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What kinds of visibility does this borderline engagement produce of the street? And what implications does all the photographic productivity have in the history and the aesthetics of carnival? My interest is in the aesthetics and the scenery that photography produced during carnival and festival performance, and the different forms of social dynamics that emerge from there. Photographs offer visual incisions that open up new perceptions and that sometime speak beyond the surface index of an image. While the image remediates cultural activism exhibited on the street directed by the political elite, it may perhaps point to the gendered dynamics that are ongoing in Nigerian cultural and political landscapes. In Nigeria, political power revolves mostly around men, and patriarchal dominance is still prevalent culturally. The superman posture of the state governor may suggest aggrandisement of power – uncontested – "within a masculinist regime of power."<sup>328</sup> The gender dichotomy which expresses itself among political elite seems to be disrupted among revellers and masquerades, as I show later, who juggle for relevance and dominance through intense performance, parade, costuming and creative art forms in a "contested territory, where competing" bands and their members strive for the star prize of 100 million naira.<sup>329</sup>

While the street is a space for mobilities, and in this case cultural parades and ceremonial cutting of ribbons, it also represents a prototype of the social life of a city in multiple ways. One aspect of this social phenomenon is the gender inequality that seems to be pervasive in Nigeria.

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<sup>327</sup> E. Peeren, "Carnival Politics and the Territory of the Street." In S. Dasgupta and E. Peeren, (eds), *Constellations of the Transnational: Modernity, Culture, Critique* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), p. 69.

<sup>328</sup> C. Lewis, "Women, Body, Space: Rio Carnival and the Politics of Performance" in *Gender, Place and Culture: Journal of Feminist Geography* (1996) Vol. 3:1, p. 31.

<sup>329</sup> A. Offiong, "Calabar Carnival: Prize money now N100m" *Daily Trust*, online, 7 October, 2017, <https://www.pressreader.com/nigeria/weekly-trust/20171007/281612420613060>, accessed on 11 September 2022.

As a patriarchal society<sup>330</sup>, gender dynamics and structural inequality are easily represented in the families, market places, photographs and can be fleetingly observable on the street.<sup>331</sup> The direction which the presentation of the carnival follows emerges from the narratives and script interpretation of the annual theme by band directors who are sometimes scholars or professionals in the field of creative arts or fashion design. In 2005, the theme for the inaugural Calabar Festival and Carnival was “Carnival Queen”. While women have always been acting as Carnival Queens for different bands during the carnival, there are also Carnival Kings concurrently. This brings the ideals of patriarchy, patrimony, monarchy and the politic of gender to the street. Different bands presented their queens and kings. Though the carnival queens dressed elegantly, they appear to be adorned and posed in manners that suggest subjectivity and inferiority to the carnival king. Concurrently, in figure 4 above, patriarchy and gender inequality can be visualised. The people appear in a straight line, with the governor appearing as a champion who has the right to address the crown. The posture of their wives in the image appear in a manner that suggests submission and unquestionable attention to what the governor is saying.

### **Voices and visuals of dissidence**

While the carnival was a place of festivity and play, forms of political dominations and secular affirmation by state’s agencies and organs of government were conspicuously read and visualized along with the beauties of colour, costumes and carnival arts. At the back of it though were forms of dissonance, exhibited by disgruntled and dissatisfied residents who claim that the carnival was either another instrument of economic sabotage orchestrated by the state or a corrupted practice that interferes with the acclaimed cultural dynamics of Efik people. This section moves outward from the discussion of visibility to consider how some sections of Calabar society have expressed their objections to the government and other carnival interlocutors.

As with any other governmental projects, Calabar Festival and Carnival has generated heated debates, criticisms and statements of public opinion among residents. Since 2005, while the festival has been touted as having boosted the economic and cultural profile of Cross River State nationally and globally by the state government, some residents still feel that festival does

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<sup>330</sup> See E. Offiong, E. Eyo and A. Offiong, “Patriarchy, Culture and the Social Development of Women in Nigeria” in *Pinisi Journal of Art, Humanities and Social Studies* (2021), Vol. 1:4, pp. 79-80.

<sup>331</sup> European Scientific Journal June 2013 edition Vol.9, No.17.

not match up to what government narratives express. For some, carnival provides light relief, to temporarily relieve the intense pressures experienced daily of a poorly performing government administration.<sup>332</sup> For other residents, the events upset sensibilities as they do not match up to the projection of their expectations of a localised festival.<sup>333</sup> They claim that Calabar Carnival “copies and superimposes foreign/western concepts to local cultural displays” instead of subscribing to the “traditional conservative touch which used to characterise various aspects” of localised festivals.<sup>334</sup> For yet others, it is about claims around cultural insensitivity in the costuming masquerades and performances during the carnival event.<sup>335</sup> In my interaction with Emme Affia, the Director of Operation for the Carnival Commission, she asserted that for the past fifteen years, the state has had to contend with critical objections posed by residents who are not in tandem with the event. These are mainly the religious institutions grouped under the Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN) and some very conservative Christian churches classed under a common name by the locals as Scripture Union (SU), who have expressed misgivings around the costuming of participants as supposedly ‘indecent.’<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>332</sup> Interview with Ansa George, 6 January, 2020.

<sup>333</sup> See F. Endong, “Nigerianness Vs. Foreignness in the Calabar Festival and Carnival, Calabar” *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science* (2017), 2, p. 3.

<sup>334</sup> F. Endong, “Nigerianness Vs. Foreignness in the Calabar Festival and Carnival, Calabar,” pp. 4-5.

<sup>335</sup> See R. Amaefula & B. Eze-Orji, “Costuming for African Values: A Re-assessment of Un-African ideals in Calabar Carnival”, <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/140133-Article%20Text-373620-1-10-20160721-1.pdf>, accessed on 5 June 2022

<sup>336</sup> Interview with Emme Affia, 14 March, 2022.



Fig. 5: Cross River State Library, Government House Photos, I July, 2022.<sup>337</sup>

As an extension to my earlier argument on dilapidation and image of the dilapidated library in Fig. 1, I want to consider another set of contests in relation to the above photograph (Fig. 5). Fig. 5 is another image that depicts the dilapidated and decaying condition of the Cross River State Library, Calabar as of November 2018, when it was published online. The photograph is from the Government House Photographs (GHP) Calabar, as printed on the photograph. The photograph was published online by Jonathan Ugbal: Government House Correspondent for *Cross River Watch*, a local Newspaper house run by the state media subsidiary. The photograph was posted online with the caption, “Ayade Commences Renovation of Abandoned State Library Complex.”<sup>338</sup> The account of the post by Jonathan Ugbal is that the state governor visited the State Library along with the Chairman of the Cross River State Library Board for an inspection tour, in readiness to commence renovation and restorative work on the library site. The library photograph is used as an illustrative and visual entry point of hope to assure the citizens of the government’s seriousness over such a claim, which citizens do not sometimes take seriously. The image may be regarded as a collaborative visual signature, posted with the write-up to support the rhetoric of the State House correspondence in 2018.

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<sup>337</sup> J. Ugbal, “Ayade commences renovation of the abandoned State Library Complex”, *CrossRiverWatch* online, 11 November 2018, <https://crossriverwatch.com/2018/11/ayade-commences-renovation-of-abandoned-state-library-complex/>, accessed 1 July 2022.

<sup>338</sup> J. Ugbal, “Ayade commences renovation of the abandoned State Library Complex”, accessed 1 July 2022.

The Cross River State Library is set on a historical ground of the former Calabar Brickfield Prison.<sup>339</sup> The library which once housed a state-of-the-art conference centre, multi-million-naira e-library equipment and a multi-million-naira power generator has been abandoned, vandalised to a serious degree and is now home for cobwebs, snakes and rodents.<sup>340</sup> The state governor visited and toured the complex in 2018 with grand publicity and made promises to revamp it. In December 2019, when I visited Calabar for my fieldwork, the state of the library was still unattended to, and decaying further. In March 2022, when I visited again for follow-up fieldwork, the library remained dilapidated. Staff, residents and former users lament the state of the library and point out that the library bears witness to a long history of government's negligence and ineptitude, and their attitude of nonconcern towards education and other developmental projects that do not have an immediate and direct pecuniary interest for state executives.<sup>341</sup> Residents point to the decaying state of the state library as evidence of a misplaced priority in investing so much into carnival celebration without channeling resources into upgrading and maintaining those infrastructures that will encourage social developments like the culture of reading among the youths, something that could uplift future development in the state in the 21st century.<sup>342</sup> While this image was produced by the Government House Photographs and used to perpetuate the state government's claims to address the problem, it is here repurposed, in a moment of "afterlife." Like my initial photograph, I repurpose it as a "visual of dissidence" that speaks to the nonconformity of some residents who say that they do not want to be cajoled into the temporary comical relief that the carnival events offer residents, who swiftly return back to their social and economic woes in the aftermath of the events every year.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>339</sup> Brickfield was the first maximum prison built in 1890 by colonial administration in Nigeria. The prison was very prominent in hosting political prisoners like Obafemi Awolowo under the Nigerian Colonial government. <https://dailypost.ng/2017/10/30/snakes-grasses-take-cross-river-states-library-photos/>, accessed on 1 July 2022.

<sup>340</sup> E. Edem, "Snakes, grasses take over Cross River State's Library [Photos]," *The Daily Post* online, 30 October, 2017, <https://dailypost.ng/2017/10/30/snakes-grasses-take-cross-river-states-library-photos/>, accessed on 1 July 2022.

<sup>341</sup> A. Akpan and T. Tondo, "Poor infrastructures discourage users from Cross River State library", 15 August 2015, <https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/poor-infrastructures-discourage-users-from-cross-river-state-library/>, accessed on 1 July 22; <https://tnnonline.info/calabar-library-complex-ayades-other-monument-of-shame/>, accessed on 11 September 2022.

<sup>342</sup> A. Ayang, "Why do you hate Cross River State: an open letter to Senator Ben Ayade", <https://qwenu.com/2019/09/30/why-do-you-hate-cross-river-state-an-open-letter-to-sen-prof-benedict-ayade/>, accessed on 1 July 2022.

<sup>343</sup> Interview with Ansa George, 6 January 2020.

Since 2015, several media outlets have utilized images of the dilapidated State Libraries in their dailies as a visual campaign to both illustrate and make evidence: “to provide validation of the nature of things.”<sup>344</sup> They try to create a public imagery on the nature of things in the educational sector of the state and to provoke the need for government’s intervention in that regard. In 2015, *The Guardian* newspaper, among others, published an article titled “Poor Infrastructure Discourage Users from Cross River State Library.” According to the newspaper report, users were interviewed regarding their experience in the library. They lamented over the poor state of the complex and complained of the lack of electricity and water, and the breakdown of toilet facilities which makes studying seemingly impossible.<sup>345</sup> High school students and researchers whose home front and environment is not conducive for studies had relied on the library’s public facility to upgrade their reading and study interests and to prepare for different forms of examinations. But the state of the library facility currently was a serious concern. Some stated that if the state did nothing about the library, the reading culture of young residents was being directly attacked.<sup>346</sup>

In 2017, *The Paradise* newspaper, an online media house located in Calabar published an article titled, “The Cross River State Library Complex under Governor Ayade” where the editor lamented the failure of Ayade’s administration in prioritising education, which he claimed was one of the campaign manifestos that Ben Ayade and his running-mate, Ivare Esu, both professors in universities, had used as their primary campaign promises. Joseph Odok, the editor, relying on “photos” – images taken from both the outside and inside the halls and offices of the complex– lamented the ramshackle and derelict state of the Library. He asserted that Ben Ayade’s administration exhibited hatred for young Cross Riverians and for the educational sector and thus refused to revitalise the educational sector, epitomised by the outright and long overdue negligence of the State Library. He concluded that this impunity of neglect was predicated on the humongous and consistent “misappropriation of funds” that the administration is known for.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>344</sup> N. Peterson, “Early 20th Century Photography of Australian Aborigine Families: Illustrations or Evidence?” in *Visual Anthropology Review*, 21(1-2), pp.11-26.

<sup>345</sup> A. Akpan and T. Tondo, “Poor infrastructures discourage users”, accessed on 1 July 2022.

<sup>346</sup> A. Akpan and T. Tondo, “Poor infrastructures discourage users”, accessed on 1 July 2022, <https://guardian.ng/saturday-magazine/poor-infrastructures-discourage-users-from-cross-river-state-library/>, accessed on 1 July 2022.

<sup>347</sup> <https://theparadise.ng/state-library-complex/>, accessed on 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2021.

Again, in 2017, the *Daily Post* newspaper also published an article titled “Snakes, grasses take over Cross River State’s Library.” The writer of the article, Edem Edem decried the deplorable state of the library which, “has turned out to be a death trap for few students and workers as well as researchers who make use of it.” One of the staff asserted that snakes were invading their offices and spaces, that there was no electricity, no vehicles, no water and no new books. In fact, nothing was there that functioned aptly. Of the seven security staff once on duty, five had retired.<sup>348</sup> *Qwenu!*, an online media outlet published an open letter written by Awan Ayang a concerned citizen, to the state governor titled, “Why do you hate Cross River State? An open letter to Sen. Prof. Benedict Ayade”. It pointed out that the State government seemed to “spend our money on street-partying, gallivanting all over the place and blaring sirens rather than carrying out the very basic functions of governance.”<sup>349</sup> He further stated that if the state continued to neglect the refurbishing and repairs of the State Library, which is at proximity with the Governor’s office and other state institutions, to a usable and accessible state, it would “cut our children’s future off and plunge us into total darkness.”<sup>350</sup> In all these cases, photographs were used as evidentiary and illustrative visuals to authenticate their claims.

Images used became visuals of dissidence, that pointed to government misappropriation of funds, particularly in prioritizing carnival and street partying over and above education and other important sectors of the society – though these are not arguably contesting sectors of the society. There is therefore a complementary discussion of dissonance between the images that I produced on the street and the narratives postulated by the newspapers. The newspapers maintained that instead of the state government prioritising education through building schools, and refurbishing state libraries, and establishing funding opportunities for indigent students,<sup>351</sup> about 4 billion naira was budgeted to host the carnival event in 2018, while a larger figure was dispensed in 2019<sup>352</sup> with about 500 million naira being given to the bands in preparation for the carnival festival.<sup>353</sup> My experience and some of the images that I produced during the carnival in 2019 re-memorialise the proliferation of this dissonance. While I could not escape the visual

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<sup>348</sup> E. Edem, “Snakes, grasses take over Cross River State’s Library [Photos]” accessed on 2 July 2022.

<sup>349</sup> A. Ayang, “Why do you hate Cross River State” accessed on 2 July 2022.

<sup>350</sup> *Ibid.*, accessed on 2nd July 2022.

<sup>351</sup> “Sustainable Development Goals”, *Un.Org*, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/education/>, accessed on 2 July 2022.

<sup>352</sup> E. Edem, “2018 Calabar Carnival to gulp N4bn – State Govt”, *The Daily Post* online, Feb 18, 2018 <https://dailypost.ng/2018/02/18/calabar-carnival-state-gives-account-expended/>, accessed on 2nd July 2022.

<sup>353</sup> E. Edem, “2018 Calabar Carnival to gulp N4bn – State Govt”, accessed on 2nd July 2022.

tensions perpetrated by the sight and site of this decomposing library and other abandoned and dilapidated infrastructures, myself and other citizens, and perhaps visitors, who intended to use the library for reading and studying were deprived of it. The issue at hand was that the carnival event was depicted as a form of commercialised culture and it was arguable whether it generated sufficient revenue and turn-over in relation to the amount invested. The point here is that I produced the image of the library – in relation to the proliferation of those of carnival – as a sign of dissonance.

Another site of unhappiness with carnival are the progressive inhibitions and obstructions the state imposed on the residents and traffic on those days needed for the preparation and the hosting of the event. The 12-kilometre carnival route runs across very important commercial hubs of the city. In the days during dry-runs, hosting of the carnival events, including the cultural carnival, and any other events that would warrant parades and street processions, access roads were cordoned off and residents who move about popularly with private cars, minibus taxis and wagon taxis struggled to access their business, work places and religious centres. The state government asserted that information is always given out to residents to prepare for the little inconvenience. But according to Jacob Agba who carried out a limited survey of 360 residents, he submitted that about 83 percent of residents he surveyed lamented their frustrations on how these restrictions affected their businesses and other engagements.<sup>354</sup>

Calabar is a small water-bound city which covers about 406 square kilometres area. There are about 101 major roads in the city with 8 highways, and many adjoining and connecting streets and lanes that form a network of travel and mobilities across the city.<sup>355</sup> In 2004 when Calabar Festival and Carnival started, government mapped out a 12km Carnival Route for carnival processions. This route connects from Murtala Mohammed Highway, Calabar Road, Mary Slassor Road, Ndidem Usang Iso Highway, Ekpo Iso Road, MCC Roundabout and connects back to Murtala Mohammed Highway. Along this route lie two major highways: Murtala Mohammed highway and Ndidem Usang Iso Highway that connect to Parliament and the exit at Murtala Mohammed Highway. These two highways are the two entry and exit points

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<sup>354</sup> J. Agba, “The Performing Arts and the Carnival, Calabar: Implications for Human Rights Protection in Nigeria” in *IOSR Journal of Humanities And Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)* (2013), Volume 11: 4, p.11.

<sup>355</sup> E. Mensah, “Street Names in Calabar Metropolis: A Socio-historical and Sociolinguistic Study”, *Journal of Linguistic Association of Nigeria* (2007), Vol.10, p. 200.

to the city. Carnival processions and rehearsals normally blocked and prevented some of these routes from free traffic flow, thus constituting a major obstacle to traffic flow in the city.



Fig. 6: Calabar Road that links with the Carnival Route busy with performances. Photo: Nsima Udo, 27 December, 2019.



Fig. 7: Calabar Road that leads to Watt Market cordoned off. Photo: Nsima Udo, 2019.

Calabar Road is one of the busiest streets in Calabar, particularly on weekdays and on a Saturday. As stated earlier, it connects to Murtala Mohammed Highway, one of the major parts of the carnival route, which eventually leads an entry and exit, in and out of Calabar. The photograph in Fig. 7 depicts a seemingly less busy and quiet part of Calabar Road during the carnival. This is because this part of Calabar Road that is at the rear end of the street adjoining Eleven-Eleven Junction and the Millennium Park where the carnival route seems to begin was cordoned off and motorists were barred from accessing the carnival route at that point. I walked a distance of about 2km to get to this point before producing this image. It was a smooth and open walk because of the limited numbers of people on the street who were all determined to get to their destination. During carnival events, the road remains blocked, and persons and goods are not able to move and be moved to the needed markets. Not all residents are particularly interested in the carnival event. The commuting residents in Fig. 7 suggests residents going the opposite direction from the centre of carnival events, perhaps going about their business on a carnival Wednesday afternoon. While this does not suggest a divided society, yet some residents seem to be incongruent with carnival and their absence could be a form of contest, possibly affirming their indifference or dislike.

Fig. 7 is my attempt to visualize inhibition and quietness, the sonic being reduced to an assertion of a visual presence – or lack of it. In contrast Fig. 6 images a section of Calabar Road that lies within the carnival route. Band members are marching, trumpets and trombones are blaring at the peak of their volumes, with photography performance enacted at the edge of the street. The aesthetics of colour, costuming, sound, vision, the technical and the street merging within the landscape of festival, which Edwards refers to as “blending sound... and other expansive historical sources” as forms of “new materialities.”<sup>356</sup> I stood on the centre pavement of Calabar Road to produce both images, though from different focal length and from different positions. They are reproduced here to depict the blustering hype of sight and sound and at the same time the tuning down that happens on two sides of the city on carnival days. Fig. 7 is set around the Eleven-Eleven Roundabout, about 1km from my Fig. 6 where boisterous performance, music, dance, chanting and singing, intensive photography and commerciality are heralded at the fringes of the street. Then, the sound filtered in and echoed stealthily to the other side of Calabar Road as I slid away from the high point of sonic, visual and performative

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<sup>356</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 120.

convergence. The images depict a sliding away and into a form of “visual [and sonic] depletion.” I stand a distance from visual and sonic loudness and descending into “quietness” as metaphorically represented in Fig. 7, but also of tuning down and tuning off of carnival sounds and sight, moving away from what I call “the centre of performance gravity.”

This sliding into depletion bears on the commodification claim of the state government for Calabar Festival and Carnival. While there are many people who claim that they benefit from the organisation of the carnival events which allows them to practice trade that results in higher income, and other citizens who have acquired skills around carnival technicalities, as I show in Chapter Three, the events equally disempowered some sections of the society, at least temporarily. People who operated intra-city and inter-city bus transports, popularly known as “taxi” in Calabar seem to be inhibited from their operations, and offices that are located around these routes are sometimes closed down temporarily. No mention was made if there are incentives provided by the state to cushion their losses.

The tensions that residents witnessed along this commercial hub and very busy route are enormous. I try to visualize this quietness and calmness imposed by carnival events at the rear of the hype and bustle of a city-wide celebration, and cultural and commercial activities that come alongside them.

### **Cultural image-making and the burden of excess**

With the ubiquity of smartphones and with these aesthetics of the carnival, and other sociocultural, political and economic activities happening on the street, they provided enormous scenes for public photographic viewing and practice. While carnival arts were articulated through arts, costuming, masquerades, cultural performance, floats and parades, as well as food vendors, street trading, street photography and the antics of politics ran along the same route. They offered multiple sites and scenes that allows for an excess of photographic practices.

The production of images during the carnival is unabating. The ubiquity of photographs and photographic performance is heightened particularly by the use of smartphones and the desire to photograph self and to memorialize cultural events. Can the plenteousness of images per se end up obscuring some images from being useful as sources of historical narratives, sourced as raw history? Christopher Morton has carefully addressed the idea of the visual

obscurity of an image in the midst of a possible “plentifulness, plenitude and potential of a photographic image.”<sup>357</sup> In trying to define his concept of “attempted portrait,” he argues that while photographs are important in relation to tracing the past and in unveiling hidden histories, it is also implicated and problematic when we consider the context in which they are produced.<sup>358</sup>

What were the power relations that were at play while producing photographic images? Morton for instance calls into question the objectivity of Evan-Pritchard’s anthropological visual records – photographs – that he produced in Kenya in 1936, stating that the photographs he produced during his study were as a result of “local response to an influential and respected local missionary – Walter Owen”.<sup>359</sup> While objectivity in photography has been questioned diversely, Gillian Rose has in her *Visual Methodologies* asserted that photographic renderings are neither objective nor innocent. According to her, while photographs are “not transparent windows on to the world,” they interpret, construct and display the world in certain ways.<sup>360</sup> These are particular ways that are seemingly subjective to the perception of the photographer, but also recording presence in excess of the intention of the photographer.

In the era of the digital turn, “photographs permeate all aspects of our life”, and photography has positioned itself as an unavoidable visual process that details every moment of our lives.<sup>361</sup> To address the issue of photographic ubiquity is to explore the publicization of photography and blurred boundaries between professional and amateur photography. Personal or vernacular photography that was formerly referred to as “amateur, private, popular, family, and snapshot photography” is a shifting ground and is vastly expanding and diversifying into what previously used to be professional and contractual visual templates.<sup>362</sup> Suggestively, personal photography has also “infiltrated every other category of photographic practice we may think of i.e., institutional, governmental, peer assessed, and any other kind of professional forms of photography and imaging.”<sup>363</sup>

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<sup>357</sup> Christopher Morton, “Attempted Portraits: Photography, Obscurity, and Articulation in the Past” in I. Gilbert and P. Hayes (eds), *Other Lives of the Image*, *KRONOS* (Special Edition) 46, (2020), p. 55.

<sup>358</sup> Christopher Morton, “Attempted Portrait: Photography, Obscurity, and Articulation in the Past”, p. 57.

<sup>359</sup> Christopher Morton, “Attempted Portrait: Photography, Obscurity, and Articulation in the Past”, p. 57.

<sup>360</sup> G. Rose, *Visual Methodologies: an Introduction to the Interpretations of Visual Materials* (London: Sage Publication, 2001), p.5.

<sup>361</sup> L. Wells and D. Price, “Thinking about Photography: Debates, Historically and Now” in L. Wells (ed) *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2015 – fifth edition), p. 11.

<sup>362</sup> A. Cramerotti, “Ubiquitous Photography – Martin Hand” in *Photography and Culture* (2014), 7:1, p. 103

<sup>363</sup> A. Cramerotti, “Ubiquitous Photography – Martin Hand” in *Photography and Culture* (2014), 7:1, p. 103.

The digital turn seems to collapse the borders between personal and professional photography. They both coexist and “involve the integration of a complex of different elements; both require a measure of commitment and competence; and both are orchestrated by concepts of project, loosely defined.”<sup>364</sup> Every part of our lives has become potential visual content, where persons, objects, space, materials, performance are targeted photographic objects. Visualizing culture goes beyond the primary essence of imaging, but advances into creating ideas, techniques, practice, communication and branding through photography. While there were multitudes of photographers who represented established media corporations – who could be classified as professionals in the 2019 Calabar carnival event for example, the vast majority of revelers and spectators used their smartphones to produce photographic images that run into excess. The ubiquity and utility of smartphones during the carnival internalize and personalize photography, but also try to publicize a form of external as well as of an individuated self, immersed and entrapped within a dynamic and vigorous cultural environment.

The radical pervasiveness and ubiquity of photographs has also allowed photography to maintain its public performativity and productivity – performed and produced in the public, but also maintaining a public presence and permanence that is virtually accessible through online archives. I think of photography as a practice, technique and performance that has gone more public than private. Even when images are produced in a private mode, they are sometimes connected on live feed or posted later on online platforms for public viewing and consumption. The production of self-imaging, now known as the selfie, has added to these visual dynamics, to the excess and ubiquity of photographic productivity. Those in popular journalism revile the selfie, and self-imaging as the “shadow expression of online narcissism,” but Dereck Murray asserts that the selfie which utilizes contemporary visual technologies for self-imaging is “a means to assert a sense of personal value, recognition, and empowerment.”<sup>365</sup> He utilizes an anti-utopian model to assert that the ubiquity of the practice of selfie “creates a representational system of value for subjectivities who experience persistent devaluing and/or erasure.”<sup>366</sup> Julia Eckel et al assert that “the practice of sharing selfies is at the core of a new form of personal

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<sup>364</sup> E. Shove et al, *The Design of Everyday* (Oxford: Berg Publishing, 2007), p. 70.

<sup>365</sup> D. Murray, “On Photographic Ubiquity in the Age of Online Self-imaging” in J. Lewis and K. Purry (eds) *Ubiquity: Photography's Multitudes* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2021), p. 180.

<sup>366</sup> D. Murray, “On Photographic Ubiquity in the Age of Online Self-imaging”, p. 181.

photography that is not private anymore, as family snapshots stored in a photo album used to be, but a form that is directed toward sharing pictures with others from the outset”.<sup>367</sup>

These forms of visual engagement have expanded the scope of cultural image making to excess, and it means that photographs saturate the visual landscape of carnival culture. Does this excess become a “burden of representation” for the photographer, self-image photographer and the viewer who wants to access photographs as a means of engaging with the carnival in different forms? What do the excesses and multitudes of images do to a researcher like myself in attempts to practise history while also practising photography? Following the above argument, I suggest that this excess should not be problematic in relation to what photographs do to histories and to the memory of carnival participants and viewers who get into or will get into the visual zones of these images. Elizabeth Edwards asserts that while photographs have become “transmissive and visceral elements of history,” yet “the ubiquity of photographs in the historical and contemporary world make them a privileged site for a wide range of investigations and debates [as well as senses of affect]. Their presence defines the age, even for those who ostensibly have no interest in photographs as sources or anything else.”<sup>368</sup> While photography’s excess augments the “historical landscape of sources” available to historians, its usage concurrently increases the use of photographic metaphors in writing and reading history.<sup>369</sup> For Murray, photography’s ubiquity and the distributive potential of digitalism combined offer a space for photography and self-image photographers to “desire... self-desire... self-fashioning... and [to make] intense intimacy... the love of self” needed in complex spaces of festivities and leisure.<sup>370</sup>

I now turn to the photographs I took of the festival in 2019. Many of my images were not produced with a smartphone, but with a professional Nikon D3500 camera. They were produced in a time when the festival claimed to have cast off its Caribbean legacies, become more localised, yet at the same time incorporated a substantial series of additional events that gave it more of an international flavour. Following Elizabeth Edwards’ assertion that photography’s ubiquity offers a privilege site for the production and reproduction of history, the cultural

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<sup>367</sup> J. Eckel et al, “The Selfie as Image (and) Practice: Approaching Digital Self Photography” in J. Eckel et al (eds), *Exploring the Selfie: Historical, Theoretical and Analytical Approaches to Digital Self Photography* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 6.

<sup>368</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 12.

<sup>369</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 12.

<sup>370</sup> D. Murray, “On Photographic Ubiquity in the Age of Online Self-imaging”, p. 181.

photographs that I produced in 2019 were products of multiple shutter clicks that produced numerous images representing the unfolding of events on the ground. While they were visuals of a recent past, they are also images that freeze the past, archive past events in photographic mode, such that will allow for the memorialization of the event as well as a source for further historical research in the future. In an article that explores the critical points in Walter Benjamin and Roland Barthes' cultural conceptions and significance of photography and its historical inclinations, Tim Dant and Graeme Gilloch note immediately from the beginning that "the content of every photography is history."<sup>371</sup> This is because every photographic image produced bridges two distant periods together: the time when the image was produced and the period in which it is being viewed at any given time.<sup>372</sup> For them, while the photographic image is limited for being cut-up in "a" frozen moment: a miniature of a procedural reality, yet its "power" lies in "reflecting that moment from the real past" but also in bringing the past into the present and confronting us with a virtual or tactile imagery representation of that "stillness" of the past.<sup>373</sup>

I find resonance here with Dant and Gilloch's analysis, though with some contextual nuance. The very act of photography and engaging with viewing photographic images – excess images - are conscious acts of historicity. They become acts of historicity when both the photographer and the viewer are caught up within the same "historical complex" as the image, or aware of the historical events that the photographs are trying to represent. When viewed, photographs are able to launch the viewer into a time perspective and at the same time provoke and enhance memory, a collective memory. Engaging with photographs prompts the viewer's sense of the past spontaneously, thus producing historical knowledge of the past.<sup>374</sup> The context in which cultural images generate knowledge therefore depends on the knowledge of the event to which the photograph appears to represent. The photographic images in this study – selected from many photos - are aestheticized "raw materials out of which a historical consciousness is fashioned"<sup>375</sup> and out of which I craft a recent historical narrative of Calabar Festival and Carnival.

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<sup>371</sup> T. Dant and G. Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 5:1, p. 6.

<sup>372</sup> T. Dant and G. Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History," p. 6.

