeria. Without an institution like the one Chris went to perhaps he would have reached the limit of his photographic ambition and it would still be something like carrying your camera and photographing your kids but then this was an avenue through which he could develop.

A lot of the top photographers in the United States today started before they had access to many of these sorts of places. A lot of them actually got on their photographic training in the army. There were a lot of people who drafted into the army and were posted to the illustrations department so they were photographing for the United States government and then when they were decommissioned they now had acquired the skills that they now applied to advertising, documentary work and different areas of photographic work. Many of them would now be the people whom when different institutions were forming and introduced courses in photography they now had to lend their experience and expertise to these kinds of courses.

Therefore you'll have times of year when these people would come and lend their experience and expertise to these institutions so that a lot of the people who come through are touched by people who are not just equipped with the theory of doing it but are working photographers.

GR: Let's go back to what you said earlier on about the very important pre-requisite for being a photographer: having an eye and the heart. I just want us to touch on that because it seems to me to suggest one of the directions in which Nigerian photography may go in the years to come. You'd have people who have the potential for being artists, who would be yearning to express themselves through this medium and not just snapping.

BARBER: I think in a nutshell I would conveniently say that half or one-quarter of the boys who are studying painting and graphics in Nigerian schools, if they had access to photography, half of those artists would have ended up as photographers.

They have very good eyes for arrangements, when they apply the sense of graphics or painting with the medium of photography our advertising photography

would improve in leaps and bounds. When boys at Yaba College of Technology do 'Still Life' and paint what they've arranged and you see the introduction of colours from the top of their head, now if they were working in photography where they have physical silk cloth and all kinds of stuff to arrange those products and with vision of what they put down and they're able to put that on camera, advertising in this country would improve a lot, posters, hangings in our homes would identify more with our own images, not going into people's homes and see the so-called 'Weeping Child' painted in Italy, and stuff like that or the lush green cabin of a Korean family being peddled by street traders.

But half of the paintings in the homes of the rich in this country depict 'Ilubirin'. That's what the painters are painting. The poorer ones are putting lush green posters of Korea up the walls of their homes. But the really rich are getting top painters to give them paintings of Ife village road, or Eyo in town or Ibadan roof-tops, you see.

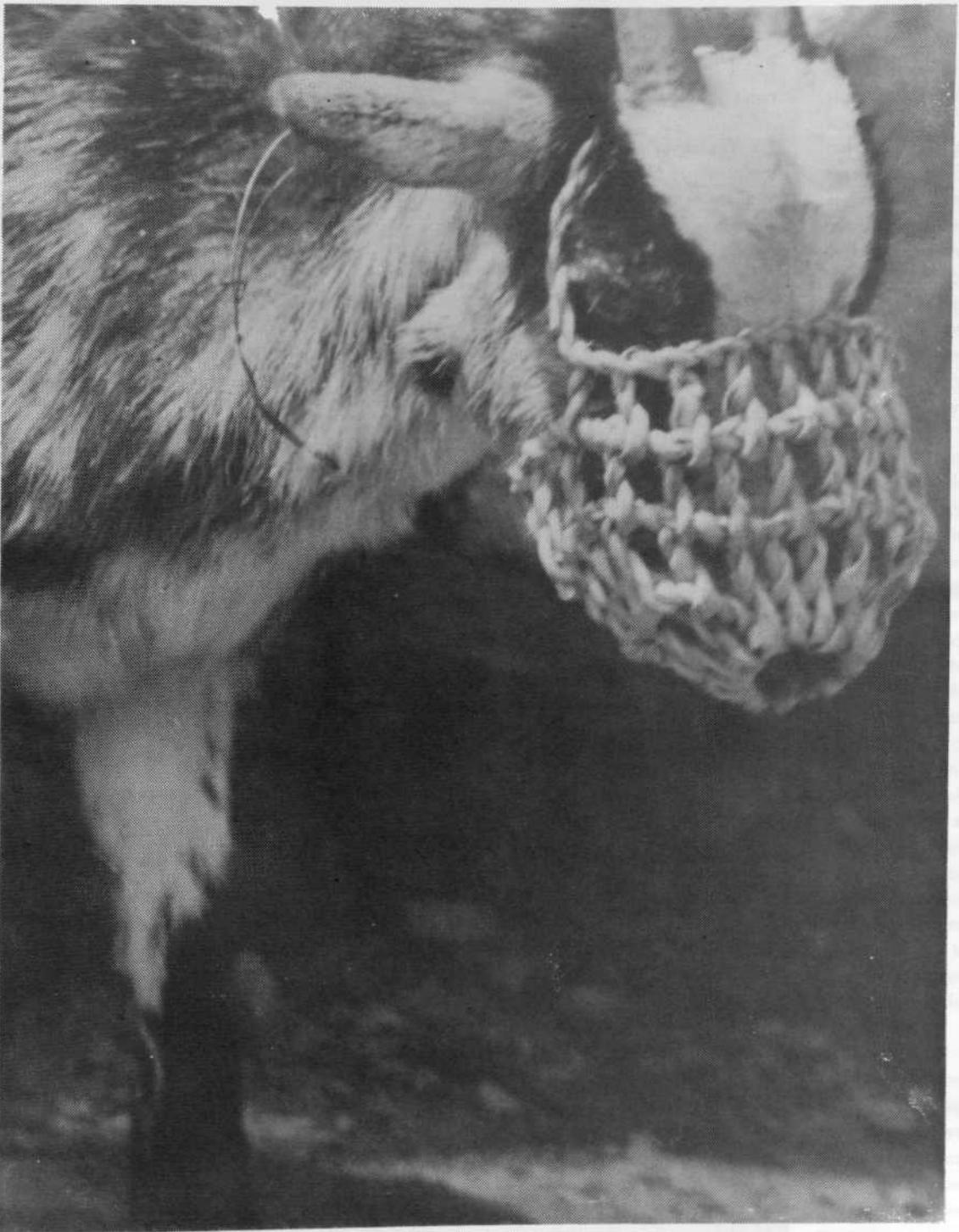
GR: It appears that language is an essential tool for any artist no matter his area of specialisation.

