

### Module 3: Interview with Delovei Kwagala

[00:00:12] Welcome to this Q&A session for "How to report safely strategies for women journalists and the allies. We're really fortunate and lucky to be joined today by Delovei Kwagala, who is a Ugandan Lombardi photographer currently residing in Johannesburg. Delovei had a mixture of experience of reporting on different issues across different countries in Africa. And we're very delighted to bring them in for this conversation today to talk about some of the personal safety considerations, that they face. And I just want you to introduce to our people listening a little bit more about your work and the types of issues that you cover.

[00:00:59] Hi, thank you so much for having me. So, my work centers around identity, belonging and gender sexuality and literally for its kind of like, you know, to provoke conversations around certain stereotypes that are embedded in our society to kind of defy, you know, like the norms of the society and try to change the narrative where we can, you know, especially with social injustices as well that are kind of like, you know, tend to come up in the same context. So, yeah.

[00:01:44] Amazing, and I know that in the course of your work, you have experienced different issues in relation to your own identity. Can you expand on some of those a little bit, the ones that are safe to do so and just share with us some of your own sort of personal safety considerations do you think about before you leave home to do your reporting work?

[00:02:13] So, since I do a lot of, like, sensitive topics when it comes to like where livelihood in Uganda, in the African countries at large as well. Also like for the fact that Uganda is like on the top of like the most homophobic countries in the whole world. And if you're familiar with the base also, like, you know, they're always trying to bring up the cue that gets built over and over again. So, which then puts us in a very scary situation, you know, just kind of like, you know, the UN security at the moment or so, like, you know, being gay really can give you, like, life imprisonment. So, because I deal with issues like that, also like sexual abuse and, you know, like human rights, women's rights, I tend to also like feel a bit, not a bit, but a lot unsafe when I'm working on issues like this. And so, in the relation to the question about like living what I have to consider as safety, but when I'm living the house, first off, obviously like as a muscular and presenting person,

[00:03:36] I always need to think about toning down my appearance. In most cases, I have had incidents where I have had to remove my septum, you know, because it's definitely like known and not known as long as it's not a very common thing in Uganda, but also not known as, you know, like formal or professional. So, I have had to do that in many occasions. And also, like I have also faced a lot of harassment with how I look. And also, you know, that comes with judgement and, you know, like a lot of being undermined because of, you know, like the simplest things that you don't even have to the ridiculous things that you don't even have to think about. And I think the country would be here. You have to always think about having your press card or any access pass from the organization that you're working with so that the police doesn't really hassle you or give you trouble. But I mean, also, like on the I don't know, like. On the parts of that is just like not entirely it doesn't necessarily guarantee your safety, because even when you happen to have press cards, you can still be refused access. But I think it's something that you have to consider just having, you know, just in case to kind of like avoid all of those other issues that might come up. The other thing would be like the safety, you know, just kind of like making sure that all your equipment is secured in one place so that in case of

anything, you can easily just grab your bag and go. And of course, transportation, because I think it also plays a big role in movement in Ferguson, like, you know, whichever one it is, whether it's reportage or like the commentary. And I mean, in Uganda, we have like borders, which are basically motorcycles, the very like very, very efficient and fast and take you to places like very quickly. But in the end, also, like, you know, they can also like be safety hazards, you know, like because they are also known to perpetuate into like the Fifth or conniving with, you know, like robots to kind of like, you know, giving their clients or customers. And so, I think it's always important to kind of consider, especially if you want to move around with your equipment, consider like getting like hiring the car so that it can transport you to just avoid to just be, you know, like a bit more precautions, especially if your equipment is noninsured. But I think it's very easy for us to kind of like, consider insurance before any of these other safety measures. But also, like alternatively, because I also know, like, that is extra expensive. So, when you're working with an organization, it's always important to courts like transportation so you can hire a car. And so, it can just put you back and forth for like for your safety and also your equipment. And also, if it's news coverage, I always carry a bottle of water because, you know, like things usually escalate into gas and you always have to kind of like put that in mind that, like, when it happens, then you can always, like, protect your face in that way. I mean, it's not necessarily like the best out there. Like the best idea. I think the best idea would be to have like, or the PPE equipment. But that's very unrealistic, considering the circumstances of like eight of them being expensive to acquire, you know, or even inaccessible. So, things as simple as water can actually come in handy. And I think everyone would be like, you know, for me personally, I think just having my phone on me all the time and updating my family members where I'm at a given moment, especially if it's a protest, it's something political or, you know, because currently there is a lot of this is off topic. But I think it's important to mention, especially with what's going on in Uganda at the moment, there's a lot of disappearance and kidnappings of like people who are who seem to be working or like in agreement; not in agreement, but in support of the opposition. So, in times like that, you always have to remember that you can fall victim at any time. So, I think it's always important to kind of like be in touch with family and all of that. And I think lastly, this is mostly for safety, for your own workflow is to make sure that you have multiple F.D. pads and batteries just in case, because I have happened to go out in a field with attempted cover up. I didn't have a list because I feel like in a remote village you can't really access, you know, any shops or even like any commercial. So, to me that's far reaching. But yeah, I like to kind of like be on the safe side, just have, like, you know, at least one more of each. So, you know, they're like in case you can always, you know, figure things out. Yeah.