<sup>373</sup> T. Dant and G. Gilloch, "Pictures of the Past: Benjamin and Barthes on Photography and History," p. 6.

<sup>374</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 2.

<sup>375</sup> J. Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, p. 2.



Fig. 8: A member of Freedom Band responding to my photographic gesture: Calabar Carnival 2019. Photo by Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.

I produced the image above (Fig. 8) from one section out of so many sections of the Freedom Band at the Calabar Carnival in 2019. The image appears to remind us of the enduring legacies of the Trinidadian carnival aesthetics, despite the attempt and the claim as indicated earlier of its dissipating influence. The photograph is a portrait of a member – dancer – from Freedom Band. There are more than 20 sections of performing groups by each of the bands. In Calabar Festival and Carnival, bands are divided into sections, and each section is costumed differently, specifically to reflect certain conceptual and artistic ideas and identities, depending on the intellectual and script interpretation of the year’s theme and the “visual rhetoric”<sup>376</sup> that is intended by the different band directors and their groups. As a competing carnival event, band sections marched across and performed in front of different adjudicating team positioned at different points along the carnival route. Adjudication to choose the winning band is said to be a

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<sup>376</sup> N. Udo, “The WhatsApp Profile Photo: Identity Representation and Visual Rhetoric in the Digital Age” in *WritingThreeSixty: Journal of Research and Creative Texts*, Vol. 4:1, p. 98.

complex, rigorous, laborious and a “serious business.”<sup>377</sup> Adjudicators among other factors based their judging on the sophistication of costumes, creativity, performative expertise and connectivity of floats, costumes and other forms of performance technology to the thematic essence of the year.<sup>378</sup> The winner takes home about ten million naira (about ten thousand US dollars in the current dilapidating Nigerian economy) yearly in reward money, including monies that were offered to bands to prepare for the event.

The image in Figure 8 of a member of the Freedom Band taken on the street is both a candid photograph and portrait photograph. It is a portrait produced on the street. Some of the photographs I took on the street were taken with a gesture requesting consent from subjects. In most cases, responsive gestures of consent were received. Being on the street, the train of carnival bands was moving constantly, and the air was crowded with sounds and blasting of loud music. My intentions of reciprocity were not met as no time was available for proper identification of, and with subjects, or to offer recompense for the gestures with copies of photographs – hard or soft copies, or at least a proper thank you gesture. Here, setting my camera and beckoning on my subject. Her gesture – a beaming smile – seemed to indicate that the photographer’s beckoning for an image was welcome, a gesture that is already a commonplace during a carnival event like this. While apparently showing interest in my photographic advances, she also tries to maintain focus, to stay in tune with the rhythm of her band’s movement.

The focal subject of my photograph – the dancer, and all the components of the frame are parts of an elaborate visual complex that is made up of different actors, both contesting and collaborating at different degrees to produce, consume and circulate photographs.<sup>379</sup> More than five images were produced of this performer on the spot - while I was also stepping backwards - with the affordance of auto-generated settings and intermittent shutter speed on the Nikon D3500 camera that I used in the field. With this camera I bear a symbol of photographic professionalism, trying to interrupt the propensity of the excess that the smartphones offer. While adding to the scale of photographic ubiquity, the image also speaks to the seeming unrestricted

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<sup>377</sup> F. Egbemode, “Carnival Calabar 2014 in the Eyes of an Adjudicator” <https://crossriverwatch.com/2015/01/carnival-calabar-2014-in-the-eyes-of-an-adjudicator-by-funke-egbemode/>, accessed on 31 October 2022.

<sup>378</sup> F. Egbemode, “Carnival Calabar 2014 in the Eyes of an Adjudicator” , accessed on 31 October 2022.

<sup>379</sup> J. Hevia, “Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer-Era China (1900-1901), Making Civilization,” p. 81.

accessibility granted by costumed revellers to beckoning photographers, who tend to immediately pick on a picturesque scene before jolting out of sight.

In the process of production, the photo offers us a pause to reflect, the opportunity and duration to notice and observe more than we could. If the image bears any cultural signification, it's the dancer's reflections on the aesthetic complexities that the carnival festival has contended with since 2004. The dancer in focus, with some other performers seen at the rear are engrossed with their parading trend. While trying to produce this image, my position as a photographer was intercepted many times by both the parading band members who were trying to keep me out of their way as well as other photographers who were joggling to position themselves to be able to produce fascinating images in the midst of a crowded environment. But these tensions did not dissuade my intentional photographic practice as long as the subjects welcomed my photographic gesture.

The image in Fig. 8 is packed with cultural signifiers. It portends a carnival celebration with costume and performance aesthetics that represent a sequel to the Caribbean carnival genre. The coloured feathered crown – which are broader than a usual head mask of Efik masquerade, the metallic fabric skirts and the shiny sleeveless top are all representations of contemporary global carnival costuming trend of “bikini, beads and feathers,” influenced by the global style and fashion.<sup>380</sup> It smacks of the contemporary preference for the “Las Vegas Showgirl” costume by a younger generation of carnival performers.<sup>381</sup> This is a typical image conceived of the carnival, and it defines how a greater part of the Calabar Carnival day looks. But it also portends an image of a hybridised festival, a compilation of Caribbean carnival imaging, local cultural features and a touch of innovativeness. While beads are parts of the Caribbean cultural aesthetics, the way they are being worn here appear to reflect an inclusion of Ibibio/Efik cultural aesthetic. The dancer has hung her beads below the chest, instead of on the neckline, similarly to how *mbopo* initiates and *abang* dancers adorn their beads while in celebration and dance.<sup>382</sup> I read the black strap bag hanging on her waist as touch of innovation. While it adds to the aesthetic appeal of the costume, it appears to doubly function as a purse where money, smartphones and other portable valuables are kept handy.

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<sup>380</sup> R. Copeland, “Bikini, Beads and Feathers’ at Trinidad Carnival: the voice of the younger generation,” <https://libres.uncg.edu/ir/uncg/listing.aspx?id=4093>, accessed on 23 June, 2022.

<sup>381</sup> R. Copeland, “Bikini, Beads and Feathers” accessed on 23 June, 2022.

<sup>382</sup> See N. S. Udo, *Visualizing the Body* for more details on *mbopo* rituals and their dress code.

While this is not a self-image, it is in a way an “image of self” and a visual signature of agreement by the performer to saturate the photographic landscape with photos boundlessly. The moment of photographing is so fleeting and brief, that the “dancer-subject” appears not to care about where and how her image will be used, visualised or stored. Her desire seems to be inhabited in the fleeting moment of being photographed, satisfied by the flash light or the sound of the shutter. What the dancer “immortalize[s] is the moment and the experience,”<sup>383</sup> the experience of reveling, as well as the moment of her contribution to the ubiquity of cultural photographs made available within the “historical landscape” of sources.<sup>384</sup>

There are two men in white tops who are included in my photograph. They may be spectators, revelers, participants or residents, or all of the above – standing on the sidewalk, but brought in the borderline of the image. One of them seems to focus attention on the dancer, the other is looking into his phone. The image depicts a spectator-photographer who may be trying to scrutinize his phone for an already produced image, maybe an image of “my dancer-subject”, other dancers, or perhaps an image of countless photographic scenes or sights that abound within the festival landscape. This scene is a common place in a photographically-dense environment, given the atmosphere of a photographic practice that the carnival environment provokes, and given the photographic desire that the ubiquitous digital and visual technology offers.<sup>385</sup> In the digital turn, photographers take opportunities to check, verify, accept or reject an already produced image before passing it on to storage as “finished product.” Yet, the life of an image is also so fleeting that even after the event, subsequent scrutiny on stored images still poses a danger to the survival of a photographic image as they are subject to disapproval, defacing, doctoring or deleting.

The visual documentation of the carnival by both local and international media networks like the South African based Multichoice, professional photographers, personal photographers, revelers, visitors and residents as well as researchers like myself have increased by the year. As the events became more global and attracted more tourists and visitors, so the “visual economy” advanced and proliferated, infesting the visual landscape with an excess of photographs, as well

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<sup>383</sup> A. Gunthert, “The Consecration of the Selfie: A Cultural History” in J. Eckel et al (eds), *Exploring the Selfie: Historical, Theoretical and Analytical Approaches to Digital Self Photography* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 28.

<sup>384</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 10.

<sup>385</sup> D. Murray, “On Photographic Ubiquity in the Age of Online Self-imaging”, p. 181.

as advancing the commercialization and patronization of carnival photos for different purposes. While there is no specific empirical data study to properly evaluate this claim, the evidence of multiplicity and proliferation of image use, the increase in media institutions on the ground, and the accessibility of more people to camera phones certainly raises this possibility. Calabar Festival and Carnival becomes increasingly present in both the media and visual landscapes thus expanding the performative scale of the carnival but also bringing more viewers into the visual scope of the event. My inclusion in the frame of the smartphone moment is an allusion to this tendency.

The general response of respondents during my fieldwork who assert that the increased use of camera phones for image making in the recent years is more than in the earlier years when people could not afford and own camera phones raises this point clearly.<sup>386</sup> Professional street photographers who are found around the Calabar Cultural Centre also assert that their business of producing images for residents and visitors has dropped over the years due to the easy accessibility to image production through smartphones. Image documentation is so prolific that we can also experience the event as a “carnival of photos” in which I was both a participant and an observer. In all this, the street stands out as a re-spatialized landscape through which culture is intensely visualized, and visibility is multiplied and performed, curated and exhibited, and through which revelers, tourists and participants experience the “‘magic’ of a mediated place” in relation to carnival participation and a modernized cultural engagement.<sup>387</sup>

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<sup>386</sup> During my fieldwork in 2019, majority of my respondents whom I interviewed and the people I interacted with off record agreed to using smartphone to record themselves during the carnival and to produce other photographic scenes during the carnival.

<sup>387</sup> N. Couldry, “On the Actual Street” in D. Crouch, R. Jackson and F. Thompson (eds) *The Media and the Tourist Imagination: Converging Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2005), p. 60.



Fig. 9: Ekombi dancer performing before Governor Ayade’s VIP booth and before adjudicators during the Calabar Festival and Carnival, 2019. Photo: Daniel Williams, 2019.

The “bikini, beads and feather” and the “Las Vegas Showgirl” imagery does not always dominate the visual landscape of Calabar Festival and Carnival. There are several other images and performances that interrupt the “showgirl” visual narratives and tilt more to a contemporary Efik cultural identity removed from the Caribbean carnival grade. There are so many components of the festival carnival and there are so many sections of the events that ceremonial performance is driven in different directions. For instance, there is the Cultural Carnival, which was introduced in 2009 and centres around promoting what is claimed to be African culture through performance and masquerades. It is said by carnival organisers to add a sense of “indigeneity” into the entire event, which was perceived to have been too much of a Caribbean cultural identity by some locals and some scholars in the early years of carnival prior to 2009.<sup>388</sup>

While unveiling a new logo and the carnival theme in 2009, the incumbent state governor of Cross River State at the time, Governor Liyel Imoke claimed that adding a separate event like

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<sup>388</sup> See R. Amaefula & B. Eze-Orji “Costuming for African Values: A Re-assessment of Un-African Ideals in Calabar Carnival, <file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/140133-Article%20Text-373620-1-10-20160721.pdf>; F. Endong, “Nigerianess versus Foreignness in the Calabar Festival and Carnival Calabar,” *International Journal of English, Literature and Social Science* (2007), 2: 3 for details of this claim. In my interview with locals in 2019, some of the locals asserted to this claim and also showed satisfaction that the Cultural Carnival was introduced into the whole carnival package.

the Cultural Carnival one day earlier, separate from the main carnival day that is held on the 27th of December, but a component of Calabar Festival and Carnival, “resonate[d] with the public in its social, economic, environmental and cultural significance.”<sup>389</sup> In 2009 when it was launched, it started with presentations and competitions by cultural troupes and masquerade groups representing the 18 local government units in the state. By 2019, invitation to participate in the Cultural Carnival had been circulated to all the 36 states of the Nigerian federation. During the Cultural Carnival on 26 December, all the participating troupes representing either states or local governments assembled at the Millennium Park and paraded from there across the 12 Kilometer Carnival route that goes from Calabar Road via Mary Slassor Road. The route continued through Marian Road, Efié Ette Junction, MCC Roundabout before connecting back to Calabar Road and the Millennium Park. These forms of cultural mobility remain a major aspect of the Calabar Festival and Carnival and its performance tradition.

The image in Fig. 9 was produced during the 2019 Cultural Carnival performance by Daniel William, the chief photographer in the governor’s office. Daniel William has worked with the government media group since 2010. He started as a freelance photographer covering cultural events in the state until he joined the Government House Photos (GHP) in 2010. He has since advanced through the ranks to become the chief photographer in the governor’s office in 2019. In an interview with Daniel William, he lamented his dissatisfaction with the state government on how the carnival events are managed and executed. He raised issues with how the state government spends huge amounts in organising carnival while their conditions of service in the state civil service were unsatisfactory.

While the image is originally produced for the state and its publicity archive, my connection with Daniel William gave me access to his 2019 photographic archive for the Cultural Carnival. In the image above, an *ekombi* dancer appears to show off her dancing legerdemain in front of the Governor’s VIP booth. She is dressed in a costume that mimics *nkugho* or *mbopo*, a pre-nuptial female ritual that was practiced predominantly among some people of the Cross River Basin until 1999/2000, when the federal and state governments in Nigeria promulgated legislations that outlawed all forms of female genital mutilation that *mbopo*

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<sup>389</sup> J. Babatunde, ‘Calabar Carnival turns festival, gets new logo’ accessed on 29 June 2022.

was associated with.<sup>390</sup> *Ekombi* dance is one of the ways that pre-nuptial rituals are being reinvented and retained in the postcolonial period.<sup>391</sup>

The dancer is dressed in a fascinating blend of yellow and purple, with beads, waist wrapper and a slim top. She is decked with an exorbitant hair coiffure with attached golden combs that Efik women use during marriage engagement, and reminiscent of honour, beauty and the iconicity of power that Efik women are known for in marriage.<sup>392</sup> The dancer looks relaxed and engaged in her performance, and perhaps smiles away the intensity that she invokes during the performance. Here, “the camera, the photographer, and the photographed—the technology, the subject, and the object of the picture—form a compact situation” – which defines the performativity of machine and human in producing a cultural photograph.<sup>393</sup>

The dancer is caught-up in a conga mood, perhaps responding rhythmically to a musical resonance in the centre of the street, where makeshift tents are assembled for spectators and viewers to pay per view. Her performance posture, costumes and the personalities that are blurred out of view under the VIP booth are indexes of photography’s manipulation. But let’s go further away from that into the realm of emotional, cultural and creative practice of photography. The digital camera’s advantages of faster shutter speed and pre-processed image viewing allows for a photographic production that contributes to the excess. But also, the contemporary digital camera that was used by Daniel William the photographer possesses digital manipulative functions that can add creative impulses to the kinds of image one produces. Since William is producing for the state publicity archive, his image, as the one above, tends to be contextualised within visual communicative and creative practice.<sup>394</sup> This is so, given that the photograph might perhaps be used to illustrate and align with advertising rhetorics and branding techniques for Calabar Carnival in magazine, brochures and promotional web pages and blogs, “with images being used as a form of visual linguistic persuasion.”<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> N. Udo, *Visualizing the Body*, p. 115.

<sup>391</sup> See N. Udo, *Visualizing the Body* for details around how dance troupes are used as reinvention models for women rituals in contemporary time.

<sup>392</sup> See also Imoh Imeh, *Daughters of Seclusion: The Revelation of the Ibibio ‘Fattened Bride’ as the Icon of Beauty and Power* (New York, Lang Publishing 2012) for further understanding of the significance of Efik material culture and mbopo/nkugho.

<sup>393</sup> J. Ruchatz, “Pictures of People Taking Photographs” in J. Eckel et al (eds), *Exploring the Selfie: Historical, Theoretical and Analytical Approaches to Digital Self Photography* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 51.

<sup>394</sup> J. Meron, “Photographic (In)Authenticity: Making Strange as a Creative Practice Response,” p. 65.

<sup>395</sup> J. Meron, “Photographic (In)Authenticity: Making Strange as a Creative Practice Response,” p. 68.

The creative index of the image is informed by the blurred background setting, achieved by adjusting aperture priority mode, focal length and the distance of the photographer to his or her subject. Such blurred background allows the subject stand out. “A blurred background does not compete for the viewer's attention and can make photos appear more professional.”<sup>396</sup> A blurred background brings photographs into an artistic mode. This kind of image generates appeal and affect, both of which are important factors in brand advertising. The pronounced subject becomes the object of both the optical and visual focus thereby aligning the image with the intended visual narratives. It projects the image into a “high-quality and eye-catching [mode] so that the brand’s message is delivered”<sup>397</sup> as a story of the cultural appeal and sophistication of Calabar Festival and Carnival.

### **Carnival photography as counter narrative**

The yearly hosting of Calabar Festival and Carnival by the Cross River State government tends to assert the positionality of Calabar as a factor in the process of carnivalizing culture in Nigeria. Calabar has been celebrated in this process as it exports carnival expertise in assisting to set up carnival programs across Nigeria. But photographs of the carnival in some ways, when read closely, complicate this narrative. They have the potential to convey and at the same time disrupt the politico-commercial narratives of the secular state. Furthermore, how do carnival photographs produced in the recent past provoke a sense of “historical consciousness” or “historical knowledge” of the past? Going by what Santu Mofokeng postulates in “Black Photo Album,” photographs convey meaning and history and should not be ignored or dismissed as evidence of “bourgeois delusion,”<sup>398</sup> because “there are knowledges attached to seeing,”<sup>399</sup> and they possess the capacity to evoke possible counter-narratives.

In *Rhetoric of the Image*, Roland Barthes asserts that photographic images possess some analogous and re-presentational codes, which generate some form of verbal articulation and

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<sup>396</sup> K. Fergusson, “How to take photo with a blurred background” <https://feltmagnet.com/photography/how-to-take-a-photo-with-a-blurred-background/>, accessed on 10 September 2022.

<sup>397</sup> R. Raju, “The importance of Advertising photographs” <https://www.splento.com/blog/photography/the-importance-of-advertising-photography/>, accessed on 3rd October 2022.

<sup>398</sup> S. Mofokeng, “Black Photo Album” in R. Noire (ed), *Anthropology of African and Indian Ocean Photography* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1996).

<sup>399</sup> P. Hayes, “Santu Mofokeng, Photographs: ‘The Violence is in the Knowing,’” *History and Theory* (2009) Vol. 48, p. 37.

linguistic meaning. But he asks, “how does meaning get into the image? Where does it end?”<sup>400</sup> Barthes tries to establish connotative limits to the meaning of an image, where it purportedly begins and ends. But he also concedes to the opinion that the forms and meanings of the particularities represented in an image depend heavily on cultural knowledge,<sup>401</sup> which are indeed subjective knowledge. While photographs are rhetorical, the meanings that they evoke are fleeting and limitless, depending on temporality, space, and the semiotic relationship between the image and an event in the past.

The knowledge that photographic seeing produces as postulated by Santu Mofokeng and Okwui Enwezor is a subjective knowledge in relation to Shawn Michelle Smith’s conception of “seeing” as being “shaped by cultural forces and the psychic reflexes of the viewer.”<sup>402</sup> We need therefore to question and examine the acclaimed “equivalence between visibility and the political” in relation to images, both as commercial advertisement apparatus and as visual aids for political affirmation. In doing so, we would be able to uncover the cultural and ideological forces that underpin the aestheticization of visibility, while also filling the gap and uncovering the supposed invisibility created by photography practice.<sup>403</sup> Thus, some warn that there are the “limitations encountered when we trust photography as if it were perception—as if it were a window rather than a flat, constructed surface.”<sup>404</sup>

What is my positionality in relation to being a photographer and a researcher, attempting to represent the carnival photographically as well as historicizing the carnival, but also trying to probe the visual trajectory exhibited by government agencies, the media and personal photographs posted by revellers and residents online? During my research and fieldwork in Calabar in 2019 and 2022, I was able to engage with senior officials in the Cross River State Carnival Commission. I also interviewed the State photographer in the governor’s office and some of these respondents granted me access to their photographic archives comprised of photographs of themselves and other celebratory shots during the carnival. The conception of perceiving the event as an intervention to remedy Cross River State’s economic woes presupposed a direction to which images were produced to forecast success during the event.

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<sup>400</sup> R. Barthes, *Rhetoric of the Image*, (New Haven: Letee's Island Books, 1977), p. 152.

<sup>401</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>402</sup> S. Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 14.

<sup>403</sup> S. Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, p. 14.

<sup>404</sup> *Limits of Photography* Exhibition, <https://www.mocp.org/exhibitions/2012/01/limits-of-photography.php>, accessed on 18 September, 2022.

Perhaps also, the cultural idea that claims the position of Calabar as a society that promotes both traditionalism and innovation guide the process of “seeing” by government agencies while also blinding one from what not to see on the street within the visual landscape that carnival celebration produced.

The street is the center of the events and the visual landscape of the carnival festival is produced on the street. In my opinion, the secular/state funded “lenses” produce frames that coincide with the objectives of commercializing and carnivalizing culture. But the impact (and the visibility) of the culture of failure and administrative incompetence and corruption abounds. As stated by Smith, the intentional suppression driven by secular ideologies limits what one can or cannot see. Along the streets of Calabar, there are several sites, sights and scenes that discountenance these aestheticized claims. There are many dilapidated and abandoned projects right along the routes of the carnival parade and sometimes in close proximity to event centres and venues. The tensions and trends that this complex visual landscape exerts delimits the perception of organisers and participants in deciding on what to frame into carnival photographs.

During my fieldwork, I decided to take a different approach in how I visualized the event, in relation to certain emerging issues in the society. This is predicated on my training in visual history,<sup>405</sup> but also based on my direct affinity with Calabar where I lived and still live, and where I hoped the sociocultural and politico-economic situations of the city would change for the better. My photographic scope could not escape these sites of invisibility that have over the years escaped the lenses of carnival photography.

But carnival photographs go beyond this insider/outsider media publicity and the attendant visible and invisible scope. Like Thompson argues about street photography and its African American connoisseurship, carnival photography, which also includes the street photography genre of setting temporary studios with backdrops on the sides of the road waiting for patronage from carnival participants, performers and visitors, also serve as “souvenirs” and as “creation of memories and conduits of memory.”<sup>406</sup> Carnival photos serve to record celebrators’ attendance and participation in the yearly events, but also serve as “conduit of memory” as they are shared with acquaintances and loved ones outside the frontiers of the event

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<sup>405</sup> In 2017, I participated in the UWC Visual History postgraduate module, which combines theoretical and practical approaches to teaching photography. It was my first formal leaning on how to practice professional photography.

<sup>406</sup> K. Thompson, *Shine: The Visual Economy of Light in African Diasporic Aesthetic Practice*, p. 54.

and on online platforms. In other words, carnival photos possess a form of social movement. Carnival photos traverse boundaries and access boundless places through the social media platforms and their internet backup as digital images. Others who patronized street photographers acquire hardcopies that they carry along to their locations after the event, thus materializing presence and generating tactile affect while engaging with their photographs across time and space. Others who utilized their smartphones or other digital equipment to record carnival performance and presence photographically carry them along, stored away as metadata in their phones or other accessible storage facilities to other regions outside Calabar. These mobilities and materiality of images further define the complexity of visual production, representation, circulation, consumption, affect and sometimes disaffection that enthrall carnival photography.



Fig. 10: Members of a band on the street in discussion while waiting for the governor to flag-off the event, Calabar Carnival, Calabar, 2019. Photograph by Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.

I produced the above photograph in 2019. In the photograph, Master Blaster band members and masquerades are costumed in a gallant blend of white, brown and off-brown ornate gowns that are in contrast of the carnival normative: the bikinis-colours-feathers-floats-flesh costuming. The facial expressions exhibited by the band members in the image suggest a sense of tension, disappointment and stress as they stand with their hands crossed anticipating the

arrival of the state governor. Their posture and mien further suggest a sense of bewilderment but also a sense of engaging in some kind of discussion - petty talks maybe – suggestively trying to reengage the moment productively. The anticipation of when the governor will arrive for the occasion was uncertain and stressful because no information was circulated, to the best of my knowledge. All were left in empty and suspended anticipation. But they shouldn't be baffled. In the recent past, the trend where the governor comes late to the flag-off event has become a norm.

My engagement with the field was a very complex one. My photographic engagement was torn between fascination and critical visual representation and archiving. There were moments where scenes seemed to enthrall me photographically, and at the same time, my critical perceptive mode was equally active. As I was immersed in the unfolding events of performance and celebratory atmosphere, I equally encountered scenes that I perceived as registering the frustration that filtered in within the landscape of reveling. The photograph above was taken on 28 December 2019, precisely in the late afternoon when almost everyone – participants, masquerades, residents, tourists, band leaders and band member, as well as government officials and ad hoc staff- were waiting for the arrival of the state governor, Ben Ayade to officially flag-off the events. It seems all facets of the events were ready except for the arrival of the governor. No particular reason was given for the late arrival of the governor, at least to my knowledge, to whom the sole right has been bestowed by Cross River State to flag-off carnival events. The photograph represents some of the moments and scenes that portend the stress, the tensions, the disappointment, the weariness and the exhaustion exhibited by revelers and visitors during this festival conundrum. The state photographers would not record images of this kind that might discredit or counter the pro-government narratives of a progressive and people-centred cultural event. I tried to record such lackluster scenarios in pictorial form in ways that would set in perspective the experiences of revelers beyond the narratives of the state government.

But also, as stated by George Agbo in his doctoral dissertation, photographs have become crucial platforms where contested and protested resistance against the political activities of the state government as perceived by residents are framed and expressed virtually. They are also a platform through which other “frame their obsession visually.”<sup>407</sup> The perception of citizens about the successes of any political dispensation or administration in Nigeria is mostly

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<sup>407</sup> G. Agbo, “Photography, Facebook and the Virtualisation of Resistance in Nigeria,” unpublished PhD thesis in History, University of the Western Cape, 2016, p. 4.

influenced by some socio-political markers like religion, ethnicity and party affiliation, but sometimes on what individuals stand to gain depending on their modes of proximity to the centre of power. While some residents celebrate the government for the reveling opportunity which has created a carnival economy that they benefit from, the rest of the citizens who seem not to benefit, or perhaps benefit marginally, or some political and cultural activists who claim to stand for the good of the society in general, are either indifferent, dissatisfied or passive.

These affects and expressions are either visually represented or demonstrated in how revelers and residents engage with photography, at least during the carnival. Some residents and revelers have benefitted economically, participatorily and in some ways from the carnival are akin to the successes of the state government. The images these set of residents and revelers produce are celebratory shots, announcing their achievement and support for the event. In an interview with Daniel Duke who was one of the protocol officers for the carnival, Daniel Duke asserted that since he joined the carnival as a protocol officer in 2017, he has been able to pursue his academic goals through the proceeds of his service during the event. He asserts that he is always on the lookout for carnival programs and has functioned in this position on a yearly basis since 2013. He claimed that organizing the carnival by the state government and him being enlisted as a protocol officer under the commission for the past 6 years has helped him gather resources to further his higher education, an ambition that he had struggled for previously. For him, carnival photographs are celebrative shots used to memorialize his participation in the event. He does use his photographs to memorialize his participation as well as express his obsession for the “democratized” economic benefits that he and others like him have been able to garner through the carnival, partaking in what Nigerians popularly refer to as “national cake.”<sup>408</sup>

Other residents express their sense of apathy to the state government’s organised carnival festival and the political situation in Nigeria. Yet, their indifference does not deflate their interest in producing photographs of themselves for self-celebration, self-inscription, affective self-imaging and their individualized immersion within the celebratory and festival landscape without paying attention to the political tensions surrounding the society and the political characteristic of the carnival. Carnival and photographing-self become a form of healing, an expression of “freedom” and the opportunity to leisure and play, to ease out of and vent off the pressures of political and economic exclusion and social denial of inclusivity within the supposed dividends

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<sup>408</sup> Interview with Daniel Duke, Calabar, 29 December 2019.

of democracy that they were promised since 1999.<sup>409</sup> Even though it is hard to escape from certain forms of signages that reference politics and a “broken” system, they choose to develop some form of blind spots, at least temporarily, from such visibilities.

Yet, others demonstrated their disaffection by refusing to take any photograph of themselves by themselves or requesting to be photographed during the event or within the arena of the event. They also try to deliberately avert being photographed, which was seemingly unattainable given the multiplicity of photographic encounters and the unpredictability of unannounced and unsolicited photographic events that happened in a street festival like Calabar Festival and Carnival. But this act of self-refusal, a kind of visual protest, what I refer to as “temporary or circumstantial photophobia” – a short lived no-interest in photography during the carnival - is a subtle reminder of Patricia Hayes’ idea of the “empty photograph.” Hayes metaphorically invokes the idea of “emptiness” around the sense of inertia that repetitive encounters with some set of archival photos can produce – a sense of photographic fatigue and diminishing value “that require no more looking at, engagement, or critical thought.”<sup>410</sup> “Categorical emptiness” as she coins it presupposes a sense of disinterest, inertia and lethargy for active viewing of archival photographs. Here, while emptiness references disinterest, inertia and lethargy for viewing carnival photography, it also presupposes an “inert” expression towards taking photos of self within an intense photographic carnival space. Taking photographs or owning carnival photographs, and activating the “vagaries of memory” of the event may promote and evoke an unsettling sense of disaffection that the carnival represents for this set of people. In a conversation with NY who chooses to be referred to simply as NY, he furiously expressed his displeasure “with the way the carnival is being organized these days.”<sup>411</sup> NY asserted that in the

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<sup>409</sup> A. Agbage et al, “Democracy and Governance Assessment in Nigeria,” a Review Paper by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), 2006, [https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf\\_docs/PNADI079.pdf](https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNADI079.pdf), accessed on 30 September 2022. See also O. O. Innocent, “The Quest for Democratic Rule and the Dividends of Democracy: any Hope for Nigerians and Democratic Consolidation?” Conference paper presented at: Post Election Peace Building and Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria, Benue State University, Makurdi, 2020, where the author asserts that the Nigerian agitation for democratic governance after a long era of politically brutal and economically disastrous military regimes for over three decades has produced no meaningful results. He asserts that “Nigerians and the nation at large have not felt [any] better under the democratic rule they so fought for and massively embraced; with corruption, unemployment, poverty and other indices of development still on the increases.” [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343392079\\_The\\_Quest\\_for\\_Democratic\\_Rule\\_and\\_the\\_Dividends\\_of\\_Democracy\\_any\\_Hope\\_for\\_Nigerians\\_and\\_Democratic\\_Consolidation](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343392079_The_Quest_for_Democratic_Rule_and_the_Dividends_of_Democracy_any_Hope_for_Nigerians_and_Democratic_Consolidation), accessed on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2022.

