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There Was a Campus: Nostalgia, Memory and the Formation of University of Nigeria "Campus Kids" Online Communities

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ABSTRACT

The ceremonial opening of the University of Nigeria on 7 October 1960 formed part of Nigeria's independence celebrations, linking the destiny of the institution to the nation. Seven years later, the outbreak of the Nigeria–Biafra war (1967–70) instigated a decoupling. This article reads the war as a turning point in the history of the institution, and examines the post-war dynamics on campus, arguing that the momentum many university academics invested in building Biafra was transferred into the rebuilding of the University of Nigeria. In the post-war context, community building was a central aspect of the university's restorative project, and the experience of "campus kids", the children of university staff growing up on campus, was shaped by the sense of kinship that was fostered between families. With a focus on campus kids from the 1980s and 1990s, this article explores the use of social media in facilitating the reconnection of campus kids online. It discusses the use of online spaces in the remapping of the past, community building and socio-economic support, and suggests that these digital communities present a contemporary online iteration of the home-town association.

KEYWORDS

University of Nigeria; Biafra; campus kids; Nigeria; social media

ABSTRACT IN IGBO

Emume mmeghe nke Mahadum Naijiria n'ụbọchị 7th October 1960 hiwere akụkụ mmemme nnwere onwe nke Naijiria, na-ejikọta ọdịnihu nke ụlọakwụkwọ na mba ahụ. Afọ asaa ka e mesịrị, ntiwapụ nke agha Naijiria na Biafra (1967-1970) kpalitere ntọhapụ ha. Akụkọ a na-agụnye agha ahụ dị ka oge mgbanwe na akụkọ ihe mere eme nke ụlọakwụkwọ ahụ, ma nyochaa usoro agha mgbe agha gasịrị na ogige mahadum bụ campus, na-ekwu na a na-ebufe ọkụ ọtụtụ ndị mahadum tinyere n'irụ Biafra n'ime irụghachi Mahadum Nigeria. N'ihe gbasara agha mgbe agha gasịrị, ụlọ obodo bụ akụkụ etiti nke ọrụ mweghachi nke mahadum, na ahụmịhe nke ụmụaka ogige mahadum a na-akpọ campus kids. Ụmụ ndị ọrụ mahadum na-etolite na campus, toputara site n'echiche nke ikwu dịgasị n'etiti ezinụlọ ndị a. Site n'ilekwasị anya na campus kids sitere n'afọ 1980 na 1990, edemede a na-enyocha iji mgbasa ozi ọha na eze social media na-eme ka campus kids zukotagharịa n'ịntanetị. Ọ na-atụle iji oghere ịntanetị na nhazighari nke oge gara aga, njikọ ndị obodo na mmekọrịta akụ na ụba nkwado, ma na-atụ alo na ndị obodo dijitalụ e nwere ugbua na-egosipụta ka nzukọ ime obodo.

