

Chapter Eleven

Reclaiming Liberian Narratives through Photography

Seeing beyond Our Sight

Gabriel B. Tait

PHOTOGRAPHY AND CULTURE

The research team was stuck, literally. The Mitsubishi L300 bus I was driving with a group of Liberians was in a rut. Mud was everywhere. It was Liberia's rainy season! As I hit the gas the tires just spun, no traction. We unloaded the bus and decided we could push our way through. As we looked for a path to navigate, I noticed a lady in a beautiful yellow dress. She was walking amid the mud. I stopped and asked the team to observe the lady in the dress. The sight was peculiar, because she was not muddy. They acknowledged her and returned to pushing the bus. We finally made a path, loaded the bus, and continued on our way. Shortly thereafter, William Boen, a local pastor of a small church, turned to me from the passenger seat and shared the following story:

A boy was in the forest. He was searching for a crying baby squirrel. As he went from person to person, he asked if they heard the faint cries, but they did not. He searched tree after tree. The sound was consistent, but faint. After some time, the boy came upon a tree and found the baby squirrel; its mother was dead. The baby was hungry. The boy took the squirrel home and cared for it; eventually he released it back to the wild. Amazed with the boy's dedication and skills, the villagers asked, "Why weren't we able to hear the squirrel's cries?" The boy replied, "I was trained to listen keenly amidst all the other sounds."

Boen then said, "Gabriel, back on the road you noticed the lady in the yellow dress. We have been here in the forest, but it took you to point out the pretty sight in the middle of the mud. Likewise, we pray that your study will help Liberians show these sights." Humbled by Pastor Boen's observation, I continued driving to Buchanan, Liberia, for our first training session. I was

excited for the opportunity to learn about Liberian identity through photography and make sense (Geurts, 2002; Pink, 2011) of the cultural narratives they would share (Fisher, 1989; Ravitch, 2014; Warnick, 1987).

While it is common practice in many nations around the world for people to communicate about their culture, identity, and/or tribal group through the use of stories, photographs have also been used. On the continent of Africa (and its 54 countries) Western books, papers, and journals have used photographic images to stereotype and misrepresent a continent of people and their diversity of cultures (Gullestad, 2007; Scruggs, 2010; Thompson, 2012). Many of these images exposed issues of poverty and cultural differences to the world (Lutz & Collins, 1993), which were previously unseen by outsiders. However, these photographs and images, left to the interpretations of others, have had unintentional negative implications, consequences, and interpretations (Boone, 2005; Levitt, 2005). These negative influences and cultural oppression (Byrd & Rothberg, 2011; Dolo, 2008) have stifled any indigenous meanings in the photographs and images.

As with Boen's earlier story, these images when produced by local people can offer an emic (or insider's) (Pike, 1967) perspective that is foundational to who the people are, what they believe, and how they live.

In recent years, however, there has been a groundswell of participatory studies used to reclaim what Geertz (1983) referred to as *local knowledge* and the shared meanings associated with this knowledge (Tait, 2019). Researchers now aim to learn from local communities about their culture and identity, and try to give some agency to the people in how they are represented. This interest in participatory research methods, and the narratives they draw out, has given rise to more inclusive research studies.

Using an ethnographic lens, this chapter builds on the literature by revealing how a team, comprised of 11 Liberian men and women, used *Sight Beyond My Sight* (SBMS), a participatory photography research method, to reclaim and explain their cultural narratives by sharing important photographs about who they are, how they live, and what they believe.

LIBERIA AND ITS CULTURE

Understanding the historical context of Liberia is vital to understanding the importance of (1) why many Liberians have remained mute about their cultural narratives, and (2) what their voices reveal about the significance of their culture. American theologian Robert E. Webber (2008) asks the central question, "Who gets to narrate the world?" While Webber's question is filtered through a Christian lens, it is vitally important to this chapter when

considering the foundation of this study in Liberia. Liberia is a West African country of nearly five million people (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2019). It is slightly larger than the state of Tennessee.

Founded in 1847 by former and freed African American slaves being repatriated from America, some of Liberia's first settlers landed on the shores in 1821. The descendants of this settler population became known as Americo-Liberians. The Americo-Liberians established a socially elite class and a politically powerful one-party government system, the True Whig Party (TWP). The TWP ruled and controlled indigenous ethnic groups by an oligarchy for over 130 years, thus setting up what many Liberian scholars (Clegg, 2004; Dolo, 2008; Dunn, 2001; Guannu, 1982) suggest is and has been an identity crisis in Liberia. Levitt (2005) argues the crisis was already present, and the infusion of African Americans only exacerbated the conflicts. Nevertheless, many Liberians now believe the following: (1) they are powerless because of a lack of education, (2) they are economically destitute, earning about one dollar a day; and, (3) they are being dismissed as culturally insignificant because of their ethnic or religious traditions, which are deemed inappropriate by mainstream society. These perspectives give rise for many Liberians to argue that they are subaltern.