<sup>410</sup> P. Hayes, “Empty Photographs: Ethnography and the Lacunae of African History” in P. Hayes and G. Minkley, eds., *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2019), pp. 60-61.

<sup>411</sup> Interview with NY, Calabar, 28 December 2019.

beginning when the carnival project started, the government promised that the event will bring lot of economic and social benefits that would accrue to residents. But up till now, “only few people who have links with state officials in one way or the other benefit from the events.”<sup>412</sup>

Thus, photography’s “social act” does not conveniently fit into the claim of an unquestionable source of evidence. It rather “stands at the crossroad of history and memory” but an intersection that is complicated and vexed, according to Leigh Raiford.<sup>413</sup> “Conspicuous display [pose] are central to photographic performance [orchestrated in front an organized backdrop].”<sup>414</sup> During carnival, photographic postures that are seeming un-staged and un-consented on the street are reminiscent of the carnivalizing and reveling mood that revelers are prone to. But sometimes this norm is interjected with passive postures that complicate and vex the histories and memories of carnival and photographic performance (Fig. 10). Producing this passive posture as a photographer was not orchestrated by prior intention to represent people as un-posed. It was motivated by the intent to keep documenting scenes of carnivalizing mode, but also using photography critically. But as Smith asserts on the “limits” and “excess” of photography, photographers sometimes “depict things [they] had no intention of at the time.”<sup>415</sup> Some depictions of carnival photographs and the context of their framing are influenced by cultural perception of the photographer – cultural here denoting more of a worldview and biases than vernacular ritualized and performance tradition. But much as Smith further opines, photography has the capacity to “reveal[ing] new limits to human sight” but also with oscillating perception, photography sometimes is “technologically, culturally, and historically determined.”<sup>416</sup>

Thompson points to how photographs can mobilize affects effectively in picturing and producing notions of a defined and shared community.<sup>417</sup> While Thompson is talking about how backdrops used in street photography emerge and mobilize affect across diasporic black communities in Jamaica and in America, in the Calabar Carnival the interlude of waiting and the posture of bafflement it exuded among revelers seem to conjure an image of temporary exclusion

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<sup>412</sup> Interview with NY, Calabar, 28 December 2019.

<sup>413</sup> L. Raiford, “Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory” in *History and Theory, Theme*, (2009), Issue 48, pp. 112-129.

<sup>414</sup> K. Thompson, *Shine*, p. 67.

<sup>415</sup> S. Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, p. 4.

<sup>416</sup> S. Smith, *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*, p. 7.

<sup>417</sup> K. Thompson, *Shine*, p.10.

in an inclusive environment. Fig. 10 above suggests a community of revelers who are ultimately ready for the event but seem to feel a sense of loss, left off the landscape of festival, though temporarily, but sometimes left out of the inclusivity of the socioeconomic and pecuniary super-benefits that accrue to the political class.<sup>418</sup>

Smith also talks about the forms of visibility and the dynamics of seeing that happens in photography. She asserts that the introduction of photography advances the visual scope and experience of human in superlative ways. But also, photography's seeing also inhibits and forecloses what one cannot see.<sup>419</sup> Conversely, in its ambiguous positionality, photography can also amplify and advance our perceptive scope beyond our recognizable and thinkable visual scope. It brings those social factors and characteristics, that though they did not escape our perception, but were not within our immediate photographic visual field of cognizance. Photography thus homes in and traps certain images into its constructed frame that alerts our attention while looking at them later.

In the photograph above, my photographic perception was to frame the unconventional dress code exhibited by some band members. But the photographic visual field succeeded in framing certain politico-economic and sociocultural inclusions beyond my focal view as the photographer. It "captured" the "crude oil" insignia "at the edge of sight," suggesting an undeniable agency and the domineering pecuniary positionality of petroleum economy in the politico-economic and cultural currency in Nigerian in the 21st century. But it also seems to be in denial of history, as it "slides between the past and the present denoting inclusion and exclusion"<sup>420</sup> of Cross River State in the Nigerian petroleum economy. Cross River State's motivation to explore the economic potential of cultural tourism was informed by its intention to diversify the monopolistic dependence on oil economy in 2004. But in the later years, the state asserted that tourism activities, including Calabar Festival and Carnival were revenue projects set in place to remedy the state from the fiscal malady that it suffered for being excluded from the fiscal benefits of littoral states in Nigeria in 2008.<sup>421</sup> The juxtaposition between the historical

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<sup>418</sup> See R. Suberu's "Prebendal Politics and Federal Governance in Nigeria" in Adebani, Wale, and Ebenezer Obadare, eds. *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 79-101.

<sup>419</sup> S. Smith, *At the Edge of Sight*, 7.

<sup>420</sup> P. Hayes, "Introduction: Gender Histories" in *Gender & History*, Vol.17 No.3 November 2005, pp. 519-537.

<sup>421</sup> [https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/599776\\_oil\\_wells\\_belong\\_to\\_akwa\\_ibom\\_supreme\\_court\\_rules.html](https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/599776_oil_wells_belong_to_akwa_ibom_supreme_court_rules.html) accessed on 30 September 2022.

narrative of carnival as a touristic campaign motivated by the exclusion from the crude oil economy, and the celebratory and visual insignia of crude oil paraded during the carnival, amplifies as well as complicates history.

Again, I assess the different forms of visual engagements or perhaps photographic engagements exhibited by carnival participants during the carnival. These photographic engagements elicit different strands of analysis. During the carnival, many participants were consoled with what the affordance of photography can offer. Particularly during the period of inactivity and celebratory limbo – while waiting for the arrival of state officials - many took to their camera phones to visualize and memorialize the aesthetic depth of the event and the aesthetic depth of the festival landscape. Smart devices and their photographic functions allowed participants and revelers alike a sense of easiness in image production and circulation. The accessibility and availability of these devices transformed the waiting moment into explorative photographic experimentation, and seems to offer an incontrovertible evidence of a touristic adventure.<sup>422</sup> It further expands the visual landscape of the celebration as images are produced ubiquitously. It reminds us of what Susan Sontag’s idea of how photography’s development along with tourism empowers tourists to “take possession of space in which they are insecure.”<sup>423</sup>

The photograph in Fig. 10 is a prototype of the complex nature of street photography. Not only in the complexity of genre, as it “stand on the crossroads between the tourist snap, the documentary photograph, the photojournalism... treated as much as vernacular photography,”<sup>424</sup> it is also complex in how it frames multiples images into one frame. A boy in a yellow shirt looking into the screen of a fellow’s camera phone held by hand is imaged into the photograph. The image of the boy and his posture suggests an attempt to scrutinize a produced photograph presented on the screen of a camera phone. Though we cannot see the content on the screen, the boy’s reflexes, gesticulation and facial expression suggest that the photographer with the camera phone maybe seeking the approval of the boy or his validation on the aesthetics of a produced image, either of the boy or other possible photographic subject. The image frames together the different social-cultural dynamic and activities that happen during the carnival “waiting period.”

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<sup>422</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 7.

<sup>423</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, p. 7.

<sup>424</sup> C. Scott, *Street Photography: from Atget to Cartier-Bresson* (New York, Routledge, 2020), p. 15.

While photographs serve as channels of memory during carnival, as a street photograph, it sometimes leaves the viewer to decipher the complexity and connectivity between and among the seemingly different images congregating in one frame.

### **Street photography: a conduit of un-staged photography**

To return to the question I started this chapter with: What is the place of the street in the production and consumption of a contemporary and commodified African festival? During the carnival I produced many photographs on the street. Some of these photographs would be classified as portrait photography, others would be seen as street photography. Street photographs allow for the production of an image that does not predispose the subject to set a pose. It is an “un-posed, un-staged photography [that] records, explores, or questions contemporary society and the relationships between individuals and their surroundings.”<sup>425</sup>

These images were sometimes taken without the awareness or consent of the subject, thus “the scene being captured is unplanned, and, consequentially, un-consented.”<sup>426</sup> This does not attune to the “invasion of privacy in public spaces generally recognizes, [but] under most circumstances, one who reveals himself in public does not hold a reasonable expectation of privacy.”<sup>427</sup>

In street photography, the portability of camera and the camera phones allows for easiness in documenting the world around us. It brings to fore visual frames that would have escaped the lenses of organized photography that must go through the protocols of officialdom. Street photography unofficially documents events on the street that question secular authority and thus provoking questions and seeking answers for events that would have easily passed the eye of official photography and evaded the course of history. In some metropolitan societies where the drive for urbanization and gentrification unsettles and dislodges residents and their residential existence, particularly of the less privileged, like in Amsterdam, street photography has been used as a “form of resistance against the lived experience of gentrification and social

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<sup>425</sup> Emily Airton, London Street Photography Festival, UNDo.NET (2011), <http://1995-2015.undo.net/it/mostra/122873>, accessed on 20 October 2022.

<sup>426</sup> Cuador, Claudia. "From Street Photography to Face Recognition: Distinguishing Between the Right to be Seen and the Right to be Recognized." *Nova L. Rev* (2016), Vol. 41, p. 242.

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

fragmentation in the accelerated city.”<sup>428</sup> People have been very aware of the documentary potency of photographs. But as postulated by Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner, street photography can also be complicit with the imperative of neoliberal globalization,<sup>429</sup> and in this case complicit with imperious secular visual narratives of carnivalizing culture against other unexpected aspects of the society.



Fig. 11: Band members waiting for the governor with many of them sitting on the centre pavement along Calabar Road, Nsima Udo, 2019.

Fig. 11 is a photograph that I produced on the street. As a street photograph, it was taken in an un-staged, un-posed, un-consented and unintended context. As a street photograph, it “shows and hides, and reveals both what has and has not changed” but also positions the subjects

<sup>428</sup> Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner, “Slow Art in the Creative City: Amsterdam, Street Photography, and Urban Renewal” in *Space and Culture* (2015) Vol. 18, p. 1.

<sup>429</sup> Christoph Lindner and Miriam Meissner, “Slow Art in the Creative City”, p. 1.

as a signifier and marker of the social, political and cultural import, in relation to an event that occurs in the street and the society in general.<sup>430</sup> Here, this street photograph is positioned as a conduit of memory, memorialising the different layers of engagement during the carnival event. But it also serves as a confrontational image: presenting the myriad forms of derelict structures in the background that confronts the carnivalesque narratives of Cross River State. It frames together a complicated aesthetics of colours, creativity, catharsis and cruelty. It brings into focus, a form of photographic juxtaposition into the frame. Debbie Lisle beautifully captures the concept of photographic juxtaposition when through what she refers to as “active viewing,” she disavows the dominance of familial trope of pity and abject victimhood in war photographs, but juxtaposes war and leisure through benevolent viewing that “interpret the detritus of leisure within the Late Photography of war.”<sup>431</sup> The carnival photograph in Fig. 11 juxtaposes leisure and tension, colours and banality, mobilities and inhibitions, timeliness and tardiness as well as a sense of “photographic unconscious” in the “ambivalent space of encounter.”<sup>432</sup>

While carnival photos contextualize the ethno-political hierarchies that are occasioned in Nigerian body politics, they also symbolize the complicated tensions that exist between the organizers and the carnival community. There seem to be some tensions between the organisers of the carnival, who seem to trade-in the carnival festival for politico-economic convenience, on the one hand, and other cultural connoisseurs, interlocutors and practitioners like costumiers, creative and sculptural artist, reveler and masqueraders, dancers, event planners as well as tourists, visitors and residents who tend to put in some forms of sophisticated and energized efforts of ingenuity, hard work and passion directly or indirectly, and physical attendance to make the carnival event workable, appealing and aesthetically sophisticated, on the other hand. For example, the magnitude of delays that revelers experienced during the 2019 carnival event short-circuited the revelry and gyrations that it should exhibit. These delays seem to impose a handicap to the performative resonance of the carnival, but also reveal a closer attachment and a kind of filial relation that exists between participants and their smartphones during the events.

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<sup>430</sup> M. Wigoder “Some Thoughts about Street Photography and the Everyday,” in *History of Photography* (2001) Vol. 2 No. 4, pp. 368-378, DOI: 10.1080/03087298.2001.10443239.

<sup>431</sup> D. Lisle, "The surprising detritus of leisure: Encountering the late photography of war" in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2011), Vol. 29 No.5, p. 888.

<sup>432</sup> D. Lisle, “The Surprising Detritus of Leisure”, p. 889.

The proximity and insistent attachment of participants to smartphones during the carnival reinforces the idea of “prostheses”. This technology/human relation and interface seems to be relevant in these moments of delays as they tend to “empower users, facilitating emergent behaviors that add [virtual and visual] value” to their carnivalizing participation<sup>433</sup>. Caroline Marchant and Stephanie O’Donohoe assert that “the constant presence of this mobile technology – smartphone - in users’ hands as well as their lives has led to the proliferation of prosthetic metaphors.”<sup>434</sup> Miller carries the arguments further by stating that this prosthetic interface between smartphones and users inadvertently obscures the borders between “technologies, embodiment, knowledge and perception,”<sup>435</sup> as they become “increasingly woven into the fabric of everyday life.”<sup>436</sup> While the “prosthetic” arguments are complicated and complex in defining the human/technology binaries in relation to duality, fluidity, disapproval, addiction or appropriation, the idea of prosthesis here encapsulates the extended assistance that smartphones and mobile technology offer in trying to dowse the tensions that participants experienced at the times of delay – waiting for the arrival of the state governor.

The image in Fig. 11 was produced at the height of the delay. The woman in the foreground is framed depicting someone in motion, and her entire dance group are pictured dressed in their colourful costumes ready for the carnival performance to commence. While her colleagues are seated on a road pavement in anticipation of the expected moment, she seems to be walking away with a pouting countenance. She is pictured with many colourful and decorative designs. But she is also being “beautified” with a smartphone in her hand – as can be seen on others. Many of the participants both in costumes or otherwise were seen carrying their smartphones conspicuously on the hands or hanging them on their neck as necklaces with decorative straps and casings. While the handiness of a smartphone relates to the flexibility and portability of phones as in “mobile phone,” in Calabar, mobile phones and the way they are handled sometimes define class and are seen as “item of fashion... they express the user's personality. Newest, latest, slimmest, and shiniest become urgent point-of-purchase drivers.”<sup>437</sup>

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<sup>433</sup> C. Marchant and S. O’Donohoe, “Homo prostheticus? Intercorporeality and the emerging adult-smartphone assemblage” in *Information Technology & People* (2019), Vol. 32 No. 2, p. 453.

<sup>434</sup> C. Marchant and S. O’Donohoe, “Homo prostheticus?”, p. 453.

<sup>435</sup> J. Miller, “The fourth screen: mediatization and the smartphone”, in *Mobile Media & Communication*, Vol. 2 No. 2, pp. 212.

<sup>436</sup> C. Marchant and S. O’Donohoe, “Homo prostheticus?”, p. 467.

<sup>437</sup> P. Day, “How mobile phones became fashion items” <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-28605207>, accessed on 5 October 2022.

Smartphones are mostly shown off items of class in relation to what brand and make that the carrier exhibits. They define class, sophistication and ostentation, extending the fashion complex of certain individuals.

The availability of smartphones has immensely contributed to the proliferation of street photography, sometimes unintentionally. But smartphones are also important in photographing and memorializing self. In trying to understand the role of mobile phones in the daily lives of young people, Mihailidis asserts that in relation to the consistent engagement of young people with their phones and the available facilities of a front-facing camera and rear cameras which allows one to store images of oneself that evokes affective and emotional impulses, smart phones become “our best friend who will save all our secrets, pleasures and sorrows.”<sup>438</sup> Proximity to it can potently generate “positive feelings of confidence, intimacy and security, while also leading to degrading feeling of anxiety, exclusion and obligation.”<sup>439</sup>

The proximity and utility of smartphones thus portend a prosthetic relationship between humans and technology. It blurs the binary between the two but also allows for something like a third eye that not only aids in visualizing and expanding our visual scope, but also in memorializing cultural images of self and others that can facilitate historical and discursive engagements. Its immediacy, accessibility, handiness and portability allow it to immediately retains what is perceived photographically without attending to the ritualism of professional photography. It infuses the photographic landscape with an excess of images of the street that activate “vagaries of memory”<sup>440</sup> for historicizing performance and cultural practices, particularly in relation to histories of the recent past.

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<sup>438</sup> P. Mihailidis, “A Tethered Generation: Exploring the Role of Mobile Phones in the Daily Life of Young People” in *Mobile Media & Communication* (2014), Vol. 2 No. 1, p. 67.

<sup>439</sup> G. Mascheroni and J. Vincent, “Perpetual Contact as a Communicative Affordance: Opportunities, Constraints, and Emotions” in *Mobile Media & Communication* (2016), Vol. 4 No. 3, pp. 310-326.

<sup>440</sup> P. Hayes, “Empty Photographs: Ethnography and the Lacunae of African History”, p. 61.

## **CHAPTER THREE:**

### **THE CARNIVALIZATION OF CULTURES AND THE ECONOMICS OF CARNIVAL**

Since 2004 Cross River State has tried to appropriate carnival festival and events as a showcase to display certain cultural forms and practices of people of the state and to boost its tourism economy. Beyond tourism and cultural aesthetics, Cross River State government through its carnival commission has also tried to expand its national political and sociocultural standing in Nigeria and in Africa and to establish an important global network and diplomatic engagement. Official invitations from Cross River State Carnival Commission are extended to the Ministries of Culture of all state governments in Nigeria to send their cultural troupes and representatives to participate in the Cultural Carnival.<sup>441</sup> Additionally, international cultural and performance troupes who represent different countries were officially invited to participate in the International Carnival that started in 2012. Most of these troupes were official representatives from their governments, as each group flew its national flag and had some of their diplomatic institutions in Nigeria with them on the ground. These inter-national cultural itineraries are fully funded by the Cross River State government as stated by Moses Ogar, the Director of Research, Calabar Carnival Commission.<sup>442</sup> Countries were invited without any particular political or diplomatic considerations, except in the context of accessibility to responsible government agencies and timeous responses from the invited countries or cultural agencies.<sup>443</sup> In 2019, there were representatives of about 33 countries across the different regions of the globe that sent in cultural and performing/dance troupes to participate in the event, advancing popular awareness and boosting a drive towards Cross River State as a tourism destination.

In this chapter, I look at the politics of performance through the instrument of culture as it relates to the diplomatic and national engagements, interactions and possible transactions between Cross River State and other state governments in Nigerian, and between Cross River State and some states and their cultural institutions outside Nigeria, regionally and internationally. How do we think through carnival in the world of cultural diplomacy? Why has

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<sup>441</sup> For example, in 2018, the Cross River State Carnival Commission extended an official invitation to the Pan-African Council that is located in Brazil to send representative to the carnival event. <https://www.panafricancouncil.org/nigeria-cross-river-state-calabar-festival-carnival-africanism/>, accessed on 16 September 2022.

<sup>442</sup> Interview with Moses Ogar, 10 January, 2019.

<sup>443</sup> Interview with Moses Ogar, 10 January 2019.

culture been carnivalized in Nigeria? And what position does Calabar play in this carnivalizing project nationally?

### **Politics of performance**

I will begin to explore these questions by briefly looking at some aspects of both Caribbean, Notting Hill and Latin American carnivals, to animate some aspects of the “politics of performance” that weave around carnival performance and celebration. In “The Politics of Aesthetic Debate: The Case of Brazilian Carnival,” Taylor notes that the Rio Carnival started out of a slave culture, and was influenced greatly by African practices in the 18th century. In the 20th and 21st centuries it grew into a popular cultural identity and as a national symbol, “expressing the essence of Brazilian-ness, *brasilidade*”<sup>444</sup> that was exported and traded on international cultural and touristic templates and as an instrument and symbol of “political,” diplomatic and touristic engagement. For instance, samba, a performative component of Rio Carnival is believed to have originated from an African martial art dance called *capoeira*. *Capoeira* is today an Afro-Brazilian dance culture that has asserted itself as an aesthetic identity and “essence of Brazilian-ness,”<sup>445</sup> that is performed at different performance and cultural templates across the world.<sup>446</sup> The politics of aesthetics that Taylor iterates lies in a cultural movement within a performance landscape. What was initially seen as local performative practice progressively advanced through to become a cultural and political cadre of national identity. Brazilian samba is currently being seen and regarded as popular: a mainstream “indigeneity” that now plies across an international cultural and political landscape.

The oscillations between internal and external politico-cultural impact within the cultural landscapes of carnival performance in the Caribbean and South America helps to navigate an understanding of its performativity as a global brand. In Trinidad and Tobago for instance, state representatives struggled to maintain carnival as an image of what they refer to as “cultural nationalism” by trying to “create, encourage and maintain strong national cultural institutions” with the aim of impressing “a shared sense of national identity and culture” among the diverse

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<sup>444</sup> J. Taylor, “The Politics of Aesthetic Debate: The Case of Brazilian Carnival” in *Ethnology* (1982), Vol. 21, No. 4, pp. 301-303.

<sup>445</sup> J. Taylor, “The Politics of Aesthetic Debate,” pp. 301-303.

<sup>446</sup> J. Goncalves-Borrega, ‘How Brazilian Capoeira Evolved from a Martial Art to an International Dance Craze’ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/capoeira-occult-martial-art-international-dance-180964924/>, accessed on 5 January 2023.

populace that can resist external cultural forces that seek to compromise it.<sup>447</sup> But as Garth Green has shown, this ambition has been constantly overturned, in practice, in the face of an exacerbated intent for cultural commodification of carnival and cultural packages that are constantly changing and that are seeking the patronage of the contemporary young generation.<sup>448</sup>

The Notting Hill carnival with a strong Caribbean influence started in London against the backdrop of the arrival of *Empire Windrush* at the Tilbury Dock in 1948. The arrival of Caribbean immigrant workers in Notting Hill was the foundation for asserting a cultural identity of a street carnival in London. The Notting Hill Carnival started as an in-house festival in 1959 by Claude Vera Jones who was a Trinidadian born American writer who migrated to London. This event navigated across waves of political and sociocultural tensions and morphed into a symbol of black identity and later part of a tourism agenda in London. In tracing how a community festival transcended sociopolitical barriers, Nicole Ferdinand and Nigel Williams assert that Notting Hill carnival, a Caribbean immigrant festival, utilized the burdens of politics and power relations to assert itself and develop into an international tourist event.<sup>449</sup> Its slide from localized cultural identities and performance into a global brand was always troubled, sometimes accompanied by intense street violence. The 1950s Notting Hill racial violence where hundreds of young white men mobbed black men and sometimes threw hand-made firebombs into the residences of black and coloured immigrants are some of the tensions through which the carnival was birthed.<sup>450</sup> The politics and power relations and the tensions they exhibited culminated in establishing a festivalscape that advanced the frontiers of cultural tourism in Notting Hill, that which remediates the materiality of Caribbean identity historically, but also an inclusive black identity in London. At the fringes, Notting Hill Carnival visualized through performance the multicultural identities of residents of London, but also attracted global patronage.

The history of Caribbean carnival and its versions in diasporic immigrant communities in Europe and the Americas are linked to slaves' struggle for inclusivity, migrants' contests against

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<sup>447</sup> G. Green, "Come to Life": Authenticity, Value, and the Carnival as Cultural Commodity in Trinidad and Tobago," p. 204.

<sup>448</sup> G. Green, "Come to Life", p. 204.

<sup>449</sup> Nicole Ferdinand, Nigel L. Williams, "The Making of the London Notting Hill Carnival Festivalscape: Politics and Power and the Notting Hill Carnival" in *Tourism Management Perspectives* (2018) Vol. pp. 33-46.

<sup>450</sup> Emma Loffhagen, "The forgotten racial history of Notting Hill Carnival", <https://www.standard.co.uk/going-out/attractions/notting-hill-carnival-2022-forgotten-racial-history-police-b1021012.html>, accessed on 14 December, 2023.

exclusion and the urban poor campaigning against political and sociocultural marginalization. They have simultaneously been politico-cultural movements, arising from a simple community festival in most instances, growing into national and global popular cultural frameworks. These dynamics oscillate too. For most Caribbean carnivals, the political and power relations ascended from the slums and the slave yards into the citadels and bastions of power, creating a festival template that has grown to symbolize an imaging repertoire of national identity and a hallmark for tourism, the economy and international strategic relations. In the post-independence era and in the 21st century, and with the potentials of garnering income and advancing event tourism, Caribbean carnivals are now government funded and organized events, with established institutions and commissions in each of the countries to assert control and organization.

In another sense, carnival has been seen as a subtle form of subversion against organised order. In “Aspects of the ‘Carnivalization’ of Contemporary Cultural Practices,” Olena Troitska et al theorize “carnivalization as a phenomenon of modern cultural practices and as a method and construct of restoring the integrity of worldview, world outlook and value-semantic attitude of a person” within a certain changing cultural setting.<sup>451</sup> What they try to establish is that during carnival, the comical interplay of everyday life blurs the boundaries between holidays and workdays,<sup>452</sup> since carnival was purported to be a holiday that “exits from the systems and regulations”<sup>453</sup> of established institutions. Reading Bakhtin, Renate Lachmann, Raoul Eshelman and Marc Davis, they express the opinion that carnivalization implies a subversive inversion and parody of high culture,<sup>454</sup> what Bakhtin himself describes as a “complete withdrawal from the present order.”<sup>455</sup>

While my conception of carnivalizing culture inclines to the idea of holiday, renewed worldview and a sense of inversion, it does not, in the case of Calabar, carry the weight of subversion as proposed by Bakhtin and Bakhtinian scholars. It rather proposes a secular affirmation of an existing cultural order within a hybridised cultural phenomenon championed by the political elite who control political affairs in Cross River State. It further connotes an

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<sup>451</sup> O. Troitska, “Aspects of the ‘Carnivalization’ of Contemporary Cultural Practices” in *Philosophical Anthropology, Philosophy of Culture*, (2020) Vol. 1 No. 165, p. 100.

<sup>452</sup> O. Troitska, “Aspects of the ‘Carnivalization’ p. 100.

<sup>453</sup> O. Troitska, “Aspects of the ‘Carnivalization’ p. 100.

<sup>454</sup> R. Lachmann, Raoul Eshelman and Marc Davis, “Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture” in *Cultural Critique* (1989), Vol. No. 11, p. 118.

<sup>455</sup> M. Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), p. 275.

adaptation of a popular cultural paradigm into an acclaimed “indigenous” performance to advance cultural commodification. Thus, a cultural wave of adapting carnival as regional cultural refiguring in Nigeria started from a particular point, with Calabar in 2004. The 2004 Calabar experience has become a kind of cultural promenade through which carnivalizing performances have spread to other regions of Nigeria. It has become a centre for transmitting carnivalizing aesthetics across Nigeria in the era of cultural commodification in the 21st century.

The politico-cultural dynamics and social history proposal seems to be different and subverted in regard to Calabar Festival and Carnival. From 2004 when it was first organized, its history reflects a top-down approach. The flow and influence of politics and power in cultural formation and performance are inclined downward. Seeing the possibility of appropriating performance ideals and cultural philosophies and the cultural aesthetics of the people of Calabar and Cross River State into the mechanism of tourism economy, government authorities began to create a cultural framework that would supposedly advance the socioeconomic status of the people in general, but the political leaders most importantly.<sup>456</sup> This top-down dynamic has remained the same over the past 15 years.

Furthermore, there are other forms of engagements that I refer to as forms of “politics” loosely used, that are promoted by the carnival festival that this chapter foregrounds. These engagements function within both national and international fronts and are targeted at facilitating diplomatic, cultural and economic relations between Cross River State and other state governments and their agencies in Nigeria and between Cross River State and other international bodies. These inter-national relations are facilitated particularly by both the Cross River State Ministry of Sport and Culture and the Governor’s office which are the cultural diplomatic faculty of the state government, but also facilitated by both virtual and visual particularities of photographs on different national and international platforms.

In *Politics of Cultural Festival in Ghana*, Carola Lenz points out the place of performance in the political interactions between and among chiefdoms and between the host communities and the regional and national government in Ghana. She points out the place of the

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<sup>456</sup> See F. Agba et al “Carnival Fiesta and Socio-economic development of Calabar Metropolis, Nigeria” where they discuss the suspicions about government claims around the socioeconomic gains of Calabar Festival and Carnival since in several reported cases, government projects that were instituted to provide basic necessities of life and advance the socioeconomic wellbeing of citizens were mainly highjacked by officials for personal gain, thus leading to a “colossal waste of public funds.”

media in facilitating the politics of negotiated relationship between the local communities, and regional and national government. For her, “cultural festivals are thus also sites of cultural innovation and arenas where ethnic and local identities, national identity, popular culture, and culture staged by the state confront one another.”<sup>457</sup> She traces the colonial roots of festivals in Northwest Ghana and their developmental process in the 20th and 21st centuries. The “neo-traditional” process of development as she points out, integrates contemporary elements of representation and performance into African festivals through continuities, adaptation and innovation and thus advances the festival into an important “collective occasion of self-affirmation” as well as a means of “politics of invitation” and negotiation.<sup>458</sup>

Borrowing from Lenz’s conception then, Calabar Festival and Carnival seems to utilize a “neo-traditional” festival framework to establish and advance a cultural and tourism product where the idea of “carnivalizing culture” spread across Nigeria. Calabar Festival and Carnival has created a politico-cultural and economic integration among communities in the state as well as among other state governments and national institutions in Nigeria. As the popularity of the carnival events in Calabar grew nationally and as it attracted international patronage, some state governments in Nigeria decided to latch on it to rebrand and reengineer some of their festivals to wear the image of a carnival. This is what I refer to as the “carnivalizing culture” in the Nigerian context. Consequently, these states institutions and their governments contracted Cross Riverian carnival connoisseurs who have garnered expertise in carnival aesthetics through their Calabar-Carnival nexus to organize and administer their carnival project.

Furthermore, Calabar Festival and Carnival further extends its cultural and political nexus into international frontiers through the politics of cultural negotiation, participation, patronage and tourism. Calabar Festival and Carnival as an event became a platform through which global patronage and cultural intermingling were garnered, and through which different genres of performance are expressed in Calabar. In this chapter, I endeavor to trace this process of carnivalizing mobilities that moved from Calabar and across to other states of the Nigerian nation and other cultural performative expressions that emerged in Calabar during the festival and carnival. I also try to establish how the trajectory of national relevance and sociopolitical

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<sup>457</sup> C. Lenz, “Local Culture in the National Arena: The Politics of Cultural Festivals in Ghana” in *African Studies Review*, (2001) Vol. 44, No. 3, p. 48.