ISIOKWU

Mahadum Naijiria; Biafra; ụmụ ogige mahadum; Nigeria; Mgbasa ozi ọha na eze

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The University of Nigeria, whose main campus at Nsukka was opened the year of Nigeria's independence, signalled to a nation that was both confident and eager for the right to self-govern. As the first indigenous university, the University of Nigeria regarded itself as an important educational space that was needed to train the next generation of Nigeria's workforce and to counter the degradation endured during Britain's colonial occupation. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a key figure in Nigeria's independence movement and the country's first president, "founded Nsukka almost as an antidote to [University College] Ibadan" (Ike 1976, 9), which had been established in 1948 as an outpost of the University of London. The University of Nigeria looked to the campus universities of the USA, specifically Michigan State University (MSU), to provide a model for the design of the Nsukka campus and a template for curriculum development. This deliberate move away from the British tertiary educational model was in recognition of the historical ties between Britain and the universities established in British colonies; as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o notes, "the universities and colleges set up in the colonies after the war were meant to produce a native elite which would later help prop up the Empire" (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o 1986, 93). While there was symbolic value in the rejection of the British university model, 1960s America still operated under Jim Crow laws and so the positioning of MSU as a suitable model for the liberatory vision of the University of Nigeria wasn't without its own problems. The ceremonial opening of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) on 7 October 1960 formed part of Nigeria's celebrations following the country's independence from Britain on 1 October 1960. The naming of the University of Nigeria and the timing of its opening signalled "the intention of the founders to link its destiny to the destiny of the Nigerian nation" (Obiechina 1986, xv). The university's motto, "to restore the dignity of man", gestured to Azikiwe's "Nsukka Dream" in which he saw the university playing a central role in the "restitution of man's inalienable birthright to social equality, economic security, political freedom and religious tolerance" (Azikiwe 1986, xiv). Azikiwe's vision for the institution was linked to his broader political philosophy, known as Zikism, which focused on the liberation of African peoples. Zikism played an important part in nationalist political discourse, while also reflective of Azikiwe's Pan-Africanist ideology. Within the University of Nigeria, the extent to which the Zikist objective to "restore the dignity of man" could be realised was debatable, given that, as the university largely catered for those with the socio-economic means to study there, it was unable to directly impact the wider nation. As Claude Ake notes, the objectives and outcomes of independence greatly differed as, "on the whole, political independence in Africa was rarely the heroic achievement it was made out to be; it was often a convenience of deradicalization by accommodation, a mere racial integration of the political elite" (Ake 2001, 4). Within the university system, the coupling of the University of Nigeria's fate to that of the nation meant that, as Nigeria entered into a state of economic decline, so too did the institution.

In addition to its educational function, the University of Nigeria's campus was also home to many university employees and their families. The campus was both the workplace and the family home for many, and this ecosystem of intimacy in which one's personal and professional lives were intertwined shaped the formation of relationships as one's colleagues were also one's neighbours. In this article, the term "campus kids", which refers to the children of university staff who grew up on campus, is extended

to include children who spent much of their time on campus, studying at the university's primary and secondary schools and building close friendships with children who lived on campus. This article engages with those who were campus kids in the 1980s and 1990s, which was a particularly turbulent time in Nigeria, marked by increasingly intense military rule. It was during this period that the take-home pay of academics plummeted, and while members of faculty could have reasonably been described as members of Nigeria's elite during the country's boom years, the reduction in their income led to a fall in social status for many, typifying the polarisation of Nigeria's class structure.

The University of Nigeria's campus kids, much like those at other foundational universities in the country, forged close bonds which are visible in the sustained networks that exist beyond the confines of campus. Unlike in other Nigerian universities, the Nigeria–Biafra war created a heightened appreciation for stability, community and the home as sanctuary. This article brings personal memory[1] into conversation with institutional history in its exploration of the cultivation of community among families on campus. Drawing on a number of archives and scattered sources, it pieces together a history of the development of the University of Nigeria, paying particular attention to the Nigeria–Biafra war. It argues that, with the fall of Biafra, many of the University of Nigeria's academics diverted their energies from nation building to institution and community building, suggesting that the sense of community that developed on campus is intrinsically connected to the post-war experience of reconstruction when a shared sense of purpose galvanised the university's staff and students to work towards salvaging the institution from its ruinous state. This article contends that the nostalgia expressed by campus kids in the wake of the university's decline is rooted in the conception of campus as compound[2] in the immediate post-war era, with the re-establishing of networks online reverberating with the university's post-war community rebuilding efforts. Finally, it examines the use of social media in the maintenance of these communities, and reads the online assemblies of campus kids as a digital reorientation of home-town improvement associations.

There Was a Campus …

By the time of the university's silver jubilee in 1985, it had already borne witness to a tumultuous first three decades of independence, marred by political instability, conflict and economic decline. In the introduction to *The University of Nigeria, 1960–1985*, an edited book marking the institution's twenty-fifth anniversary, Emmanuel Obiechina remarks:

> The University had partaken of the optimism, the tragedies and the restorative vigour of the Nigerian nation, with the watershed formed by the tragic Nigerian Civil War. To tell its story is to place the University in the living current of the nation's evolving history. The story should be told because, in spite of the harsh realities of the struggle to restore the institution, the will to succeed has survived vibrantly in something approaching heroic proportions that recall the optimism and idealism of the early life of the institution. (Obiechina 1986, xvii)

Published during Muhammadu Buhari's first presidency, which marked a return to military rule, the optimism projected by this collection speaks in part to the continuing effort of

institution building through the dual process of reflecting and recording the university's first two and a half decades. This edited volume sought to solidify institutional history and validate the university's accomplishments as it looked to the university's future.