Dennis and Dennis (2008) add there are a myriad of issues that contribute to this crisis, but two underlying factors are: (1) the settlement of African American slaves in Liberia during the nineteenth century, and (2) the fractured government structures that oppressed ethnic Liberians and stifled many of their narratives. Dennis and Dennis illustrate the historical context of this oppressive structure observing:

The Free Negroes and freed slaves who went there thought they were free. Instead as Americo-Liberians, they remained captive to the effect(s) of slavery and racism. In their longing for success and status, they "rose" by exploiting the natives and justifying it on the basis of cultural inferiority. In an all-black nation, culture superseded race. (p. 3)

The cultural narrative informed African Americans that they were subservient to whites in America. During the mid-1800s and 1900s, Liberians had outsiders come into their communities, photograph them, and represent their culture and their bodies with an outsider's definition and perspective. Most of the time, the indigenous community did not have a say as to whether they would visually represent their culture and their bodies. Fetter (2008), looking through a postcolonial lens in Africa, likens the difficulties reconstructing populations' histories (and their narratives) without the local communities' involvement, "like reconstructing political history from the memoirs of a dishonest politician: you can't believe it all, but you ignore it at your peril" (p. 87). Equally,

many of the cultural and visual representations that have been projected about the country and its citizens have been distant and one-sided. This is the process that the postcolonial critique calls "othering the other." Hence, exploring these important identities was an imperative part of this study.

Narratives and Photography in Africa

For more than 180 years, photography has been diffused into societies throughout much of the world, including Liberia. We now view photographs hundreds of times each day through various media. These images reveal in part what Fisher (1989) observed as "the narrative paradigm" (p. 56). The photographs and the stories that are shared about them reveal as much, if not more, about the image makers as it does about the context and communities that are represented. For Fisher, these narratives expose "symbolic messages" (p. 56) that invite both "interpretation and assessment of human communication" (p. 57). Even within a narrative paradigm the most important voices are being omitted.

Like Fisher's rhetorical investigation, Sontag (1977) takes another perspective in examining photography as a form of communication by suggesting it provides "a new visual code," where photographs have the ability to "alter and enlarge" both what we have access to see and what is communicated through the lens (p. 3). Pictures shape the way we organize reality when we are not looking at pictures. Sontag posits that photographs are a type of "grammar" that construct an "ethics of seeing" (p. 3). In light of this "ethics of seeing," many of the photographs and visual documents produced by the settlers in Africa did not follow this code. This notion formulated what Tienou (1991) and Coombes (1994) call a concerted effort to marginalize the continent as part of a "monolithic imperial propaganda" (Coombes, 1994, p. 2). Pictures shape how we see others, and tend to essentialize (or categorize) others in a monolithic way. That is why when someone says "African" we usually have a mental picture of a dark-skinned person in animal skins, with shields, and spears. Coombes (1994) reflects,

Africa was uniformly reproduced through a series of tropes as a "land of darkness," "the white man's burden," people with savages of an inherently inferior order, both intellectually and morally, to the white colonizer. Consequently, the material culture that was brought out of Africa as a result of the "civilizing mission" of the white colonizers is usually understood in most historical accounts as being relegated solely to the demeaning category of "trophy" or curiosity over this period. (p. 2)

Thompson (2012) explains how there was a distinction between the Western "us" and the non-Western "other" in some of the more insidious cam-

paigns used to distinguish the "backward" non-Westerner from the "modern" Westerner in Western society.

Subaltern Voices

The use of photography in a cross-cultural context provides a narrative lens to view cultures in their diversity, to understand the African imagination or the Euro-American imagination about Africa (Behrend 2002), and to serve as a vital communication tool for various forms of media (Lester, 2014; Littlejohn & Foss, 2005; Mead, 1978; Poole, 1997). Spivak and Morris (2010) raise an empowering question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" Spivak and Morris attributed the concept of "Subaltern" to Antonio Gramsci for his early twentieth-century work. Gramsci, an Italian Marxist, framed the subaltern as a subgroup that is not a player in society's power politics, a group without a voice at all. So, it did apply to colonized people and other people left out of the equation and thus silenced. Now widely accepted and used in anthropology, sociology, and historiography, subaltern has been formulated by historical, political, and economic discourses. Gramsci's work focuses on giving voice to these subaltern peoples.

Interpretive Theory of Culture

Many theories of interpretation are available (Barthes, 1982; Cartier-Bresson, 1979; Edwards, 2006; Geary, 1991; Poole, 2005; Sontag, 1977). Most people today agree that interpretation is about perspective; that is, there are many interpretations possible. The historical view emphasized the "viewer perspective" leaving out the possibility of a "creator perspective." This reflective aspect is beneficial for the viewer, but it omits direct input from the creator. This can be a useful tool because it allows the viewer to place the visual record in a particular historical context, but it does not go far enough. These theories often alienate instead of empowering the insider. They do not provide the space for the creator(s) of the image, or people in the cultural context of the image, to tell why they created the image or properly interrogate the image in its context. Thus, critical pieces of the photographic and reflective process[es] are omitted. When this input is omitted, key questions are missed: What does the image mean in the host community's sociocultural context? Why was the image created at a particular time? Who are the people in the photographs? What meanings are given to the signs and symbols in the photographs? And, is the meaning consistently received among other members of the culture or society? These facts can best be recovered and interpreted from within the context.

