**Transcript–– Gender Reveal Season 12, Episode 8: Fola Francis**

Please contact us at gendereveal@gmail.com if you have any corrections to this transcript.

Tuck:Just a quick note before we start the show: this episode is structurally similar but tonally *extremely* different than what we usually put out into the world. If you are brand new to Gender Reveal, I really, really encourage you to start with a different episode—like, pretty much any other episode. We have lists of recommendations at genderpodcast.com/starterpacks, or you can just back up a couple weeks to like, Shing or Lucy or Cassius or whatever jumps out at you. Okay, here’s the show.

[Gender Reveal theme music by Breakmaster Cylinder plays]

Tuck: Welcome to Gender Reveal, a podcast where we hopefully get a little bit closer to understanding what the hell gender is. I’m your host and resident gender detective, Tuck Woodstock.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: Hey everyone, hope you’re all hanging in there. This week, it is my honor to share my conversation with Fola Francis, which was recorded on December 4th of last year. You might be familiar with Fola as a Lagos-based fashion designer, model, and actress, or as one of the most visible and publicly out trans women in all of Nigeria.

I have been trying for a month to figure out how to say the next sentence in a normal way, and ultimately there’s no good way to say this, but shortly after our interview, Fola was in a tragic, shocking accident in which she drowned at a beach in Lagos.

And before we go any further, I just want to really emphasize: Fola very much wanted to live; she was planning to live a long and joyous life, and I would very much like YOU to live a long and joyous life. So if you are struggling with, [sigh], you know, the looming specter of death that haunts us all, the sheer amount of loss and suffering we’ve all been hearing about every day for the last several months and beyond… I see you, I get it, and I want to encourage you to reach out to people in your life, because the most important thing we can do right now is really to support each other.

Regarding today’s episode, we are clearly still releasing the interview. It felt really important to me that as many people as possible get to learn about Fola, and specifically learn about her in her own words.

So, in this episode, Fola talks about the state of trans rights in Nigeria, both now and historically. She also tells us about throwing some of the first balls in Lagos, creating her own queer fashion line, and walking in Lagos Fashion Week despite being low-key blacklisted for being trans, which is obviously iconic of her to pull that off.

When we first scheduled this interview, we spoke with Fola about ways that she could record her side of the conversation so that we would have better audio. But when it came time to record, those methods weren’t available, so the audio we have for this interview is Zoom audio that was beamed halfway around the world. Because of this, and because Fola has a habit of talking very fast—which obviously I deeply relate to—this audio can be difficult to parse at times. If you are someone who is struggling with it, the good news is that we have a full transcript available for you at [genderpodcast.com/listen](http://genderpodcast.com/listen). We will also link to it in the show notes.

By the way, I took all the ads out of this episode because they felt tonally inappropriate, but I do want to let you know, really quickly: we have a bunch of really fun limited-edition Trans Day of Having a Nice Snack merch in the shop for this month only, that helps us raise money for our mutual aid fund. You can find it as always at bit.ly/gendermerch.

And now, it’s time for this week in gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: This week, we just want to take this opportunity to share a couple of brief tributes to Fola made by her friends.

The first clip is a TikTok that was put together by the journalist Vincent Desmond, it features the voices of several LGBTQ Nigerians who knew Fola. We will post a link in the show notes to the video; I recommend you watch it because the video part of the video is great. And also there are subtitles if you need them. But in the meantime, here’s the audio:

[soft piano music plays quietly in background]

Uyaiedu: Fola inspired me the most in the way that she lived her life. She lived so authentically, visibly and loudly.

Chisom Peter: Seeing her live the way she did, just exist, despite the fact that trans people have it bad in Nigeria, it made me want to live freely too. And I did, and I do.

Lola: The person I reached out to when I wanted to start medically transitioning was Fola, and she was the only person that actually responded to me.

Chisom Peter: She was always there for trans and nonbinary people in Nigeria. I mean, she had those activities where she made sure that trans and nonbinary people found safety, had a sense of family.

Nelson: It was always a great thing to have a point of reference all the time, and have someone whose life could be referred to when you think about living openly and proudly as one’s self.

Uyaiedu: Fola was mother. Fola *is* mother. Fola invited me to my first ball, and just seeing Fola there, doing what she was doing… I didn’t even know Fola had that in her. You know, to host the ball in the way that she did, as if she was born to do it.