BARBER: But remember what Jide said earlier. We don't even have career guidance in schools. Most times kids grow up thinking uncle is a lawyer, I'll also be a lawyer or aunty is a doctor, I'll also be a doctor. You have to be this, you have to be that because you are not exposed to anything otherwise....

ADENIYI-JONES: No matter what you think or feel you won't even have the guts to go and tell Papa you want to become a photographer. They'd say you want to disgrace the family.

BARBER: And when we begin to have the workshop and visuals for the young people, you will see the common trend. I have seen it over a long time. In the 70s there was a rush into hairdressing and it started with most of the people who helped our parents look after us as nannies; some were domestic helps, there were some who were cousins or other family relations. After serving the family for so long, to pay them back they were sent into hairdressing. I don't mean it in a derogatory sense: a lot of people who were not actually exposed to the kind of background that you and I were exposed to but grew up in our environment ended up with what they'd taken from our families. They became the hairdressers.

Some certainly went abroad later to improve on their services but some remained with garage hairdressing. But hairdressing caught on and a trend appeared. After a while, it moved to catering. A group of people too went into catering—mostly girls, and



some few boys. And those people became the ones who owned all the fast food shops, pepper soup joints and others. When this died down they now went on to fashion. By the time it hit fashion university undergraduates and graduates who could not find jobs after the National Youth Service (NYSC) also got into the act and this enhanced the class of those in the fashion industry. When you asked many school leavers what they wanted to do they'd quickly tell you 'I'm into fashion. I am a fashion designer'. Soon the trend shifted: Now more than half the girls in town have gone into computers. Now any girl in town who's not

in the university or some school is into computers.

So you find a lot of our young girls being progressive. Thriving on their own, running some fashion shops or something but how many boys have something to show as regards skill. This is where I see photography coming in, in order to bridge that gap. And I think the time is ripe.

GR: Still thinking about training, I should quickly ask, is photography then an art or science?

BARBER: There are arguments for and against. We can't go into that now....

GR: Yes taking into consideration the sophistication of the cameras now available, some of which can do virtually everything, where does the art begin and science leave off?