<sup>458</sup> C. Lenz, “Local Culture in the National Arena”, p. 50.

positionality of Calabar came to be because of its touristic inclinations and strategic cultural diplomacy that sets it apart among the community of states in the Nigerian cultural and tourism terrain. As a political interpolation, I also consider how complementary tourism programs and facilities which contributed in positioning Calabar as an international tourism and cultural destination have declined and decayed in the recent years, without commensurate political will and efforts by the government to maintain or revamp them.

### **Advancing the aesthetics of carnival in Nigeria**

Since 2004, the demand for a carnival genre has heightened in different states of the Nigerian federation. These states were inspired by the success story(ies) of Calabar Festival and Carnival to test the new cultural waters. Subsequently, they incorporated or introduced carnival celebrations into their touristic programs. Before the carnival move, some of these states had festival celebrations that had garnered some national and international appeal. But the clout and perhaps the global patronage and branding capability of Calabar Festival and Carnival's organizers, who have successfully attempted to create a visual, media and cultural template of carnival events particularly in the media and internet space, and in the political arena, lured these states and provoked the interest among state administrators to look in the direction of carnival. The 2012 Report of Calabar Festival and Carnival conducted by the Research and Planning Department of the Cross River State Tourism Bureau states that "at the National level the Calabar festival has become an icon which is being copied by other States."<sup>459</sup> The Cross River State actually recognized their positionality in advancing the carnivalizing process and moved towards remodeling indigenous cultural festivals to adopt the posture of Caribbean carnival in Nigeria. This is what I refer to as "carnivalizing culture."

For instance, the successes of a Caribbean-like and Trinidadian benchmark carnival in Calabar spurred the Rivers State government, a neighboring state to Cross River State in the South-South Nigeria,<sup>460</sup> to upgrade their cultural tourism agenda. They re-invoked the carnival genre and rebranded their cultural event as Port Harcourt Carnival. This Port Harcourt "carnival"

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<sup>459</sup> "Report of Calabar Festival /Carnival 2012", Archive of The Research and Planning Department of The Cross River State Tourism Bureau, Calabar.

<sup>460</sup> Nigeria is divided into 36 states, with Abuja classified as the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as a separate territory from the states. But all of them are currently being classed into six geopolitical zones, thus: North-East, North-Central, North-West, South-West, South-East and South-South, <https://infomediang.com/6-geopolitical-zones-nigeria/>, accessed on 4 November 2022.

termed *Carniriv* was actually conceived in 1988, earlier than Calabar carnival. In its formative years, it was more a celebration of opulence and diversity and “a fine agglomeration of the customs and cultural practices of the various ethnicities making up Rivers State” turned into a cultural package that could sell in a tourism market, popularly known as a “festival of thousands of masquerades.”<sup>461</sup> Though it was termed carnival, it did not yet take on the Caribbean carnival imagery, cultural materiality and performance prior to 2008. In 2008, inspired by Calabar carnival dynamics, *Carniriv* took on a renewed carnival imaging and combined their diverse cultural performance tradition with a Caribbean style carnival. And in 2012, River State government for the first time established the River State Tourism Agency to register *Carniriv* on the global tourism market. It ventured into featuring bands from the Notting Hill Carnival and Trinidad and Tobago Carnival,<sup>462</sup> and drafting Calabar carnival experts into its planning and event execution. Thus, aided by Calabar carnival authorities, *Carniriv* began to key into the global carnival branding network, bringing an important Caribbean carnival network into focus.

Lagos State, a state in South-West region of Nigeria is very popular for its Eyo festival. For over a century, Eyo festival attracted local, national and international tourists and participation from across the Atlantic and other parts of the world. Eyo festival belongs to a distant time beyond the colonial era in its provenance according to Yoruba oral tradition. But the festival changed from its ritualistic connotations into the celebration of splendor and opulence in the more recent past.<sup>463</sup> Following the national hullabaloo that accompanied Calabar Festival and Carnival and its acclaimed successes, in 2010, Lagos State government re-instated the Lagos Carnival and Cultural Fiesta to further advance the cultural and event tourism of Lagos State, and to tap into the tourism economy that was beginning to thrive in Nigeria in the 21st century. The earliest form of carnival in Lagos was brought by the Brazilian returnees who resettled in Lagos in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and introduced what was then known as *Fanti* or *Caretta* Carnival of Lagos.<sup>464</sup> But the 21<sup>st</sup> century carnival imaging sought to reset Lagos State as a cultural hub, with

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<sup>461</sup> “River State’s Carniriv Festival” *European CEO*, <https://www.europeanceo.com/finance/rivers-state-carniriv-festival/>, accessed on 10 July 2022.

<sup>462</sup> River State’s Carniriv Festival’ *European CEO*, accessed on 10 July 2022.

<sup>463</sup> Artsofthealltimes, ‘Arts and Culture in Nigeria: Eyo Festival in Lagos (Adimu Orisa Play), *Owlcation* online, 3 January 2022, <https://owlcation.com/social-sciences/history-arts-and-culture-eyo-festival-in-lagos-nigeria>, accessed on 10 June 2022.

<sup>464</sup> K. Prah. *Back To Africa: Afro-Brazilian Returnees And Their Communities*. Vol. 1. Centre for Advanced Studies of African Society Cape Town (CASAS). See also <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/08/locals-lagos-fear-carnival-forgotten-links-to-brazilian-past-nigeria>, accessed on 10 July 2022.

its advantage as the commercial capital of Nigeria. This new carnivalizing motivation of Lagos state post-2004 seems to be drawn from Calabar Festival and Carnival, as many carnival professionals from Calabar have been drafted to assist Lagos state organize its own carnival version.<sup>465</sup>

In Abuja, the political capital of Nigeria, the Kubwa, Abuja FCT Nigeria Carnival and Parades started in 2005 and includes street parades, boat regattas and a cultural competition including different states in Nigeria. The event is hosted around several venues including the Kuje Stadium, the Old Parade Ground in Area 10 and the popular Area 1 Roundabout. The event is managed by the Ministry of Federal Capital Territory and claims to be promoting diverse Nigerian cultures as well as showcasing the six area councils that make up the host city.<sup>466</sup> This proliferation of carnival celebration in Nigeria between 2005 and 2010 is part of the promotion of tourism enterprise in Nigeria at the same time.

In some of these pockets of carnivalizing culture and festival, its celebration and commercializing impetus across Nigeria, cultural agencies, carnival experts and event managers from Calabar became important contractual resource persons hired by different cultural agencies of states to help set-up and facilitate operations in the new movement. Having contributed to facilitating the successful hosting of carnivals in Calabar, they in turn became a needed human resource to help facilitate carnival celebrations and events across different regions and states in the country. Certain costumiers and float experts, and other experienced facilitators in carnivals aesthetics and art, were contracted from Calabar to assist in creating costumes and building floats in carnival celebrations across Nigeria. In a move that turned claims to locality and the vernacular on their head, Cross River State carnival exponents, after training facilitated by Trinidadian experts in 2006, 2008 and other subsequent years, became a hub for indigenous carnival experts and skilled workers to oversee the operationality of the different sections of the genre, from costuming to float building, to event management, security and the likes.

In 2011, the Nigerian Minister of Culture, Tourism and Orientation, High Chief Edem Duke, during an unveiling ceremony for the carnival theme for Calabar Festival and Carnival noted that Calabar had “introduced a new lexicon in Nigeria’s tourism programme by initiating

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<sup>465</sup> Interview with Emme Afia, 4 January 2020.

<sup>466</sup> B. Onochi and S. Omolaoye, “Abuja set for Carnival”, *The Guardian*, online, 10 November 2019, <https://guardian.ng/art/abuja-set-for-carnival/>, accessed on 10 July 2022.

Carnival Calabar, Cross River State.” This new “lexicon” and its aesthetic forms, meaning and performance tradition were also being advanced by Cross Riverian experts, who assisted in setting up some of the carnival events in different states. Umana Nnochiri, an expert costumier and a permanent costumier for Passion 4 Band, who on several occasion designed costumes for the Cross River State Governor’s band asserts that from about 2010, she was on several occasions contracted to design costumes for bands in Abuja Carnival, Lagos Carnival, Port Harcourt Carnival and Owerri Carnival.<sup>467</sup> Esekong Andrew Essien, a scholar and expert in theatre scenography and carnival arts who was the Technical Director for Passion 4 Band was also a technical facilitator contracted to help plan, set-up and build carnival floats and platforms across most of these carnival celebrations in Nigeria.<sup>468</sup> Emme Affia, then Director of Operations in Calabar Carnival Commission also hinted on how many Calabar youth who were trained by the Caribbean carnival experts had also been contracted to help at different points of carnival organization across Nigeria.<sup>469</sup> Since about 2005, Calabar has become a pool where carnival experts can be drawn and exported to other Nigerian states and provinces to facilitate the hosting of a successful and aesthetically rich carnival, so to speak, across Nigeria. The carnivalizing project that Calabar started in 2004 has brought in Lagos State, Rivers State, Abuja, Imo State among other into the carnival trend in Nigeria, joining the carnival club of swimming-costumed feathers-colours-floats- outlook in the post-military cultural and tourism phenomenon in Nigeria.

### **Internationalizing cultural relations through carnival**

Not only did Calabar export its product to various parts of Nigeria, but the Cultural Carnival which was instituted in the Calabar Festival under Liyel Imoke continued, with more states of the Nigerian federation sending in their cultural troupes and performance groups. As the event expanded in leaps and bounds, in patronage and participation across the country, its international presence also began to advance. Through what is called the International Carnival, the Carnival Commission began to invite international cultural groups across African and beyond to participate in the event. The International Carnival in Calabar became a platform where cultural troupes from different countries came to perform and to showcase their cultural and artistic

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<sup>467</sup> Interview with Umana Nnochiri, 11 July 2022.

<sup>468</sup> Interview with Esekong Essien, 11 July 2022.

<sup>469</sup> Interview with Emme Affia, 16 March 2022.

performance. While there were moments of participation by cultural groups from other countries since 2005, it was only in 2015 that Calabar Festival and Carnival was largely internationalised, when a specific day was particularly set aside and formalised for international participation. In 2015, 30 countries were invited, about 15 troupes representing 15 countries participated in the international show.<sup>470</sup> These cultural troupes were sourced either through their embassies and consulates in Nigeria or through Nigerian embassies in the invited countries.<sup>471</sup> Gab Onah, the Chairman of the Cross River State Carnival Commission asserts that while some troupes were officially representing their countries sourced through their embassies in Nigeria, others were private groups that the Nigerian diplomatic corps in the invited countries could access according to time and readiness.<sup>472</sup>

Prominent among the pioneer international participants and band groups was the Brazilian Vai Vai Samba band, which made its first appearance in 2012 through Governor Liyel Imoke's invitation. By 2019, the International Carnival had attracted troupes from about 33 countries from across Europe, the Americas, Asia, the Middle-East and Africa. In 2019, it was a tightly-packed event that was held through the night at U. J. Esuene Stadium, with many foreign dignitaries, ranging from the entourage of officials from different embassies and consulates in Nigeria, their diaspora communities, and troupes, visitors and tourists from outside countries. These new additions expanded the performative scope of the event, brought different forms of cultural aesthetics into a carnivalizing space while also carnivalizing all aspects of the festival, where the imported aesthetics and performance almost overshadowed other more locally-based cultural dynamics present in the festival event.

But it is difficult to draw a clear distinction between local and imported culture in the Calabar festival. As mentioned earlier the internationalization of the carnival had already had taken the form of costumes, resource persons and other carnival technicalities being sourced, hired and imported from the Caribbean. From about 2016 though some of the costume designers decided to try their hand on how to use local materials and fabric to create costumes for some section of their bands. By 2019, a whole section of Passion 4 band was dressed in costumes made from locally sourced materials and fabric. Umana is of the opinion that the aesthetic of the

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<sup>470</sup> I. Isine, "Nigeria: 15 countries to attend Carnival Carnival, 2015", *Premium Times* online, 13 December, 2015, <https://allafrica.com/stories/201512140254.html>, accessed on 29 June, 2022.

<sup>471</sup> Interview with Gab Onah, Chairman, Cross River Carnival Commission, 30 October 2022.

<sup>472</sup> Interview with Gab Onah, 30 October 2022.

locally made costumes was popularly accepted by revelers and band members and was scored acceptably well by the carnival adjudicators.<sup>473</sup> By 2019, according to Emme Affia who is the Director of Operations for the Carnival Commission, all forms of carnival technicalities, by service or products, that were sourced from the Caribbean, had ceased to continue. All the organising sectors of the events and all productivities and materials were locally sourced, procured and fabricated, thus saving a huge amount of capital flight from the carnival budget.<sup>474</sup>

Furthermore, Calabar has also traversed the international waters in relation to its carnival celebration. The springboard, and much of the training and inspiration, as indicated, was the Caribbean world. Since 2005, there has been a seasonal traffic of persons and performance aesthetic across the Atlantic. “The dialectics of tradition and adaptation” that traversed the Atlantic Ocean, when enslaved Africans advanced the dynamics of African cultures and masquerades to the slaveholding regions in the West Indies and in the Americas in the era of trans-Atlantic Slave Trade<sup>475</sup> were re-enacted in reverse through the Calabar Festival and Carnival. The cultural link that was established between African and Caribbean led to a new wave of cultural transactions in the 21st century. While African slaves were forcefully and brutally carried away into the Caribbean world as pawns of commerciality and instrumentality of forced labour in the three centuries before the Victorian era, in the 21st century, African elites and political juggernauts traversed across the Atlantic, to purchase cultural forms and aesthetics from the Caribbean in a new era of an African-Caribbean cultural nexus.

Apart from patronizing Caribbean cultural experts who have been contracted on many occasions to train Calabar practitioners, in the 2006 version of Calabar Festival and Carnival, a mock-steel band, facilitated by Trinidad’s cultural group, featured in the street parade. Also, in 2011, High Chief Edem Duke, the Minister of Culture, Tourism and Orientation for Calabar also led a 9-person delegation to Trinidad and Tobago to “draw from the pot of other carnivals” globally.<sup>476</sup> This kind of Caribbean [or carnival] trotting was again repeated in 2018, this time towards South America when the Cross River State Commissioner for Culture and Tourism Development, Eric Anderson, travelled to Brazil to glean from their century-long carnival

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<sup>473</sup> Interview with Umama Nnochiri, 14 March 2022

<sup>474</sup> Interview with Emme Affia, 16 March 2022.

<sup>475</sup> R. Njoku, *West African Masking Traditions and Diaspora Masquerade Carnivals*, p. 2.

<sup>476</sup> T. Oladokun, “Between Nigeria and Trinidad... Synergising for Carnival Relations” *Vanguard* online, 1 March 2012, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2012/03/between-nigeria-and-trinidad-synergising-for-carnival-relation/>, accessed on 18 June 2021.

expertise. It was a further attempt, as the government claimed, to firmly position Calabar Festival and Carnival to garner more organizational prowess, logistical management and revenue generation.<sup>477</sup>

Beyond the above forms of Caribbean-trotting and South American jaunts by government officials, other international engagements presented themselves during Calabar Festival and Carnival as forms of cultural diplomacy. Cultural Diplomacy has been described as “as a course of actions, which are based on and utilize the exchange of ideas, values, traditions and other aspects of culture or identity, whether to strengthen relationships, enhance socio-cultural cooperation, promote national interests and beyond.”<sup>478</sup> Nigeria has been recognised as possessing the potential to harness cultural diplomacy, otherwise referred to as soft power “to negotiate with any player in Africa and globally through the plank of soft [or cultural] diplomacy.”<sup>479</sup> International Carnival relations and exchange has been a trend along with the mobilities and migrations of cultural interlocutors who move from the point of emergence to another point of establishment.

From 2005, Calabar has been host to many popular international figures in the field of carnival and cultural industries. It has hosted many national cultural troupes who participate in the carnival event at different levels in different years. These individuals and troupes were invited to participate in different versions of the carnival and to lend their clout to boost the international value of the event. For instance, in their published article in the *Daily Independent* newspaper, Emeka Alex-Duru and Bassey Inyang note that in 2008, revellers and participants representing “Cameroon, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados were present to add glamour to the Carnival.”<sup>480</sup> A representative of the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Culture and Gender Affairs, Edgar Zephyrine, was in attendance and handled some important functions during the carnival.<sup>481</sup> In 2009 Michael William a senior board member of the Notting Hill

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<sup>477</sup> “Cross River State delegations shines at Rio Carnival, 2018 in Brazil” *Hyperstation.com* online <https://hypestationng.com/cross-river-state-tourism-delegation-shines-at-rio-carnival-2018-in-brazil/>, accessed on 18 June 2021

<sup>478</sup> Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, “What is Cultural Diplomacy? What is Soft Power” [https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en\\_culturaldiplomacy](https://www.culturaldiplomacy.org/index.php?en_culturaldiplomacy), accessed on 15 July 2022.

<sup>479</sup> A. Idowu and O. Ogunnubi, “Nigeria’s Soft Power and Economic Diplomacy in Africa” in *Journal of African Foreign Affairs* (2018), Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 189-206.

<sup>480</sup> E. Alex-Duru and B. Inyang, “Nigeria: Trills and Frills of 2008 Calabar Carnival,” in *Daily Independent* online, 8 January 2009, <https://allafrica.com/stories/200901090230.html>, accessed on 24 October 2022.

<sup>481</sup> E. Alex-Duru and B. Inyang, “Nigeria: Trills and Frills of 2008 Calabar Carnival,” accessed on 24 October 2022.

Carnival was part of the logo unveiling ceremony for the Calabar Carnival under Senator Liyel Imoke's administration.<sup>482</sup>

In 2012, a Brazilian carnival band was invited to participate in the festival, and in 2015, and as indicated earlier, about 15 countries including Brazil and Trinidad and Tobago participated in a version of what came to be known as International Carnival. By 2018 and 2019, 27 and 33 countries respectively, represented by cultural and performing groups, participated in the International Carnival, including USA, Mexico, Vietnam, Egypt, Bangladesh, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, South Africa and a host of others. Fahimil Islam, the Secretary, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Bangladesh was on the ground with his troupe. He noted that the theme for the year's carnival, *Humanity* was a globally sought-after value. He asserted that world leaders should be charitable to their citizens first, and maintain a sense of humanity in the global realm to allow for stability and peace in the international arena.<sup>483</sup> Calabar Carnival thus became a platform through which multicultural political agencies intermingled and fused themselves into a diverse but collective cultural block where some global politico-cultural narratives assert themselves, but also an agency for diplomatic cultural relations that emanate from a nation's cultural values to create foreign policy incentives through what is referred to as "soft power."<sup>484</sup>

I want to return in this regard to the International Carnival at the U. J. Esuene Stadium Calabar which has become a night-time event. The arena for the International Carnival represents what Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael refer to in another context as an "imbrication of multiple identities... and rainbow nationalities"<sup>485</sup> across different aspects of the event. The festival landscape and the visual markers during the International Carnival indicate an environment with diversity of cultures, familiar and sometimes unfamiliar to performers, participants, spectators and sometimes the government functionaries that are present. The International Carnival has continuously signified a conglomeration of nations, performances and cultures, represented with different colours, costumes, drums, dance, flags, language, music, props and performance traditions, and a melting pot where class, status, different modes of

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<sup>482</sup> J. Babatunde, "Calabar Carnival turns festival, gets new logo" accessed on 15 July 2022.

<sup>483</sup> "Calabar Carnival: Int'l delegates urge world leaders to ensure global peace, stability", *Vanguard* online, 31 December, 2019. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/12/calabar-carnival-intl-delegates-urge-world-leaders-to-ensure-global-peace-stability/>, accessed on 17 July 2022.

<sup>484</sup> G. Scott-Smith, "Soft Power, US Public Diplomacy and Global Risk" in A. Fisher and S. Lucas (eds.), *Trials of Engagement: The Future of US Public Diplomacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 99-100.

<sup>485</sup> S. Nuttall and C. Michael, "Introduction: imagining the Present" in Sarah Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael, eds., *Senses of Culture: South African Cultural Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 1.

identities tangle. Entrance to the arena was claimed to be strictly by invitation. I had already been granted an entrance ticket as one of the state's recognised observers. But, on getting to the venue the gates were loosely manned, and entry was seemingly free for all. The Calabar International Carnival became a space that brings together political elites both locally and internationally, performers and dancers, revelers, residents and spectators who are caught up in a dynamic cultural relation between performance and business, and between the secular and the popular.



Fig. 12: Vietnamese troupe pose for photographs in Calabar during the 2019 International Carnival. Photo: Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.



Fig. 13: Belize troupes performing in Calabar during the International Carnival. Photo: Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.



Fig. 14: A section of the auditorium with spectators and visitors seated while watching the event. Note also the use of smartphones to photograph the events. Photo: Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.

The above images are part of the photographs that I produced of the international performing troupes and a section of the nocturnal International Carnival on 28th December 2019. In the build-up to the moments of performance, performers were granted positions to sit and prepare for their performance presentation by the open auditorium at the far-right end of the U.J Esuene Stadium. While guests were still arriving, many of the international groups were asked to pose for group photographs by the Government House Photos. Photographers from different media houses took advantage of the poses and jostled for space to take photographs for themselves too. While carnival photos are sometimes populated with sites of un-posed and un-staged images as forms of street photography, there are also incidents where performers pose and perform for photography during carnivals (Fig. 12). Such carnival photographs (Fig. 12) contrasted with carnival photos taken on the street, but were part of the performance that was seriously featured during the international carnival.

Fig. 12 tries to present an image of the Vietnamese Cultural Troupe, made up of mainly women and garbed in red long dress. While they were ready to perform to the crowd of spectators who were intent on consuming the diversity of pose and performance, they equally posed and perform for the camera. There is only one male among the 10 women. He is dressed in a different manner from the women, in a “mufti” so to speak and evokes a sense of “sartorial elegance” that I mentioned in Chapter Two. His dress seems to differentiate him from the women. It evokes a sense of superiority and class, as though he is the one directing the troupe, and show. The backdrop of the Fig. 12 pictures an open auditorium where the rest of the international performers were seated but amplified in Fig 14.

I place these images which I took cumulatively, (Figs. 12-14) in order to depict the International Carnival arena as a world of collaborative “culturalism” matched with diversified creativity. The way I present these photographs is to animate a sense of an event that frames and compresses continental boundaries within a localized space of the stadium through the representations of multilevel and hybridized cultures and cultural aesthetics that were exhibited as nationalized identities, so to speak. I use them here to signify the expanded scope of participation and performance that Calabar Festival and Carnival has come to represent. Groups that represented countries like Ghana, Bangladesh, Slovakia, Kenya, Turkey, Russia, Belize, Egypt, Zambia, Czech Republic, Botswana, Ethiopia, Hungary, Lesotho, Lithuania, Brazil performed in the city of Calabar. Their performances were viewed and consumed by a public that

was made up of international, national and local audiences, in varying degrees of presence. The presence of these selected photographs thus extends the idea of cultural boundaries of the festival beyond the national and continental boundaries of Nigeria and Africa. With the population of nations that were present during the carnival fusing through the images I produced and reproduce here, Calabar carnival stands as a site of multicultural performance in a space that offers an international cultural and performative matrix.

Beyond visibility and beyond the backdrop, photographing the International Carnival and the archive it generated are both “eventual sites” of historiographical possibilities.<sup>486</sup> They mobilize creativity, performance traditions, cultural practices and consumption into one frame. They allow us to visualize my representations of how tourists and revelers both local and international intermingle, interact, filially engage, and consume the forms of cultural and performance diversely in one place. The International Carnival is performed and visualized differently from the street carnival base on modes of performance and sptatorial positionality. But as events, both for photography and performance, Calabar International Carnival compresses the globality of cultures within a space, with my photographs used as prop here to represent how the event has reshaped the host country’s internationalizing and conventional national branding.<sup>487</sup>

### **Calabar Carnival and the tourism landscape**

Calabar Festival and Carnival is one of the major events in the tourism, cultural-festival and entertainment landscape in Calabar and in Nigeria in general. But there are other entertainment and tourism facilities in Cross River State that make up the Calabar tourism landscape. In 1999, Nigeria was newly returned to civilian rule. The new dispensation of civil democracy began in Nigeria with the then president General Olusegun Obasanjo’s gesture of disrobing his military uniform for a civilian *agbada*, a very flamboyant and expensive flowing gown won by Nigerian elites and politicians, mainly of the Yoruba extraction. At the time, a new sense of the need to diversify the state’s economy from oil monopoly to other avenues of revenue generation was

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<sup>486</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 70.

<sup>487</sup> See M. Thani, “Channelling Soft Power: The Qatar 2022 World Cup, Migrant Workers, and International Image” in *The International Journal of the History of Sport* -Special issue: *Asian Journal of Sport History & Culture* (2021), Volume 38 No. 17, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2021.1988932>, accessed on 1 October 2022.

heralded by the federal government, since according to the government, overdependence on oil revenue could not sustain the nation's economy.

Cross River State responded to this call with both hands and began to invest in tourism. One of the projects that set Calabar apart from other states in the tourism enterprise was the establishment of Tinapa Free Trade Zone and Resort in 2007. The gigantic project stood on an 80,000 square metres landmass and cost around \$450 million to build.<sup>488</sup> Godlewski asserts that even though conceiving of an “utopian ideal in a Nigerian context might seem an exercise in counterintuition,” Project Tinapa was “considered as future lodestar of West Africa tourism.”<sup>489</sup> It was supposed to be a “showcase of Nigerian dynamism, a commercial [and touristic] hub for West Africa raking in millions of dollars” with the sophisticated and majestic landscapes, avant-garde domes, gigantic buildings and conference centres and world class leisure and entertainment facilities.<sup>490</sup> In its early days of establishment, Tinapa Resort placed Calabar on the pedestal of event management, tourism and entertainment, within an international visual economy. It attracted international business consortiums and entertainment patronage. But the poor management and complex political bottlenecks pushed this massive entertainment and business complex into the realm of a dilapidated white elephant project from about 2015.

Obudu Mountain Resort was another important tourism landmark in Cross River State. Formerly known as Obudu Cattle Ranch it was started in 1951 by M. McCaughley, a Scottish veterinary doctor who was looking for “a good spot to eat steak, escape the mosquitos and admire the scenery view.”<sup>491</sup> It was later appropriated by the Cross River State government as a ranch run by a Scottish expert Huge Jones.<sup>492</sup> In the 2000s it was repurposed as a tourism resort and re-christened Obudu Mountain Resort and Hotels. The state tapped into the natural vegetation, scenic views, mountainous topography and cool weather, drawing comparisons with

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<sup>488</sup> “Tinapa: Nigeria’s \$450 million white elephant”, *Vanguard* online, 17 May 2017,

<https://www.vanguardngr.com/2017/05/tinapa-nigerias-450-million-white-elephant/>, accessed on 10 July 2022.

<sup>489</sup> I. Godlewski, “Emerging African Utopia: Tinapa Trade Free Zone, Calabar, Nigeria” in *Traditional Dwellings and Settlements Review* (2010), Vol. 22, No. 1, THE UTOPIA OF TRADITION: Twelfth Conference of the International Association for the Study of Traditional Environments, December 15-18, 2010, American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut, Lebanon: Conference Abstracts (FALL 2010), p. 34.

<sup>490</sup> A. Adisa, “Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, Calabar”, *Come to Nigeria* online, 23 July 2015, <https://www.cometonigeria.com/where-to-go/tinapa/>, accessed on 10 July 2022.

<sup>491</sup> “The Obudu Mountain Race: where athletic excellence and Nigerian hospitality meet”, *The Guardian* online, 5 December 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-running-blog/2013/dec/05/obudu-mountain-race-nigeria>, accessed on 11 July 2022.

<sup>492</sup> “The Obudu Mountain Race” accessed on 11 July 2022.

regions outside of Africa, to establish an attractive tourist resort. It played host to important sporting events like the mountain running race, government conventions, corporate meetings, and in 2011 was supposed to be used for a presidential retreat during Goodluck Johnathan's presidential administration in Nigeria.

Between 1999 and 2007, during Donald Duke's administration, the resort received government priority in rebuilding and management of facilities. This was because, according to some Calabar residents, Governor Donald Duke was the brain behind tourism ideas and its utility for economic diversification. He facilitated the projects of "remodeling of the ranch's old buildings, structures and facilities, topped with the construction of an International Convention Centre, a Presidential lodge, honey factory, water park, gym facilities and tennis courts" He upgraded "the Becheve Nature reserve park, the Utanga Safari lodges, top-class Ranch Hotel, a 15-km cable car, and the Obudu Ranch Resort International Mountain Race, all to create awareness and attract high-level patronage globally."<sup>493</sup> The scenery and topography of the resort also attracted celebrated reality TV shows like the Guilder Ultimate Search, Session 2 that was held in 2004.<sup>494</sup>

The Marina Resort was another tourism facility that was established during Donald Duke's administration, between 1999 and 2007. The palatial riverside facility opened to the public in May 2007 to add to the tourism lure of the state. It paraded both leisure facilities and at the same time provided space to visualize the trauma of slave trade through the Calabar Slave History Museum. Facilities like seaside huts, restaurants, lounges, and facilities for "watercraft, boat rides, jet skis, carousel and bicycle rides and other fun children's activities"<sup>495</sup> ran alongside the Calabar Slave History Museum. Some of the lounges and restaurants were built with local thatched and raffia roof mud, to create the sense of indigeneity while lunching or resting in the lounge. It is housed close to the Old Residence Museum, Calabar, Millennium Park and the J. U. Essuene Stadium, which were all brought into the tourism narratives in Cross River State. The

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<sup>493</sup> A. Ojekunle, "Obudu Ranch Resort: N10bn tourist hotspot finally catches Ayade's fancy in twilight of his administration" *Business A.M* online, 8 October 2020, <https://www.businessamlive.com/obudu-ranch-resort-n10bn-tourist-hotspot-finally-catches-ayades-fancy-in-twilight-of-his-administration-2/>, accessed on 11 July 2022.

<sup>494</sup> "Obudu Cattle Ranch, Cross River State", [https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?locations=Obudu%20Cattle%20Ranch,%20Cross%20River%20State,%20Nigeria&ref\\_=ttloc\\_loc\\_2](https://www.imdb.com/search/title/?locations=Obudu%20Cattle%20Ranch,%20Cross%20River%20State,%20Nigeria&ref_=ttloc_loc_2), accessed on 11 July 2022.

<sup>495</sup> "The Marina Resort", *Visit Nigeria Now!* Online, 12 June 2014, <https://www.visitnigerianow.com/tours/marina-resort/>, accessed on 12 July 2022.

facility was built in the heart of the town, close to bus stations and the Margret Ekpo International Airport.