Lola: I don’t know how to say this, but like, her being here is literally the only thing I’m asking for.

[piano music ends]

[new somber music begins]

Tuck: This second clip is by friend of the show OK Timileyin. Timi gave us his blessing to release this interview with Fola in the first place, which was very important for us to actually talk to one of Fola’s friends and community members and make sure it was okay that this existed in the world. Timi was also generous enough to send us these words for Fola.

Timi: My dear Fola Francis. It’s been months since you departed. I know life hasn’t been the same, I would say. It’s been a lot. That’s all because you’re not here, and it’s hard to move on without you. I just hope you are in a good space, resting, being that girl that you are, that you will always be. With love, Timi.

[music fades and ends]

Tuck: This has been This Week in Gender.

[This Week in Gender segment chime theme music plays]

Tuck: OK I’m going to be honest, I hate to do a tense switch; I’m just going to read this like Fola wrote it for us.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: Fola Francis is an openly trans woman living in Nigeria. She came into the Lagos fashion scene in 2015, where she started her activism through fashion. She’s also a fashion designer, content creator and actor. She’s the first trans woman to walk the runway at the Lagos Fashion Week.

[Gender Reveal theme music ends]

Tuck: The way we always start the show is by asking: in terms of gender, how do you describe yourself?

Fola: I identify as a trans woman; my pronouns are she/her and they/them.

Tuck: Perfect. I was wondering what messages about gender and gender roles you grew up with. What did the culture around you tell you about the opportunities of gender that you had or didn’t have?

Fola: I grew up in Nigeria. And Nigeria is very patriarchal. I mean, everywhere in the world is very patriarchal, but especially Nigeria. Our culture is very much… men are the head of the family, men have to be more successful, men just take everything, you know. Men, men, men: it’s always about men. And women are always, like, secondary. So that is what I grew up around. And you know – why is the father the head of the family when the mother is essentially the one that basically makes everything work? That’s what I grew up around.

Tuck: Do you remember the first time that you heard about trans people, or even met a trans person?

Fola: Oh my god! This is – I’ve never been asked this question, but this is very good. The first time I ever heard of a trans person, I think, was in university, which is insane. [Laughs] And this about ten years ago. I was watching a pageant show online, and a trans person was one of the contestants. And it was such a big deal; like, it caused such a big controversy at the time. It was that moment I knew, OK, I finally have the words to describe who I am. Even though I never started transitioning at the time – at that time, I just knew that I did not identify as the gender I was assigned at birth.

Tuck: Yeah. When you were coming out, did you have other trans people in your life that could support you and help you in that? Or were you trying to figure that out on your own?

Fola: I had absolutely no one. No trans friend, no trans person, no trans person even in this country.Like, to look up to or even draw any inspiration from. Looking at trans people in other countries played a huge role in my transition.They were the people I was looking up to. But as far as like here in Nigeria or in Africa, I had no one. No one even on the media, I would say**.** Not anyone I actually knew personally. It’s also the reason why I became really very, very visible just so I could become a point of contact fortrans people here in Nigeria.

Tuck: Yeah. We get a lot of questions from people all over who are like “I’m trans, but I don't know how to build trans community in the place where I live.” Like, “I don't know how to find other trans people.”

Fola: Yeah.

Tuck: I know that you posted a lot of TikToks about your life…

Fola: Yeah.

Tuck: …is that the main way that you met other trans people and made that community?

Fola: Oh absolutely, absolutely. After I started becoming very visible and posting my TikToks**,** so many trans people started reaching out to me on various social media platforms**.** Or even through mutual friends, like “I’m a trans person and I just started my journey but I don’t know how to go about this, you know, how to secure gender-affirming care.” So I was basically talked into activism and started helping other trans people, basically just helping each other out. And now we have a huge community where we draw inspiration from each other, and we are very, very visible. Because my whole thing is that I don’t want trans people to live in the shadows. Like, it’s fine if you want to live in the shadows, but if you want to be visible, you have the right to be visible and take up as much space as you want.

Tuck: Right. So you organize these events now under the name “Dolls Activities”...

Fola: Yeah.