NWOKEDI: Let me tell you... the high degree of sophistication in a camera is not what makes a good photograph. You still have to resort to your brain, sit down and think as an artist. Some of those features are there if you like to use them but in spite of all these features there is still a manual over-ride. A camera does not make a good photograph. A good photograph is simply created by a disciplined, educated mind. Agreed there's a lot of science in it but there's a great deal of art too.

It is unfortunate really that there are no schools in this country teaching photography to any substantial degree. It bothered me so much when I returned to this country that I had to speak with the authorities at the Fine Arts department of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. I tried to create an awareness about the immense developments in photography. Some to my surprise were simply not aware of what photography was all about. So we arranged for some of the students to come over to our studio in Lagos for industrial attachment and I know why I did that. It was to get them exposed first and foremost.

TUMO-OJELABI: If I may come in... I think the issue is not the instrument. The issue here is the man handling the equipment, his ability. Let me cite an instance. I trained as a Confidential Secretary. Sometime ago I asked a typist to do something for me and this job had to do with display. She had the typewriter. But because I had the benefit of training earlier as a confidential secretary I had already formed a mental picture of what I wanted and when the lady did the job for me it was unsatisfactory. She was not prepared to go beyond the barest possibilities that the instrument provided. Photographers are not going to be under any threat even with more sophisticated equipment. Much has to do with whether the man who handles it, how much he is prepared to reach out.

[Don entered into a section of his studio and reappeared with two cameras. One a modern compact type, the other a massive quaint type placing them on the table. He illustrates with them]

BARBER: When you talk about sophistication of cameras I was going to say this is from the 40s (referring to the older type) the design has no meter. This is the modern one but the fact remains that when we talk about cameras the only thing there that makes photog-

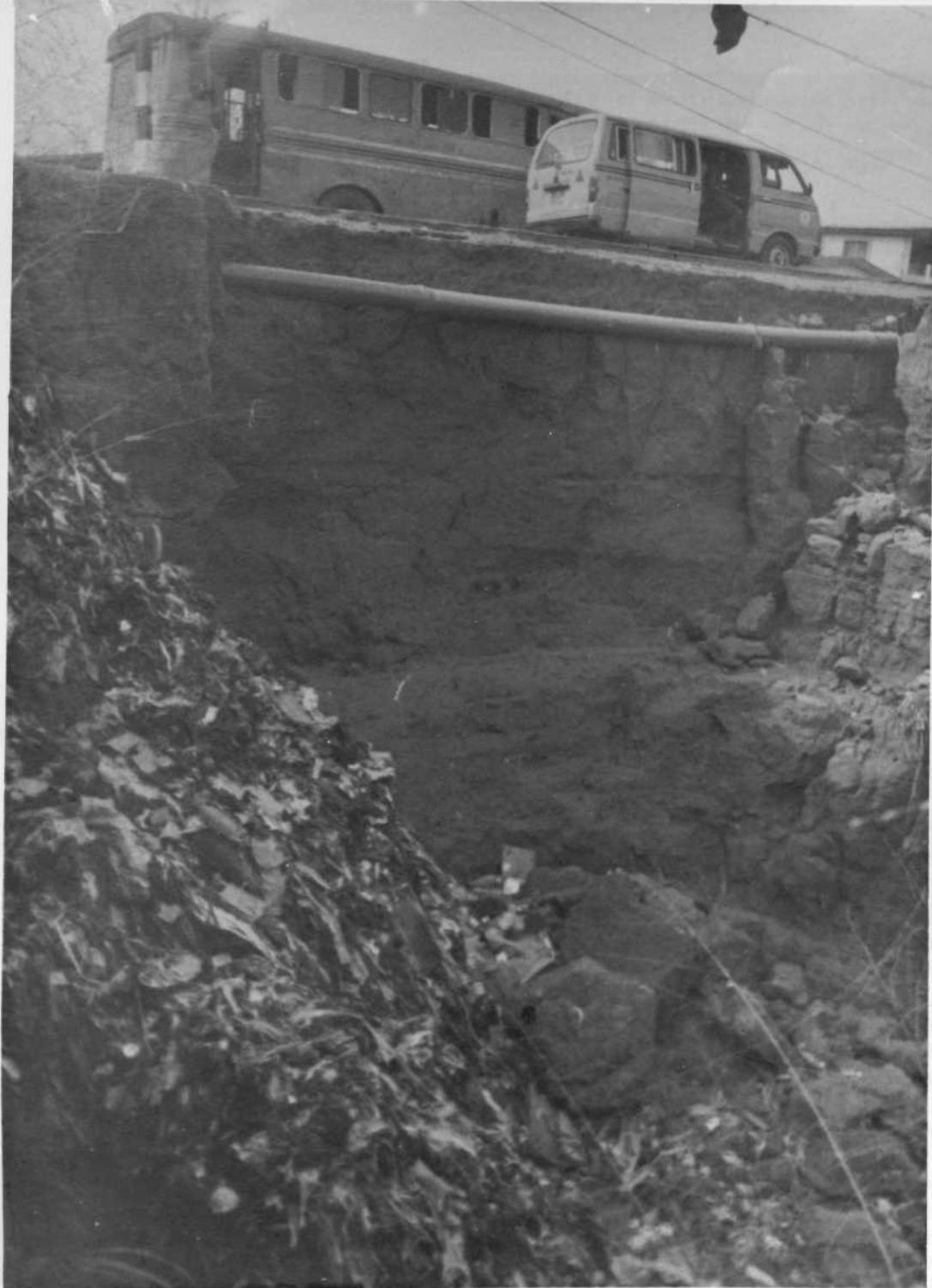
raphy is your head, and the lens.