The language of "survival" and "restoration" that Obiechina employs speaks not only of an institution but also to a region emerging out of the devastation of the late 1960s. *The University of Nigeria, 1960–1985* was produced just 15 years after the Nigeria–Biafra war, a war which was fought on the soil of eastern Nigeria. When Biafra announced its secession from Nigeria in May 1967, the destiny of the institution was once again aligned with that of the nation as the University of Nigeria was relaunched as the University of Biafra. Months later, with the fall of Nsukka, the campus was transformed as it became a significant military base for federal forces. UNN staff initially relocated to the University of Nigeria, Enugu Campus (UNEC), but the capturing of Enugu marked a challenging chapter in the university's history when it no longer occupied its own buildings. Rather, its administration was forced to find bases in Umuahia and Owerri, at a time when Biafra's territory was shrinking and suitable accommodation was becoming increasingly sparse. There was immense physical damage to the university infrastructure during the war, and the war had a significant emotional and psychological impact on its staff and students. The destruction of the campus is apparent in two contrasting descriptions of UNN in the preceding months and immediate aftermath of the war. In April 1967, a few months prior to the outbreak of war, Douglas Killam describes UNN as "a wonder of a University, aglow with health and enquiry and forwardness, everything that should exist to serve the nation with disinterested enquiry [and make a] helpful comment on nationhood" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1997, 123). In contrast, Ezenwa-Ohaeto presents a stark image of the "university … in ruins" as it emerged from almost three years of bombardment:

> Buildings had been destroyed, office equipment thoroughly looted, furniture destroyed or carted away, books burnt and the premises deliberately neglected. Refuse had been dumped there and most of the houses and paths had been reclaimed by the encircling forest. It had been used as an army camp by the Nigerian soldiers and their abandoned vehicles and damaged tanks littered the landscape … Students reappeared without being summoned; the staff members were recalled officially. The deprivation of the war years enabled them to adjust to an environment which lacked water, accommodation and electricity. The university functioned without a vice-chancellor throughout the remaining months of 1970, although later a governing council was set up. It was a terrible time for members of the university community, many of whom slept on planks. The classrooms had no chairs and the students sat on cement blocks … the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, commenced in 1970 without the financial power even to renovate its buildings or provide the necessary amenities. (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1997, 156)

UNN was targeted by federal troops during the war as the institution symbolised the resistance, ambition and intellectual nucleus of the young nation. UNN was a source of pride, and it was seen by Biafran forces as hallowed ground that needed to be protected. As Chukwuemeka Ike writes, Christopher Okigbo reportedly told an old classmate that "it was a compulsive urge to keep the Federal troops off the sacred grove of academe that made him take up arms" (Ike 1986, 42). Okigbo, a former assistant librarian at UNN and one of Africa's most promising poets, died just outside Nsukka only a month after the war started.

During the war, the University of Nigeria was seen as a significant site in the agitation for Biafra's independence.

> [A]s the war ended in January 1970 there was reason to fear that there never again would be a University of Nigeria … More than any other institution, Nsukka was regarded by influential federal officials and army officers as the center of the Biafran rebellion … The university had undeniably buzzed with secessionist agitation long before the event, and many of Biafra's most important figures were culled from the Nsukka staff.[3]

In the post-war period, the task of nation building gave way to institution building, which was apparent in the fact that many of the architects of "the principles of Biafra's revolution" had been members of faculty at UNN. During the war, Chinua Achebe was appointed as the chair of the National Guidance Committee, a committee that was tasked with writing "a kind of constitution for Biafra", later known as the Ahiara Declaration, which included "at its core a set of philosophical rules that would serve as a guide for the people of Biafra" (Achebe 2012, 144). This undertaking was born out of the necessity to create a clear and cohesive articulation of what Biafra stood for, and, in turn, what the nation was fighting for. Members of this committee included Ikenna Nzimiro, Emmanuel Obiechina and Eyo Bassey Ndem, all of whom worked at UNN. At Nsukka, many of these scholars turned their attention to agitating for a better institution. They channelled the sense of urgency cultivated during the war into developing a roadmap for the University of Nigeria, which at times meant focusing on the institution's shortcomings.