Tuck: …and something I love that you've talked about is not wanting them to feel like charity events, which I think is so important.

Fola: Exactly.

Tuck: So, can you talk more about how you make sure it doesn't feel like charity?

Fola: I mean there’s nothing wrong with helping peopleor anything. But we are already aware of our situation. We know that we are basically at the bottom of the food chain of society. So we don’t want to get reminded of thatat any trans-focused event or any kind offormal activity whatsoever. So the first event that I did for Dolls Activities was actually a “Girl Dinner.” [Laughs] I called it a “Girl Dinner.” It was a little dinner at my place; I invited a bunch of trans and nonbinary people. And we just had drinks, and had bruschetta and pasta. And it was really cute!

And after that I was like “OK, I would love to make something larger still.” And I reached out to people — my friends, allies that could help support, and donate clothing and other things that trans people might need. And I partnered with another queer organization in Nigeria that could help and support and bring the event to life. So, we put our heads together and decided to make it not look like a charity event. We knew there was gonna be a clothes drive and a food drive, but we’re gonna make it look like, “OK, you can shop from different stations for food and clothing and just have fun.”

So it was just like everyone coming together and having fun. So it was not even a thing of less-privileged trans people. It was like, different kinds of trans people were there — like from different socio-economic — and everyone felt free to pick a clothing or two, because we made sure that everything that was donated, we made sure we curated them and we went through them and we made sure they were good shape and condition.

Tuck: Yeah, I love that idea of reframing it as, “Oh, we're shopping. We’re like, putting it in our bags…”

[5:46]

Fola: Yeah, and we literally printed bags that said, “Thanks for shopping, doll.” [Laughs]

Tuck: I *love* that. You also organized balls…

Fola: Yeah.

Tuck: … and I loved seeing – I saw some videos and some photos. It looks so fun. Had you been to balls before you started organizing them?

Fola: Oh yes, I have. Initially – like, prior to 2018 – I did not even know there were balls in Nigeria. But they were like, very underground balls. It was later I found that there were so many balls, but they were extremely underground. They were really amazing, and it was at that time that I saw *Paris is Burning*, and I’m like, “Wow, I cannot believe I actually got to experience this in Nigeria.” And it just got me thinking like, “I would love to do this, but invite more people,” because ones I attended were like very few people in attendance. I wanted more queer people to experience that experience. And so I partnered with someone, this was 2022. That was the first ball I organized. It was during Pride Month. It was called “Pride in Lagos.” And we did it together, and everyone loved it that attended, and they were like, “Oh my God, please do another one soon.” And the plan initially was to only host them during Pride Month. But for last year’s Halloween, we did another one again, and people attended and people really loved it. And so it just became bigger and bigger.

Then this year I hosted two balls. One’s for Pride in Lagos. Another one was called Fourteen Years and a Ball, which was really big, really official. It was almost, like, very mainstream. We invited different queer people from different walks of life. And we told them this is gonna be a safe space, just so everyone feels safe. And we made sure there were changing rooms or bathing rooms for people who don’t want to wear their costume or their outfit from their houses, so they don’t get harassed by police or anyone. They can come to the venue and change their outfit, and walk in the categories they like to walk in. We just made sure it was a place where everyone felt welcome and respectful of your gender identity, sexual orientation or expression, and we were able to achieve that and it was really beautiful. And we’re gonna do another one next year.

Tuck: You alluded to the safety, and not getting arrested. Can you talk through the different anti-LGBTQ laws in Nigeria that might get in the way of this queer organizing that you're doing?

Fola: Absolutely. So, the law that criminalizes queer people here in Nigeria is called the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act. It’s existed since 2014, and basically there are different sections of the law that criminalizes queer people. But there are not specific bills or laws that criminalizes trans people. But what the authorities do is that they weaponize these laws too against trans people and gender nonconforming people, because they don’t recognize that there are other genders other than male / female. So, that’s a problem. So, there are not specific laws that affect trans people.

Part of that law now has been repealed. So like, we couldn’t have queer gatherings before; that was against the law. But that section has been repealed now. But like, we kept “hush hush” so we didn’t attract unwarranted attention from non-state and state individuals. So we just make sure we try as much as we can to inform other queer people of the section that got repealed. So when they find themselves in any kind of position, they’re able to defend themselves, and know the law, and know that they got unlawfully detained, if they were.