[00:09:26] That's great. So much good advice there. And we've talked a lot about, you know, safety planning and we talked about kids and equipment. And in other parts of this training, we talk about accommodation, transportation and communication, which are like things that you've touched on there. But also, to hear it realistic way on the ground is important because depending on who you work for or your situation with your staff, journalist or a freelancer, your access to different resources is going to be different. And we've talked about definitely not having an editor to check into or a newsroom safety manager and that it might be a family member that you do the check ins with. And I think you'd mentioned before that that's part of also a part of your sort of anxiety measures as well, because if you have your child and also your parents worried about, you know, what your situation is in relation to, like your child at home. Well, so I think it's good to hear those coming out, because I think we often assume that when we're doing, like, more challenging high-risk work, we don't leave any family behind. And I think if you're not as sis as this white male photographer or journalist, there's this company had been going.

[00:10:58] Yeah, you could just up. And that's not always the case. Many of us really. And I think that brings me nicely onto the next question, really. If there's lots of nuances around safety and identity and is there anything about your own personal safety that you have to think about that perhaps others might not have to think about?

[00:11:24] I think then that brings me to my spirituality because, you know. Because as a person and also a masculine presenting person, he just kind of like, you know, it's a mix of the things you don't want to be in play. It's like this, so obviously I always have to worry about, like, you know, how I'm going to be perceived, you know, especially being out there in like just normally as I would dress, you know, I'm a very like I have a very distinct style, you know, of dressing. I always have to, like, kind of like tone that down, like way, way, way down so that it doesn't put off, you know, like maybe clients or even like, you know, the people that are participating in the projects that I'm working on. And also, like that aspect of me is like being a mother, if not being a parent to a young child. I think that this is a topic that is still very, very widely ignored in the photography industry where like, you know, even when it comes to like applications and stuff like, you know, job applications, no one ever considers that part that, as you know, like a person might have a child was, for instance, recently I got into a residency and I had to, you know, kind of like tell them that I have a child, that I wouldn't be able to live back at home, you know, for a long period of time. And they just feel like they just didn't understand. It's like, sorry, we don't have the budget for that. We have not your child.

[00:13:13] So, you know, and so I think obviously I always have to consider that, like, you know, if I have someone to leave my child for a day or two, then I'm constantly going to be reassuring my child that I'm safe, you know, meaning that constant communications with them. And obviously kind of like, you know, also in a way like parenting on the move, you know, just kind of like, you know, calling and checking in. Have you done your homework? Have you eaten, you know, like, what are you doing now to still continue, like, the normalcy? But, you know, like on the goal, which is I think that many people have the privilege of, like, having to really think about that and also just kind of knowing that, like, the person that I'm living with, my child is trustworthy because, you know, of all the things that happen to children at the moment, you know, you always have to be cautious about who you leave your kids with, you know, so it's a very difficult situation. But so, it really, really, really affects, you know, like the safety mindset in that way. And I think also, like just as I feel that I like being different, definitely has always made me a target, you know, wherever I go, which, you know, like has in the past and sometimes now gives me a lot of social anxiety and feeling like I can't really go to something they say is because of fear of harassment. And, you know, I someone who is just curious about if I'm a boy or a girl and just ended up groping my boobs in, like, you know, asking me all this like. Questions that don't even concern them, so and it wasn't the only incident by most of the times, I feel like there are many, many places that I can go to, you know, in Kampala because of like what they're known for, you know. And also, like it goes on to like the other context of like, you know, how men are glorified in our society, that they can get away with a lot of, you know, like catcalling and like, you know, on the streets and whatnot. And so, there is a lot of anxiety when it comes to, you know, like my being different because it's not only about, you know, like how I identify as, but it's also like a physical aspect of it, too. And. The everything would be like, you know, the sensitivity of the projects that I tend to work on, you know, safety is always a question for both me and the participants, meaning like we always have to draw a plan of safe locations to shoot from, which is always, you know, like ends up being that like my backyard or like another friend's house. And if it's at a friend's house, you have to think about who is going to be there, you know, so you can avoid