Greater knowledge can be learned about cross-cultural context by applying Geertz's (1973) interpretive (symbolic) anthropology model to the visual discipline. Geertz focuses his research on what Gilbert Ryle first described as "thick description." Using the camera as a metaphor, Geertz describes "thick description" as two movements. Geertz uses the example of a wink. The movement is observed, first, as a muscle twitch. The second movement is not in the photograph itself. It involves interpretation; someone inside the culture recognizes the wink as "(1) deliberately (sent), (2) to someone in particular, (3) to impart a particular message, (4) according to a socially established code, and (5) with cognizance of the rest of the company" (p. 6). Continuing this metaphor, the camera then becomes a tool for recording the actions, symbols, and context that others in the culture, not the outsider, will have to interpret.

Moreover, the "thick description" principle seeks to offer layers of interpretative details of culture. While Geertz was not particularly keen on the emic/etic distinction and never wanted to claim that he was providing the "native point of view," he would have said that he was using the native point of view to develop his layered interpretation. But, ultimately the interpretations, in the final form, were the job of the anthropologist. Thick description focuses on gathering a comprehensive picture of cultures, their rituals, the participants, their roles within the culture, and the context in which the events take place.

This approach presupposes the more you know about a culture and its members, the more you will gain a clearer picture about the people. Geertz does offer pause to this idea, reflecting, "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (p. 29). He also argues that this "interpretive approach . . . is essentially contestable . . . and . . . is a science whose progress is marked less by a perfection of consensus than by a refinement of debate" (p. 29). In this way, Geertz admits that there is always another perspective to consider and another layer of interpretation to add. Hall (1997) takes a more practical and visual approach expressing:

Culture, it is argued, is not so much a set of things—novels and paintings or TV programs or comics—as a process, a set of practices. Primarily, culture is concerned with the production and exchanges of meanings—the "giving" and "taking" of meaning—between the members of a society or group. To say that two people belong to the same culture is to say that they interpret the world in roughly the same ways and can express themselves, their thoughts and feelings about the world, in ways which [*sic*—that] will be understood by each other. Thus, culture depends on its participants interpreting meaningfully what is around them, and "making sense" of the world, in broadly similar ways. (p. 2)

In these two perspectives about culture and its meaning, photography is used as a tool for the observer to focus on the signs, symbols, meanings, and interpretations in this web of culture.

Geertz reminds us, "Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity" (1973, p. 14). This concept is at the center of using this theory for this study. The culture's members have the visual say in what will or will not be represented in their culture. They also have the "say" in what the photographs mean to them and their culture. Geertz further offers a revelation regarding interpretation adding, "A good interpretation of anything—a poem, a person, a history, a ritual, an institution, a society—takes us into the heart of that of which it is the interpretation" (p. 18).

Expanding the Process

In the early 1950s and 1960s an attempt was made to change how minority communities were viewed and represented. In the midst of a sweeping post-colonial movement abroad, John Collier's (1967) work with various Native American populations helped reorient society to see and hear from members of this group. Collier helped establish a benchmark for social scientists utilizing visual data. He revealed how photography could be incorporated with interview techniques (which some now refer to as participant photography or photo elicitation). Through his interview technique participants were much more involved in the research process (pp. 44–66). Native American participants freely shared narratives about the people, places, and artifacts presented in their visual records. This method should be used with caution, as Collier states,

Photography can gain us a foothold in a community. But just as fast, and completely, photography can get us rejected if we are guilty of insensitive intrusion with a camera. It must be clear that when we start photographing the inner workings of social structure we leave public domain and enter the confines of more private belief and behavior. (p. 42)

Because he was an early pioneer of visual anthropology as an ethnographic tool, Collier's work expanded how researchers and participants viewed their respective communities.

Worth and Adair (1997), building on the work of Collier, explored a participant action model with Navajo Native Americans in the Southwestern United States. They believed visual researchers, mainly anthropologists, were successfully "grasp(ing) the natives' point of view" (Worth, 1974, p. 12). But

they also believed researchers were not going far enough in their exploration of the human identity within a given culture. Their solution was to develop a “method of eliciting a visual response in a way comparable to statements obtained through the use of verbal linguist techniques” (p. 13), which was one way to bridge the gap between what the researchers saw in their fieldwork and what they were told by their informants.