Tuck: When you're talking to other people about coming out, potentially, in Nigeria, do you have advice for them about how to stay safe in those situations? About how public to be?

Fola: Oh, so what I encourage people to do is to do whatever they want to do. Like, you can look up to people and draw inspiration from them. But at the same time, our stories are similar but our stories are very, very different, you know? It’s easier for a trans person here to find themselves going through their transition and everything away from their family. Because the worst issue here is when a trans person is finding themself, but they still live with their family. You know, sometimes their family — some of their family members have to take them for deliverance and other extreme religious methods. Or even throw them out of their houses. We’ve dealt with so many cases of homelessness when it comes to trans people here in Nigeria.

So my advice to trans people here has always been: put yourself first. Make sure it’s the right situation. I know that sometimes it feels like there’s never a right time to come out. But when you’re ready to come out, you do not owe anyone visibility. You don’t have to be out or out yourself, you know? You are still valid; it doesn’t change the fact that you’re a trans person. Don’t think that you owe anyone visibility because visibility comes at its own cost, you know? I mean, I’ve dealt with my own share of transphobia and extreme consequences, backlash for my visibility. So, I wouldn’t advise anyone to do it unless they really want to.

Tuck: Yeah. Well, you were the first openly trans person to walk in Lagos Fashion Week, famously. I have heard that story, but can you tell the story to our listeners?

Fola: Yeah. It was last year. Initially it was just as a joke, I think. [Both laugh] I mean, first of all, I’ve always had the dream since I was a kid that I wanted to be a runway model. I’ve always had that dream. But it felt like a longshot, really; just one of those fantasies or whatnot. Then last year, I think I posted on TikTok, I was working and I was like, “Oh, it would be nice to get casted to walk the runways of Lagos Fashion Week. So my friend said, “Go for it, I think you should, I think it would be great!” And then my friend said, “Oh, Fola, I know that if you want to do this, you know you can really do it, you just have to work towards that point, and you can put your mind on anything, you can achieve it.” And I was like, “You know what… that’s true.” And then at that time, it was March, and Fashion Week is usually during October. And in March I started like reaching out to designers already, because I *knew* I wasn’t going to get invited to Lagos Fashion Week. That’s definitely not going to happen. Even if I go for casting calls, I would never get picked because I’m a trans person.

And so I started reaching out to like the designers individually, the ones that I had relationships with. And the ones that I know their social media, or the ones that I know have commented on my posts. And I did reach out to a few around September; I got a lot of “no”s. Then one designer finally confirmed and said “OK, you walk for me for my show in October.” And I was really excited, I already went in to do the fitting, everything was great. I was really excited, I already had announced it to my friends, “Yeah, I’m walking in Fashion Week,” whatever. Then two days before our show, the show got canceled!

And I’m like what?! I’m like, this is crazy. And this is two days before the Lagos Fashion Week as well. And I’m like, “Damn, I guess I’ll try again next year.” Then I went to the Lagos Fashion Week Instagram page. They posted the show schedule. And I’m like, you know, let me just go through this whole show schedule and see, check out the designer list and see, any designers that I am familiar with that I think would make me work, or let me just reach out to a few, whatever. Then I went on the schedule, looked at all the designers, and I saw two designers. I’m like, “You know what? This designer, I’m familiar with their clothing, their pieces are very gender-neutral. Let me just reach out to both of them. At least one of them is going to tell me yes.” I reached out to of both of them and within like an hour they both replied and said they’d love to have me, and I’m like “Wow, OK!”

And basically, that’s how it happened. So whenever people ask me, “Oh, you were invited to walk in Lagos Fashion Week?” I’m like “I wasn’t invited, no.” [Both laugh] I was very persistent. And I was reaching out. Because I remember being backstage at this show, I was getting so much side-eyes from the organizers. They were like, “Why is this bitch here?” [Tuck laughs]

It was just so many people judging, not wanting me to be there, but I was like, yeah, I’m here, there’s nothing to do about it. So that’s how it happened.