This camera body does not make photography. A good model of it with a talented head can make good photography. This is only a black box that covers the light-sensitive material. And the difference between this black box here and this one, (the modern model) is that they've put on certain things that make you take photographs, like shutter speed and aperture on the camera, for you to set, whereas with the other one, you have to manually calculate them. So what you have here with sophistication is speed of work. But even with this speed it depends on the environment in which you are working.

When it comes to real photography and work for advertising, this would not apply and you have to abandon the sophisticated models and come back to the real thing because under those conditions you are working under a controlled environment so the question of speed is no longer important. So you come back to calculate manually, focus manually and do stuff manually, because you're under control. But if you are on the football field where you need to follow the guys and everything, this is your peg, (holding up the compact model). But when that football needs to now be done for advertising either things will be re-arranged, the environment controlled, the manual camera is big enough for what they are going to use the photograph for.

ADENIYI-JONES: I remember being at a seminar with some photographers in Abuja and one of the photographers said to me that with all these automatic cameras things could get very bad for us since virtually anybody now can take good photographs. You know he was worried about what future holds so I told him that even though everybody now can take good photographs I didn't share his anxiety but a similar discussion a few years later came up with the discussion of the development of the digital cameras, and how this stuff was just going through the roof with technology and now what are we going to do because they manipulate images? The craftsmanship is still important. It would be like the computer, you still need to think. You have to be able to think and decide because of certain limitations of the sophisticated camera. There is a wide variety of them but all they will do will be to level the scientific aspect of the playing field. And that can only be good for a creative mind because after all the client might wonder why he should pay for something he could do himself. But once you get a level playing field, it will be easier to see who are the people who you have to pay to do what.

GR: So the eye and the heart will actually overlap.



Copyright Sunday Tumo-Ojelabi, 1995

ADENIYI-JONES: Images still have to be created by people who can think and feel and the comment I made about the eye and the heart is because that's what you shoot with. You don't shoot with the machinery. Photography has not improved as technology has improved because, basically its how people interpret emotions.

NWOKEDI: So long as you know that a photographer sees things, or a scene, in a particular way. If each

person here is assigned to shoot the same piece we're not all going to get the same result. Everyone will come out with his own picture. Each photographer will capture his image based on his interpretation of what he sees. A lot of personal view will be represented in the picture. That's what makes the big difference. So using an automatic camera will do no more than give you an average impersonal exposure. Look at the mood behind the picture. For example there's always something that most people will not notice, something people will just walk past but the photographer will see and think of how to capture. These are not functions of the camera.

GR: It echoes what Jide said earlier about the interpretation of emotions. Sometimes I believe that the photographer is actually imposing his own vision of the

world on the viewer. It's not just a question of what somebody saw or did not see. It's not as if it's really there. It's something that's coming from within. Something that's existential to the artist.