But between 2015 to 2022, these infrastructures became progressively dilapidated. It seems all the anticipated glories of tourism from the early years of operation became moribund or were waning very fast. The Obudu Mountain Resort, the Tinapa Resort and the Marina Resort and many other tourism facilities in the state struggled to survive the political onslaught of maladministration and corruption. In 2022 when I visited, the Marina Resort stands as a shadow of itself, with only the Slave History Museum striving to stay afloat. The visibility and the visual templates they currently offer are inversely grotesque. These great fascinating and palatial infrastructures are now looking like abandoned cities, lost paradises and have attracted media revisualization. Media houses, newspaper platforms and non-profit organizations began to explore these spaces, through both photographs and documentary videos, perceiving them as “hostile visual encounters”<sup>496</sup> in an entanglement of text, image and voice to campaign against governmental inattention to the fast-degrading state of these facilities, and made calls for revamping these facilities and the tourism program of the state.

One such instance was a fascinating and audacious documentary film, *Inside the Abandoned Tourism City of Nigeria: Cross River State*. Stephen Ndukwe the producer visualized and lamented the gross abandonment and neglect of state authorities and management institutions towards these tourism facilities. He featured images of the wreckages, juxtaposing them with what they used to be. The visual tensions from the video elicited unpalatable reactions online from locals, tourists who had once visited these resorts and other online observers who were both perplexed by the availability of such palatial infrastructure and the level of sophistication in Calabar as well as being dismayed at how they have been maladministered to the point of uttermost neglect and dilapidation.<sup>497</sup> Ndukwe blamed the state’s gross neglect, abandonment and ineptitude to the high level of corruption and selfish intent of the political leaders and their contractual cronies, who had allowed these gargantuan monuments to turn into “a ghost town and a monumental waste.”<sup>498</sup> This nefarious neglect pointed to the cultural poverty

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<sup>496</sup> A. Graham. "Hostile visual encounters: fighting to control photographic meaning in the DRC's digital age." *Africa* (2019), Vol. 89, No. 2, pp. 266-285.

<sup>497</sup> S. Ndukwe, *Inside the Abandoned Tourism City of Nigeria: Cross River State* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=skdYTQ2pC9s&t=43s>, accessed on 11 July 2022.

<sup>498</sup> S. Ndukwe, *Inside the Abandoned Tourism City of Nigeria*, accessed on 11 July 2022. I will recommend that readers watch this documentary to have a clearer understanding of the direction of my underlining argument.

of the facilities' maintenance, lack of sustainability and project continuation that has bedeviled the political space in Nigeria in the 21st century. While it cannot be generalized, these cultural, sociopolitical and economic morbidities point to the idea of “satanic geographies” in the project of contemporary globalization.<sup>499</sup>



Fig. 15: An abandoned and dilapidated structure of part of UJ Esuene Stadium. Photo: Nsima Udo, 29 December 2019.

Like Ndukwe’s documentary, my photograph of a dilapidated and abandoned building above, an extension of the EJ Esuene Stadium, and central to the spatial positionality of tourism in Calabar, deviates from the celebratory visual archiving of the festival carnival. While simply a photograph of a dilapidated building, it is also complex. It is loaded with political elements that point to some of the characteristics of the Nigerian political system. The photograph depicts signs of intense weathering and falling apart of concrete frames and pillars. This photograph is a “static photograph” but also rhetorical. It generates a “tense grammar”<sup>500</sup> of disquiet that ruptures

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<sup>500</sup> T. Campt, *Listening to Images*. Durham: Duke University Press (2017).

the flow of leisure and the affect that the carnival event was meant to evoke. Rhetorically, it speaks to the poor culture of sustenance of infrastructure common in the Nigerian polity generally. The image seems to generate tensions of visibilities and visualities, the kind that might interrupt the reveling mood that residents, tourists and viewers might encounter. Behind the death-like image of the building, I have included in the frame a telecommunication mast standing tall above the structure, maybe that of MTN or other communication corporations in Calabar, which may allow for an easy circulation of these kinds of photos without any communication glitches. Despite its proximity to the commercial hub of Calabar, this extended structure remains derelict, unattended to and abandoned. This structure was supposed to be an extension of the UJ Esuene Stadium, but in its current situation, it seems to rather extend the narratives of abandonment and dilapidation, while also affirming the visuals of governmental infrastructural and policy neglect that populates the Nigerian structural landscape.

The photograph images a space that seems to have been deserted and abandoned for several years. It seems not to be attractive to residents to even take cover under it during a hot afternoon as when the image was produced. In its abandoned state, the space seems to have been repurposed by residents as an alternative parking bay for people who have any business around the region. I included one vehicle parked in front of the wreckage. The image of the one vehicle represents the limit that the space can be useful, as I supposed residents fear that any of the wrecked pillars may fall off and could cause damage to man or vehicle. The image was produced while I was curious to see more of the carnival than what was staged. I accessed the back of the stadium through the back route to see “the underbelly” of carnival so to speak. Along the way, I encountered this item of dilapidation. In the image, I frame the skyline as a backdrop, while the brightness of the sun seems to blur the boundary between dilapidation and the blue sky. There seems to be an opening in the sky from where brightness flows into the dilapidated building, depicting a sense of illumination for the rickety and abandoned frame, a blinker of hope for a kind of “resurrection and ascension” so to speak, from structural decay into a completed, useful and perhaps photographically attractive structure sometimes in the near or farthest future, as power changes hands in the state.

The Nigerian socio-political and structural landscape is rife with cases of abandoned infrastructural projects that continue to dot the Nigerian and Calabar’s landscape. Being alarmed at the magnitude of abandoned projects and properties in Nigeria, Paulinus Ihuah and Abiye

Benebo undertook a quantitative research approach to determine the possible causes of incessant cases of abandoned properties in Nigeria. Among many other factors, they found out that prominently the “inconsistence in government policies, improper project planning and design, improper project costing”, corruption and fee fraud<sup>501</sup> mitigated against project completion by certain government agencies in Nigeria. In 2020, the Federal House of Representative sitting in Abuja found out that about 52 billion naira has been wasted through abandoned government properties, and the reason for these are predominantly revenue leakage due to corruption and financial fraud.<sup>502</sup>

These claims confirm the analysis of Bolarinwa and Osuji about the manner in which the Nigerian political landscape has operated since independence, worsened in the subsequent military era, and was aggravated in the current democratic dispensation where the government seems to act for the benefit of the few who are privileged to belong to the political elite.<sup>503</sup> This is a country where a budget for the completion of the project would be syphoned exhaustively through all kinds and systems of financial fraud and misappropriation strategies between and among policy makers and contractual stakeholders, yet the building stands ramshackle. Juxtaposing the image above with the aesthetic configuration of the carnival theme of 2019, Carnival: *humanity*, we may find a disjuncture between the theme and the practicality of events in Calabar in general. While its visibility was captured on video and photographically the implication is also very visible, both in aesthetic and economic terms. In relation to the carnival, it challenges the visual narratives of the state which churns out images of celebration about the carnival. It further tends to disavow the acclaimed economic advantages of an exorbitant carnival festival to better the fiscal situation of Cross River State.

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<sup>501</sup> P. Ihuah & A. Benebo, “An Assessment of the Causes and Effects of Abandonment of Development Projects on Real Property Values in Nigeria” in *IMPACT: International Journal of Research in Applied, Natural and Social Sciences* (IMPACT: IJRANSS) ISSN(E): pp. 2321-8851.

<sup>502</sup> Y. Akinpelu, “Reps probe N230 billion abandoned projects”, *Premium Times* online, 13 May 2020, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/392551-reps-probe-n230-billion-abandoned-projects.html>, accessed on 21 July 2022.

<sup>503</sup> O. Bolarinwa and U. Osuji, “Political Elitism in Nigeria: Challenges, Threats and the Future of Citizenship” in *Open Journal of Philosophy* (2022), Vol. 12 No. 1, p. 105.

## Visualizing the economics of carnival

Amongst these tourism ventures Calabar Festival and Carnival has been touted as a significant cultural and festival instrument for economic development in Cross River State. This assertion has been prominently pushed by the state government from the inception of the carnival festival in 2004. The state government has consistently maintained that Calabar Festival and Carnival is part of a touristic economy that was set up in early 2000 to generate fiscal revenue for Cross River State. While no particular empirical economic statistics are available to substantiate this claim, there are some published essays that support the claim, which I will try to engage with in this section.

The state government held that the socioeconomic development of Cross River State was poor compared to other states of the federation.<sup>504</sup> The state was formerly regarded as a “civil service” state where the majority of its revenue generation was dependent on civil service jobs and taxes generated from those jobs. In 1999 when Governor Donald Duke pushed for the adoption of tourism as an alternative option to diversify the state’s economy, he settled on adopting some existing tourism ventures within the state, its rich cultural complex of the state combined with developing “the bio-diversity assets in the State’s prime forest to market to global tourists.”<sup>505</sup> This initiative started to gain ground in the early 2000s.

In a 2012 Report, the Cross River State Tourism Bureau asserted that adopting cultural festival and carnival as a catalyst for the tourism economy was predicated on two objectives: one, to “serve[s] as a destination marketing tool, in the sense that people who would ordinarily not visit the destination would do so because of the staging of the festival/carnival... secondly, during visitors stay in the destination they are involved in purchase behaviours that would have direct and multiplier effect on the economy of the host community and the state at large.”<sup>506</sup> The penchant to advance the tourism drive through the festival was to generate direct and indirect revenue, prompted by the paucity of investment and industrial facilities in the state. The economic downturn in Nigeria in the post-democratic era in general had affected the industrial potential of Calabar. The desperation for revenue generation had led the government into

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<sup>504</sup> See S. Eko, E. Ifere and U. Udonwa, “Diversifying the Cross River State Economy through Tourism: Opportunities and Challenges” in *Global Journal of Social Sciences* (2013), Vol 12, pp. 19-26.

<sup>505</sup> J. Ushigiale, “For survival of Calabar Carnival” *This Day* online, 3 June 2019, <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2019/01/12/for-survival-of-calabar-carnival/>, accessed on 24 July 2022.

<sup>506</sup> Cross River State Tourism Bureau Report, 2012, p. 3.

adopting a taxation policy that stifled the investment environment in the state. This was inimical to industrial development and in about 2000 some companies that were the mainstay of employment in the state folded, partly because of the invasive tax policies of the state.

Added to the above was the exclusion of Cross River State as a littoral state (in policy) in the Nigerian oil revenue allocation. Spurred by the unhealthy impact of the colonial officialdom of the infamous Berlin Conference of 1885, colonial boundaries have become a crucible for inner conflicts in Africa since independence.<sup>507</sup> One example of this territorial conflict is the Cameroon/Nigerian contestation and geopolitics over Bakassi Peninsula. The conflict of territorial demarcations between Nigeria and Cameroon dates back to 1903. The knowledge of available oil and gas reserve in Bakassi Peninsula “triggered mounting hostilities and military confrontations in the early 1990s between Cameroon and Nigeria.”<sup>508</sup> The Nigerian Military occupied Bakassi in 1993, triggering further conflicts that led to military casualties from both sides. Cameroon dragged Nigeria to the International Court of Justice on border matters and in 2002 ICJ ruled in favour of Cameroon based on a 1913 Anglo-German Treaty. By 2008 the Nigerian Military and other service institutions pulled out of Bakassi, officially ceding Bakassi Peninsula to Cameroon.<sup>509</sup> The consequence of this judgement was the identity and geopolitical confusion of people who had once identified themselves as Nigerians in all cultural and nationalistic ramifications to be now seen as Cameroonians in a new geopolitical configuration.

Prior to 2008, Bakassi Peninsula was considered a part of Cross River State which made Cross River State a beneficiary of the Federal government special revenue – the 13% oil-derivation fund, allotted to states in the littoral zones in south-south Nigeria. The consequence of ceding Bakassi to Cameroon spiraled into another economic phase when in 2012, Cross River State ceased to be recognized as a littoral state and thus lost the allocation of national oil revenue due to losing over 76 oil wells to Akwa Ibom State, a regulation upheld by the Supreme Court of Nigeria.<sup>510</sup> The whole politico-economic quagmire, and the consequent reduction in national allocation provoked a deeper drive into searching for an oil alternative, of which tourism became

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<sup>507</sup> See “130 years ago: carving up Africa in Berlin,” <https://www.dw.com/en/130-years-ago-carving-up-africa-in-berlin/a-18278894>, accessed on 2 October 2022.

<sup>508</sup> F. Baye, “Implications of the Bakassi Conflict Resolution for Cameroon” <https://www.accord.org.za/ajcr-issues/implications-of-the-bakassi-conflict-resolution-for-cameroon/>, accessed on 2 October 2022.

<sup>509</sup> F. Baye, “Implications of the Bakassi Conflict”, accessed on 2 October 2022.

<sup>510</sup> “76 oil wells belong to Akwa Ibom, Supreme Court rules”, *The Premium Times* online, 10 July 2012, <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/5997-76-oil-wells-belong-to-akwa-ibom-supreme-court-rules.html>, accessed on 24 July 2022.

an option. The political and economic extent that Duke's administration invested in the direction of tourism is attested to by the initiation, innovation and execution of several touristic frameworks exemplified by the establishment of the tourism infrastructural facilities discussed earlier in this chapter, many which fell later into a state of dilapidation. But what is the implication of the above in defining and historicizing what I refer to as the economies of carnival? How do we visualize these economies in relation to the "visual invisibilities" and the lacuna created by the lopsided popular images put forward by the state and the media world?

There is a general consensus among several scholars that governments at local, regional and national levels utilizing carnival celebration and events as an aspect of cultural and performative tourism attract socio-economic benefits to the host community and the secular authority that hosts such events. Government agencies have in some instances undertaken economic impact assessment and research to ascertain the socio-economic benefits of carnival celebration in their regions. In 2011, the London Development Agency produced a report "The Economic Impact of Notting Hill Carnival" in which they detailed the social and economic implications of Notting Hill Carnival. The study undertook a statistical impact assessment of the carnival and summarised thus:

The Notting Hill Carnival is an important social and cultural event in the London calendar and a valuable component of London's image. It also has a major economic effect on the London economy, with an impact on incomes of £93 million in 2002 and a possible full-time equivalent impact on jobs of 3,000."<sup>511</sup>

The National Carnival Commission of Trinidad and Tobago, the Association of Caribbean States, the Brazilian "comissão de frente" (meaning "Front Commission") and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) all agree that carnival celebrations developed to being a product representing both the national cultural identity as well as boosting social and economic development. In addition, they claimed that it enhanced economic activities and productivity, particularly during the season of the event. In evaluating the summaries of research funded by Inter-American Development Bank on the economic impact of festival and cultural tourism in the Caribbean and its sister events in America, Helga Flores Trejo, principal specialist for innovation and creativity at the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) noted that,

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<sup>511</sup> The Economic Impact of the Notting Hill Carnival, London Development Agency, p. 56. <https://tfconsultancy.co.uk/reports/nottinghillcarnival.pdf>, accessed on 24 July 2022.

Beyond the sequins, the music and invaluable tradition, carnivals are an expression of the enormous potential of the creative industries, an ecosystem that produces revenues of over US\$124 billion a year in Latin America and the Caribbean. When national and local governments bet on them and promote them, they are enhancing their role as an engine of creativity and innovation.”<sup>512</sup>

In Calabar, the socio-economic impact of the carnival festival has been documented broadly. Some papers survey Calabar Festival and Carnival’s impact on certain economic parameters, though without clear financial data. In 2008, Bassey Esu et al assessed the economic impact of Calabar Carnival through different economic and social parameters and concluded that the influx of national, international and local visitors from other parts of Cross River State to the events increased visitor numbers as well as purchasing patronage in the areas of accommodation, food, entertainment, transportation, thereby injecting money into the city’s economy, and Cross River State at large.<sup>513</sup> In their 2012 research Titus Amalu and Anim Ajake paid attention to the income generating framework of residents through their engagements with tourism-based industries and related ventures during the carnival celebration in the state. They concluded that while there is a steady increase in the number of tourists that participated in the carnival event, there was also a corresponding increase in the number of people that participated in carnival related ventures during the period, with a greater number of people involved in petty trading and recording the highest income during carnival periods.<sup>514</sup>

This research was more of a romanticized version of evaluating the carnival, without a critical analysis of the funding that goes into the event and concomitant revenue generation targeted after the event. In 2013, F. Attah et al tried to undertake a more critical analysis of the socioeconomic impact of Calabar Festival and Carnival for the residents of Calabar and Cross River State at large. They argued that there was suspicion around the government’s effort to institutionalize carnival festival as an aspect of the tourism economy and to invest huge amounts of public funds annually into the carnival project, as it was possibly predicated on incessant maladministration and brazen embezzlement of funds meant for important individually-oriented

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<sup>512</sup> <https://www.iadb.org/en/improvinglives/carnivals-celebration-development>, accessed on 25 July 2022.

<sup>513</sup> B. Esu et al, “Analysis of the Economic Impacts of Cultural Festival: The Case of Calabar Carnival in Nigeria” in *Tourismos: An International Multidisciplinary Journal of Tourism* (2011), Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 333-352.

<sup>514</sup> E. Amalu and O. Ajake, “An Assessment of the Influence of Calabar Carnival on the Economy of the Residents of Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria” in *Global Journal of Human Social Science, Geography & Environmental GeoSciences*, (2012), Vol. 12 No. 10, pp. 65-74.

projects in the Nigerian polity.<sup>515</sup> The study interviewed about 1495 residents, and focused on “the state of infrastructural facilities, the level of poverty in terms of income generation, the standard of living of the people in areas of clean and healthy environment, and the level of sexual behaviour of the people during the carnival.”<sup>516</sup> They went on to argue that as of 2012, the wave of socio-economic development that Cross River State experienced particularly under Governor Donald Duke could not be particularly attributed to the effects of the carnival project. In summary, Attah et al submitted that while carnival aided the development of infrastructures in the state, the carnival periods also attracted volumes of visitors and tourists to Calabar who spent huge amounts of money on food, accommodation, transportation and other essentials, which in turn provided a thriving business environment and opportunities in the metropolis. But they argued this was only on a short-term basis, during the carnival period, and did not provide for long-term economic sustainability.<sup>517</sup>

The gap in all these studies is the lack of financial data to give credence to understanding statistically the indices of development and economic gain appropriated by the government in terms of revenue generation viz-a-viz the investment of a “huge amount of tax payers’ money that run into millions of naira.”<sup>518</sup> This may be as a result of the inaccessibility of financial records and audit materials needed for such information, or not being able to engage with the proper government agencies that can offer such statistical data. It could also be because of the bureaucratic bottleneck that researchers face while trying to access government archives, a challenge that I faced greatly during my fieldwork in 2019. Since this research is not an economic empirical survey, it does not promise to fill these gaps, but it does indicate there is a need for some indicators of investment as income for the festival and some visible measures of socioeconomic development, such as perhaps around infrastructure.<sup>519</sup>

One way to find some of this information is in the internal reports produced by the Cross River State Tourism Bureau research team between 2012 and 2016, where emphasis is laid on the changing numbers of attendees as well as the attitudes of attendees towards different

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<sup>515</sup> F. Attah et al, “Carnival Fiesta and Socio-economic development of Calabar Metropolis, Nigeria” in *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention*: (2013), Vol. 2 No, pp. 33-41.

<sup>516</sup> F. Attah et al, “Carnival Fiesta and Socio-economic development of Calabar, p. 35.

<sup>517</sup> F. Attah et al, “Carnival Fiesta and Socio-economic development of Calabar, pp. 33-41.

<sup>518</sup> E. Edem, “2018 Calabar carnival to gulp over N4bn – State govt”, accessed on 25 July 2022.

<sup>519</sup> Habibullah Khan, “Measurement and Determinants of Socioeconomic Development: A Critical Conspectus” in *Social Indicators Research*, (1991), Vol. 24, No. 2, pp. 153-175.

packages of events. Less emphasis is paid to the attendees' direct spending capacity, while no mention is made of the gross amount invested in the execution of the event or the estimated turnaround effect in revenue generation from different sectors of the carnival. The reports showed how the numbers in attendance had increased from about 300,000 in 2012 to 1,620,000 in 2016.<sup>520</sup> They estimated that in 2012 attendees' estimated expenditure was about N8,838,000 while the total attendees' expenditure for 2016 was N12,111,369. There is a disjuncture between the data provided by the report with the claims of socioeconomic development if one goes by the income determinant factor as one of the parameters in measuring development. Going by the budgetary allocation for the carnival, about N4,065,504,643 was allocated for the event in 2018,<sup>521</sup> two years after the above report. But in 2016, attendees' total expenditure was about N12,000,000, and the cumulative attendees' total expenditure between 2012 and 2016 does not match up with the 2018 government estimated investment in the event. While these estimates are far from correlating, it conflicts with the state's claim of the carnival being a source of alternative revenue generation for the state.

Beyond the above analysis, the carnival seemingly did produce other economic multiplier effects on infrastructural development (though some of them have become grossly dilapidated in recent years as stated above), seasonal trade income in hospitality, transportation, media and photography, and in small-scale trades like street trading and food vendors. Many young Cross Riverians who had hitherto been jobless or without lucrative skills benefitted from the carnival training that was convened by Trinidadian carnival experts. These skills set acquired through the training assisted some of them to be hired into the direct planning and execution of carnival celebrations across Nigeria in this era of carnivalizing culture. Different sections of each band employed lots of young people each year to play different parts during the carnival. The state employed young people and professionals into different sectors of the events beginning from around October each year either as ad hoc staff or trained for permanent positions.

In my interview with Emme Afia, the Director of Operations for the Cross River State Carnival Commission, she noted that some of the ad hoc staff had extra training beyond carnival-oriented roles, which had consequently translated into acquiring life-skills that some are leaning

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<sup>520</sup> Cross Rive State Tourism Bureau reports, 2012 to 2016.

<sup>521</sup> E. Edem, '2018 Calabar Carnival gulp over N4billion – state govt', accessed on 25 July 2022.

on today, thus alleviating poverty among unemployed youth.<sup>522</sup> Photographers who are positioned on the corner of the street always have high expectations of carnival season because according to them, this is the peak moment when they make the highest income across the year. Some photographers stated that they were very expectant of the season that attracts many photographically-conscious persons and patrons who want a document of the day and the people they shared it with. But others concur with the receding effects of the carnival, as they seem not to harness much income in the recent years, compared to how it was about 7 years previously, particularly when photography has almost been overtaken, simplified and personalized through cellphone photography.

### **Contemplation and juxtapositions of carnival economies**

How then do we visualize these conflicting accounts in relation to governmental claims as against the available data reports produced by the same government agencies when one reads them congruently? I want to do this in what might appear a strange way by using photographs for historical contemplation. In the first lines of her essay, Joanna Scherer invokes the idea of historians using photographs as “documents.” While she draws annotated attention to the myriads of “philosophical and pragmatic questions” that problematize the assertion, she argues that photographs can be an important resource if used as “anthropological documents.” But she further concedes that photography lacks the level of objectivity not as replications of reality itself but as “representations that require critical reading and interpretation.”<sup>523</sup> She notes that for photographs to function effectively as a source of anthropological – and historical – study, they must be treated as “social artifacts.”<sup>524</sup> Photographs should thus be scrutinized in relation to understanding the process of interaction and social relations between the photographer, the subject of the photograph and the consumer – viewer – of the photograph as any given time. She calls for a “reflective critical study of the photograph that contextualizes images to aid in the reconstruction of culture”<sup>525</sup> and histories of cultures. Her views broadly reiterate James Hevia’s concept of photography as a complex institution that weaves together a conglomerate of actors

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<sup>522</sup> Interview with Emme Afia, 16 March 2022.

<sup>523</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” p. 32.

<sup>524</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” p. 32.

<sup>525</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” p. 32.

and actants.<sup>526</sup> Her view is understood given the essentializing models that were typical of colonial ethnographic and anthropological photographs, in relation to how they viewed what they referred to as “indigenous” people and tribes of non-western communities in repressive visual mode.<sup>527</sup>

How do you juxtapose this cultural economy with visual aesthetics? And with myself being the producer of these images, and given the call for a reflective critical study of the image in an attempt to historicize culture, what positionality do these images play in the context of their production and in their reflective critical approach to the economies of carnival in Calabar Festival and Carnival? In “Red Textures and the Work of Juxtaposition”, Corinne Kratz asserts that in museum studies, and from an aesthetic point of view, juxtaposition as, “a shift in perceptual pacing” allows for a close reading, and positions one within a “highly productive” position.<sup>528</sup> Her conception relates to the juxtaposition of images and segments, images and sound, and the productive kernels.<sup>529</sup> I draw from this concept as I try to juxtapose images above with a closer look at some of the government reports I was privy to access during my fieldwork in Calabar. While juxtaposition in photography presupposes manipulation of images, it sometimes relates to establishing irony or similarity across two images, and is sometimes unintended.<sup>530</sup>

I draw from the concept of juxtaposition to establish an irony between the secular insistent narration of a swelling economy consequent upon Calabar Festival and Carnival as a tourism frame, while also using my photographs as a resource to think through the carnival economy. While the state government and carnival administration try to maintain an increased rhetorical tempo on the economics of tourism and the carnival, in my reading there seems to be an overstated emphasis. Thus, comparing the reports, the poetics and the image, in what Susan Sontag refers to as “radical juxtaposition,”<sup>531</sup> there seem to be an overstated claim of the

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<sup>526</sup> J. Hevia, “The Photography Complex: Exposing Boxer-Era China (1900 – 1901), Making Civilization” in R. Morris, ed., *The Camera and its Histories in Photographies East and Southeast Asia* (London: Duke University Press, 2009), 81

<sup>527</sup> A. Bank, “Anthropology and Portrait Photography: Gustav Frisch’s ‘Natives of South Africa’, 1863-1872” in *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, Special Issue: Visual History, (2001), Vol. 27, p. 45.

<sup>528</sup> C. Kratz, “Red Texture and the Work of Juxtaposition” in *Krono: Journal of Cape History*, (2016), Vol. 42, p.31.

<sup>529</sup> C. Kratz, “Red Texture and the Work of Juxtaposition,” p. 32.

<sup>530</sup> Juxtaposition: <https://www.libertyartsyreka.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Juxtaposition.pdf>, accessed on 26 July 2022.

<sup>531</sup> S. Sontag, "Happenings: an art of radical juxtaposition." *Against Interpretation* (1966): pp. 263-74.

economic benefits and viability of the carnival events to the people and society of Cross River State.

In my interaction with food vendors, hoteliers and photographers, there was a general consensus that the level of patronage received in 2019 and in the recent years was down compared to the previous years. Residents also recollected the hype, the excitement and the passion that filled the air “in those days” when carnival was approaching. The purchasing power of residents who make a high proportion of attendees at the events had dropped dramatically over the years. The preparatory engagements of government agencies in terms of cleaning the entire city, gentrifying old buildings, renewing and repainting monuments and junction effigies like the Mary Slassor statute and Itiat Abasi Orok statutes at strategic road junctions, and painting roads and walk ways, were long gone. This may be as a result of the administrative disinterest or ineptitude of the top tier of government administrators, the poor economic environment in Calabar as well as the general economic meltdown in Nigeria since 2015.



Fig. 16: Food vendors arranging their wares on the street during Calabar Carnival. Photo: Nsima Udo, 27 December 2019.

The image above (Fig. 16) produced as a street photograph during my fieldwork reasserts such a juxtaposition. “As integral parts of the photographic matrix of a given past or event,”<sup>532</sup> it foregrounds the kinds of economic activities that take place on road pavements during the carnival. Carnival liberalises and informalizes trade, where the rules of registration were not particularly enforced by the government. Because of the drive for event commercialization, the state government opens the space for informal trading. Petty traders and unemployed residents sometimes utilized every available space along the carnival routes to build temporary and mobile stalls, and to also hawk their goods around. These stalls were canopied with bought umbrellas, branded with signages and logos of some of the carnival funders. While traders used branded umbrellas to shade off the scourge of the sun during transactions, they also unconditionally promoted the businesses of the mega corporations, without any direct reward. Goods that were sold on the street were mainly culinary and grocery based, with canned and bottled beverages tucked-in under a blanket and cushion of ice to feed revelers and quench their thirst. This kind of makeshift concept of cooling beverages is popular in Nigeria both in street trading, but also among other grocery shops. “Ice blankets” as we would like to call it points to the temporality of street trade, but also the “epileptic” and unreliable electric power supplies, visualized in this photograph as malfunctional power transformers “at the edge of sight.”<sup>533</sup>

Let’s rethink Joana Scherer’s invocation of photographs as a historical resource. She argues that photographs can be considered as “icons..., visual artefacts of what was of interest to the photographer at a moment in time,” “an art of choice of the photographer;” in relation to the subjective view of the photographer while producing an image. Furthermore, photographs are also exposed to subjective continued unending re-analysis by viewers. Therefore researchers must deal with these limitations and biases by subjecting photographs to detailed analysis of the broader scope of events surrounding the intentions and motive of the image producer as well as the sociological factors surrounding the subject and his/her cultural environment.<sup>534</sup> She further submits that historical photographs when looked at intently should enrich our study of anthropology [and history], particularly when such photographs pass through the analytical

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<sup>532</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 65.

<sup>533</sup> A. Mogroup, “Nigeria cannot grow with its epileptic power supply” *Vanguard* online, 20 July 2022, <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/07/nigeria-can-not-grow-with-it-epileptic-power-supply-ademola-mogroup/>, accessed on 5 October 2022.

<sup>534</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” pp. 34-35

frame of cultural insiders whom she refers to as critical “indigenous photographers,” and who also disrupt popular narratives.<sup>535</sup>

In Fig. 16 I have depicted traders arranging their wares in preparation for the day’s business, waiting for carnival revelers and attendees who form the widest bulk of their patronage. Behind them is an electric transformer that actually may refuse to transform and transmit electric power to residents in the state in most periods of the year. In a distance, I have included in my photograph a professional photographer approaching the scene, with some cash in hand and his camera on his neck hunting for patronage, which seems to be scarcer than before – due to the ubiquity of smart phones and a declining trend of the carnival event. In the far distance, almost indiscernible and out of focus is an entrance built like an arc and painted with green and white, the national colours of the Nigeria state. This arc is an entrance into the Millennium Park, where the tallest flag in Africa once stood. The image is a complex photographic production that weaves together elements of the economies of carnival, the cultural economy of petty trading and street trading and the visual economy and practices that dominate in this period of democratized practice of ubiquitous visualization. The image stands like a visual window that allows us to be “voyeurs” into the practices of governance that have become emblematic of gross negligence. The image together with this explanation as a visual document and a mnemonic device that evokes “patterns of subject-matter, symbolic content and composition”<sup>536</sup> relevant in historicizing culture.

While this is a static image framed within a limited scope of spatial positionality, a critical analysis of the entire frame evokes a sense of an economy that is subsistent and that has an apparent infrastructure of the transformer and the monumental arc to support it. But is actually of little or no substance whatsoever. It represents a system of economy – a juxtaposition so to speak - built primarily on informal trade. It lacks the foundations for economic growth and profitability that has been claimed constantly, year-in and year-out, by the state organizing authorities who organize the Calabar Festival and Carnival.