Tuck: Yeah. And you had had a background in fashion before this and before you came out. So when you came out as trans, did that change the way that you approached the fashion industry or the way that it treated you? I assume it changed the way it treated you. [Laughs]

Fola: Oh absolutely. It changed the way they treated me**.** It changed the way I approached the fashion industry. I mean, because I used to work in fashion, that was the reason why I had some relationships with designers and people that work in the fashion industry and whatnot. But when I started becoming very vocal about my gender identity and my transness… o, it gave crickets. [Laughs] Invitations stopped coming in, they stopped reaching out. I was basically told at some point by a PR person that I was blacklisted from most PR lists. And I’m like “OK, slay!” [Both laugh] Whatever. So I saw it coming, but it wasn’t something that moved me, to be honest. I’m like yeah, I don’t need you guys, that’s fine.

Tuck: Yeah.

Fola: At some point, some of the people who work in fashion started gravitating more towards me. The industry in Nigeria is very superficial. It’s very elitist. So, I would say like when I started garnering more like professional recognition for my work by myself, a lot of people wanted to seem cool, I guess. [unintelligible.] So, they started inviting me for stuff and started including me in stuff. I just make sure like I pick-and-choose the kind of stuff I go for, and make sure like I decide the kind of people I am around in the fashion industry. There are so many who are not doing it for the right reasons, you know?

So, I took a major step back. Even though I came out, I get lots of invitations for stuff. I just make sure do I not go for everything. Because if it doesn’t go with what I believe in, I shouldn’t be there. If it is going to be [unintelligible], I shouldn’t be there. And so many of these people are also very about using trans and nonbinary people’s aesthetics without including them, themselves.

Tuck: I was reading that during the [#EndSARS](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/End_SARS) protest; you were making clothing for those protests. I was wondering what the relationship is for you between your fashion and activism.

Fola: So, my clothing line is very athleisure and t-shirts. During the #EndSARS protest, I just thought of like, “What way can I support? Just like lend a little hand?” And I was like “OK, you know what, let’s print shirts that say “Queer Lives Matter.” Because a friend of mine – Matthew, they are a nonbinary person – they had chanted “Queer Lives Matter” and gotten, at the protest run by cishetero people, they tried to shun them. And I’m like, “no, fuck that!”

So I decided to print the shirt that said “Queer Lives Matter.” And gave it to them and a couple of other protesters to wear the following day. And that’s how it came along. And my brand is very, I mean, it’s by a queer person, so it’s very, very queer. I have shirts that say “Ask Me About My Pronouns” which I see everywhere; it’s one of our best-selling shirts. And I have another shirt that basically says “Disrupting the Cistem,” but spelled C-I-S-t-e-m. So my brand is very mainstream. It’s for everyone. It’s for heteros, it’s for gender-nonconforming, it’s for *everyone*. But it’s very much queer at the forefront.

Tuck: Do you have plans for future projects with that? We saw there might be another fashion line you're working on, or something else that we saw you tag, so just wondering what you have next in the fashion pipeline.

Fola: Oh, yes yes yes. I’m currently working on a new clothing line that’s going to be very African, very batik. So I’m currently working on that. I’m actually taking batik classes right now so I can also learn batik techniques for myself. So I can also like work with Africans and actually know what I’m talking about. So there’s that going on. Also, Dolls Activities are so much in the works. We’re currently looking for more donors because we’re trying to work on securing a safe house so that we can house trans people that do not have accommodations. We’re also having an event coming up in March for Trans Day of Visibility. So there’s so much in the plans and I’m working on that. And fingers crossed for whatever comes next.

Tuck: You've also, I saw, done some acting recently. How did you get into acting?

Fola: [Laughs] This was very funny. I am friends with filmmakers, and my friend had saw one of my TikToks where I like, lip-syncing, and she said, “Oh my God, I think you’d be good at acting!” [Laughs] I was like, “Yes! Bitch I wanted to! I wanted to act but my parents wouldn’t allow me, they wouldn’t allow me to; acting had been one of my dreams.” And she was like, “OK, I’ll let you know if I ever have a role that fits you.” And I’m like, “OK, no problem.”

And then like fast-forward to like a year later, she just sends me a script and says, “OK, I think I found a role that fits you.” And I’m like, “OK, no problem.” And it was a short film. And it was shot within a day, and there were just such good directors that I just felt really comfortable. And I think it actually won a film festival recently, and it’s just amazing that the first thing I did, it won something.