ADENIYI-JONES: This, I think, is very interesting especially for the person who is reporting situations, whether its a situation for fashion or Passions Magazine, or for war going on somewhere. There has to be a level at which the photographer is imposing his

viewpoint, because he is a human being and he sees what he sees. But then you have different people approaching it in different ways.

Some people approach their documentation of events from a very passive point of view, where you try to sense, and that's why, once again it's subjective because it's your sense you're now going to report from. Then you have another kind of photographer who has a very strong view about the situation and goes out to show it. And going out to show it sometimes involves manipulating and there is an ethical question there

Sometimes again it involves just looking for what: It's not even deliberate, he's just looking for what he wants to see. There's a picture I saw during the Nigerian civil war. It was taken by an Italian photographer who was working in Biafra during that time. He had these women with firewood on their heads by

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some little market in some little village going home in the evening. Now, I saw it in a magazine in England. The picture was taken and the story written by two people who had been moved to go where they thought all kinds of terrible things were happening to let the world see. And from their own perspective, one of the best ways of showing the real impact of what was going on was not to show gory things of people in pieces but to show the impact on everyday life and to see women who are the fairer sex, who we pinch their bottoms and cuddle, walking for miles with wood on their head. That revealed that this war was terrible. Look what it had done to society, whereas a Nigerian photographer going to capture that same situation would not see that because for goodness sake, that picture would not, in his view, show anything of the impact of the war because that is life in that place. So, obviously, it is a matter of who you are imposing your own self on the situation which is why we are trying to de-emphasise this business of photographers zooming in and just photographing a situation and going away. You now find, in particular the big agencies, trying to get people who live there to now supply them

with images. People who have some understanding of the milieu in which they are working, because that is crucial to your interpretation of the situation, especially the visual interpretation of the situation.

The same thing would apply in advertising. What happened hitherto was that the Coca-cola people in their head office would say Coca-cola advertising must always be the same. But now they're realising that for the different markets, visually, what you see means something different. Therefore, you now ask the people living there, 'look do your local things, see what your particular situation demands' and it's all because I think people are becoming more visually literate. Talk to them in the language that they understand.

There's an American photographer whose work I have a lot of admiration for. His name is Eugene Smith. He's dead now. But I am inspired by a concept that I first heard espoused by him, 'that the truth be your prejudice.' Now to me it speaks of a prejudice of the truth that is common to everybody, not dependent on the narrow perspective from which we view the world. And it's the quest for that truth and adherence to that prejudice that should guide you in deciding the path to tread in photography. I say this because you talk of somebody coming and imposing their ideas - everybody comes with their prejudices. So you must be prejudiced. That's why you have to look at the environment, what's happening in this vicinity, you also have to be aware of what I bring with me from where I come from. My own cultural norms, so it means that taking a position becomes a bit difficult. Because you realise that there are several, several positions.

GR: Yes the question which I would like to ask before we continue is, should an artist allow himself to be imprisoned by the opinion of others or by the dominant view or position?

ADENIYI-JONES: No. I don't believe that he or she should be a reflection of the dominant view of the society because, the painter, writer, photographer, etc are supposed to be at the cutting edge of development in the society. Therefore your role is to be constantly pushing at those limitations. Why, to make people who are trapped in the dominant view say oh! OK, maybe there's another way, because there are so many things that form the dominant view, like convenience for example, I need to make a living, 'if I don't do this I will never get ahead.' So we have to constantly hack away at the dominant view in order for our society to keep up with the rest of the world...

GR:...Which is also a reminder of one of the motiva-



Copyright Don Barber, 1993

tions for PAN. We were trying to discuss the background of each photographer....

TUMO-OJELABI: I came into photography from the elementary school. In the 60s at the end of the school year there was a group photograph of the whole class and the photographer was invited.