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<sup>535</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” p. 37.

<sup>536</sup> J. Scherer, “The Photographic Document,” pp. 34-35.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### VISUALIZING CARNIVAL: PHOTOGRAPHIC PERFORMANCE AND AERIALITY

This chapter investigates how technology has contributed to creating a carnivalized visual and festival landscape that is powered by changes in photography, like digital cameras, crane propelled camera operations and drone photography. It traces how the visual history of the carnival has changed over the years, and how that change pairs with the technology to visualize an “affective and emotive” landscape that might provoke and advance complicated social tensions and balances of power in a multicultural and patriarchal city.<sup>537</sup> I analyse how those affective visual objects and their virtual circulation through different social media platforms provide a virtual repository that instrumentalizes and advances the commodification of carnival culture and a “politics of carnival.” I ask: how does the visual economy analysed in this chapter link with the larger economic questions raised in the last chapter? What gratification arises from being visualized, for the revelers, in line with earlier histories of portraiture and subject-formation? Furthermore, what does this notion of an elaborately “visualized carnival” offer in our quest to understand the history of cultural festivals and carnival in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? What is the interconnectedness between performance, visibility, and the concept of photographic performativity and affect?

Photography has always played a crucial role in modes of visualizing carnival, cultures, festivals, and other cultural practices and performances in Africa since the early 19th century. Candice Keller asserts that photographs are like “visual griots” that archive the changing phases of cultural practices and performances in visual form. Keller’s theory of the “visual griot” referred to photographs produced in the late 19th and 20th centuries. But her conception is also pertinent in the 21st century, in an era of image proliferation and visual craze, offering a method through which to approach changing image content in a time of growing preponderance of digital cameras, camera phones and virtual storage applications, which has changed the visual landscape. In the 21st century digital era, the boundaries of visibility have been loosened, with countless obstacles overcome in the context of photographic technology, image production and manipulation, virtual participation, digital storage application, and an immediate and

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<sup>537</sup> A. Ogaboh Agba et al, “Tourism Industry Impact on Efik’s Culture, Nigeria” in *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, vol. 4:4, p. 357.

uncontrollable circulation of images along internet networks. These tend to create a seamless visual landscape that extends and permeates beyond the spatial configuration of the festival.

Here, the concepts of visual landscape and festival landscape relate to the visualizing of an expansive layered and complicated cultural frame contiguous to an image, but also beyond the limit of its positionality at a given time. But much more than this, it affords an understanding of the socio-political, cultural, aesthetical and affective dynamics of the contemporary commercialized festival and how photographic technologies like the smartphone and drone aerial photography have institutionalized this landscape. I further define photography as a performance, inclined along with the performative traditions and cultures of masquerades and revelers. Several of the photographs used in this chapter are part of my photo archive while some are sourced from online platforms. The latter were taken with digital camera aerial photography that point to the sensory elaboration of images produced under the technological hyper-activism of the digital turn.

### **Visualizing carnival and festival landscape**

A landscape image “reflects and reinforces particular idea about class, gender, race and heritage in relation to property rights, accumulation and control (and affect).”<sup>538</sup> Thus, visualized festival landscapes are sociocultural images that appear as fixed in visual forms, but fluid in social and relational form. They are objects of festival and carnival landscape that exist both in the photographic frame and beyond the chemically and mechanically (and now digitally) produced images. They bridge the binary that exists between the object on the ground and the photographic subject in particular, posing as an indexical praxis, both as a reproduction of live subjects as well as a creative art directed by a calculating mind.

There are two parts to understanding photography as art and thought. One, in the process of “picture-taking,” there is always an existing image (a scene) that photography tries to fix. In this scenario, photography becomes a reproduction of an existing object, with little or no aesthetic choices attached. The second part relates to the idea of “picture-making”: here, photographic production is not merely a reproductive mechanism, but also expresses the freedom of the photographer to produce an artistic image loaded with aesthetic consciousness and choice,

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<sup>538</sup> L. Wells, *Photography: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), 298.

beyond the existence of the object of view.<sup>539</sup> The tension and ambiguity between picture-taking and picture-making overlaps in the production and reproduction of image.

In *The Paradox of Photography*, Pierre Taminiaux asserts that in the 21st century, photography has taken on a complicated paradoxical position, one characterized on the one hand by passion for visual expression and representation; and on the other hand, the suspicion of the subtle intricacies that photography produced on the grounds of its manipulative propensities.<sup>540</sup> Furthermore, photography has taken on a highly diverse position which makes it very difficult to align solely with any field. Its technical, artistic, scientific, cultural and commercial applications leave it boundless. It simultaneously engages across disciplines and across different areas of interest, yet maintaining its independence.<sup>541</sup> My interest here is in how photography has in the 21st century been incorporated into new media templates. “Today, we cannot imagine the media without the visual support of images that expand our capacity to understand world events.”<sup>542</sup> Photography has influenced the changes communication media impose on cultural and performance traditions and the sociocultural fabric of our society. It particularly aids in bringing a seemingly realistic view – “the sense of nearness involved in the thing”<sup>543</sup> – of events that happen far away into our visual space.

Photography extends the spatiality and participatory trends of cultural festivals beyond the physical spaces of performance. Comparing photography with the railway system and the postal service, Simone Natale quoted a Philadelphia Photographer in 1866 who “labelled photography ‘the railway and telegraph of art’, observing that it too was also able to ‘carry us to points afar.’”<sup>544</sup> In reading Kracauer’s essay “Photography,” Miriam Hansen considers Kracauer’s conception that the “temporality and historicity” of photography, and its supposed alienation from human control, produces no nostalgic or positivistic effects, but also that the meanings of photographic images are reconstituted through the process of circulation on domestic and public media platforms.<sup>545</sup> She further asserts that the shortfalls regarding these

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<sup>539</sup> P. Taminiaux, *The Paradox of photography* (Amsterdam: Rodopi B.V, 2009), p. 4.

<sup>540</sup> P. Taminiaux, *The Paradox of photography*, p. 5.

<sup>541</sup> P. Taminiaux, *The Paradox of photography*, p. 6.

<sup>542</sup> P. Taminiaux, *The Paradox of photography*, p. 6.

<sup>543</sup> J. Dyki, *The Art of Photography: 1839-1989. Museum of Fine Arts*, (Houston: Yale University Press, 1989), p. 9.

<sup>544</sup> S. Natale, “Photography and Communication Media in the Nineteenth Century”, *History of Photography*, 2012 36:4, p. 453. DOI: 10.1080/03087298.2012.680306.

<sup>545</sup> M. Hansen, "Kracauer's Photography Essay: Dot Matrix-General (An-) Archive-Film'." In *Culture in the Anteroom. The Legacies of Siegfried Kracauer* (2012): pp. 93-110.

temporalities can be countervailed through film, which along with contemporary development in still images “place photography at the crossroad of modernity.”<sup>546</sup> Beyond this, the contemporary engagement with photography in the 21st century offsets its earlier historicity in relation to its “alienation from human control.” While in visualizing carnival, both film and still images contribute to memorializing performance, which the nostalgic experience of which participants and “benefactors” can always redeploy and remediate afresh, thereby promoting sociocultural affects and maintaining continuous connectivity to past events, and endorsing permanence in temporality. Street photography, vernacular photography, professional photography and media institutions, individual smartphone photography, and the official state-owned media houses as well as multinational media institutions help to facilitate these mobilities of images that transport a summarized version of the event frozen on a piece of paper or on screens virtually and physically into extended spaces.

While “media” has been defined in diverse ways with generative meanings, here, I refer to the media as a form, means and channels of communication and transmission of verbal messages and non-verbal images from sender to the receiver, and from one point to another.<sup>547</sup> But media also implies a form of persistent storage of images, virtual or otherwise, and the different visualized forms of representations. While this includes channels of communication driven by the contemporary internet technologies that allow for real-time transmission, it also includes mass communication channels like television, radio and newspapers, the street photographers and individual “vernacular” photographic representations, who produce images for themselves, for commercial and branding purposes and for carnival patrons and revelers, and who carry these images to acquaintances and places and in spaces removed from the carnival venues. The images then become “agents of engagements” in mediating and extending affects in relation to culture and festival in the contemporary. Today, most of these produced images are archived on several platforms that have an online presence and can be readily accessible through the boundless internet platforms anywhere. Different mass communication networks and media institutions, both secular and private like Cross River State Broadcasting Corporation, *Vanguard Newspaper*, *the Guardian Newspaper*, Multichoice, GOGA Africa and so on, and other internet

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<sup>546</sup> M. Hansen, “Kracauer's Photography Essay,” 93.

<sup>547</sup> “E-Business and Cyber Law”. [http://www.jiwaji.edu/pdf/ecourse/political\\_science/MBA-HRD\\_401\\_COMMUNICATION\\_MEDIA-converted.pdf](http://www.jiwaji.edu/pdf/ecourse/political_science/MBA-HRD_401_COMMUNICATION_MEDIA-converted.pdf), accessed on 3rd August 2022.

channels, and cultural and entertainment news bloggers like AllAfrica.com and Kwekede.com create a visual presence and landscape of images that mediates in visualizing carnival.

In “Photography,” Siegfried Kracauer tries to critique the representation of photography in “the question of likeness” in relation to the passage of time. But he also asserts that the image of the “grandmother in the photograph is also an archeological manikin that serves to illustrate the costumes of the period.”<sup>548</sup> While the colonial state attempted to objectify the colonized people visually to control, inhibit, and fix identity tags to advance its agenda, the memorializing impetus of photography produced disturbing counter-evidence that generated contradictory discourses.<sup>549</sup> Didi-Huberman shows how the brutal and so-called “insurmountable” Nazi State feared the documentary capability of photography in memorializing their evil machinations against the Jews that they heinously attempted to bar and silence all forms of visual transaction at Auschwitz.<sup>550</sup> The ambivalent capacity of photographs continues in the way it allows them to both counter the narratives propounded by authorities, but also when we engage them critically, they tend to counter the claim of the original intention by which they were produced.

### **Visualizing culture: visual documentation and the postphotographic age**

Miriam Hansen has argued that in recent years we have entered a “postphotographic age,” where the “old order” that makes claims of authentic and accurate indexicality of images through the “reflection of light on a photochemical surface... have been radically displaced and reframed by digital modes of imaging.”<sup>551</sup> She further asserts that this technologically immersed production, usage, proliferation and storage of images “persist in different forms and in vaster dimensions.”<sup>552</sup> Similarly, Joan Fontcuberta also alludes to the current photographic era as postphotographic, defined by the technologies of digital photography, characterised by the proliferation of images and the prominence of the internet, smartphones and social networks.<sup>553</sup>

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<sup>548</sup> S. Kracauer and Thomas Y. Levin, “Photography” in *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1993), pp. 423-424.

<sup>549</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories: Photography, Anthropology, Museums* (London: Policy Press, 2001), pp. 1-23.

<sup>550</sup> G. Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of all: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 2-24.

<sup>551</sup> M. Hansen, “Kracauer's Photography Essay”, p. 94.

<sup>552</sup> <sup>552</sup> M. Hansen, “Kracauer's Photography Essay”, p. 94.

<sup>553</sup> J. Fontcuberta, interviewed by Sabin Bors: <https://anti-utopias.com/newswire/post-photographic-condition/>, accessed on 11 August 2022

In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century photography has interwoven itself into every aspect of our social, cultural, personal and professional lives. Thus, visualizing carnival and visualizing culture in the postphotographic age is so ubiquitous in the photographic landscape. Carnival photographs are thus in “excess,” yet selected photos can also form a collage of visual documents that can assist in understanding the cultural history of Africa. The expanse of the digital also produces a proliferation of images and different photographic landscapes. These photo landscapes of carnival share certain commonalities: they are commonly imbued with the aesthetics of colours, shiny materials, creative arts, floats, bodies, as well as certain elements of control exerted by the state in how certain carnival images are produced, reproduced and circulated along digital highways and on other visual platforms. This is particularly so in relation to how carnival images are appropriated for brand promotion and tourism marketing, where the state has taken charge of tourism and the cultural economy.

In the digital turn, the visualization of the carnival by the state media and other media outlet that is funded by the government provides a simple and accessible tool to produce a skewed festival landscape that does not allow for messy narratives of an aestheticized, visualized and economically driven carnival festival. Thus, in the postphotographic age and with the abundance of digital tools, an attempt to visualize carnival from the perspective of popular media defines a visual tradition where photographers and their subjects collaborate to create images that “define[s] a glorifying narrative of the featured individual.”<sup>554</sup> The state media organ attempts to produce a representation of a systemic and productive secular carnival photographically. Through their creative enterprise and expertise in the organised posing of subjects, and through “the implicit selection of one view over another,”<sup>555</sup> as well as the manipulative indices of digitalization, they produce honorific and fantastic images that represent the carnival event and recast it as a grandiose and developmental tourism and cultural event that would appeal to the patronizing intent and leisure sense of tourism consumers.

But these productions and reproductions of images are products of a combination of actants working within a certain “photographic complex.” Visualizing carnival speaks to the aesthetics of performance, festival and tourism activities of the carnival, but also the socio-

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<sup>554</sup> A. Graham, “Hostile Visual Encounters,” p. 27.

<sup>555</sup> L. Scott, “Images in Advertising: The Need for a Theory of Visual Rhetoric” in *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 21, No. 2 (Sep., 1994), pp. 252-273

historical and sociocultural dynamics that flit through the entire festival. This further relates to Hevia's idea of the "photographic complex" which refers to a "network of actants made up of human and non-human factors... a range of agencies, animate and inanimate, visible and invisible," through which images are produced, reproduced, represented, circulated, viewed and owned as a "tool of empire" for surveillance, documentation and control of the colonized.<sup>556</sup> The "photography complex" is a comprehensive structure through which visual forces clustered and are appropriated for imperial purposes.

I deploy Hevia's "photography complex" here to define how clusters of agencies of government, private and public photographic institutions, revelers, the viewers and consumers, and other non-human apparatuses like the smartphones and other mobile apparatuses, the technological processes, internet facilities and the different platforms for virtual presentations, transmission and circulation, and so on are part of a "technomaterial process" that produces and reproduces a "triumphant" image of a commercialized festival that "suffuses the social world."<sup>557</sup> But this "photography complex" read in "connotative... context"<sup>558</sup> also produces images that are seemingly illusionary of a reveling society. It antithetically and inversely images a society that is bedeviled with several sociopolitical, economic and cultural upheavals.

While the carnival plays an important role in the social, cultural and recreational lives of Cross River residents, its political maneuvering and economic tropes are overtly exaggerated. Except for aspects of dilapidated images as stated earlier, carnival photos are largely framed to depict and indicate a beautiful, clean, safe and welcoming city where festivity, performance and reveling are uncontestedly orchestrated. But the general perception of the everyday is seen differently. In trying to escape the obvious, "visualizing carnival" through the lenses of the media and secular agencies seems to be a visual smokescreen through the artifice of photography. Popularly, Carnival photos present a "spectral" and unreal image of a society. They camouflage as a well and welcoming city, largely ignoring the devastating experience of everyday life in Calabar

One of the first images of the carnival that became accessible online was on a YouTube channel hosted by one Igunbor who uploaded nineteen short voiceless video clips on his

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<sup>556</sup> J. Hevia, "the Photography Complex," 81.

<sup>557</sup> J. Hevia, "the Photography Complex," 80.

<sup>558</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, 84.

YouTube channel in March 2007.<sup>559</sup> These videos, which are between 19 seconds and 3 minutes long, are records that I consider as “raw histories,” not in the sense of an “unprocessed form” or in any distinctive truth-telling function.<sup>560</sup> Instead they are “raw” in their indexical potentials and in that they carry traces upon which new thoughts on histories and historiographical processes can emerge. While they are mediated by Igunbor’s subjective view and the Youtube template, and are potentially ambiguous as any pictorial source would be, they are as well “visions of the past.” They enact what Edwards refers to as “presence...making the past legible in the present... simply being there” with the capacity to illuminate the historical path of the event.<sup>561</sup> As a form of visualizing carnival, these videos are not “film” of any genre, that are based on programmatic casting. They are like “raw” documentation of events in a filmic form, and can be seen in the light of an “evidential inscription for historiographical contemplation.”<sup>562</sup> They are digitized “visual incisions” of history which when viewed critically can reveal micro-views of events that might alter the apparent social and historical context upon which a history of Calabar Festival and Carnival is examined, in relation to how the images interact “in context” with “their fields of origination and with their fields of action - the multiple threads that connect things”.<sup>563</sup>

The prevalence of the immediacy and access to video facilities on smartphones and on other portable digital cameras, like the one that Igunbor used in producing these videos in 2006, has shifted the discourse on how historians should relate with the documentation and evidentiary disposition of video images. The radical implication of film as history that Rosenstone suggested in relation to how historians should utilize visual mediums that are subject to drama and fiction in thinking about the past,<sup>564</sup> has been much more digitally “radicalized.” Or to put it more clearly, the evidentiary proclivity and the process of historical thinking with video images have been broadened by the ubiquitous immediacy that smartphone video facilities offer in the contemporary. This is because, as stated above, these kinds of videos, in reference to Igunbor, are like raw footages, produced on-the-spot for the camera, with little or no recourse to the proclivities of drama and fiction, but mediated by Igunbor’s mobility, focal view, and perhaps his choice of scenes to record. While these videos cannot be regarded as non-mediated, yet they

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<sup>559</sup> Igunbor, ‘Calabar Carnival: 2006, 2007’, <https://www.youtube.com/user/Igunbor>, accessed on 11 August 2022.

<sup>560</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories, Photographs, Anthropology, Museums* (London: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 1-23.

<sup>561</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 72

<sup>562</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories, Photographs, Anthropology, Museums* (London: Polity Press, 2001), pp. 1-23.

<sup>563</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 83.

<sup>564</sup> R. Rosenstone, *Visions of the Past*, p. 3.

can provide visual anecdotes that can “disrupt and unsettle dominant historical discourse.”<sup>565</sup> When looked at closely, one can piece together a general understanding that can generate an indexical impetus that allows us to construct a historical narrative of a recent festival that might differ from the official discourse.

While “truthfulness” or “factuality” is a goal for documentary film as a genre of filmmaking, the expectation becomes both a negotiated and conflicting intent “between the knowledges and beliefs, which are differentially held by groups and individuals.”<sup>566</sup> John Ellis asserts that the truthfulness of documentary film is an aspiration that both the film maker and user supposedly long for, but not intrinsic in the footage.<sup>567</sup> It seems that in this digital era, photographic objectivity has been grossly sacrificed on the altar of aesthetics and photo-creativity. As WJT Mitchell argues, “the emergence of digital imaging has irrevocably subverted [visual] certainties, forcing us to adopt a far wavier and more vigilant interpretive stance ... Today, as we enter the post-photographic era, we must face once again the ineradicable fragility of our ontological distinctions between the imaginary and the real.”<sup>568</sup>

Igunbor’s short videos cannot be classified within the documentary film genre. They are rather “documentation videos.” They are raw footage, “raw” videos that document an event with the eyes of an observer or a reveler whose transitory moments of recording could perhaps reflect some form of subjectivity as a reveler, but not in any aesthetic, genre or ontological inclination. Igunbor’s approach is a kind of an observational and unscripted filming method that discovers and exposes the actions of the subjects in “the theatres of lived events.”<sup>569</sup> They are defined, it appears, not by specific scenes or series of scenes of interest, but by the circumstances of Igunbor’s mobilities and itineraries along the carnival route, and filming with a voiceless digital camera as he moved along, at the borderline of analogue extinction and at a time when smartphones were not very popular in Nigeria and remained a luxury.<sup>570</sup>

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<sup>565</sup> N. Udo, *Visualizing the Body: Photographic Clues and Cultural Fluidity of Mbopo Institution, 1914-2014*, p. 20.

<sup>566</sup> John Ellis, “How documentaries mark themselves out from fiction: a genre-based approach, *Studies in Documentary Film*” (2021), 15:2, pp. 140-150, DOI: 10.1080/17503280.2021.1923144.

<sup>567</sup> John Ellis, “How documentaries mark themselves out from fiction”, p. 142.

<sup>568</sup> J. Mitchell, *The Reconfigured Eye: Visual Truth in the Post-Photographic Era* (Boston: MIT Press, 1992), p. 225.

<sup>569</sup> S. Carta, “Visual and Experiential Knowledge in Observational Cinema, <https://doi.org/10.4000/anthrovision.1480>, accessed on 13 February 2023.

<sup>570</sup> S. Fatimi, “An Analysis of Smartphone Camera and Digital Camera Images Captured by Adolescents Ages Fifteen to Seventeen” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Columbia, 2021, p. 1. [file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Fatimi\\_tc.columbia\\_0055E\\_11202.pdf](file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/Fatimi_tc.columbia_0055E_11202.pdf), accessed on 17 August 2022.



Fig. 17: A screenshot image of Igunbor's videos showing revelers marching along the carnival route, Calabar 2006.<sup>571</sup>

Igunbor recorded these short videos with the aid of a hand-held small digital camera that could not pick up the audio for the events, either for technical or functional reasons.<sup>572</sup> The quality of these videos is poor and cannot by any form or standard pass for professional photography or film making. This may be because at the time of procuring the video, such hand-held cameras produced low-resolution images. As a video, it can be described in Elizabeth Edwards' definition as "a long quotation of linked moments,"<sup>573</sup> an animated clip of a larger performance trend. It fits into Richard Vokes' conception of "vernacular photography" which assumes a broader, unofficial, unprofessional, independent and everyday photographic [and filmic] practice, that pays no attention to pose, frame and composition, as well as little consideration to specific aesthetic depth.<sup>574</sup> It could also be seen as a self-styled performance: a performativity of "personal video" recordings that are conventional, banal and lacking any

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<sup>571</sup> Igumbo, *2006 Carnival Parade*, December 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGZevYoYpdw>, accessed on 12 August 2022.

<sup>572</sup> Igumbo, *2006 Carnival Parade*, December 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tj1oD25ikvU&t=31s>, accessed on 12 August, 2022.

<sup>573</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. xi.

<sup>574</sup> R. Vokes, "On 'the Ultimate Patronage Machine': Photography and the Substantial Relations in Rural South-Western Uganda," in R. Vokes (ed), *Photography in Africa: Ethnographic Perspective* (Oxford: James Currey, 2021), pp. 207-209.

significant visual charm. I believe these are videos that were meant particularly for personal [online archive] albums or household collections. They are made accessible by the developments in digital camera technology,<sup>575</sup> and the archival capacity of filmic applications like YouTube. The YouTube application both archives the video and also serves as a domain for public accessibility, offering almost free access to many viewers.

These short videos remain very important historically, particularly in relation to understanding the changing dynamics around the festival landscape that have developed in Calabar over the past 15 years. James Cahill asserts that “YouTube reveals the manner in which *previously surmounted* aesthetic modes [of historical anecdotes] persist into the present and invite a reconsideration of the timelines for actualities and attractions.”<sup>576</sup> Igunbor’s video mobilizes the aesthetic connotations and visual currency of the time and drives them aesthetically into the present. The videos hold relevance for the “actual, current, topical, and timely,”<sup>577</sup> and to the continuing aesthetics of culture, performance, visuality and politics enmeshed within the ontology of a commercialized festival. They offer raw data on the ground and allow for a historical reflection of the performative and cultural provenance of carnival, and what changes have occasioned the performance of carnival and the performance of visuality between 2004 and 2019.

The image above (Fig. 17) is a screenshot image taken from one of Igunbor’s short videos. I choose to read the “videos” and the screenshot image within one conceptual framework, in alliance with Vokes’ conception of “vernacular photography.”<sup>578</sup> While there are technical and media differences between a video and a photograph in terms of their nature and modes of transmission, and in terms of their historical referencing,<sup>579</sup> they share commonalities in inciting an act of believing. Yet video raw footage “lets us believe in more things but photos allow us to believe more in one thing.”<sup>580</sup> The fleeting scene in the video is here frozen and fixed in a photo form with the function of a screenshot. The video in its entirety may be made with a “functional origin” for a specific reason.<sup>581</sup> Though Igunbor is not within the video reel, the video tends to

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<sup>575</sup> R. Vokes, “On ‘the Ultimate Patronage Machine’”, p. 208.

<sup>576</sup> J. Cahill, “A YouTube bestiary: Twenty-six theses on a post-cinema of animal attractions.” In *New Silent Cinema*, (Londo: Routledge, 2015) pp. 264.

<sup>577</sup> J. Cahill, “A YouTube bestiary”, p. 265.

<sup>578</sup> R. Vokes, “On ‘the Ultimate Patronage Machine’”, p. 207.

<sup>579</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. xi.

<sup>580</sup> Christian Metz as quoted in E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. xi.

<sup>581</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 14.

communicate his presence, and perhaps to communicate the culture of carnival performance emerging in Calabar. Now a screenshot, the fixity of a scene as a photograph, allows for a persistent intensive looking. It allows us to “look beyond what we see and attuning our senses to the other affective frequencies through which photographs register.”<sup>582</sup> It brings past events to be “fixed and active in the present, communicate[ing] the past in the future.”<sup>583</sup> But neither does the fixity of the photo diminish the potency of its ambiguity: it “remain[s] socially and historically active...[and] more open to the generation of multiple performances and the making of multiple meanings.”<sup>584</sup>

Igunbor’s videos have agency in cultural, social and political representations. They visualize the carnival in ways that represents the cultural conceptualization of the festival and also show the evolutionary process of visual culture and performance historically. The videos and image above bring together revelers, spectators, aesthetics of performance, infrastructures, mobilities and itineraries, visual performativity and the political into one frame. The enmeshed visual conflation in the above frame reproduces the social dynamics that defines Calabar Festival as a state-sponsored event, mimed as a commercial venture. Igunbor’s videos show that Igunbor operated along Marian Road, Calabar, one of the busiest spots along the Carnival route, where the videos were produced and where spectator concentration is normally high.

Igunbor was caught up between two performative and affective paradigms: perhaps his presence as a resident or resident spectator offered him an opportunity to both watch and enjoy the carnival, but at the same time record the event with his digital camera. The inconsistencies in handling the camera as evidenced in the video depicts a swaying body that tips between catching glimpses of this new and emerging performance culture as well as focusing on recording the scenes for the camera. Iganbor seems to be moving back and forth behind other spectators with his digital camera and swaying like a pendulum from side to side to take in moments of performative aesthetics for both human and mechanical gaze – the camera. He digitally visualized the movements, performance, animation and parades of different band groups to produce this moving effect.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> T. Campt, *Listening to Images*, p. 9.

<sup>583</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 14.

<sup>584</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 14.

<sup>585</sup> Igunbor, *2006 Carnival Parade*, December 2006, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dGZevYoYpdw>, accessed on 12 August 2022

The screenshot image which I have selected is packed with sociocultural and political signifiers, depicting the changing landscape in the carnival. The carnival started in 2004 but only asserted a carnival-like parade in 2005, with 2006 being only the second year of actual band parades on the street. The videos show a budding event that was met with sparse attendance. This is a broad daylight event on a street that looks very unkempt, maybe littered with trash by revelers and audiences during the event or a reflection of the untidiness of carnival routes in the heat of the event. The costumes worn by revelers catch our attention. The “blue regalia” are signifiers of an “afterimage:” one that hangs around and persists even after we have been removed from the visual frame that stimulates the effect.<sup>586</sup> At the time, the costuming paradigm was less of a “bikini, skin and feather” orientation that is a dominant visual imagery of Caribbean carnivals and that is featuring in Calabar Carnival in recent years. I engaged with all thirteen of Igunbor’s videos posted online, and the dynamics of self-fashioning in 2006 was a display of modesty and simplicity. This system of costuming was distinctly different from the elaborate, multifarious and dense aesthetic that accompanied the costume technology and performance of later carnival versions.

The image above carries a signifier of politics, an inclusive visual mimicry that overlooks the production and performance of carnival. The billboard that is filmed in Igunbor’s video, here frozen, positioned at the far centre of the screenshot image is an advertising board with pictures of two political figures who are political candidates of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP). It is an advertising billboard used in Nigeria during political campaigns and elections, but which typically remains in place even after the electioneering process is over. The two one-storey houses painted in yellow are located at No.1 Okoi Aripo Estate, Calabar where the PDP state secretariat in Calabar at the time was housed. The flags in front are mainly the Nigerian flag, Cross River State flag and the PDP flag. The image typifies the manner in which political officers “oversee” the administration and execution of the carnival events.

The image above records a moment of elections in the past “fixed and active in the present.”<sup>587</sup> In spite of the history of the video and the history of carnival, the video and the screenshot image both seem to bear a history of politics in Nigeria, caught up in a carnival photo

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<sup>586</sup> Z. Gürsel, “Framing Zarqawi, Afterimages, Headshots, and Body Politics in a Digital Age” in Olga Shevchenko, ed., *Double Exposure: Memory and Photography* (New Jersey: Transactional Publishers, 2014), pp. 65-66.

<sup>587</sup> E. Edwards, *Raw Histories*, p. 14.

where politics and play are juxtaposed. The electioneering process is now a common phenomenon in the Nigerian political system that has purportedly embraced the “democratic” inclinations of the West since 1999.

But while the video carries traces of moments of politicking, it also brings to memory how there has been a systematic undermining of this process and a kind of “democratic capture” in Nigeria through election rigging and corruption over the past 23 years that I witnessed. The billboard in the video indexes PDP candidates in Calabar, imaged as a screenshot that produces an “afterimage” through a “metaphoric mind’s eye”.<sup>588</sup> It recalls for me unending occasions when corrupt politicians and the political systems merchandised votes, funded hostilities, generated electioneering and campaign irregularities and disenfranchised ordinary Nigerians.<sup>589</sup> This image, shut-out and lifted off from the video, freezes a specific time or moment - from a series of moments in the video. It documents both the cultural and performance tradition as well as helping to historicize the social and visual culture of Calabar society, a prototype of Nigeria in general, but also an “afterimage” that from my perspective haunts our contemporary democratic claims.

In 2006 when this video was taken, it was at the threshold of an exchange between analogue photography and digital image making.<sup>590</sup> But in 2019 when I embarked on my first fieldwork, the affordance and ubiquity of smartphones centralized photography within the framework of digital image making, which bridges every form of economic and class category at least in general. In many events today and even on the street, it is easy to spot someone brandishing a smart phone to document events or scenes as they unfold, or to take a selfie – photographing the self - either in a still photography form or in filmic form. Nigeria was signed into cellphone technology in 2001 when President Olusegun Obasanjo privatized Nigerian Telecommunication Limited (NITEL) and opened the way for Econet and Mobile Telecommunication Network (MTN), two multinational telecommunication corporations in Africa, and other private corporations in privatized and competitive telecommunications business to pitch their services in the country. The privatization policy of President Obasanjo launched a

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<sup>588</sup> Z. Gursel, *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the age of Digital Circulation*, p. 3.