In 1971, Achebe, Nzimiro and Obiechina,[4] each of whom had contributed to the writing of the Ahiara Declaration, were now faced with a different adversary. They engaged in advancing their vision for Nsukka through the "fiery magazine" (Nwakanma 2006) *Nsukkascope*, a publication which took the university leadership to task. In the wake of the war, the federal government took over the running of the university and appointed Professor Kodilinye as its vice-chancellor. It is often stated that Kodilinye was sent to disrupt and subvert the principles of the university. Kodilinye's attempts to remodel the institution were not only expensive, they were also deemed to be "anachronistic and colonial" (Olisa and Enekwe 1986, 64). The substantial disruption and polarisation that set in during Kodilinye's time as vice-chancellor significantly hampered the University of Nigeria's post-war reconstruction. According to Obi Nwakanma, "*Nsukkascope* fought Kodilinye for Nsukka's soul. Some suffered arrests and detention, but eventually Kodilinye resigned" (Nwakanma 2006). Ezenwa-Ohaeto describes how "the contents of the first issue of *Nsukkascope* fulfilled the requirements of its motto [Devastating, Fearless, Brutal and True] for Achebe's editorial criticized the vice-chancellor for living in splendour in the midst of squalor" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1997, 163). *Nsukkascope*'s motto reveals the ardour with which its editorial board met the challenge to advance the university in spite of all the adversities which faced them. Achebe recounts that "[w]e came out of the Biafra war full of zeal in all kinds of directions" (Hayes n.d, 50) and so the battle for the "soul" of Nsukka noticeably rhymed with the struggle for Biafra. It was with a sense of purpose that the *Nsukkascope* editorial board took bold and decisive actions to publicly criticise their vice-chancellor – a boldness that was undoubtedly fortified during the war.[5] *Nsukkascope*, operating in a mode similar to that of the fourth estate but within the university setting, provided stinging critiques of the University of Nigeria's administration, the

wider sector and the military government's presiding over higher education. Its content focused on issues relevant to the staff and students on campus, which ranged from obituaries for colleagues who had passed away to discussions on pedagogy. *Nsukkascope* primarily featured contributions from members of faculty across disciplines, including political science, medicine and English. As a product of the university, produced by its faculty and often discussing the institution, *Nsukkascope* contributed to the sense of the university as an autonomous unit. Its objective was to advocate for a better institution and to hold those in positions of power accountable.

The immediate post-war period saw new life breathed into the campus following three years marred by death and destruction. University of Nigeria students, many of whom had spent time on the battlefields, also transferred their energies from fighting for their nation to the protracted process of re-establishing their university. For many, the reconstruction project on campus felt like a continuation of the fight for Biafra, as the resilience of the people and the struggle they had engaged in over the last few years fuelled their return to campus.[6] Ulli Beier notes that, in spite of being confronted with a dilapidated campus, "the morale was high – almost exuberant. The experience of war had been traumatic, but they [the students] said that it 'taught us what we are capable of!'" (Ezenwa-Ohaeto 1997, 158). At this moment of rebirth for the university, Nigerian academics based abroad in countries such as Germany, America and Jamaica were hired, many of whom were willing to return home with their families, ready to contribute to the development of the University of Nigeria. While the crisis of the Nigeria–Biafra war had placed Nigeria on a different path, puncturing the promise of independence, the commitment to the Nsukka dream forged by Nnamdi Azikiwe remained alive, albeit transformed. As Lewis and Margaret Zerby note:

> The University as we knew it had been born at the moment that the new nation had been born, and the University as we knew it died the moment that the young nation as we knew it died. Both are reborn, but the new histories of African education will reflect the events which have transpired since May of 1967, for this time each has begun with a history all its own, with documents, and a past. (Zerby and Zerby 1971, 161)

The war brought about the decoupling of the university's aspirations from those of Nigeria, and, in post-war Nigeria, the university became an enclave filled with the energies that had been diverted from the Biafra national project. As Nwando Achebe, herself a campus kid, notes: "[A]ll of the people that came back to Nsukka [after the war] tried to create a state of normalcy for their families. They started trying to rebuild."[7] After years of dislocation and disruption, the desire for stability and community was imperative. While the university was a site of further education, to many the campus served primarily as their home and their community, with its gates evoking the outer markings of a family compound or the boundaries of a town or village. The perception of the university being its own dominion is one that has been echoed by campus kids. Not only was there an affinity among families who lived on campus,[8] but the campus itself was relatively self-sufficient; there were botanical gardens (attached to the department of botany), a zoo (attached to the department of zoology), vast areas for farming attached to the faculty of agriculture (used both for research and in the production of food), as well as shops and medical facilities. Houses on campus had significant garden space, and families would grow crops such as maize, runner beans, cherries and mangoes. The campus

provided nursery, primary and secondary schools, which were attended by campus kids as well as children from the wider community, with school trips organised to sites on campus such as the zoo or botanical gardens. Consequently, it was quite possible not to set foot off campus for extended periods of time, and so this strengthened the already close-knit community.[9]

The Nsukka Dream Deferred?

After the oil boom of the 1970s, in which Nigeria witnessed significant economic growth, the mismanagement of funds, poor economic policies and political corruption meant that any improvements to the economy were temporary. The 1980s were defined by economic decline, and the military government was becoming increasingly hostile to voices critical of its regime. While in many ways the campus had felt like a cocoon, the challenges that existed beyond the University of Nigeria's gates began to seep in. With the rise in gas and kerosene prices, many academics turned to firewood to cook. The Abacha stove, fired by sawdust, came into use during the military dictatorship of Sani Abacha in the 1990s and was frequently used on campus. In families where both parents were employed by the university, the government's withholding of pay to university staff meant that some families faced over six months' arrears in their rent. Nevertheless, in spite of the hardships faced, the university campus was described by campus kids as a place where they felt safe and at home, a space where everyone felt like family, and this communal style of living contributed to the temporary shielding of children from the wider social issues.

By the late 1980s, universities across Nigeria had been involved in strike action in response to the lack of fair wages, contributing to an exodus of university staff who sought employment abroad.[10] Protracted periods without pay or with wages that didn't rise with inflation created financial insecurity and the decrease of capital among university staff. Strikes became commonplace in Nigerian universities, with some strike action lasting months, leading to significant delays to the completion of degrees by members of the student body. Since 1999, there have been 17 university strikes in Nigeria, culminating in almost five years of industrial action (Spooner and Oluwagbile 2022); the most recent strike lasted eight months and ended in October 2022. Writing in 1990, and discussing the dislocation of African literary studies, Biodun Jeyifo describes the "arrested decolonization" which witnessed "the shift away from the African continent, away from African universities where the center of gravity of serious, engaged study and teaching of African literature was initially located" (Jeyifo 1990, 45). This shift, decentring Africa in African literary studies, is indicative of broader shifts at work, as it corresponded with the departure of many academic staff and students to institutions of higher education in North America and Europe. Obi Nwakanma describes this state of "arrested decolonization" or "unfinished nationhood" (Nwakanma 2008, 7) as "the basis of its [Nigeria's] problematic modernity. Nigeria is, in its current formation, a hybrid state; a nation of multiple nations coalescing to form the basis of nationness and national belonging" (Nwakanma 2008, 1). For the University of Nigeria, which had centred decolonisation in its founding principles, the effects of *arrested decolonisation* surmounted the deferral of the Nsukka dream.