incidents of like, you know, someone calling police on you because you're shooting with boys with makeup or flowers, addresses, you know, so and I also feel like, you know, it's very limiting in many ways because, you know, I always have to strategize and also just kind of like think about the way out just in case things go down or like someone invades the space, because this has happened before where we were shooting at the central location and then a policeman came and we had to run, which ended up in my camera being confiscated. So now I'm being very cautious about that, you know, because in the end, I don't want to, like, put in danger the people that I'm working with because they're already, you know, putting themselves out there, you know, to be judged to be, you know, like abused or like because we just understood, you know. So that also is a very, very huge safety hindrance. And, you know, like I personally have to worry about, especially being in a country that is homophobic, that I do a lot of, like work as well. At.

[00:17:30] That's amazing in in not amazing that these things happen. I mean, amazing amount of planning and strategizing that you have to do, because through the nature of the work you do, your you have to have that level of protection for the people you're photographing because of the sensitivity which affects you and also the people that you're working with. And it also brings out a lot of what we've talked about in this course around why we do risk assessments, why we do this planning, why we think about location, safety, how are we going to get there, who we're going to meet, because these all matter when it comes to the issues that you're talking about here. You know, you you're living through that experience and having to do this on the ground on a day-to-day basis. I think those listening to you talk about this will relate to this and certainly now be more aware of that. I mean, an element of this course is about our ship and about people having more of an awareness of what it's like to live through different identities. And when that identity is persecuted and oppressed, then what do you have to do to create this safety strategies for yourself? You know, you've got another layer of planning that you have to put in there on daily, every day.

[00:19:01] Yeah, and it makes me think about. What people us ally in the media industry, whether freelancers or staff, can do to make it a safer space for non-binary photographers and how to be a good ally, I mean, it's not your responsibility to guide people. It's also down to people to learn themselves and use Google and, you know, find out for themselves. But if you experience harassment and you're working with on a commission with an editor for example, you're working for a magazine feature and you do get interested in the ways that you've mentioned, what sort of things would you like to get in the way of support? What would you kind of hope to hope to get?

[00:19:57] I think the first one of that would be just kind of like ensuring that the other people that I'm working alongside with, you know, appear friendly. So, as you know, like that they can understand which behavior is tolerated and what is known as. I think that is really, really, really very important when it comes to that, because we there's a misconception that obviously that, you know, people that are doing photography because you get to travel to different places and work with different people, that, you know, there is an automatic Walkman's to that.

[00:20:41] But unfortunately, it's not, because in the end, like, you know, you work with people that are really, really, really dismissive of all of these boundaries, you know, especially like when it comes to men, you know, like they just like, OK, why can't you just decide and be one thing like these? Only two genders, you know, so things that like as simple as that that can really, really offend someone and put you off from creating your best work because of, you know, like ignorant comments that are just thrown around

because simply someone can get away with it, you know. And I think, secondly, it would be like to kind of like also like, you know, going back to the behavior and also, like, you know, mentioning language, you know, because especially like for me, pronouns are really, really important. You know, like I'm not binary.

[00:21:38] I go by them, you know. But it also doesn't mean that everyone binary person goes by. They've been you know, it's pronouns just like identity. You know, it's a personal preference, you know, that like you don't just assume that just because I'm masculine presenting that that makes me into a box of wanting to be am mean, you know what I mean? Or like just because I'm feminine, presenting that that like that then gives you a right to just call me a She, you know, because I think it's really important for people to normalize pronouns because, you know, like, it's really offensive, especially in this community. And I think, like for as photographers, like, you always have to, you know, for those ones was are like dismissive about the things, you know, like I think that it's important to be open minded, especially like because if you're in the industry, you're going to be working with a lot of people and you're going to be sent out to do a story about like a certain group of people. And you're going to end up like offending them because you simply can't get your head around, you know, do a little research about, like pronouns in language that is meant to be used. And then you're not going to give a story because these people are going to be offended. And then I'm going to want to work with you, you know, so to avoid such incidents, you know, like, please go on, go, go. I, you know, like educate yourself about like, you know, pronouns and languages that I kind of, like, accepted to be used around queer people.