Worth and Adair (1997) wanted to learn about the Navajos through motion pictures that were united by the interpretations from Navajos. The researchers gave the Navajos motion picture cameras and had them capture life in their community. Worth and Adair’s premise was the more communication channels a group had the better off they would be in expressing who they were (p. 5). They argued that by studying how people present themselves through the images they make, the greater the opportunities were to learn about the participants. I agree with this general premise, though many complexities in studying culture exist that must be considered.

More recently, Pink (2013) has approached the multiple ways photography can be used for ethnographic research. She suggests the photographs taken by participants are “representations of ethnographic knowledge” and models of “cultural production, social interactions and individual experience(s) that may otherwise not be acquired” (p. 1). Hermkens (2007) also acknowledges the ethnographic value of photographs that serve as a cultural text when she looks at church festivals and identity in Papua New Guinea. For both Pink and Hermkens, the photograph serves as a valuable entry point for researchers to gain emic (or insider’s) perspective.

DEVELOPMENT OF PHOTOGRAPHY AS A RESEARCH METHOD

Sight Beyond My Sight (SBMS)

Sight Beyond My Sight (SBMS) is a mixed methodology research method and theoretical approach I developed to learn cultural narratives in cross-cultural contexts. SBMS uses photography and in-depth interviews as a way to understand one’s identity and the cultural narratives they share. While there are other photo elicitation type of methodologies (Collier, 1967; Harper, 2002; Hubbard, 2013; Vassenden & Andersson, 2010; Wang, 1999; Worth & Adair, 1997; Ziller, 1990), SBMS utilizes the best of many of those approaches to offer a more robust or complete picture of what participants have to say about their own photographs. Built on the biblical narrative of Mark chapter 8, where Jesus has an interaction with a blind person, SBMS uses this

narrative as a metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) to illustrate the transformation of the blind man to see with clarity.

Furthermore, SBMS seeks to ensure that the outsider’s premature interpretation does not become the final statement. The photographs local photographers make are not amenable to outsider interpretation without the local knowledge. When efforts are made by outsiders to engage local photographers about their work through participation (Coudry & Jenkins, 2014), a clearer picture is gained. This aligns with the second encounter between Jesus and the blind man who came away seeing clearly.

SBMS argues that, by employing local participants to: (1) take photographs, (2) reflect on the photographs they have created, and (3) engage in a collective community dialogue for shared meanings of the photographs, a more holistic understanding is produced.

Method

To begin the SBMS study, a research team was developed and trained. The team included a cultural informant, a local photography instructor, several research assistants, and a number of volunteers. SBMS utilized a Liberian photographer to train Liberians in photography. This was advantageous for this study because Liberians know their cultural vernacular in ways that outsiders do not. For example, during several of the training sessions a participant asked, “Where did the trainer get all the ‘fixed focused cameras?’” Confused, I looked at the trainer and waited for his response. He grabbed one of the Canon G15 digital cameras and said, “These fixed focus cameras were brought from America.” In the United States we call the cameras the participants were using “point and shoot” cameras. The trainer shared with me and the research team that they did not use the term “point and shoot” to describe their cameras, because of the negative connotation associated with the term and Liberia’s history of war. In this two-hour photography training session, both the research team and study participants realized the importance of the local community defining their own terms and narratives.

Each participant was trained concerning the goals of the study. Participants were provided digital cameras, on a rotating schedule (up to four participants were given cameras in a one-week rotation); each participant was given one week to make pictures. The emphasis was placed on the data and not on the aesthetic quality of the images.

Over 750 photographs were taken during the study. In the next step, participants were asked to select their top 20 photographs and then, from these, the top three photographs that best emphasized their culture and identity. Each participant then sorted and piled (Spradley, 1979) their photographs,

developing their own themes and categories for each pile. Finally, the group of eleven participants came together for a focus group meeting where commonly appearing themes were presented and discussed. Cultural narratives were then recorded. I will present two of the themes.

Selection of Photographs

Clarence had spent the last five hours sorting through over 200 photographs he had taken. He organized his top 20 photographs into categories discussing the meanings in a way that provided insights into Liberian culture and identity. We were both exhausted and almost finished with the task when I wondered what would have been the response of Liberians in the late 1800s if anthropologists and other social scientists had asked for indigenous interpretative input to their images? Would this participatory practice have evolved differently from what Clarence Cole (2011) and I were now doing and discussing? What input would the local community have had, and at what stages in the process? Would they have cared about how they were represented? Suddenly Cole (2011) blurted out, "This is deep!" My attention refocused on our current task. "What's deep?" I asked. "It's deep how we embrace and accept or get comfortable with conditions outsiders put on us. They [i.e., Liberians] are comfortable with acceptance." This was a key moment when the insider joined in the discussion about interpretation. Clarence saw that I was still unsure of what he was saying, so he pointed to a photograph he had taken of a chimpanzee sitting on the back of a bicycle. As I watched Clarence's disposition change, I knew we were about to have an enlightening conversation about his final group of photographs.