The mid-1980s to mid-1990s is a period of life in UNN captured in the writings of author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie.[11] In spite of the national and global shifts which

contributed to the decline of the institution, Adichie's memories are underpinned by nostalgia for her childhood as a campus kid at Nsukka, where her father, James Nwoye Adichie, worked as a professor of statistics, and her mother, Grace Ifeoma Adichie, worked as the university's first female registrar. In her creative non-fiction, Adichie describes the beauty and comfort of the campus and the sense of community that existed: "by the 1980s when I was growing up, Nsukka was manicured, avenues lined by dogonyaro trees snaked between four-room bungalows with porcelain bathtubs and five-room duplexes with gravel-covered driveways" (Adichie 2003). The "local" quality of Nsukka that is exuded in Adichie's writing, brought about by a sense of community, is juxtaposed with the international and intercultural makeup of staff on campus, as Adichie recalls:

> Our neighbors were colorful, literally. There was the childless Ghanaian woman married to the German professor opposite us. I remember looking out the window and watching them walk around their yard, holding hands, stopping often to kiss. Up our street was the Irish woman married to the Nigerian and their brood of eight loud olive-skinned, devastatingly handsome boys. Then there were the Ijeres nearer us – close friends still – whose mother was Swiss and who often came over to our house still chewing on their chicken bones from lunch. Other friends would come too, and we would play raucously outside until someone got hurt and an adult made everyone go home, or until the sun went down and it got too dark to see. (Adichie 2003)

Adichie sets up a cinematic scene in describing the different households which made up her street growing up. The relationships are loving, the boys living locally are "devastatingly handsome" and the children are able to safely play with complete abandon until night falls. These idyllic snapshots of her childhood on campus stand in contrast to the dominant depiction of Nigeria during this era in which freedoms were increasingly being eroded, the economy was in decline and the violence of military rule was escalating. This cosmopolitan depiction of UNN, a place Adichie often describes to her American friends as a "quaint university town in eastern Nigeria" (Adichie 2003), shares many qualities with the metropole. Adichie emphasises the multicultural populace of UNN while at the same time depicting a shared identity born out of their overlapping lives and intertwined domesticities. While nostalgic, the version of UNN that Adichie presents provides a microcosmic image of what the nation could have been or is striving to be, in a setting in which ethnic, national or cultural difference enriches society and diversity does not inhibit the development of a sense of commonality. As Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley argue, nostalgia "can then be seen as not only a search for ontological security in the past, but also as a means of taking one's bearings for the road ahead in the uncertainties of the present … Nostalgia can be both melancholic and utopian" (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 921). UNN is presented in Adichie's non-fiction writing as a place of immense joy, but that joy was found not just in places but also in people. While there is the possibility for Adichie to return to Nsukka, she is unable to return to the UNN of her childhood.

#ForeverACampusKid

When I visited UNEC in 2018, I did so with my friend and colleague Yvonne Mbanefo, who gave me a tour of the campus that she called home when she was growing up.[12] We had

made the journey in an effort to interview one of UNEC's professors for a project we were working on. As we entered through the main gates, Yvonne began taking photos of the campus, from library buildings to the carefully tended plants. With a growing catalogue of images saved to her mobile phone, she selected a few to upload to Facebook, accompanied by the following text: "Guess where I am!!!! I spent my formative yrs within the walls of this compound #foreveracampuskid #lionsandlionesses #unn #unec #Enugucampus".[13] We arrived at the professor's office and settled down into our discussion with him. When we emerged from our meeting an hour and a half later, we could see the flurry of excitement her online post had caused as many of her fellow campus kids had enthusiastically responded, some reflecting on their time at UNEC and others requesting photos be taken of their former homes. The post was liked over 150 times, and responses to it came flooding in with over 80 comments made, many of which conveyed the following sentiments: "Sweet memories … my home!", "Home is where the heart is, we didnt [*sic*] know how privileged we were living there especially as kids", "Where it all started … the foundation … #foreverhome" and "Best years of my life!"[14]