Tuck: Yeah, that's great! Are you playing trans roles, or just roles for women generally when you're acting?

Fola: So, I’ve played two different roles now, and they were both trans roles. But I’m definitely open to playing a cis women role, non-binary role – definitely open to that. But I think as a trans person, I felt more comfortable playing a trans person role. Because I’m very new to acting, so it’s very much my safe comfort zone. [Laughs]

Tuck: Yeah, definitely! Well, I have a silly question for you. I saw on Twitter that you were into “And Just Like That…” [Both laugh]. So, speaking of film: which “Sex and The City” character would you be, do you think?

Fola: Hmm… I’ve never thought about this. [Laughs] Oh but growing up, I would say I would be Carrie Bradshaw. [Laughs]

Tuck: Yeah! The main character – of *course*, of course. [Laughs]

Fola: The main character. But now, I think I would be Seema, the brown woman. She’s just very fabulous, I love her.

Tuck: Yeah, yes, totally. I read somewhere that you have a degree in — is it international relations, is that right?

Fola:Yes, I do. But I’ve never used my degree before. [Laughs]

Tuck: Well, I was gonna say: is that a field – if you weren't busy doing all of this fashion, and modeling, and acting, and all of these creative things – is that something that you're still interested in? Or what made you pursue that?

Fola: Absolutely, I am still very much interested in it. I would love…I’ve tried applying for different roles in this field, but unfortunately it always comes down to the fact I’m a trans person. And of course I am not experienced in this field, even though I’ve had my degree for a long time, because I didn’t have the chance to be able to work and get any form of experience in international relations. So, I’ve never been able to use it, but I definitely would be open to work and use my degree because having a stable income is something that I very much need. But it is what it is.

Tuck: Yeah. What's it like in Nigeria trying to access gender-affirming healthcare and legal transition?

Fola: Initially when I started transition – I started my journey – I had to get my gender-affirming care shipped in from the U.S., actually. I had friends there who helped me buy and get it here. I still do, but like now, lately we’ve been able to look for ways that we can bridge the gap, because getting them shipped in from the U.S. is very, very expensive to access with more expenses for shipping and everything. So what we do now is we share knowledge between each other. Like we have doctors that are also queer that recommend certain medications to us. I mean, they don’t work as quickly as the ones that would probably be sent to us from the U.S. or other countries. But it’s a journey, and yeah, we make it work.

Tuck: Is there a way to change your gender legally in Nigeria?

Fola: Not at all. At *all*. No.

Tuck: OK. So how often does that affect your life and your ability to just move through the world safely?

Fola: It has affected me immensely. I have not been able to travel at all, you know, due to this. Even just like traveling interstate – just within the country, and taking flights – it’s insane, it’s just difficult. Not to talk of like, trans travel internationally. Because the same issue I go through is the same issue so many trans people I know also go through. Because it is very hard, even trying to change something as little as your gender on your passport, on top of your name.

Especially if you have already gotten a passport before you transitioned.

So, it’s extremely hard, and it’s something that I’m going through personally. It’s just something I tell myself, “You know what? Until this whole thing fixes itself, maybe I’m just gonna sit down.” Or until I’m comfortable, ready to face whatever trauma that comes with travelling out of the country. Then I’ll do it.

Tuck: Yeah. Well, I think we touched on this a little bit: do you have advice for people living in parts of the US or other countries where being trans is being more and more criminalized? Do you have any advice as someone who has to… has had to live through all of these laws against queer and trans people in Nigeria?

Fola: Yeah, like I said before: just make sure you are in a safe environment**.** And just try, because it’s very difficult, because I didn’t even know what a safe environment even meant for me because…

Tuck: Right.

Fola: Nowhere feels safe here. Because you basically have to have a certain level of privilege to be able to afford a level of safety. Because everything is very monetary because nothing works, or hardly anything works here. So what I’ll just say is that… just reach out to people that you think are going through the same journey that you’re currently going through. Ask them for advice, ask them for ways they... how they were able to get help. And feel free to reach out, don’t be shy. Don’t feel any kind of shame, just reach out to as many trans people and queer people as you can.

There are a lot of queer organizations here that help trans people. You can reach out to my platform, Dolls Activities. We do as much as we can to redirect trans people to other organizations that focus more on the kind of issues that anyone is facing; as far as, you know, mental health, securing housing. There are so many organizations here that give back to queer people.