I saw this man, the school photographer for the six years that I was in that primary school. He came every year with this large box with red and black cloth over his head and I got enticed to the magic he was performing under the cover of the cloth. After three days, we were all given postcard size copies each and I wondered at how he did it. I would spend time trying to locate myself in the mass of tiny images. That was where my wonder began and year after year the picture session was an occasion I looked forward to. So when I left elementary school a half brother of mine whose parents had no money to send to school went to 'learn' photography. I eventually had the privilege of spending parts of my secondary school holidays with him. He would take me into the dark room. Whenever he was making his darkroom calculations, counting, I thought he was recounting some incantation. But I observed that after counting for a while he removed the paper and put in some liquid solution and some images began to appear. It was then that I resolved that whatever it took to become a photogra-

pher I would become one. So when I was admitted to the university to read history, I rejected the offer. I was re-admitted to read Yoruba but I was worried about the limitations that I thought Yoruba (African languages and linguistics) should give, so I discussed with one of the lecturers who encouraged me to accept the offer. He said I could cross over to his department where I would have the opportunity to do photography. I accepted the admission to read Yoruba at Ife. Because I was in constant touch with the dramatic arts department where a course was offered in photography and cinematography I had to change over. This change was however very difficult initially because my head of department was reluctant to release one of his most promising students. In the drama department, you could not specialise in cinematography unless you passed the courses in still-photography. So I did electives in photography so that I was able to do cinematography. I can recall my lecturer in photography asking me during an informal discussion, what I would like to become. He was very surprised when I said photographer and when he asked if I intended to specialise in still photography or motion and I answered that it would have to be still photography he was more surprised. He asked why and I said because that was what I liked. I had discovered I would rather become a still photographer. This lecturer tried to convince me that motion



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photography was better - he himself had studied cinematography in France. But I had already made up my mind. So that was how I came into photography.

GR: At the moment you are a Press Photographer...

TUMO-OJELABI: Yes.

GR: In fact there's the other question about training opportunities. We have not addressed the question of local apprenticeships and also the schools of journalism which run elective courses in photojournalism.

NWOKEDI: I know there's a problem. Because we don't have institutions which train photographers so what can fill in that need are the existing studios. If a studio can handle about two or three clients at a time, after a number of years they are going to learn something. But a lot has to depend on the apprentices themselves. First of all, they must take photography serious. Sometimes a lot of people come to my studio thinking that this is a play thing. They think its something one just comes to because conditions have pushed me here for awhile, you know; I'm going to do another thing in the future.

But if we are able to educate our people to start seeing photography as a serious profession and there's a lot of future in it, the sky is the limit as to the things one can attain in the field.

GR: Do you believe that they have a lot to offer the apprentices?

NWOKEDI: Well, it depends on what the guy is doing himself. It depends on the level of the studio, depends on how the studio is operating....

GR: Talking about the average...

NWOKEDI: But it might be difficult to say considering the usage of the word average. The way I look at it, I don't see a lot of studios within that average bracket. I see two extremes and a big gap in between....

ADENIYI-JONES: If I may come in, there are two things. One is, I can say hearsay, from my point of view. The guy who has the studio called 'Le Fahts' I was told, I met him once but I don't know him, and he's never told me his story. But I was told that he started off as an apprentice to a photographer who was working in Akoka (Lagos mainland). He clearly, in terms of success, is streaks above the person



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through whom he got into photography.

Now, perhaps, this was a particular individual who was lucky enough to be motivated, maybe to meet and interact with people who said listen, this thing you can, you know, improve upon. But out of all the many, many, many, this is one example of a good photography story.

But you see, because we are dealing with the same society, what would make people open their eyes to certain opportunities is what they see as success. So he went into supplying photographic materials and then processing. Now I believe that his success has spawned the boom of develop-and-print photographic places in a way that if there was an example of a photographer who had become very, very, financially successful, many other people would come in. So at the moment, how much the people benefit from apprenticeships is so difficult to say. There are all kinds of things that come into play: one is that by the time somebody goes into apprenticeship as a photographer, because we don't have these role-model success, by the time everybody has agreed that you can go and learn photography, its possible that you'd have tried everything else and failed at it. So the raw material that you're starting with, very often is disadvantaged. Its not that these guys have decided this is

what I want to do. Its when I wanted to do this, no way, I failed this exam, I did this and failed. Sometimes its either people who've had their child, spoilt brats, brought up in England given all these and that and they come back, some of them zonked out on drugs, they can't figure... and then the parent would say 'Ah, look... please, my son you know... is a problem... can you show him, you know because he can't do anything else. (laughter)

Now, luckily I've not had the experience of having been saddled with any of them. But those are extreme examples. Generally, for people in that situation, until there's a role-model out there that will make somebody who could aspire to anything say: 'Ah this is what I want to do!'