Responses to Yvonne Mbanefo's Facebook post reveal the loose network of "campus kids" with whom she has maintained contact, in spite of her own relocation to the UK over two decades ago. The period alluded to in what Yvonne describes as her "formative years" includes a time in the 1980s and 1990s when many academics left Nigeria, including Yvonne's own father. Many universities went into a state of accelerated decline, as one campus kid notes: "our taps stopped running water ages ago, like in the late 80s/early 90s".[15] For the writer Chika Unigwe, whose childhood home was just beyond the UNEC gates and who studied for her undergraduate degree at UNN,

> What you shouldn't romanticise is the reality of Nsukka, and by the reality I mean the structures and the buildings, really dilapidating with students overcrowded in hostels because there is no room for them, with professors teaching computer sciences with no computer in sight … even though we could see Nsukka deteriorating, we lived under the illusion that the deterioration was temporary.[16]

In Unigwe's description of UNN, the nostalgia for what the university used to be mediated her perception of it as a student. The imagined UNN did not correspond with its reality, and in spite of her real-world experience, there was a suspension of disbelief in the expectation that once again UNN would be restored to its former glory. Unigwe's comments show that nostalgia for the University of Nigeria isn't a recent phenomenon; rather, it mitigated some of the increasingly apparent problems the university had been facing. The inertia that accompanies discussions of the university's dilapidation stands in contrast to the discussion of dereliction after the war. In 1970, presented with the destruction of the campus, the momentum to rebuild the university was propelled by the ideals and reinvigoration of the Nsukka dream. The wave of determination and the tenacity of Nsukka's students and staff were instrumental in the re-establishment of the University of Nigeria. The slow and steady decline signalled in Unigwe's statement was born of decades of underfunding which brought about widespread disillusionment among staff. The post-war optimism and belief in the regeneration of Nsukka had subsided, as the full effects of the chronic neglect following the government's takeover of the university became apparent.

For many, the nostalgia that codifies campus kids' reminiscences of the University of Nsukka extends beyond their own individual experiences, as it is also tied to the

inheritance of memories of independence, the war and post-war politics which informed the interpersonal dynamics on campus. The experience of loss campus kids feel is layered – loss associated with Biafra (loss of life, property, countries), the dispersal of members of the university community during military rule in the 1980s and 1990s, as well as the loss of a childhood home. The nostalgia for life on campus facilitates the strengthening of a collective campus kid identity, of which Fred Davis notes that "nostalgic experience" plays a role "in engendering *collective* identities among people generally, but most especially among members of 'the same generation'" (Davis 2011, 448). For Pickering and Keightley:

> The experience of loss is endemic to living in modernity, regardless of whatever version of it applies in any particular time or place. Whether through war, revolution or regime change, mass involuntary migration and emigration, or less dramatically through social mobility or social redevelopment and the dispersion of existing communities built up over time, change and attendant feelings of loss have altered how the past is seen and considered. (Pickering and Keightley 2006, 920–921)

The fostering of online communities among campus kids facilitates a greater sense of permanence, albeit virtual, for the assembly of this geographically unmoored group who share collective memories of a former physical home on campus. The communal act of remembering alters the sense of loss from that of the individual to that of the group, and this group act of remembering offers up new sites for the growth and re-establishment of this community.

Yvonne Mbanefo's Facebook post was generative in increasing the connections among campus kids, as respondents would tag other campus kids in their responses, especially if an image was of personal significance, broadening the conversation and widening the network. Each image uploaded on this post had its own accompanying dialogue as campus kids responded to the visual prompts. The discussions that ensued ranged from reflections on the recognisability of the site captured in the photos to sadness at the campus's state of disrepair and pleasant surprise at the areas that had been well maintained. The photos served as a stimulus for campus kids to share childhood stories linked to the photographed locations. These stories capture life on campus as seen through the eyes of the young people living there during the 1980s and 1990s. The responses to these images begin to produce a map of the campus that is informed by personal relationships and experiences, as well as by specific locational knowledge. Sites are described in relation to particular events which took place in them or in terms of who lived in close proximity to them. Thus, campus kids take on the role of the cartographer, and the map that emerges is intelligible to those who share this transitory and experiential knowledge of campus life. While most of those who responded to the post no longer have family living on campus, the community that has been cultivated has now found a home online, aided by social media. The response generated by this post is indicative of the sustenance of a globally dispersed community whose coming together is facilitated by the geographical focal point of the campus. The capacity for online spaces focused on the past to foster a broader sense of community and identity in the present forms part of the discussion of James Yékú and Ayobami Ojebode's engagement with the Facebook group the Nigeria Nostalgia Project (NNP),[17] as they note that the "reconstruction of history in the online community serves to buttress a nostalgic longing for the past that could potentially foster national bonding as well as shared and collective identity