Top 20 Photos

After participants finished isolating their top 20 images, a sense of accomplishment was evident. They were ready to share their narratives. I was almost ready. I still needed them to rank their top 20 photographs and put them into groups. This stage would help me and the participants understand the categories of the photographs and their level of importance. Spradley (1980) notes, "Finding out what people know is important, [but equally as] important is discovering how people have organized that knowledge" (p. 131).

One participant, Prince Mulbah (2011), took several days to complete his sorting because he became sick after the first session. During his first session, Prince organized his 18 photographs into 11 groups. I knew he was articulate, engaging, and an intelligent young man, so I was very interested to watch

him as he worked through the process. Prince moved photos from one pile to another over the course of 15 minutes, never settling on his final decision. When he grabbed his head in frustration, I asked, "Prince, do you want to take a break?" He said, "No, I want to keep going." "Prince, there is no right or wrong way to organize your photos," I told him to try to build his confidence. I asked again, "Do you want to take a break, may I get you something to drink?" This time he said yes. As we ate crackers and sipped fruit juice, he continued to examine the photographs. I learned to take the pressure off by saying, "Organize your photos one way now, and we'll talk about it, and then later you can reorganize them in another way, and we will talk about that."

We continued the sorting process. I asked where he was having problems. He said the pictures looked like puzzle pieces. I realized I had to approach the piling process another way, so I used a school subject's metaphor (Lakoff, 2014). Lakoff and Johnson (1980) posit how society "fundamentally thinks and acts in a metaphorical nature" (p. 3). Thinking of the different piles of photos as distinct classes seemed to make sense to Prince as he removed the pictures from their existing groups and again started the process. "This photo goes here . . . this photo goes there," Prince said with confidence. Within 10 minutes he had whittled the 11 piles down to five and was finished. I asked him, "What was different about this process? Was it difficult for you?" He offered this reflection:

[The process] was difficult, because my mind was not open. So, when you asked me to put in a group, I thought I should just spread them [on the table]. But it wasn't until you really made it simple that my mind opened up. I was able to look at the photos and say this . . . this . . . and this, they all point to one goal. I said if this man is about election and this lady is about the election, then all should go into one group. When I realized these photos should have the same explanation I said these should all be in one group. They fit together! (Mulbah, 2011)

Prince's reflection highlights the desired goal for SBMS—to learn about Liberian culture (and any other culture) and identity from Liberians (and the local people). SBMS also shows that the researcher cares about having Liberians reflect on the meaning and categories of their own culture. A similar process occurred with the other 10 participants. After sorting the piles, the participants then ranked each pile by its level of importance. Based on their pile sorting, I compiled a list of the 53 pile labels the participants provided for their top 20 photographic selections. These titles served as thematic labels for the larger body of images. The labels also offered insights about how the participants organized ideas concerning a particular topic they wanted to represent.

Themes

Each culture speaks a language unique to its people. The language is revealed in words, rituals, behaviors, and visual artifacts. These elements are keys to the “cultural meaning systems encoded in symbols” (including language) (Spradley 1980, p. 99). The first requirement for an outsider is the need to commit himself/herself to understanding these encoded symbols (Hall, 1993), as well as the conviction that the answer to this question is not in her or his head. In a cross-cultural context, anthropologists have traditionally been on the front lines, trying to decipher these codes of culture.

Unfortunately, as Michael Rynkiewich (2011) emphasizes, “The 1960s model of culture . . . tended to reify the concept of culture as a causative agent, and tended to depersonalize people as subjects of study” (p. 8). Anthropology has continued to develop, but missiology (and others disciplines) are still in a catch-up mode (p. 8). My informants were agents in their own right.

From the participant categorization and interpretations of these photos I was able to discover four overarching themes, all of which deal with identity, culture, and community: (1) who we are (and are not), (2) how we live, (3) what we eat, and (4) what we believe. These themes revealed the interconnectedness of how Liberians viewed their belief systems with their identity. I will discuss two of these cultural themes, how we live and what we eat, and the narratives that emerged.

These two themes can be better understood by exploring Richard Robbins’s (2009) concept of the cultural construction of identity (p. 205–242). Robbins established his framework by asking, how do people determine who they are? And, how do they communicate who they are to others? Steven Ybarrola (2009) offers insight into these questions noting, “When it comes to issues of identity things are never as simple as they may first appear” (p. 111). To untangle the complexities of identity Robbins suggests each person has an “identity toolbox” (2009, p. 211). We negotiate multiple identities, keeping in mind that “every person occupies several statuses in life over time” (Rynkiewich, 2011, p. 68). This intersectionality and how to better understand these identities is the impetus of this chapter. When we understand the negotiated meaning in how people define and represent themselves, we get at the core of their narratives. In the next section I present the photograph and then allow the participant to provide his or her interpretation. At the end of each section I offer an analysis based on my participant observation, interviews, and experience as a photojournalist.

How We Live

Amos Korzawu was a student at the University of Liberia. His major was marketing. He said he took photographs that showed businesses in his community.

