

In the centre of this photograph, a woman stands, facing a two-tone wall. Her arms are gently folded behind her back, while her head is turned slightly to the left, revealing part of her face. She is wearing a red hat with a buckle above its brim, and an open-backed dress, the colour of coral. On her right shoulder blade, her dark skin gives way to a lighter toned, raised scar. Partially covered by her black bra strap and her dress, the bumpy scar winds its way onto the back of her right arm, before fading into her natural complexion.

We can only see the woman's top half. Her short, locked hair is visible underneath her hat, and, while we cannot see her eyes, the gold of an earring glistens in the lobe of her left ear.

We're close enough to see that the scar on her back, while still clearly visible, isn't from a recent injury. Enough time has passed to heal her wound, and while it may fade over time, the physical reminder of her injury is something she will probably wear for the rest of her days.

I took this photograph in Liberia in 2017, as part of my first personal project: The Process of Re-learning Bodies. It began as an exploration of how trauma survivors across Africa adapt to their changed bodies, while marking the absence of the effusive culture around body positivity.

By the time I photographed this woman, who stands in front of a blue-and-white-painted wall, I had already spent some time documenting scars. At this point, I was comfortable enough to approach people and ask them about their injuries; about the stories behind them; and about how they cope with the marks that have changed their bodies.

This project is about how people from different communities deal with their scars, and it is driven by what I had seen across the continent. Most photographs I saw of African people's scars had been taken by white people, and were often focused on those who had been victims of horrific abuse, violence, or terrorism. I found the approach grotesque. I remember seeing an image of an African woman with significant scarring, pictured shirtless and sitting on the floor. Why did she have to be on the floor? Why wasn't she on a chair? Of course, scars, injuries and their traumas are important, but you can still represent the person who carries them with dignity.

I realised that this was reflected in society: a lot of people looked at scars with a fascination for the grotesque, and I wanted to focus on a different, gentler reality. Because a lot of scars aren't from violence or abuse.

Sometimes they're from car accidents, sometimes they're from boiling water, or fires.

The woman in this photograph got her scar from a road traffic accident. And while there are often long stories behind how scars came to be, I prefer to focus on the lasting impact they leave; not just physically, but in how they make people feel. Because it's our feelings that remain; often they even outlast the scars themselves, as they fade and, eventually, disappear.

This photograph, and the series it belongs to, is very personal to me. A childhood car accident left me with a large scar that I still have today. And as a Nigerian woman, I wanted to look at how our communities affect the way we view our scars and how we re-learn our bodies. I grew up not being affected by my scar, but changing communities changed my story.

As a child in Nigeria, I remember how my scar was treated – it was very matter-of-fact and open. Complete strangers would ask, 'Oh, my God, what happened?' But when I moved to

America to study, people stared, said nothing, and looked away. For the first time in my life, I was self-conscious.

And as this project went on, I began to take closer shots of people's scars; sometimes the images would be so close they were hard to identify: was it somebody's scarred skin, or was it a landscape? It was difficult to tell, and I loved that. The patterns of our skin's healing reflected the patterns in nature.

Shot on a Canon 5D Mark III, this image represents a midway point of the project, and it seeks to establish a connection between the marks on our flesh, and the marks on the earth. Her scar flows like a river, from her back, across her shoulder, to the back of her arm. And that's the objective: to show the parallels between the healing process of our bodies and the pre-existing patterns in the natural world.

I like how this approach plays with people's minds. It shifts the perspective and focus on how we look at scars. It creates curiosity and helps us look beyond the damage done to our bodies, instead looking at the way we heal.

I have always found it strange that people's fascination focuses on the gory details of *how* they came to be. I wanted to redress the balance and make it less about the morbid curiosity that people deem 'other' to them. I wanted to shed it from the narrative. Shed the faces and the bodies, and thus shed the morbid, leaving only curiosity.

While working on this project, someone said to me, "People focus on the scar and forget about the injury". It stuck with me. What if we didn't look at scars in this way? What if people saw them from a different perspective, as beautiful markings? It was easy for me to see a connection between the markings on our bodies and the markings in nature, and hopefully through my work others can too.

I hope this photograph demonstrates that the inherent way our bodies regenerate is a natural phenomenon. And that society should not only recognise it, but embrace it.