Then, also there is in the areas that I have moved, a very strong reluctance to impart your knowledge to somebody else. If its not within a formalised area like the teaching area. I worked for sometime at the Federal Ministry of Information. They brought people in at the level of assistant photographer where you come in and learn. Now, the first studio that I went into - it was not in this country - the first day the guy who ran the place said 'Ah look come, come lets see how easy it is to process a role of black and white film. The first day I was there, I processed a role of film

and from then on you learn to hone your skills to do it well. At the ministry of information, you will have a guy who would have been there for six months and people would be telling him 'you can't enter darkroom like that o. So you think you just come here and just enter like that, you know. So because you yourself are limited in what you can see as possibilities, how can you let somebody else come and take your 'garri'? So you then say, 'This kind thing wey we dey do e hard o.' (laughter)

GR: Okay maybe Don will now tell us what brought him into photography?

BARBER: If you ask me what brought me into photography I'll just say, independence. That's all. I just wanted to express myself and my own vision. My first background in visual arts had to do with motion picture. I'm into television. I came back to work for the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA).

GR: Where from?

BARBER: From England. But I had to like fight, slap people... my name was synonymous with beating up people at the NTA. But I realised that I couldn't continue like that, one of the ways I could express myself was photography which had just me, the equipment and nothing else, because in reality a television crew was a big crew, usually some six, seven people involved, to the stick of a stopwatch to bring the image.

So its stuff like that together with the indiscipline I could not relate with as regards our television practice here. So I just quit the scene and did more photography.

GR: I'd like us, before we conclude to also talk about the market for photographers in Nigeria.

BARBER: Photography as I keep saying, is one of the most lucrative professions in Nigeria. The newspapers rely on photographers, in printing also photocopying is photography, X-ray in hospitals is photography; it is still light passing through sensitive material to achieve that. So the industry isn't just seen in the camera point of view. Its so wide.

I believe over 50 million Nigerians have been photographed, I would expect so, no matter where they are....

NWOKEDI: Go to most people's homes and you will see large displays of pictures on the sitting room walls....

BARBER: And we're talking maybe at least five naira per picture... multiply that by 50 million, thats 250

million naira. That's astronomical even when everyone gets photographed only once.

Also, photography is actually a document. Photography on its own is document. And we have a knack for not keeping records. We are either scared that someone will see us in somebody's house because of the kind of work we do and stuff like that. But once in a while we do. Most people overlook photographs today only to regret it tomorrow. I have seen the richest of the families of Lagos and their father or grandfather dies and there's no illustration.

And the guy blocks four streets, and brings the whole bands in Nigeria to play for his father's burial but has no photograph. He can afford to pay all of them but cannot afford to find a photograph of his father to put obituary in the newspapers. Because he never said, 'Daddy I'll give you a treat. I'll take you to a photographer's studio.'

If I found a photograph of you today in secondary school class one, with any member of your family, you'll beg me. Everything you can to get it from me. You will be my good friend, you'll be coming here every other day to visit me, because, you want a copy. Probably when you took that picture in Class One you had *craw-craw* on your head but it won't matter you'll still want a copy of it. May be you were not even wearing trousers, you could have been posing then in just a jumper but you'd want it to show to people, 'see when I dey small.'

ADENIYI-JONES: There's an interesting thing about your question and maybe I should just add that as a photographer, just like anybody else, I don't think that the society owes anyone of us a living. So in a way, to say that the society is not this or that, matter little. As with everything, if you do something that's of value to enough people in the society, the society will reward you. And so it should be.

If you do something that they need, that's why Don's example was very good. The responsibility of the association (PAN) now, is to let people know and see that they can get high quality photographs. And as Don was saying, why can't you, as a treat, photograph your father or grandfather and it becomes a family heirloom and I am sure if enough people can see it from that way then you'll discover that a lot of people would want that.

So I think the society owes you nothing. If you have chosen to be a photographer and the society does not want photographers then you'll be hungry. If it does, but it doesn't know it yet, you have to find ways of letting it know, and you'll be rewarded.