For me his photographs seemed like a hodge podge of sights and people in Liberia. The number of photos varied in each participant’s pile. Korzawu’s largest included 13 photographs in a grouping. The theme was business. He said, “Liberia does not have just one business, but different businesses that people are involved with in our community” (Korzawu, 2011). From his grouping he identified six different business types: (1) fish sellers (see figure 11.1), (2) money exchanger and (telephone) scratch card sellers, (3) tailors, (4) used clothes sellers, (5) rice and grain sellers, and (6) street vendors. Korzawu said these groups have specific roles in the business world.

In the middle of the piling session I asked Amos, “How does this group of photos speak to you and your culture? And why should an outsider know about these different businesses?” He looked at me in his cool, laid-back posture and said, “If someone for your side comes to Liberia and don’t know [about the levels of selling] they will waste a lot of money. Selling is a part of Liberian culture.” Korzawu’s grouping offers an important perspective on grasping the idea that the diversity of business in Liberia should not be seen through Western categories.

In the urban area, Amos made a number of photographs from the market. Different from the hunter, the market seller collects their product from fisher-



Figure 11.1. Amos P. Korzawu, of Providence Baptist Church in Monrovia, Liberia, takes photographs of a fish seller as part of his culture. This photograph represents one of a number of businesses in Liberian culture. By Amos P. Korzawu for SBMS & Gabriel B. Tait.

men on the coast. Korzawu's photos focused largely on the food the people sell. The photo was placed in the "How we live" category because Korzawu focuses on the transaction of fish in a society. "In Liberia, selling [goods] is one of the ways we make money," Korzawu stated. This photograph shows a lady preparing to sell fish, another food staple for many Liberians. The price of fish varies by season and/or type of fish. A Red Snapper may cost between 50 and 75 LD, which is about \$1.00–\$1.25. There are two ways to prepare fish for selling: dried and raw. The fish drying process can take several days to complete. The point is that one level of insider interpretation invites the exploration of other levels.

What We Eat

Liberian food, like its culture, is a mixture of traditional and southern American influences. Olukoju (2006) notes, in Liberia generally, three types of cuisine exist: the indigenous of the various ethnic groups in the country, the hybrid cuisines of the Americo-Liberians, and foreign imports. Helene Cooper describes the food as "Creole cooking with a coastal African twist" (Cooper, 2010, p. 1). Social class and status (largely) determine the food one eats (Olukoju, 2006, p. 80). The Lebanese, who have been in Liberia since the late 1800s and represent the largest number of non-Liberian merchants, have a great influence on the food.

"In the interior, everything plays a significant role within the [palm] tree," Adama S. Fayiah (2011) says as she selects a photograph from her take. The palm nuts and the kernels they produce play an important role in the diet of Liberians. The nut and the kernels are used to produce various oils, soups (a general term used for stews and sauces served over rice and fufu, fermented cassava), and snacks. Palm oil, along with rice and fish, is a dietary staple for many Liberians. In Fayiah's photograph she shows palm nuts sitting at the base of an oil palm tree, which grow wild in the interior.

Fayiah explains the process of making palm oil. First you harvest the vegetable. Then you wash it. After washing the nut, you boil it. Then you bust the softened palm nut and extract the kernel. After taking the kernel you beat it (in a mortar) into a pulp. Then you boil the pulp (which is oil-laden) and the oil comes to the top. You then separate the oil from the water. The oil is used to make red oil, which is used to flavor many of the stews and soups of Liberian dishes. Fayiah explains, "Red oil can be used for food, they put in cassava leaf and potato greens, and you can even use it for a rub if you are burned" (Fayiah, 2011). Many meals in Liberia contain oil (either red or vegetable), pepper, fish, and cassava.

The by-product of the nuts can be made into a pasty sauce called palm butter, which is one of the national dishes of Liberia. Palm butter is generally mixed with fish or meats and is served over rice with pepper. The value of Fayiah's photograph could have easily been missed. She used the photograph as a way to highlight an important staple in the Liberian food. For Fayiah, the photograph was a picture of record showing outsiders an important food staple in their community.

Food is culturally defined. What is taboo in one culture is often accepted and enjoyed in another. One of the ways Liberians make distinctions between groups, areas, food, and their cultures is by saying "this side" or "that side." Such was the case when Prince Mulbah presented photographs of an individual "burning [i.e., barbecuing] a dog" for eating and commercial purposes. Mulbah expressed how the man, who is a friend, did not want to have his face shown, but consented to having the roasting practice displayed, because he thought it was important for outsiders to know about his cultural heritage. He adds, "The people that moved from the rural areas of Lofa County to the Buzzie Quarters (a Loma ethnic group diaspora community), located behind the Executive Mansion near the city center of Monrovia, are 'urban dwellers.'"