Just know that you do not owe anyone visibility. And also, [unintelligible], trans people go through gender dysphoria a lot, it’s one of our biggest issues. And just know that you are valid in your gender identity irrespective of your expression. You don’t owe anyone masculinity or femininity. You can just simply be. And you don’t have to get on gender-affirming care to be valid as a trans person. Because not everyone has access to it, it’s expensive. It is what it is, and health care here is shit. And that’s my major advice. Just take your time, be patient, and work on your own time.

Tuck: Yeah. A lot of times when I am talking to cis people here in the US, they’ll ask me if I think things are getting better or worse for trans people here. And I think it's both at the same time; I think in some ways it's getting a lot worse, and in other ways it's getting better.

Fola: You’re so right.

Tuck: Is that how you feel, or what is it like in Nigeria?

Fola:Absolutely. So, at the time when I transitioned, like I said, there were no trans people that I could have reached out to, that I knew. But after I became more visible, I realized that there were so many trans people. But they were just stealth. They were not visible, they were just living their life in peace because they do not want any form of problems for themselves. But after I became very, very, very visible, I would say I think a lot of trans people also became very visible, and that visibility came at its own cost, you know? It came with like, so many more harassment, so many more transphobia, and a lot of pain. So, the good, I would say, is that there are so many that I can name off the top of my head… I can name about ten trans people that I know.

Fola: I did not know them before, you know? I did not know any trans people before, but personally, like I said, I don’t know if I had seen trans people personally. So that is the good. But the bad is that with this visibility comes more issues. Because I’ve had issues where like, a trans person was like, they went out to meet someone, and it turns out that the person was trying to ambush them, and the person was trying to record them naked. All these insane cases, you know? In one case of social media harassment, I mean, in my own case – my video went viral online, and like my neighbors saw it and were threatening me and giving me death threats. These are the bad things that are occurring. But honestly the bad [unintelligible] trans people and queer people in general, we are just pushing back against the law. And like against whatever. And honestly it’s beautiful to see. Everyone is like, spare me the consequences, they’re just trying to live their lives. And honestly, I’m just happy to see it.

Tuck: Just thinking about the homophobia and transphobia in Nigeria – I know that a lot of it comes from religion…

Fola: Mhmm.

Tuck: …and I read this Reuters article once that said, [read in a mocking tone] “Nigeria is a deeply religious country, where many reject homosexuality as a corrupting western import.” But I was just like, isn’t Christianity also a western import? [Laughs]

Fola: Thank you! [Both laugh]

Tuck: So, I guess I was just wondering: how recent is this level of homophobia and transphobia? Was there a time, if we go far back enough, that this wasn't happening?

Fola: Well, first of all, queerness has always been very African**.**

Tuck: Mhmm.

Fola: Our biggest problem as Africans is we hardly archive. That is our biggest issue. Like, there are literally very few trans people being archived. So there are people that existed [unintelligible], you know? They were African, they’re Nigerian. They were even prominent in the royal houses. They would perform. They were gender nonconforming and would perform for the royalty, for the king, and everyone loved them. There have been cases where there were kings who would take gender-nonconforming as their concubine. So, queerness has always existed. I would say it was after religion came to Africa and brainwashed Africans, and we got stuck with that way of life. And now it’s very, very hard for Africans to accept that queerness existed before Christianity.

And plus, Africans are just very hypocritical, like any part of the world, because [unintelligible], there are so many people that are still queer. But it’s a thing where they’d rather you be queer in your room, in your closet, but like don’t talk about it. My parents told me that! My parents told me, can’t you not just, in my dad’s words, “Can you not just be gay in peace?” And I’m like, what does that even mean? I’m not gay.

So… [Laughs] So yeah, it’s the same thing with so many people here. We have politicians here that signed the same bill that are also queer. Like that sleep with same sex, you know? Different cases. Yeah, so it’s just hypocrisy.

Tuck: I just wanted to ask – I know you've done a lot of interviews with people who are very well-intentioned, but … I heard one person in an interview ask you, “Can men be trans?” so it's a pretty 101-level discussion of transness. Is there anything that you have wanted to talk about publicly about being trans in Nigeria – or just being trans in general – that you feel like you haven't gotten to talk about publicly, because of the sort of 101 level? Or do you feel like we covered everything?