[00:23:10] And I think in the perspective of like the in the context of the whole industry as photography, I think that we can start for the bigger organizations, obviously, that we can start by making sure that, you know, like you give people like us, you know, like photography opportunities, you know that especially when it comes to photographing our own community, because, you know, it's then in the end makes us feel safe. Even the people that we are working with and also like these, I believe in very interments and your work, you know, in my images, because I want to feel a connection. I want, you know, to feel that I know the people that I'm working with. So, it's, you know, like if you just sending out someone who doesn't know anything about, like being queer, it's going to show, you know, because in the end you're going to fly someone out just because, you know, like whatever. And then it's going to show in the images. But I mean, we all know that, like, people really don't care as long as the images are on the table in many incidents. So, but I think it would be important for us to be able to kind of like photograph on community, because then there's a bit of like intimacy. And, you know, as a person who cares about like. You know, like. No, I, I care about not fetishizing and stigmatizing my community because we have gone through a lot of that, especially when you're photographing African bodies, you know, African bodies, because, like, let us tell our stories, like, you know, like us, the Africans, as if we are on the ground, let us be the ones to interact with our own until our own stories in a perspective that we better resonate to and understand that adults as outsiders, you know, like I and also that goes also to the funding opportunities and application call outs, you know, like, oh, there's a pull out or whatever. But then when you go to outlying days, like in the books of like teaching sex, you just like male and female, you know, like it's very limiting because I might be put off from applying for that certain, you know, application or grant or like whatever, because I simply don't feel like I want to be boxed into, like, you know, like into this huge gender and gender binary, you know, whatever. Like, I want to be able to see, you know, like to say what I am, because then it gives you a perspective of who I am and the work that I'm doing, you know what I mean? Yeah. So, I think it's really important to kind of like, you know, consider not limiting people

into like, you know, but I understand some applications, just like for women only, which is OK. But if you want to put in an application out that is not gender centered, then make it open. You know, there's more to female and male out there. Like it's not only limited to that and I mean, like gender is a construct, you know, a societal construct. So, let's just kind of like, you know, try to normalize these things that are important to us that would have normally not been so important to the other person, you know, but we out here like waiting for these things to come up and then, you know, like constantly being disappointed because people are not taking us seriously, you know, and. Also, just kind of like insuring, you know, like safety and secure and safe locations to protect us from unnecessary interference and judgement, because that is also a very, very common thing where people can invade, you know, like the states and just throw, like, vulgarity and, you know, all these homophobic slurs. And you can't do anything about it because your being there as just a photographer.

[00:27:25] But then you can't really protect even the people you're working with, you know, because in most cases, it's easier for me to be on the sideline of just being a photographer who doesn't have anything to do with the sexuality of the other person, you know, but well, in the end, I'm also like we are I'm also a part of the community. So, I can't really, really exclude myself in that because whatever, you know, affects them also affects me. Yeah. You know, and I think also like circling back to funding opportunities, I feel like it's, you know, like the industry is very limited, you know, I mean, like right now people are coming up with, you know, exclusivity where they will put in a non-binary person or transposon here and there. But like, it's still not enough. You know, I do. I have been working on a project called the Kingdom in Transition, which celebrates which simply, you know, celebrates the beauty and literally like the bravery of those of us who, you know, still stay with. Try to stay authentic, you know, despite of all these limitations and, you know, like a death sentence in place. But I would also like I can't afford it. Like, I can't be finding it myself for like a long time because it's really like, you know, limiting. I want to be able to, like, access these grants that are in the US and like focusing on that with the Bitcoin community and actually be able to get funding, because I would love to like, you know, continue the story that I'm telling. But then it's very limited because, you know, like of different circumstances, which might or might not be centered around (inaudible) or like that identity or sexuality or someone, you know. So, yes.