<sup>589</sup> Michael Bratton, “Vote buying and violence in Nigerian election campaigns,” in *Electoral Studies* (2008), Vol. 27: 4, pp. 621-632.

<sup>590</sup> S. Fatimi, “An Analysis of Smartphone Camera and Digital Camera Images Captured by Adolescents Ages Fifteen to Seventeen,” Doctoral Dissertation, University of Columbia, 2021, p. 1.

new era of communication technology that culminated in “plunging” the nation into the digital realm.<sup>591</sup>

Igunbor’s video records a woman with a white shirt and a blue bowler cap attempting to photograph the carnival parade with her small camera phone: the likes of Sony Ericsson K800i and Nokia 5130i which could only produce blurry low-resolution images with less aesthetic appeal. Of course, the photographer with her cellphone, viewing the performers to “capture” desirable picturesque scenes could be basking in the euphoria of a new sense of “vernacular photography” afforded by the arrival of the cellphone. Her photographic performance seems to depict an affordance of phone-photography in visualizing the festival at the time. It depicts “an anachronistic quality” of the smartphone in media representations.<sup>592</sup> Her photography performance “simultaneously recall[s] the past while prefiguring the future.”<sup>593</sup> But I read her action as opening up an historical understanding of the place of photography performance in visualizing carnival and in creating an elaborate visual and festival landscape that composes people, structure, infrastructures, performance, colors, costumes, masquerades, metallic materials, shiny colours, floats and music infrastructures within a fleeting multitude of filmic frames, but here frozen into one composite frame photographically.

A great leap into the digital visibility and smartphone technology in the 21<sup>st</sup> century unsettled the paradigm of photography’s operability. This leap which took place “on the cusp of the new millennium occurred with shocking rapidity.”<sup>594</sup> It exerted what Elizabeth Edwards refers to as “a double assault on traditional practice.”<sup>595</sup> Digitization has been defined as an emergence of a domain that allows for the visualization, production and reproduction, circulation, archiving of cultural life and performance and the “social life ... restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures.”<sup>596</sup> It unbounds the limits posed by professional analogue photography for media circulation and further advances the inclusivity of photography amateurism beyond the confines of individual photo production and the personal album. Gillian Rose asserts that the conventional mass media became a “powerful conduit”

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<sup>591</sup> J. Olaoluwa, “Then and Now; Nigerian Telecommunication History,” <https://nairametrics.com/2019/10/02/then-and-now-nigerias-telecommunication-history/>

<sup>592</sup> <sup>592</sup> J. Cahill, “Youtube bestiary”, p. 275.

<sup>593</sup> P. Mnyaka, “The Profane and the Prophetic at the South African Beach” in P. Hayes and G. Minkley, eds., *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019), p. 209.

<sup>594</sup> Z. Gursel, *Image Brokers: Visualizing World News in the age of Digital Circulation*, p. 3.

<sup>595</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 111.

<sup>596</sup> Z. Gursel, *Image Broker: Visualizing World News in the age of Digital Circulation*, p. 3.

through which family photos flick into the public domain much faster than expected, but this is even more the case now with digital images and platforms.<sup>597</sup>

The digital photography and digital mobile template generally oscillate between democratic image representation and reproduction on the one hand, and authoritarian image representation and violent provocation on the other hand. In South Africa for instance, the propelling usage of the digital technology in surveillance through the CCTV cameras “is proliferating across different places and is found on highways, in malls, workplaces, public transport systems and private dwellings,” yet with no clear policy statements or regulatory legislation.<sup>598</sup> They are now being powered by digital applications to deliver real-time images of surveillance. Apart from the issues of security, such “panoptical” forms of surveillance inhibit freedom and subjugate citizens.<sup>599</sup> And again, George Agbo has shown how digital images and online architecture have been fashioned as “weapons of rebellion,” both contesting and systematizing violence. Digital images continue to articulate “visions of violence” that not only record acts of violence but unleash violence against innocent citizens in the Nigerian fight against Islamic insurgency.<sup>600</sup> Much more appalling is how that in India, and other digitized societies, there is the capacity embedded in the smartphone and its digital templates that allows it to be continuously and relentlessly tapped into by “private companies, state agencies, and in public spaces, sometimes coercively and often without consent” to compromise and exploit citizens’ privacy and resources.<sup>601</sup>

As shown above, the smartphone and the digital media have fast become complicit in provoking violent altercations and compromising citizens’ privacy in a panoptical manner, as well as inciting real violence in real life. Microprocessors and algorithms are built into

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<sup>597</sup> G. Rose, *Doing Family Photography: the Domestic, the Public and the Politics of Sentiment*, Routledge (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 87.

<sup>598</sup> D. Basimanyane and D. Gandhi, *Striking a Balance between CCTV Surveillance and The Digital Right to Privacy in South Africa*, APCOF Research Series Paper, Series 27, 2019, <http://apcof.org/wp-content/uploads/027-cctvsurveillanceanddigital-dorcasbasimanyanedumisanigandhi.pdf>, accessed on 13 February 2023.

<sup>599</sup> D. Mathew, “Surveillance Society: Panopticon in the Age of Digital Media,” [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335208381\\_Surveillance\\_Society\\_Panopticon\\_in\\_the\\_Age\\_of\\_Digital\\_Media?channel=doi&linkId=5d56dc60a6fdccb7dc423ad3&showFulltext=true](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335208381_Surveillance_Society_Panopticon_in_the_Age_of_Digital_Media?channel=doi&linkId=5d56dc60a6fdccb7dc423ad3&showFulltext=true), accessed on 9 October 2022.

<sup>600</sup> G. Agbo, “Boko Haram Insurgency and a New Mode of War in Nigeria” in P. Hayes and G. Minkley, eds, *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History* ((Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2019), pp. 270-271.

<sup>601</sup> Anurag Mehra, “The Digital Panopticon and How It Is Fueled by Personal Data” in *The Indian Forum: A Journal-Magazine of Contemporary Issues* (2020), <https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/digital-panopticon-and-how-it-fuelled-personal-data>, accessed on 9 October 2020.

smartphones and webcams on digital equipment that propel users into “self-reporting.”<sup>602</sup> These forms of violence, which Anthony Ambe calls “subtle violence,” advances the authoritarian and capitalistic tendencies in our society through the smartphone and the digital landscape.<sup>603</sup>

Nonetheless, with the popularity of social media and the smartphone as an instrument for the production, circulation and preservation of images, smartphones and other digital infrastructures also play very important role in the visualizing process of carnival, as well as in the archiving process of carnival photos. It leans on the aggregation of network infrastructures to proffer virtual accessibility and consumption, and advance cultural arenas beyond the streets of Calabar. In 2019, the real-time streaming offered by many digitalized news agencies and social media platforms pushed cultural and performance boundaries further, thereby creating a multifocal perception of the carnival. While I was in the field in Nigeria in 2019, I received a telephone call from some of my colleagues in Cape Town South Africa, who were concurrently visualizing and virtually engaging with the carnival right in the comfort of their sitting rooms. The “virtual reality” of visualizing carnival then becomes real.<sup>604</sup>

The disjuncture in the reality of the virtual in visualizing carnival is the absence of tactility and the materiality of performance. That is, the human physical mingling with the sea of crowds and the specific affects and energies that such mingling evokes; the air of aromas, odours and diverse smells that one is immersed with in a crowded carnival arena are lost in a virtual engagement. Furthermore, the “affect” of engagement and the mobilities that one transcends on the ground, from one point of the 12-kilometer carnival route to the other; and the expanded and broader visibility that I and other participants encountered across the carnival route (a reference to Jacques Ranciere’s notion of “the sensible”) cannot be experienced when only engaging with the virtual visualization of the carnival. There is also the disenchantment that one is immersed with when encountering the “invisibilities of the camera” while accessing this expanded view of the carnival. This is particularly so when one goes beyond the visual articulation of the camera and the state government’s selective and “managing zone of visibility.”<sup>605</sup> It makes visible the

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<sup>602</sup> D. Mathew, “Surveillance Society: Panopticon in the Age of Digital Media,” [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335208381\\_Surveillance\\_Society\\_Panopticon\\_in\\_the\\_Age\\_of\\_Digital\\_Media?channel=doi&linkId=5d56dc60a6fdccb7dc423ad3&showFulltext=true](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335208381_Surveillance_Society_Panopticon_in_the_Age_of_Digital_Media?channel=doi&linkId=5d56dc60a6fdccb7dc423ad3&showFulltext=true), accessed on 9 October 2022.

<sup>603</sup> A. Nforh, “Southern Cameroons: Fifty Years of Subtle Violence and Subjugation 1961-2016,” unpublished PhD Thesis in History, University of the Western Cape, November 2022.

<sup>604</sup> D. Chalmers, “The Virtual and the Real” <http://consc.net/papers/virtual.pdf>, accessed on 22 August 2022.

<sup>605</sup> Z. Gursel, “Visualizing Publics: Digital Crowd Shots and the 2015 Unity Rally in Paris” in *Current Anthropology* (2017) Volume 58:15, p. 135.

absence of images that visualize these invisibilities. It also calls for an expanded visual engagement so as to make visible these invisibles through the focal acuity of the possibilities of a “vernacular camera.”

Within the past few years, the ubiquity of smartphones and digital network infrastructures have tried to “promote an expanded and expansive milieu for thinking about the practices around photography and visibility in Africa ... beyond photography [into] an embeddedness and transmutation of images and visual practices in texts, orality, ritual, dance, and performance (cultural and visual) -[and film].”<sup>606</sup> There is an expanded and expansive visuality and visibility that digitization and smartphones have orchestrated. While there is a possibility of image-abuse and image manipulations used as forms of cyber-bullying and to spread fake news, the smartphones and the digital infrastructures also help in empowering citizens who seem to be distraught with the systemic failures that the organs of the state in charge of the different aspects of citizens’ lives exhibit. They furthered the festival participants’ participation in visuality and visibility mechanisms outside the limited confines of carnival performance into an engaged photography performance within a carnival visual economy.

Furthermore, individual photographic engagement aided by the smartphone can act as a “coping strategy” that diverts attention away from a conspicuous governmental clumsiness that never goes away, and toward other thoughts or behaviors [photographic performance] that are at the margins of carnivalizing gestures.<sup>607</sup> Instead of waiting for a commercial photographer or accessing a photographers’ studio that may not be handy or readily available, individual participants staged their photographic productivity within the carnival environment, allowing photographic performance to be submerged within the ambits of cultural performance. Such visual performativity advances photographic productivity and archival possibilities, proffering a mass-presence of images. It generates new forms of dissemination with a positive consequence of digital documentation for historians.<sup>608</sup> The mass-presence of images orchestrated by digital smartphones pushes forward Elizabeth Edwards’ inquiry into how photography and the digital

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<sup>606</sup> P. Hayes, “Coda: An Expanded Milieu” in P. Hayes and G. Minkley, eds., *Ambivalent: Photography and Visibility in African History*, p. 305.

<sup>607</sup> See Lara Traeger’s “Distraction (Coping Strategy)” where she analyses how “distraction (for example, focusing on an external object or imagining a peaceful place) may be used to deal with pain and discomfort during medical procedures”. The strategy is applied here where participants are coping by distracting themselves through intense engagement with photography of self or acquaintances.

<sup>608</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 112.

have constituted themselves as “sites of disturbance” in the “refiguration of the historical landscape.”<sup>609</sup> They “intervene in, and shape, historical scale” thus allowing for a larger access to carnival images, provoking a broader visualization of the carnival and a potential for new forms of historicization.



Fig 18: Revelers performing photography while waiting for the event to start: Calabar Carnival 28 December, 2019. Photo: Nsima Udo.

The photographer in Fig. 17 from Igunbor’s film set the stage for the cellphone visualization. It interacts with the image in Fig. 18 produced by me in 2019 in relation to how the public has been visualized on the street. Going by Zeynep Gürsel’s conception of the visualization of the public, she asserts that the “social needs and behaviors, technological infrastructures, and iconic templates involving state actors, private individuals, and communication networks” determine how photographic performance in the public is articulated

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<sup>609</sup> E. Edwards, *Photography and the Practice of History*, p. 112.

and orchestrated.<sup>610</sup> But more so, visualizing public events does not only increase the saturation of images in the digital-postphotographic time, it should determine what can be visually represented in a visual economy where the state and its secular power tend to “manage zones of visibility and invisibility.”<sup>611</sup>

Broadly speaking, digital photography potentially democratizes these manipulated “zones of visibility” that could have been restricted by state organs of power if it was defined under their control. It will be recalled that in 2021, the Federal government of Nigeria banned the social media platform Twitter (now X) for about seven months, restricting the circulation and transmission of images. The ubiquity and accessibility of smartphones in the hands of many citizens, participant or non-partisans, had opened up these manipulative zones, thereby providing a glimpse into those sites and scenes that were not being visualized and making them visible. These images when read in conjunction with other images may unsettle governmental meta-narratives.

While in the field during the Carnival event in 2019, the smartphone was seemingly an undetachable part of me. It was a prosthetic of a kind: an extension of one’s brain and eyes, where “vision and self-knowledge have become inextricably and productively intertwined.”<sup>612</sup> It helped me to think, recollect, visualize and document. I visualized with it and it also archived images that I could not naturally archive elsewhere. It virtually materialized my perception. My phone was very handy with me as a backup for a quick and accurate focus for the professional Nikon 3500 SLR camera that I operated. I used a Nokia 5.1 smartphone, with a 16 Mega Pixel/Phase Detection Auto-Focus (PDAF) panorama camera. The camera is laced with a technology that uses sets of dedicated light sensors for automated, quick and accurate focus.<sup>613</sup>

The image above was taken with my Nokia smartphone. It is intended to aestheticize tensions and valorize the photographic as a “coping strategy.” It points us to the agency of photography in responding to the cumulative stress that state authorities transmit to the public during public events and state functions, a reminder of the nature of citizens’ everyday narratives. The image depicts a scene that reflects another form of carnival within a carnival: a

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<sup>610</sup> Z. Gürsel, “Visualizing Publics: Digital Crowd Shots and the 2015 Unity Rally in Paris” in *Current Anthropology* Volume 58, Supplement 15, February 2017, p. 135.

<sup>611</sup> Z. Gürsel, “Visualizing Publics”, p. 135.

<sup>612</sup> C. Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 2.

<sup>613</sup> Phase Detection Auto-Focus (PDAF), *Phonescoop*, <https://www.phonescoop.com/glossary/term.php?gid=580>, accessed on 23 August 2022.

carnival of photography that I mentioned earlier. Photographic performance thus can be described as a “fair” in the public space, where both the photographer, the photographed and observers perform in a manner that creates an observable spectacle to be viewed.



Fig. 19: Gab Onah, the Chairman of Cross River State Carnival Commission introducing the governor and other government functionaries, and the 2019 Carnival Parade to guests and attendees. He was also preparing to handover to the state governor to launch the event in 2019. Nsima Udo, 28 December 2019.

Cumulatively, visualizing carnival, and in essence, “public visualization” by participants and audiences in a carnival event like the Calabar Festival and Carnival constitute a visual campaign that disavows the imagery of an uninterrupted, elaborate, productive and user-friendly revelry event that the state wants us to consume. Visualizing carnival depicts the other side of the coin, representing those messy aspects of organizing and executing the events. The visual landscape of the carnival generated by smartphones and the platform it provided in virtual wireless network portend a de-representation of the visual meta-narratives of the state as well as providing a cushioning effect, a coping strategy in managing the tensions and the tragedies that political disappointments transmit into the larger society.

While the smartphone photography is ubiquitous and stands as a form of popular culture among carnival goers, it does not overrule the place of the state media and its professional photography in carnival photography. The place of the state media in covering and visualizing culture has a longer history than the carnival origin in 2004. The Nigerian Television Authority was born in 1976: a galvanizing project that merged 4 autonomous broadcasting institutions that previously belonged to the different regional governments in post-colonial Nigeria into one national broadcasting unit.<sup>614</sup> The following year – 1977 - it immediately set to work to broadcast political, economic, social and cultural information to the few Nigerians that had the privilege of owning a television set. Visualizing culture by the state media has continued since then and different visual narratives are put forward by them. The state’s communication and broadcasting institutions like the Cross River State Broadcasting Corporation (CRBC) and the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) normally participate in broadcasting state functions through media reporting. Since 2004 CRBC and NTA have churned out many images of the carnival on television and on other media platforms like Facebook and Twitter.

In the image above that I photographed (Fig. 19), Gab Onah, the chairman of the Cross River State Carnival Commission introduced the governor and other important government functionaries to the awaiting crowd. The address by the chairman breathed fresh air as weary attendees were propelled into an atmosphere of delight: as one photographer exclaimed, “at last the event will now begin.” I photographed the chairman flanked by the deputy Governor, Ivera Esu, two Bangladeshi officials and other carnival officials. In particular, what I tried to draw attention to in my photograph was that he is being hovered over by casually dressed and stern-looking security officials, a common denominator that we find in the public appearance of government executives in both the so-called democratic and autocratic political environments globally.

On the top right-hand side, I decided to include in the photograph as presented here an umbrella designed with the MTN logo<sup>615</sup> and colour that is used to shade some of the officials from the scourging of the sun, though the crowd did not allow for a direct canopy over the chairman. This MTN umbrella is very reflective here. The intention of including this in the

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<sup>614</sup> N.F. Abass, “Nigerian Television Authority: A brief history”, *Nigerian Finder* online, 12 August, 2019, <https://nigerianfinder.com/nigerian-television-authority-a-brief-history/>, accessed on 28 August 2022.

<sup>615</sup> MNT is a multinational mobile telecommunication corporation originating from South Africa but having its operational presence in Nigeria and other parts of Africa.

photograph is to portray the positionality of multinational corporations and capitalist institutions like MTN – South African capital - who actually “cover” part of the financial and logistical cost of the event in exchange for other promotional and transactional opportunities in the state. In an interview with Moses Ogar, the Manager, Research and Statistical Analysis for Cross River State Tourism Bureau, he conceded that companies like MTN and DSTV – also South African capital<sup>616</sup> are some of the major funders who support the carnival with millions of naira, though not always through providing cash. For example, DSTV funds came as a form of service delivery. DSTV partnered with the Cross River State Tourism Bureau to publicize the events and stream it on real-time to over 185 million viewers across the world, while its advertisement flyers and banners were hung and littered across the entire Cross River region, particularly the 12 km carnival route.<sup>617</sup> The umbrella which I included in this photograph is just a small indication of the above trend.

The backdrop to my photograph (Fig. 19) is a combination of a blue banner with a signage that calls on attendees to enjoy and “experience the beauties of Calabar,” with some colourful images of performers and costumers. It emblazons a “landscape of leisure,” conveying an environment where “the conceptions of Afro-modernity are projected and developed.”<sup>618</sup> But I have also included the faint visibility of high voltage electricity distribution cables that are depicted at the top left corner of the photograph. They punctuate the narratives of leisure and Afro-modernity. While here it depicts the presence of electricity in Calabar, they also speak to the unfolding events in the state where the sight of electric cables reminds one of a dilapidated society, one that is bedeviled by infrastructural decay, very poor electricity supply and distribution mechanisms. For instance, the rural electrification project that has been part of every administration since 1999 has not been successfully implemented after 23 years.<sup>619</sup> As stated earlier, many rural communities around Calabar and Nigeria in general are still living without electricity.<sup>620</sup> What I have represented through the photograph then is a convergence between different cultural factors and challenging social dynamics framed by my understanding of

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<sup>616</sup> DSTV is a video entertainment company owned by mUltichoice and operating in some of the sub Saharan regions in Africa

<sup>617</sup> Interview with Moses Ogar, Manager, Research and Statistical Analysis for Cross River State Tourism Bureau, 6 January 2020.

<sup>618</sup> K. Thompson, *Shine*, p. 50.

<sup>619</sup> B. Badejo et al, “An Evaluation of Rural Electrification in Nigeria: a study of Ibogun Community, Ogun State” in *Interdisciplinary Research Review* (2020) Vol. 15: 4, pp. 8 – 17.

<sup>620</sup> B. Badejo et al, “An Evaluation of Rural Electrification in Nigeria, pp. 8-17.

Calabar society in the early twenty-first century, and framed in an ostensibly aestheticized and innocuous manner.

### **Expansive visual landscape: aerial photography, drones and the technology of affect**

One of the latest technological interfaces in visualizing carnival is a form of aerial photography exemplified by drone photography. Aerial photography was first introduced into photography practice by Gaspard-Felix Tournachon (Nadar), a French balloonist and photographer in 1858, about two decades after Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre's announcement of an invention that would completely redefine the scope of visual representation.<sup>621</sup> Tournachon built an enormous hot air balloon for his project, one that could accommodate a darkroom for his picture development in the sky to be able to map the landscape and spatial layout of the whole of France.<sup>622</sup> While he met with minimal success at the time, his aerial exploits opened the way for other developments and progress in aerial photography that has developed into sophisticated technology in the past 150 years. In 1860, James Wallace Black succeeded in producing a surviving aerial photograph "taken from a tethered hot air balloon *Queen of the Air* 2,000 feet above Boston" in the United States.<sup>623</sup> In 1880, Paul Desmarte used gelato bromide plates that needed only microsecond exposures to produce admirable aerial images.<sup>624</sup> These developments formed the bedrock of what later came to be called aerial reconnaissance in the military, archaeological, agricultural and environmental sciences as visual and surveillance technology; a non-aestheticized form of photography.

In the first decade of the 20th century, further attempts were made by photographers who utilized gunpowder rockets, kites and trained pigeons with miniature cameras strapped to them to produce aerial images that foreshadow modern drone photography technology.<sup>625</sup> In subsequent years, there were serious developmental strides in the use of aerial visibility in different fields. After World War I when it was first attempted, military institutions explored the potential offered by aerial photography for surveillance, intelligence gathering and spy networks. Aerial

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<sup>621</sup> J. Hawkes, *Aerial: the Art of Photography from the Sky* (Switzerland: Roto Vision Book, 2003), p. 10 – 11.

<sup>622</sup> J. Hawkes, *Aerial, the Art of Photography from the Sky* p. 13.

<sup>623</sup> O. Waxman, "Aerial Photography's Surprising Role in History," <https://time.com/longform/aerial-photography-drones-history/>, accessed on 28 August 2022.

<sup>624</sup> J. Hawkes, *Aerial, the Art of Photography from the Sky*, p. 11.

<sup>625</sup> O. Waxman, "Aerial Photography's Surprising Role in History," accessed on 28 August 2022.

reconnaissance as it is known became useful for warfare logistics, land survey and mapping, archeological surveys, agricultural surveillance, multi-temporal mapping and decision support.

After the invention of the airplane by the Wright brothers in 1903, aircraft aerial photography added a leap into the sophistication and aesthetics of aerial photography, yet with limitations in regard to the efficiency of camera stability and shutter speed. In 1908, L.P. Bonvillain, a cinematographer joined an airplane piloted by Wilbur Wright, one of the Wright brothers to take photos of Le Mans in France.<sup>626</sup> It was Sherman Fairchild's development of a camera technology with a shutter speed located within the lens that remodified the aesthetics of aerial photography in the post-war era.<sup>627</sup> While drones are not particularly only aerial, as there are unground and underwater drones, my emphasis here are on drone photography that are classified within a larger context of aerial photography.

Among other forms of photographic viewing, drone photography can produce expansive and extensive top-down photographs that surpass structural and optical boundaries, offering liberty from physical constraint and empowering the viewer. Drones can view into unseen spaces and sometimes produce surveillance images that generate both tensions and apprehensions. But they can also produce affective and emotive images with captivating visual aesthetics that demand new ways of conceptualizing photography in the postphotography era.

In general terms, a drone refers to “a land, sea, or air vehicle that is remotely or automatically controlled...either from a distance by human operators or automatically by robotic means.”<sup>628</sup> While there are many ways that drones are used both in military intelligence, surveillance, agriculture, geography, mining and photography, my focus here is on drone photography that is remotely controlled by human operators on the ground, operating their drones mainly for an aerial and elevated view. This lies within the purview of aerial photography - which has a longer history and different technology than drone technology - in terms of its elevated optical view. In 2019, aerial photography that is powered by drone cameras were very conspicuous in photographing and filming carnival festival in Calabar. As part of the performance for carnivalizing photo and photographic performance, drone photography contributed to creating an expansive aerial view of a visual and cultural landscape that transcends

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<sup>626</sup> “From balloons to Drones: the history of aerial photography” *Hartzell Propeller* online, 8 November 2019, <https://hartzellprop.com/the-history-of-aerial-photography/>, accessed on 29 August 2022.

<sup>627</sup> “From balloons to Drones”, 29 August 2022.

<sup>628</sup> G. Chamayou, *Drone Theory* (London: Penguin Book, 2015), p. 11.

the limits of the terrestrial view that normal photography provides. Just like aerial photography, drones also look down from the sky to create a visual scene that proffers an in-depth knowledge of spatial relationship of the different structures, trees, humans and street layouts.

Drone photography shares some characteristics with aerial photography. They both provide the vision of things and network of relations “that are hard for the people on the ground to comprehend.”<sup>629</sup> There are differences in terms of their methods and mechanisms of control, their maneuverability, their flight paths. Drones depend on a miniature aerial technology and mechanism that uses rotors to produce an up-thrust force with a balancing gravitational force to hover, climb, or descend.<sup>630</sup> This can be controlled through a remote technology from a detached cockpit, with highly flexible maneuverability that can access those inaccessible overhead, underground and underwater spaces. Aerial photography in contrast is mostly mounted on aircrafts and other air-borne platforms, mainly maneuvered by a pilot and a photographer or a pilot-photographer, and is restricted to mainly the top-down view with different ranges of elevated height. It is the elevated scale of visual engagements that widens the practice of photography that are accessible by both drone and aerial photography contemporarily. According to Jake Sugden, “the availability and use of drones has been a phenomenon that has taken... photography... completely by surprise. Their arrival has suddenly put highly sophisticated, very affordable, cameras on ‘easy to fly’ aircraft within the reach of budding photographers.”<sup>631</sup>

The first modern type drone technology for aerial photography powered by an unmanned aerial vehicle was developed by Israeli engineers in the 1980s for military and surveillance purposes. They needed to develop “models equipped with video cameras” for military use in their surveillance network.<sup>632</sup> In subsequent years and in the 21st century, technological advancement has expanded the use of unmanned drones for aerial photography beyond their limited use and accessibility in the previous century. The current hyper-development in visual technology and other auxiliary hardware has given rise to the development of sophisticated drone cameras that are now reinventing top-down visual perception of the world. Among other forms of angular and irregular perception there are underwater drones and more generally drone

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<sup>629</sup> J. Hawkes, *Aerial*, p. 11.

<sup>630</sup> R. Allain, “How Drones Fly: Physic, of Course!”, <https://www.wired.com/2017/05/the-physics-of-drones/>, accessed on 14 October 2022.

<sup>631</sup> J. Sugden, *Drone Photography: Art and Techniques* (Wiltshire: Crowood Press, 2020), Introduction.

<sup>632</sup> O. Waxman, “Aerial Photography’s Surprising Role in History,” accessed on 29 August 2022.

flexibility in accessing quirky spaces like caves.<sup>633</sup> Olivia Waxman asserts that the “new hardware and software like stabilizers, autopilot and collision detection systems have since given rise to store-bought drones... with high-resolution cameras, making aerial photography more accessible than it’s ever been before.”<sup>634</sup> The trajectory of technological development around aerial photography has moved from areas of specialization like military surveillance with its limited access to high cost aircraft into the realms of “the popular.” There are drones today which are easily accessible to purchase, fairly affordable and easily learnable to operate. They can produce high-quality images and videos for commercial, cultural and artistic renditions beyond official surveillance projects. While drones can be highly invasive and can play a role in the operations of political repression, I here concentrate on the aesthetic and aerial dimensions of drones. These available drones greatly democratize aerial photography and increase “the desire to see the world from the sky.”<sup>635</sup>

Recently, the advancing development in aerial photography’s technology by the introduction of drone cameras, and their flexibility, mobility, speed and subtle fluidity over spaces has been utilized for overhead all-angular shots and coverage of public events. This flexibility and broader scope of visuality has seen it being advanced into commercial photography, film-making, television broadcasting and event industries. Cultural events have also benefitted from these dynamic image productions whose optical viewing can meander through almost all forms of angular perception.

Drone photography began to be popular in Nigeria round 2000, though it was earlier utilized by the Nigerian Military for a “whispers-in-the-wind” intelligence gathering to counter and curb the threats of insurgencies and the menace of militancy perpetrated by both the Boko Haram terrorist group in the northeast and the Niger-Delta militants’ insurgencies in the south-south.<sup>636</sup> In 2013, the Nigerian Military produced a domestically made surveillance drone named “*GULMA* – the gossip.”<sup>637</sup> This was an invasive attempt to pry into and terminate the nefarious activism of insurgency and militancy against the Nigerian populace, which at the time was a budding phenomenon in the Nigerian political landscape.

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<sup>633</sup> See <https://mashable.com/archive/drone-alaska-ice-caves>, accessed on 12 October 2022.

<sup>634</sup> O. Waxman, “Aerial Photography’s Surprising Role in History,” accessed on 29 August 2022.

<sup>635</sup> O. Waxman, “Aerial Photography’s Surprising Role in History,” accessed on 29 August 2022.

<sup>636</sup> <https://www.popsoci.com/article/technology/nigeria-shows-its-first-drone/>, accessed on 29 August 2022.

<sup>637</sup> O. Waxman, “Aerial Photography’s Surprising Role in History,” accessed on 29 August 2022.

While drone photography may be used as a repressive mechanism of power and surveillance, in the Calabar Festival and Carnival, drone photography added a sense of sophistication. It expanded the scope and scale of visibility and generated some sense of affect within the visual landscape of the festival. In 2012, the same year and month that *GULMA* was launched, EbonyLife TV, a private television station in Nigeria used drone photography to visually document the Calabar Festival and Carnival in filmic and photograph form. For the first time, they introduced the “bird’s-eye view” into the photographic landscape and visual economy of Calabar Festival and Carnival. Social media observers and commentators commended the sophistication of EbonyLife TV’s gadgetry that included hand propelled crane cameras, high capacity media receiving terminals and drone cameras “flying around the stadium during the carnival day taking aerial shots and flying along with the performers.”<sup>638</sup>

Drone photography visualized beyond street layouts and participants into spaces that have been “forever” closed from public view. It shifted customized perception of the everyday into a very broad and wider aesthetic complexity. It offered an alternative view of the natural environment entangled with structures, humans and technology. Picturing the cultural landscape through an aerial view that drone photography supplies, evoked a stately equilibrium and provided a visual landscape that is patterned with lines, shapes, curves and greeneries, as well as flattening the enormity, the hugeness that confronts our on-the-feet photographic view of the structures in our environment as well as smothering the rowdiness that may come with it. And as asserted by Mathew Oxley, then “suddenly, we can see patterns and forms and colours in our everyday lives that we are just not used to seeing.”<sup>639</sup>

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<sup>638</sup> <https://techsuplex.com/2013/12/30/drones-calabar-things-carnival/>, accessed on 29 August 2022.