Fola: Oh, I’m willing to talk about everything; I do not hold back. [Tuck laughs] I do not hold back my opinions when it comes to transness at all. I’ve done a lot of panel discussions where I’ve made sure they’re very, very trans-focused. I looked up the organizers [unintelligible] a panel discussion and I’m like, “exactly, thank you.” [Laughs] And so I made sure I amplify mostly trans people, because we get lost within the issues the community faces over here. And my opinion is that we are here – the trans community – trans and nonbinary people are actually at the forefront of any queer liberation. So our issue should be at the forefront, you know?

Tuck: Mhmm.

Fola: They are always the last to be attended to. So I make sure I talk about everything trans-related. Also, trans people have no access to healthcare, period. And we can’t go to regular hospitals. I remember one of my trans acquaintances went to a private hospital, and she was basically pulled out of the clinic because they were like, “Who are you? you’re a freak,” you know? Imagine being pulled out just because you want a common checkup. I’ve not been to the hospital to check myself in over two years, which is insane, and I’m worried about that. You know? Because I want to make sure I’m in good health and I don’t want any kind of sickness to sneak up on me.

But at the same time, I’m keeping myself from it because I don’t want to get kicked out of the clinic or the hospital. So, issues like this, or even issues as far as, like, housing – I actually ask my cis friends to put their name down for my accommodations because I can’t use my name. So yeah, different cases like that.

Tuck: Yeah, it's so wild. That even happens…I lived in a state where there was a law that said you couldn't discriminate against trans people at the doctor, but they don't follow the law. So they'll still do the same thing where they’ll kick you out for being trans, and there’s still nothing you can do except to say, “Well that's not the law!” And they’re like “we don't care!” [Laughs]

Fola: They say they don’t care. it’s the same as what I was saying as well – there’s no specific law that criminalizes trans people here.

Tuck: Right, right.

Fola: But they don’t care!

Tuck: Yeah. Alright. Well, the way we always end the show is by asking: in your ideal world, what would the future of gender look like?

Fola: In my ideal world, the future of gender is going to be so diverse. Like, everyone can just be who you are, without having to explain who you are to anyone. Because it’s just like, embraced. Just like, “Yeah…umm… this is my pronouns.” “Oh, OK! This is your pronouns,” and just keep it moving. Like not any major question or any major thing, like, “Oh my God, you’re so brave. Oh my God, you’re just….” We are just simply people, you know? [Both laugh] If one more person tells me I’m “brave,” I’m going to lose it. [Both laugh] I’m just a girl.

Tuck: [Laughs] Absolutely.

Fola: So, that’s what my ideal future for trans – or, for the *world* would look like. Easier, it’s easier. I tell everyone, just do your thing, you know? We will support you. If you’re bi, good for you. Whatever you want at this point. At this point it’s just like, just know that gender is not binary. Gender is diverse. We as humans are diverse, you know? We do not think the same way, our spirits are not the exact same, so why would you think gender, of all things, will be binary? Even though intersex people exist, you know? All these different variations of people. So, yeah. That would be my ideal future. Just for everyone to like, live their lives in peace. Where anyone doesn’t have to come out to your parents, or to anyone. They can simply be. Yeah.

[Gender Reveal theme music plays]

Tuck: That’s going to do it for this week’s show! You can find archives of Fola’s life and work on TikTok @folafrancis and on Instagram @folafrancis and @thefolafrancis.

We are at [genderpodcast.com](http://genderpodcast.com), where we’ve got transcripts of every episode, including this one. You can also go to [patreon.com/gender](http://patreon.com/gender) to sign up for our bonus podcast and our weekly behind the scenes newsletters.

This episode was produced and edited by Ozzy Llinas Goodman and by me, Tuck Woodstock. Special thanks this week to Timi, Afi, MJ, and Liza for helping us navigate how best to go about this.

Our logo is by Ira M. Leigh. Our theme song is by Breakmaster Cylinder. Additional music by our friends at Blue Dot Sessions. We’ll be back next week with more feelings about gender.

Rest in Power, Fola Francis.

[Gender Reveal Theme music plays out and ends]