[00:29:27] Well, there's a lot to not to a lot of food for thought. There are lots of issues that you've brought up which I think that people are listening and embody this identity and are probably the finger clicking along with you again. Yes, yes, yes. Yes. And also, others, I think, you know, also now sort of questioning their own understanding and also how they can be better allies to people. And also, I think funding is a safety concern because of you not budgeted well to do your work. You do cut corners. And, you know, a lot of incidents have happened with freelancers, particularly because they can't afford the right people. They can't afford good insurance, they can't afford transport, you know, so it's all so, you know, to have a safe location, you often, rather than just using your own personal space, you may need a hotel room or, you know, find a building that you can rent or space or an office. So those things come into it. But what I also hear from you is that there's a lot of personal, sort of a lot of personal stress that you have to carry to do this work as well. Like it's we can't win. We live in a physical and mental state. Right. Not just one of the other ways that they're intertwined. So, when you're doing these very difficult subjects, which also impact on you as well, what do you do for yourself after you've been through something difficult? What sort of coping strategies do you have in place?

[00:31:16] So before I go to that question, I think I want us to go back on my word, like on the spot just briefly. Yes, I think that I forgot to mention that, like, I think the starting point also to kind of like, make yourself understand better about, like, you know, non-binary in photographers and people at large, you know, because we humans before we have this umbrella or live of a photographer. Right. Is that I didn't see it is a personal journey. You know, it's a very individual to me, just like, you know, the pronouns. And it evolves to anything that right now. They mean that tomorrow I'm going to feel like something else, you know, because we have 12 hours in that, you know, this is a very into changing and evolving and very like unconditioned and free movement of your own self, you know, like transitioning and transforming. And its growth, you know, and as simple as that. So, if just in case, like, I'm bringing that up because I understand many people would be like, OK, so today I go to this person in like, you know, they had identified by the list. And tomorrow is like, that's not any of your business, you know what I mean? It's like, dummy, this person is done. And I think all you have to. Yeah, exactly. All you have to do is kind of like respect that and go with what they tell you they are. You know, that is a start because I feel like there's a lot of judgement around that or you're confused or whatever, but there is no confusion. It's simply accepting growth and evolving, you know, as humans, right? Yeah. So, going back to the other one, to the question of when dealing in a bad situation, how do I hope I'm honestly familiar? You know, like for me, obviously, like it's not necessary because I can see, like family at large because my mom doesn't even understand what I do, you know, or like that aspect of it. But the found family, you know, the tribe, the people that understand it resonate with you. I think that it's important to kind of like always get back to that in just. So, you know, sit with yourself and them and just kind of like, you know, these people who kind of provided a safe space to share, you know, and be vulnerable. I think it's important because I do believe that it's not a matter of just having 100 friends when no one can really sit down with you and, you know, like putting you in the back when shit is really going bad.

[00:34:14] Yeah, well, that's why we talk so much in the safety in safety training about having a peer support network just in the physical safety and the mental safety and the emotional safety. You know, like those people if no one knows where you are, what you're doing, you know, those happen. It's just not safety, it is also state of mind, you know, knowing that you've got something safe to come back to. Is a really important factor in that, so because.

[00:34:52] So I was going to say that I can easily say therapy, you know, like that I do get therapy, but also that's very unrealistic, especially like when you are in places like where I come from, you know, because it's inaccessible. It's very expensive. I myself can't really, like, sustain, you know, like constant therapy sessions. And also because of like the limitations of it in this instance, like it's not always available, you know what I mean? Like you when I feel like when you are from situations that are traumatizing, you need like immediate support and, you know, like consolation and company, which then, like doesn't necessarily leave.

[00:35:41] OK, but just so feel so empowered by your conversation today, because there's so many of the issues that you're talking about, which some of us know, some of us don't, and just needs more visibility. So, like, these conversations are very helpful for so many different people out there who may be thinking about getting into photography, maybe thinking about what sort of stories they want to cover, how that relates to their identity and that experience and also their perception of gender. I mean, partly what I'm talking about is about gender-based violence, and it often is centered very much on one gender and not just another. And yet it doesn't really cover the whole gender spectrum. So, I think this is

like race. Lots of different talking points here for sure. And you've shared some really excellent safety advice, as well as personal safety tips, which are always very welcomed. But I just want to finish by. Where you feel the safest, like what's your safe place?

[00:36:54] In the arms of my child safe.

[00:36:58] I think that's a beautiful way to finish this conversation. Yeah, wonderful. Thank you so much. Day for taking the time to talk to us today. And please do check out day's work. Also, please do take a look at the go for me to get them through photography school and also. Yeah, just keep supporting your non binary photographers out there, everyone, because, you know, we need to keep raising these stories again and again and again to make more space for people to do the work that is most authentic to them. So, yeah, thank you very much. And we look forward to catching up with you another time.

[00:37:40] Thank you. Thank you so much for having me and giving me a platform to share.