When the Loma people moved to Monrovia they brought with them their culture and traditions. "On this side, we eat dog!" Mulbah shares. "Issue" is the name given for cooked dog. He continues:

The dog you see here was bought by him [i.e., the man in the photograph], just how you see other dogs where people raise dogs in the yard as pets and as friends, but some people they raise their dogs and at the end of the day they take their dog to sell. When they are stranded [i.e., have no money] at times and some just do it as business [i.e., sell their dog for food]. They have people who just specialize in buying dog, preparing it for business, and for food. The only dog they don't cook is a puppy. They say the dog is not full, that means it is still a puppy. (2011)

The Loma people are one of the few ethnic groups in Liberia to eat "issue." Some of the other ethnic groups view eating "issue" as taboo. They say, "Why, why, why do you eat dog? Dog is a pet! Man is not supposed to eat dog, why must you eat your pet?" This attitude emerged during the group consultation. Mulbah frowns on outsiders who look down on their eating habits. He recalls the first time he had "issue" and the numerous discussions that followed. He justifies the eating of dog in the following way:

Dog is an animal, just like the other animals. But dog chose to live in the city with members. It doesn't make a difference from other animals. . . . Haven't you bought a chicken, you raise the chicken, and eat the chicken? You buy rice for

the chicken, you waste rice for the chicken, and the chicken eats the rice. You call the chicken with a sound like (click, click), and the chicken come running to you. And when the chicken is full you grab it, slaughter it, and put it in a pot and eat it! Now why can't you eat dog? Dog is an animal, chicken is an animal. Chicken live with you in the house, chicken go out all day, and at night it comes and sleep [he's smiling] and in the morning when you are hungry you take it and put it in the pot. What much different than a dog? (2011)

Mulbah's cultural assessments of "issue" reveal many identity boundary markers within Liberian society. He also sheds light on Counihan and Van Esterik's (1997) assertion in the introduction of *Food and Culture: A Reader* that "Food touches everything. . . . Food marks social differences, boundaries, bonds and contradictions" (p. vii). Douglas (1997), one of the leading anthropologists on the study of food, summarizes the intersection between food and identity presenting, "The meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. Each carry something of the meaning of the other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image" (p. 44).

The Data

After seeing these two different themes and hearing how Liberians described them, it's important to observe how they work together to create a holistic view of Liberian culture and identity. When we started this chapter, we laid a foundation that (1) local cultural narratives have been muted around the world because of "social annihilation" (Lind, 2012) and oppression, and (2) there is a need to include local participants in the research processes. I argued that this SBMS study is useful in recovering Liberians' voice in the current cultural ecosystem.

This is seen in Clarence Cole's photograph I alluded to at the beginning of the photo selection process. During our discussion we talked about a photograph he made of a chimpanzee dressed in blue jeans, a camouflage hat, and Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) political t-shirt on the back of a bicycle (see figure 11.2). "This picture is deep. I love this picture!" Clarence reflects. "During the 2011 presidential elections the saying, 'Monkey still working let Baboon wait small' became popular. This parable was making fun of the CDC as Baboon and after a while they [Liberians] accepted [the label]. This is why the baboon has a CDC t-shirt, cap, and jeans. The most serious thing is fun to Liberians. They will only complain for a short bit and then they will forget."

Clarence was adamant that this photograph, while laughable for supporters of the CDC, was a disgrace toward the Liberian people. "Liberians will just accept any label," Cole exclaimed. "This is an identity that came from that side over in America."



Figure 11.2. Clarence Cole takes photographs that are most important to him and his culture. "During the 2011 presidential elections, the saying 'Monkey still working let Baboon wait small' became popular. This parable was making fun of the CDC as Baboon and after a while, they [Liberians] accepted [the label]. This is why the baboon has a CDC t-shirt, cap, and jeans. The most serious thing is fun to Liberians. They will only complain for a short bit and then they will forget."

By Clarence Cole for SBMS & Gabriel B. Tait.

The SBMS process was meant for the participants to explore with the cameras and gather visual data. What we quickly realized was that many participants did not have a clear perspective as to what was important to them. In line with Mark 8:22–25, their perspectives were somewhat fuzzy and unclear.

Once we had the visual data, we used a selection process to have participants choose their top 20 photographs. The selection process allowed us to have the participants rate their photographs by the level of importance as they related to the participants' understandings of their culture and identity. After the selection of their top 20 photographs, we were able to see how each participant prioritized his or her cultural categories. We verified their selections with their caption information and semi-structured interviews. This drew out their cultural narratives.

What We Eat Revisited

A closer look at this category initially appears to show "what we eat" is the least important of the four categories. It garnered just four of the top 35

photographs or 11 percent. The labels on these photographs mention food specifically (fish, issue, palm kernels, and cassava). These labels are the titles the participants gave to their photographs.

However, when we refer back, we see 10 photograph labels that could have been assigned to the "What we eat category," but were assigned to other themes. Some of the photographs mentioned food in the title, but placed emphasis on the cultural aspect of the food or its function within the culture. Other photographs speak of the process of growing, catching, or preparing a type of food. To account for this, an overlap, an asterisk was placed next to these labels. This raises the question of a hierarchy of categories, which I will not go into here, but it does show that the layers of interpretation go deeper and deeper.