<sup>639</sup> M. Oxley, “Why is aerial photography often so beautiful and serene?”, *World Photography Organisation* online, 2 February <https://www.worldphoto.org/blogs/why-is-aerial-photography-often-so-beautiful-and-serene>, accessed on 29 August 2022.



Fig. 20: Screenshot image of EbonyLife TV drone recording of Calabar Festival and Carnival, 2013.

Drone aerial photography seems to mediate spaces in relation to landscape photography. It tends to “explore places in terms of histories, geographies and geologies, focusing on the interactions between people and the environment and on shifting ecologies.”<sup>640</sup> In the same vein, drone aerial photography tends to amalgamate local histories, social constructs and cultural dynamics in an entangled web-like imagery of the festival landscape. It offers an alternative visual landscape of a network of nature, structures and humans to what is popularly and socially constructed as landscapes from the ground. Furthermore, drone photography offers an additional visual layer that both add to photography’s excess performance, production and circulation of images, and is also part of a cultural abundance, the carnival of photos.

The image in Fig. 20 above is a screen shot of Ebonylife TV clip posted on YouTube on 3 December 2013.<sup>641</sup> It is part of a 45-second eye-catching run-off advertisement clip used to announce the resumption of the 2013 Calabar Festival and Carnival and to drive through the

<sup>640</sup> Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, (London: I.B.Tauris & Co, 2011), p. xv.

<sup>641</sup> *Catch all the fun of Calabar Festival daily*, Ebony Life TV, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmjFphaNikw>, accessed on 29 August 2022.

mind of the observer, to pull attention to the attractive and inviting cultural and entertainment aesthetics that one will possibly consume during the festival. “The advertisement reel that announces this photograph is presented in a fast-paced mode that is used to draw viewers’ attention to the show, and to evoke a sense of curiosity” in order to persuade viewers to come for the event,<sup>642</sup> but also to “catch all the fun of the Calabar festival daily” as inscribed in the image.

The Mary Slassor monument is framed within this image. It stands at a four-way junction that connects Calabar South and Calabar Municipality Local Government Areas. The screenshot image represents the spatial configuration of Calabar carnival, but also portrays the popularity of the carnival attendance among residents. While the carnival is much talked about on social media, it seems not to so much affect the number of residents going about their businesses in other parts of city that lie outside the carnival route. On routes like Etagbor, Atimbo and parts of Calabar South, residents seem to be going about their daily activities and business, but are inhibited from accessing parts of the carnival route.

The drone camera was able to record a broader view of the Mary Slassor Road junction and the mapping network of how they connect to each other. Mary Slassor Road runs from the west to the east across the monument in the image; and the Target Road and Marian Road networks run to the north and south of the image respectively as a central merger. The aerial view pictures Mary Slassor’s monument in a centralized position surrounded by empty spaces, people, vegetation, cars and buildings – and how they converge and emerge in constituting the aesthetic of carnival. The monument is one of the regularly photographed edifices in Calabar as it historicizes the history of Christianity religious in Calabar, particularly in relation to abolition of the practice of killing of twins which Mary Slassor epitomizes. The image pictures Mary Slassor effigy as a towering image over and above the positionalities of revelers, residents, structures, cars, the carnival train and even vegetation. The monument itself is meant to signify how a Scottish missionary who arrived in Calabar in 1876 under the United Free Church of Scotland missions and served till her death in Calabar in 1915 had inserted a towering influence over the religious and cultural life of Calabar and its environs. Today in Calabar, almost all public functions always start with a short prayer, with libations and sacrificing chicken and goats to ancestors, and with prayers offered according to Christian liturgy.

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<sup>642</sup> N. Udo, *Visualizing the Body*, p. 97.

While aerial vision sometimes does not expose readable and identifiable details of what it presents – particularly in relation to the height of its operationality and the quality of the camera - its photographic representation “reinforces contemporary political, social and environmental attitudes [that] are seated within and influences of cultural identity.”<sup>643</sup> The image pictures a train of costumed revelers, dancers and street performers, as well as spectators, fans and street vendors who are about 2km in distance along the 12km route they will eventually cover. The image represents the broadness and borderlines of space and mobilities that Calabar Festival and Carnival occupies as it colonizes public spaces, exhibiting and inhibiting mobilities at the same time. The image poses a sense of articulation and at the same time blurs social and cultural identities. It evokes both the fluidity and collectivity of gender, class, ethnicity, nationality and political divisions in Calabar. The broader view of the image seems to freeze the trend of multiple movements that happened on the ground and that the video portrays. It depicts a sense of migration, mobility and temporality of culture that the Calabar Festival and Carnival epitomizes. Through the drone imagery Calabar Festival and Carnival appears as supposedly a cultural converging framework that is built on the assumption of an acclaimed return of some cultural aesthetic but also a congregation of different genres and forms of cultural practices and performances locally, nationally and internationally.

My awareness of the ground-mapping is very useful here in analyzing this aerial image. The image foregrounds carnival parade that is coming from the axis of the Calabar Cultural Centre, centrally located along Mary Slassor Road and opposite the Calabar Central Park-station. The parade condensed at the Mary Slassor Monument ready to face Marian Road, a very busy and affluent neighborhood of the Calabar metropolis. The aerial vision of this network of roads opened up a new “way of seeing” but also serves to “frame, freeze and fix”<sup>644</sup> the dynamic and complex elements of cultural, social, political and environmental elements woven together to create a complex cultural event.<sup>645</sup>

These forms of aerial view are now commonplace during the carnival. While in the field in 2019, I was confronted by flying drones decked with cameras hovering along with participants and revelers, over our heads and speeding away into greater heights, humming around, off-site

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<sup>643</sup> Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, p. 1.

<sup>644</sup> C. Lury, *Prosthetic Culture: Photography, Memory and Identity* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>645</sup> Liz Wells, *Land Matters: Landscape Photography, Culture and Identity*, p. 1.

and off-sight, and later to return again. Other media institutions like Channels Television, GOGA Africa (a local media institution) and some individual photographers used drones in 2019 to visualize the events. These images produced by different media stakeholders, broadly but cumulatively form part of an “affective and anticipatory archive” of photos and films stored and accessible online and as soft copies in personal and institutional collections. These massive archives run across different borders, but possess a productive potential of ambivalence, ambiguity, and slippery subjectivity that we encounter in our choice of what to see, how to see them and how to consume them, and how they can function as elements and “forces and facets of history.”



Fig. 21: Edem and his crew members operating a drone cockpit, attracting attention from participants. Photo by Nsima Udo, December 2019.

There is legislation and certification that is required to be a licensed operator of drone photography. Certifications such as Disaster Risk Management Approval, insurance, drone registration certificate, qualified and licensed pilot certification and so on are required particularly when operating in busy and infrastructurally infested areas like the “CBDs, urban

areas, National Parks, next to roads, People, Buildings and at events.”<sup>646</sup> While this legislations is risk management and competence based, it in turn defies a ubiquitous accessibility to a flexible maneuverability of a drone’s optical view for a larger population. Yet aerial drone photography is a performative and affective image-making activity that explores new trajectories of visuality.

Aerial photography and drones are directly placed in a seeming contradiction between surveillance and subjectivity. Chamayou asserts that drones are commonly related to surveillance, control, annihilation and violation of privacies.<sup>647</sup> But within the context of a democratized photography, drones have also taken up and heightened the affective propensity attached to photography. While photography has generally been theorized as being affective in how its aesthetic composition as well as its indexical nature can affect the viewer “as a result of its content,”<sup>648</sup> its affective potential has mainly been theorized around pain, trauma, grief and mourning. Beyond mourning and grief that images of trauma can generate both for the photographer and viewer, sometimes the aesthetic appearance of aerial images can provoke a high sense of astonishment at what has been photographed.<sup>649</sup> Aerial photographs produced through drones sometimes seem to bridge the gap between photography and fine arts: the distant effect greets an image that is caught up in an abstract mode than close up photos which produce personal identifications. Drone imagery seems to be alienated and unfamiliar as we do not see the world in the manner it offers us naturally.

Taken further, the positionality of the photographer who has to control the cockpit on ground, and the energies of concentration, exhibit affective impulses. Viewing a larger expanse of space beyond the natural view on the cockpit screen, where situational awareness of the photographer is non-existent, provoke heightened affective engagements and performance that sways in different directions.<sup>650</sup>

Aerial photography is normally placed in a dichotomy between surveillance and subjectivity, and sometimes between invasive and aesthetic implications. Scholars like Thy Phu

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<sup>646</sup> “Film making and the power of drones in media,” *Epic Air* online, <https://www.epicair.co.za/film-and-media-drone-photography/aerial-drone-cinematography-and-photography/>, see also, <https://uavcoach.com/drone-laws-in-nigeria/>, accessed on 31 August 2022.

<sup>647</sup> G. Chamayou, *Drone Theory* (London: Penguin Book, 2015), p. 37.

<sup>648</sup> R. Bencin, “Photography between Affective Turn and Affective Structure,” in *Filozofski Vestnik*, (2020), Vol. XLI, p. 182.

<sup>649</sup> R. Bencin, “Photography between Affective Turn and Affective Structure,” p. 185.

<sup>650</sup> “How drones have changed the photography field”, *2Bridge Production* online, <https://www.2bridges.nyc/photography-guide/how-drones-changed-photography/>, accessed on 13 February 2023.

and Elspeth Brown have asserted that photography in general “attend[s] to the complex and distributed dynamics of affect.” To them, photographic affect may not be seen in or contained within the photographic image in itself but circulates around and through the photograph as a form of social practice.<sup>651</sup> Drone aerial photography falls within a broader range of affect, not necessarily around the issues of shame, pain and trauma.<sup>652</sup> Just like “Tomkins designates affects as a primary motivational system and considers shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress, and disgust as the basic set of affects,”<sup>653</sup> the novelty, the sophistication and performative instance of drone generate a mixture of intense concentration, surprise, interest, and amazement from both the drone photographer and other passers-by who are moved by the novelty and sophistication of drone photography’s operations.

Borrowing from Laura Levin’s discussion that “the ontology of photography is intrinsically linked to performance,”<sup>654</sup> photography’s performativity was considered on the grounds of “the theatrical nature of the pose” and the tendency for the subject to allegedly pose for the camera gaze.<sup>655</sup> Levin took this argument forward by proposing the photograph-viewer encounter as producing a “performative force,” where photographs overlap their aesthetic paradigm to affect the viewer in diverse non-aesthetic ways.<sup>656</sup> But in drone photography here, as depicted by the image above (Fig. 21), performance advances beyond the subject-viewer engagement – the performativity of the pose and or the viewer’s aesthetic or affective transaction with the image. It further relates to the performative activity of the photographer and how such activism activate a sense of affective and cultural interplay between the drone photographer and her nearest constituency.

Patricia Leavy asserts that “performances are not read; rather they are experienced. Performances ... are open to multiple meanings, which are derived from the experience of consumption, which may involve a host of emotional and psychological responses, not just

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<sup>651</sup> R. Bencin, “Photography between Affective Turn and Affective Structure,” in *Filozofski Vestnik*, 2020, Vol Xli, p. 185.

<sup>652</sup> K. Gorton, “Theorizing emotion and affect: Feminist engagements” in *Feminist Theory* 8(3), DOI: 10.1177/1464700107082369 <http://fty.sagepub.com>, p. 337. Accessed on 3 January 2024

<sup>653</sup> K. Gorton, “Theorizing emotion and affect: Feminist engagements,” p. 335. Accessed on 3 January 2024.

<sup>654</sup> L. Levin, “The Performative Force of Photography” in *Photography and Culture*, 2:3, p. 328, DOI: 10.2752/175145109X12532077132473.

<sup>655</sup> L. Levin, “The Performative Force of Photography,” p. 329.

<sup>656</sup> L. Levin, “The Performative Force of Photography,” p. 329.

'intellectual' ones."<sup>657</sup> Fig. 21 images a kind of “experience of action” articulated by the drone photographers-in-action and the surprising response from other observers. These are performative. Such actions generate both aesthetic and affective outcomes, moved by a sense of surprise, curiosity, interest, amazement and sometimes enjoyment. These poses are not staged or theatrical, they are performative, sometimes including ritualistic and recycled processes of setting the camera, taking a dramatic pose, inversely not to be gazed at or for the camera gaze, but to position oneself appropriately in tune with the positionality of the drone, for a proper gaze, visualization, manipulation, control and image production. This also includes the astonished gaze of some passers-by which I framed into the image above. Their attempt to catch a glimpse of a drone flying in the sky to produce photographic images is both affective and performative. It reminds me of our excitement and response in the 1980s, whenever we, as children, heard the sound of a passing airplane, and rushed out of our rooms to see it. Visibility and sound thus constitute much of the excitement.

In the image above, the drone photographer’s pose is very generative. It is not a neutral passive action but one that generates a corresponding affective pose and mien from the human subject. Thus, the photographer’s posture, to manipulate the drone’s mobility and to capture a picturesque scene is performative. His posture and positionality in the street draw others into the performance space of visibility and visuality. While their poses are not intended, they directly related to the subject’s theatricality and “self-styled body performance for the camera gaze.”<sup>658</sup> Concurrently, psychological research has shown how engagement with smartphones is a form of “positive psychology... that promote positive affect into the practice of taking photos.”<sup>659</sup> This is also applicable in drone photography as the drone photographer’s cockpit interphase is generated through a smartphone. His intermittent movement of view between the smartphone screen and the drone flying above “promote positive affect into the practice of taking photos,” but also a heightened sense of affect, an amazement at this photographic practice.

Advancing into aerial photography, the technological interphase between the cockpit and a smartphone that offers a cinematic screen to both pilot the drone as well as to observe the best picturesque scenes, generates a more affective engagement for the photographer-pilot. While a

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<sup>657</sup> P. Leavy, “Performance-based emergent methods” in Sharlene Hesse-Biber & Patricia Leavy eds., *Handbook of Emergent Methods* (New York: Guilford, 2008), pp. 343-357.

<sup>658</sup> L. Levin, “The Performative Force of Photography,” p. 330.

<sup>659</sup> Y. Chen *et al.*, “Promoting Positive Affect through Smartphone Photography”, p. 1.

lot of intellectual acuity is needed to pilot the device and take photographs, the performative engagement with the gadgets evokes the sense of astonishment and accomplishment, exploring new visual possibilities and gazing that sees beyond what the on the ground photography could offer. Furthermore, drone photographs tend to drain the visual landscape of carnival with all the details of colours, shiny materials and the creative resonance of performance and arts that ground images exemplify.

In Fig. 21, Edem and his team of photographers are directing their drone with their ground cockpit. In the 2019 Calabar Festival and Carnival, new photographic technologies like drones were used by individuals and media houses to compete for prominence in business patronage, image branding and social media posting of carnival photographs and videos. Their spatial positionality is defined around a dense commercial hub – though improvised – that is on the street. In the background, I picture food vendors engaging in different forms of trade, a mixture of culture, visuality, and business. Edem – a pseudonym – acts as a co-pilot sharing information with his crew member, who is juggling between tracking the drone in the sky and also keeping to the “reconnaissance” on the screen. I represented Edem as performing multiple functions within the framework of photographic activism.

The image depicts a posture of gestures in a public space - the street – that attracts passers-by who are also caught up into the visual performance of scouting the sky to see the flying drone: what Ato Quayson refers to as the “performative dimension of the street”, and the messy interaction of pedestrian with other pedestrians that produces a possibility of a spontaneous performative event.<sup>660</sup> It also depicts the affective impetus of drone photography. All the energy and attention of the crew are directed towards the drone flying in the sky without much awareness as to what is happening around them. The intensity of the engagement with drone gadgets and the concentration of the crew is demanded to maintain a risk-free operation. Unaware of my photographic presence, they perform for my camera with unintended intensity. Their performative pose depicts the urge to produce aesthetically endowed images from the sky. The distance between the photographer-pilot and the unmanned drone which is off the photo frame translates into performative acts of sighting and being sighted: and a display of mastery of visualization in the public space.

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<sup>660</sup> A. Quayson, *Oxford Street: Accra Life and the Itineraries of Transnationalism*, p. 17.

Aerial photography through drones therefore brings “spatiality... spectatoriality,” affect and performativity, into a cultural intersection in a carnival arena. It expands the cultural and visual landscape of an African carnival. The elevated camera advances the demography of viewers beyond the population of revelers, participants and residents on the ground. More than that, the contemporary digital platform upon which these photographic apparatuses are linked advances the spatiality of performance and the spontaneity of viewing.

## CONCLUSION

The cultural aesthetics of the Calabar Festival and Carnival, the key concern of this thesis, is not particularly new to Cross River and Calabar. As I have shown there is a long history of performance cultures dating to the periods of slave trade and legitimate commerce, which I have maintained can be traced as being durable and surviving elements that emerge as cultural residuals in the 21<sup>st</sup> century cultural festival. Through a re-reading of photographs away from their immediate functional life, in a sense giving them “other lives,”<sup>661</sup> I interrogate the particularities that present themselves in the form of ideas, cultural practices, performance, street parades and the movement and heightening of performance around market squares, cross roads and junctions. These particularities are coded and exhibited through masquerade performance, movements, reveling, modes of gentrification of spaces and spectator attitudes.

While these “durabilities” persist and point to a scale of “survival,” they also open up understanding to a hybridized scale of inclusion and loss. The hierarchical connotations that were exhibited in the pre-carnival cultural parades and patterns of movement are recast in the carnival parade through the inclusion of carnival “kings and queens.” This is evidently gendered. While women are prominently featured and visualized as dominating the front roles in organized parades and marches and photographic representations, Calabar Carnival is still controlled by a male political elite. Among the five competing bands, only one is owned and control by a woman, indicating the positionality of men in organizing and directing the carnival.

For the past 15 years, the street has played a central role both as a social centre and cultural space for Calabar Festival and Carnival, providing a landscape for a socio-historical and hybrid cultural performance and representations. The street has functioned as a space for cultural curatorial purposes, and political and affective rhetorical narrative through which the festival is expressed, aestheticized and visualized. The street allowed for the entanglement of local, national and international performance cultures, as well as the flow of internal sociocultural and political dynamic in Calabar. It functioned as a conduit and platform for the transaction, transmission and presentation and a showcase of multifaceted cultural practices and heritage, fusing together and forming a hybridized and creative cultural product for commercialization. While it is central to performance, political maneuverability and economic activities during the carnival, the street offered

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<sup>661</sup> Patricia Hayes and Iona Gilburt, “Other Lives of the Image” in I. Gilburt and P. Hayes (eds), *Other Lives of the Image*, *KRONOS* (Special Edition) 46, (2020), p. 10.

a landscape for photographic performance, both as a stage and as a backdrop, bridging the borderlines of physical structure as well as the skylines.

During the carnival, the street opened up the space for an unrestrictive and a heightened sense of photographic practices. Many professional media houses, government agencies, tourists, visitors, residents and lovers of photography, both professional and vernacular, utilized the street as their photographic stage. As a public space, the street appeared as open to all. It was radiant with flashlights of cameras and the clutters and clicks from different cell phones and professional cameras of different brands and class. All these produced an excess of images that engulfed the photographic landscape and media highways. As the festival unfolded on the street, with visitors and heavily costumed band groups parading with their floats and other carnival technicalities, it provided several photographic scenes and sites where photographers scrambled for a piece of action to represent, reproduce and memorialize self, sight, site and scenes. Photographic advances were readily accepted. Both revelers and audiences were voluntarily available and responded agreeably to any beckoning for a photograph. The use of smart phones contributed to both the ubiquity of photographic practice as well as infesting the photographic highways with an excess of images.

In this research, I go beyond the dilemma of conceptualizing photography's ubiquity as a "burden of representation" to borrow John Tagg's conceptualization.<sup>662</sup> I assert that photographic practice in the digital turn, with its excess of photographs, is rather enriching the landscape of historical scale. I problematize the state government's discourse and claim on cultural authenticity to gain legitimacy. I rather conceptualize carnival as an innovative cultural package made up of creative performance culture, imported cultural dynamics, and incarnated forms of older cultural practices. These are woven together intentionally by an established political machinery in an attempt to build a comprehensive cultural formula to generate revenue, but which also fits into contemporary popular and sociocultural dynamics for global acceptance and patronage.

With the changing aesthetics and the juggling of the history of Calabar Festival and Carnival from the template of internal test-run to a heavy dose of Trinidadian tutelage, to a period of self-sustenance and inventiveness, its "authenticity" is predicated on a complex and very broad interface among these elements, that which sets it apart as the Calabar Festival and Carnival. The means of visualizing these forms lies in the ability of the photograph to record intelligibly, and both the indexicality and iconicity of photographed images are important. In

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<sup>662</sup> See J. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 1988).

this, the viewer is able to decipher the resemblance between the photographic object and the subject. Thus, photographs can act as a force for historical analysis. Photograph records presence – of performance, the street and many of the complexities exhibited during the carnival festival. It records the presence of the domineering influence of political agencies, as well as the “visuals of dissidence”, disrupting the popular state government narratives of the carnival as an expansive cultural and economic phenomenon.

In all of these interactions between visibility and culture, and between the secular, the vulgar and commercial, the street remains a spatial denominator upon which a commercialized and carnivalized festival faces the tensions of approval and disapproval among residents and among other cultural and social elements. The street also accommodates the tensions of nonconformity and critiques against governmental ineptitude and lopsided priority in funding street parties over and above other important developmental tasks of the state.

While some residents, visitors, interlocutors and some government personnel applaud the government for the carnival initiative on the grounds of providing a source of revenue generation for the state and for the opportunity it provides for residents and visitors to interact and mingle, and to relax, reflect and leisure within the proximity of their residences, other residents seem to stand at the margins of the streets heralding their dissatisfaction over the politics of performance and the politics of carnival, that privilege leisure over learning, though these two are not necessarily opposite. They bemoan the disinterest of the state executives over the dilapidated and decaying state of important public facilities like the State Library, articulating their worries through not conforming to carnival activities as well as excluding themselves from the visual landscape of the carnival.

Yet carnival images sometimes seem to present a visual smokescreen, offering an illusionary image of Calabar and of the carnival. Juxtaposing the images produced across the cultural sphere, beyond the visuals of performance and colourful costumes, with the poetic inclination of a yearly theme, produces a kind of cultural tension that the carnival tries to douse. There is a continuous and consistent narrative of the benefits of the carnival to the people of Cross River State, culturally, economically, aesthetically and perhaps politically. What this thesis impresses are that these benefits juggle back and forth across the three political dispensations that the state witnessed since 1999 when the idea of tourism was initially promoted and in 2004 when cultural tourism was birthed on the threshold of Calabar Carnival extravaganza. These

benefits are overtly overstated by the state's organs of government. Visualizing these dynamics is complicated, but is seemingly lopsided when one considers the visual narratives that the Cross River State visual agencies evoke in an attempt to brand, promote and authenticate the commercializing impetus of Calabar Festival and Carnival.

Visualizing carnival economies thus turns away from this lop-sidedness and tries to point towards envisioning those "event sites" that state cameras – and many other photographic perceptions – have not included in their purview. In this regard, this study juxtaposes these visual lacunae with the state's complicated bureau reports and concludes that the carnival celebration is facing a declining effect over the past several years, consequent upon corruption and financial misappropriation. Images are here used as composite photographic representations as well as a visual window that allows us to voyeur, so to speak, into the underbelly of administrative handling of tourism management and carnival technicalities. They are visual documents and mnemonic devices relevant to a history of carnivalized culture and commercialized aesthetics.

The study asserts that photographic ubiquity and the acceleration of visual technologies in the 21st century have repositioned the dimensionality of how we see. The research looks at the forms of visualization that have expanded our understanding of cultural and visual landscapes. While landscape can be conceptualized from different perspectives, I dwell on the recreational, artistic and humanistic approach to understanding the concept of cultural and visual landscape produced of the Calabar Festival and Carnival with technological changes that are not divorced of affect. I conceptualise the visual and festival landscape as a layout of performance and cultural traditions that transcend the fixity of photography into its spatial indexicality, a visually contextualized space that is littered with creativity, cultural performance, street dancers, colours, costumes, infrastructures, nature and other forms of cultural, social and political materiality, and how these dynamic features tangle and interact with each other.

The visual landscape of a contemporary cultural event like the Calabar Festival and Carnival has become a space where photography mediates spatial extensions. The fluidity of photography and visual boundaries occasioned through the media and internet facilities has extended the participatory framework for the cultural festival through virtual engagements. Photography is seen to share the mobile tendencies of transport facilities that carry both the subject and the spaces of visual engagement far beyond the place of immediate actions, but also brings distant events that are seemingly real into a visual frame.

In visualizing culture, this study tries to show that in all its ramifications of the media and the gradational movement in visual technology, photography has corroboratively expanded our perception and created a visual practice that remodels the historical trajectory of images. The technology of smartphones, along with the availability of internet infrastructures have equally democratized the practice of photography, while also helping handlers and users to navigate the tense environment that the political dynamics in Nigeria orchestrate. As reveler-users and participant-users of smartphones utilize the photographic functions on their phones for photo performance and other forms of visual and virtual socialization, they help themselves, distract themselves and decongest their minds from the fraught conditions that abound in the sociopolitical and cultural landscape of Nigeria. They are also able to connect with friends and acquaintances, as well as engage with some social media platforms in an attempt to keep their minds engaged while waiting for the belated processes of political officialdom in resuming the event of the day. I showed that these visual gadgets thus become a means of self-help, a coping strategy as well as an instrument for positive psychology that allows carnival participants to strike a balance between the desire for revelry and managing the discontent experienced from political ineptitude and state incensed displeasures.

Furthermore, this study shows how visualizing carnival and the public has increased the inundation of images in the postphotographic era. With the movement in visual technology and internet infrastructures, the production, circulation and accessibility to images have further been made easier. The world is currently being inundated with volumes and volumes of images, online and offline. The “zones of visibility” that were previously under the “panoptical watch” of state power have been deregularized.<sup>663</sup> Consequently, the availability and accessibility of smartphone and internet facilities for the popular citizens particularly during the carnival pieces together a wider glimpse into the secular cover-ups and props them into a public visual landscape that provides an imagery to challenge governmental meta narratives.

The study ends with looking at a historical reflection on aerial photography and how it has concurrently redefined how we can visualize carnival and festival. Aerial photography which is about 150 years old, having started in 1858, has got its share of gradational changes. It started out as a balloonist’s desire to see the world from the sky. The invention of the airplane and the

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<sup>663</sup> Z. Gursel, “Visualizing Publics”, p. 135.

development of cameras with effective and quicker shutter speed, and better lenses took it to another level of efficiency and aesthetic excellence. In this postphotographic era, aerial photography is made possible by the development of unmanned drone aircraft. This has also somewhat democratized its affordances despite the levels of regulation that guides its operability and its use as a security surveillance apparatus.

The introduction of drone aerial technology into the visual economy of the carnival allows for a different perception of the visual landscape that includes “seeing the world from the sky.” While expanding the visual acuity of the carnival, elevated aerial photography through drone technology does not always zoom in effectively to expose readable and identifiable details. At the same time, aerial photography reveals the depth of spatial coloniality that state sponsored events amasses, and how state organs of cultural operations encompass the street, both exhibiting as well as inhibiting mobilities. The network of lines, patterns, shapes, colours and miniature beings exemplify the height at which visuality was mechanically performed. This synergy of patterns further exemplifies the silences of cultural and social identities. It visually obliterates the social demarcations and identity dynamics that are pitched around gender, class, nationality, ethnicity - and in relation to the Nigerian factor – religion.

The drone’s aerial photography can be classified as a performative and affective image making process. Viewers of these aerial photos are drawn into what Laura Lavin refers to as “performative force,” but are also affectively affected by the expansiveness, artistry, novelty and looking that drone aerial photographs offer. It creates abstractions from the real and offer the view of the world on a new and unknown visual template unfamiliar to the viewer. While drone photography adds new modes of performance to the festival landscape, it opens up new modes and forms of seeing and visual perception. Though drone photography is often conceptualised as an act of repression that may undermine the democratic level of private spaces, my emphasis in this study is on its sophistication and affective depth. Drone photography elevates the visual range of the carnival landscape. It broadens the landscape visually and seems to blur the dichotomies and boundaries that exist between and among different social identities that close-range images seem to exemplify.

But “the affective qualities of things”<sup>664</sup> in drone aerial photography shifts the emphasis from violence, pain and shame into the realm of excitement, astonishment and the having a sense

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<sup>664</sup> E. Edwards, “Object of Affect: Photography beyond the Image.”

of sophistication both to the drone photographer and some of the carnival participants and residents, who may be happy and elated in how “their” carnival has advanced into adopting a sophisticated visual technology, so to speak, to photograph and document the carnival. While drone photography as a “material thing” placed photographic practice “within the complex relations between human and nonhuman, people and things,”<sup>665</sup> it also created a distancing effect and an overarching overview of the festival and visual landscapes, thus reprocessing the aesthetic depth and identification of colours, glitters, costumes, floats, the creative resonance of arts, performance, stunts and human bodies into abstractive frames loaded with patterns, shapes and lines that launches the viewer into a state of unfamiliar visual engagement. Both the drone and photographer and the viewers of drone images try to scale the utmost heights to catch a glimpse of a broader visual landscape created within the lens’ scope of the elevated drone but beyond the visibility scope of the photographer. These elevations and the sense of empowerment it engenders is made possible by a complex relationship between the photographer and the drone and between the photographer and cockpit he handles. This in turn creates a celebratory sense of astonishment, excitement and accomplishment, and an affective desire to see more than is offered from this kind of “eagle eye view.”

In the overall, this thesis demonstrates how a history of a contemporary African festival can be read from complex layers of its operationality, performance, cultural residues, photography, politics, and broader sociocultural and economic elements. The study critically evaluates the contributions of state apparatuses, and the impacts they create in managing and executing the idea of a commercialised festival. The thesis analyses photographs in ways that challenge the metanarratives of cultural organisers. It offers an original contribution to the literature on African festival and carnival, and on photography. It allows us to further think about the fluidity and ambivalence of photographs, but also the functionalities of photography as an affective element, a discursive apparatus and an evidentiary tool for historical endeavor, and within an ambience of cultural performativity and beyond.

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<sup>665</sup> E. Edwards, “Object of Affect: Photography beyond the Image.”

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