CONCLUSION

This chapter started with the basic question: How can we reclaim the cultural narratives of local communities? I used a Liberian case study through research collected from my SBMS research method. When I started this study, I had the following assumptions: (1) If participants were actively trained in the use of the camera, they would take photographs; (2) If participants were given a chance, they could sort the pictures according to the themes in their own minds; and (3) If the participants were encouraged that they had the control in defining their own community, they would openly share the meaning of their photographs. What I did not anticipate were the challenges and stresses brought onto participants as they worked through the meanings of their own images and notes. Prince Mulbah (2011), talking about the reflective process of photography said,

Having to explain to someone about my culture I was very very blind. I never had the sight, I never had the idea, I never even have the knowledge that one day I could explain anything about a photograph to convince somebody or make somebody to know about my culture or my community.

As Prince and the others worked through the SBMS process, I was able to gain critical insights into Liberian culture, identity, narratives, and insights I could not have gained otherwise.

After participants talked about their photographs, the SBMS team and the participants themselves noticed that they would share, reflect, and then share some more. Geertz's point, which Jacques Derrida also makes, is that there is no end to interpretation, as it is always open to an addition tomorrow. Amos Wonton said it was like the participants were feeding on the photos. His observation was meant to illustrate that the photographs were a trove of

information. Each time the participants looked at the image, new explorations offered more insights. In group sessions participants debated and argued their points, ultimately agreeing on a final list of themes.

The SBMS participants revealed a significant point that was previously noted by Geertz, "Cultural analysis is intrinsically incomplete. And, worse than that, the more deeply it goes the less complete it is" (p. 29).

At the point where convergence and consensus occurred, SBMS participants were invited to share their insights with outsiders. Mulbah (2011) says his "mind's eye started to work." He added, "as I was explaining your mind's eye started to imagine it. You will start to see things that we are talking about although you weren't there, but your mind will open up." Tite Tienou (2012), speaking of the idea—about "mind's eye"—suggests, "Photographs are a product of knowledge making (beyond the family setting) and when they are shared they are communicating something." He continues,

Assuming that photographs are knowledge, (then) the primary thing about knowledge is that all knowledge creation has an intuitive base and intuition begins with perception in the mind. "Mind's eye" relates to the beginnings of "knowledge-making." Intuitively you kind of see things before you actually express them. And the expressions are how you capture (it). And the "capture" can be with words, or pictures, or art . . . all of these are just outward expressions of the mind. (2012)

What Tienou expresses is the process of conception and reflection that Prince and some of the other members of the SBMS team were experiencing. Their insights served as a bridge to the outside culture. What they were intuiting as core to their identity was emergent through the process of taking their own photographs, going through the pile sorting process of analysis, and then continuing the conversation among themselves about deeper meanings. We were privileged as outsiders to watch and learn. Through additional conversations and the review of photographs, the outsider is able to at least go halfway across this bridge of learning about the host culture. A transaction of knowledge occurs that helps both the outsider and insider learn by, reclaiming the cultural narratives embedded in participants' minds and hearts.

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Chapter Twelve

Social Media Campaign to Improve Religious Tolerance

Syed Ali Hussain and B. William Silcock

RELIGIOUS TOLERANCE IN PAKISTAN

Religious intolerance is a global phenomenon and no country is free from it, whether it be the Rohingya crisis in Myanmar, the conflict in Yemen, or tensions in Syria, Ukraine, Venezuela, or Afghanistan. Like other nations, Pakistan has also engaged with religious extremism. One example that made global headlines was the Asia Bibi case. In 2009, a Christian woman from a rural area of Pakistan was charged with blasphemy following an argument with a coworker as she harvested berries in a field. After spending eight years in solitary confinement and an extensive legal battle, she was finally acquitted by Pakistan's supreme court due to insufficient evidence. In October 2018, news of her release was broadcast globally. While a majority of people in Pakistan supported the decision, it also sparked protests by a group of extremists resulting in street riots and violence. In this chapter, we will discuss the opportunities afforded by social media to improve religious tolerance for minorities in Pakistan.

In the 1960s, Pakistan was one of the most peaceful nations in the world, with economic progress comparable to countries like Singapore (Ahmar, 2011). But following a series of incidents including military rule by general Zia (1978–1988), and an Afghan war involving ethnic and religious intolerance, Pakistan's economic prosperity and social harmony fell into a downward spiral. The Asia Bibi case is part of a trend reflecting the misuse of religion for political gains, social backwardness, unemployment, and poverty. Specifically, blasphemy-related charges against minorities have resulted in violence and extra-judicial killings. Many innocent people have died or been imprisoned, while countless others are living in the shadows of sectarian violence and poverty. Despite all of this, the picture of religious