among its members, even as they debate different aspects of the country's invaluable past" (Yékú and Ojebode 2021, 510). Similarly among campus kids, the convergence online to engage with aspects of their past experiences growing up on campus also facilitates a collective identity, but in this instance it centres around a campus kid identity rather than a national identity. The collective nostalgia expressed by campus kids is exacerbated by the impermanence of their campus homes. As residential accommodation on campus is reserved for members of academic staff, there is an understanding that these homes are linked to employment status. The hashtag used by one campus kid, #foreverhome, defies the transient nature of campus accommodation by invoking an idea of home which isn't bound to the occupancy of a particular building. In this way, representation of the campus as home is adjacent to the notion of the home town which one can always claim, even if there is no distinct site to return to.

The impermanent nature of housing on campus is discussed in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's essay "The Writing Life", in which she captures her emotional response to her parents moving out of their family home following their retirement from UNN. Here, Adichie expresses a strong connection to their campus home and fantasises about the possibility of reclaiming it:

> They talked about the hiring of lorries, the buying of cartons. They sounded practical and calm. How could they not see how momentous this was, that we were leaving behind 25 years of our lives. But of course they did; they simply are not as much given to drama as I am. While they talked about the old furniture they had given out, I entertained wild thoughts: I will find a way to become fantastically rich and will bribe the university into giving me the house back. (Adichie 2007)

While Adichie describes her response as dramatic, she captures the difference in campus kids' relationship to their campus homes from that of their parents. The communities forged on campus are often formative aspects of their childhood, and their homes are largely places of safety and comfort in their early lives. In facing the vacation of these homes, a chasm between past and present becomes increasingly apparent. Adichie's immediate thought of how to reclaim this home signals to her longing for an irrecoverable past as her home on campus now retreats into the realm of memory.

In a 2003 publication, Ike Anya, whose family were neighbours with the Adichies at UNN, credits "Heart Is Where the Home Was", Adichie's "stirring account of a recent visit to Nsukka", as inspiration "to think about putting together an anthology to be titled *Umu Nsukka: The Children of Nsukka*, in celebration of the small university town where we grew up" (Anya 2003). Anya, and his co-editor Unoma Azuah, circulated a call for submissions on "The Nigerian Village Square", an online chat forum and precursor to web 2.0 social media platforms. Bringing this call to the digital public sphere broadened the possibilities for such a project as it opened up the conversation to a geographically dispersed network who convened on this site. Although the publication didn't come to fruition, submissions were made by campus kids and former UNN students, and in recent years Anya has revisited the idea of publishing this collection.[18] *Umu Nsukka*, which was intended to include poetry, memoir and stories, once again signals to the literary heritage of Nsukka and exhibited the desire among campus kids to share their stories. The proposed title for this collection, *Umu Nsukka*, is reminiscent of an Igbo formulation for the naming of clans and villages, many of which begin with "Umu" or

"Children", arguably the most famous of which is the fictional Umuofia in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The choice of name for the collection is indicative of the familial connection felt among campus kids and resonates with the kinship bonds that are at the foundation of clans and villages. The intention to create this publication reveals an effort to grow an archive on the institution with accounts that differ from those of texts such as *The University of Nigeria, 1960–1985*, as they provide personal rather than institutional histories. These contributions would not be bound by frameworks that require one to consider the past in relation to a vision for the future; rather, the nature of this text made space for the act of remembering and reconnecting.

The ongoing public interactions of campus kids are visible on platforms such as Facebook,[19] Twitter and Instagram, but there are also closed formal networks on WhatsApp which facilitate communication among particular groupings of campus kids, such as chapters for specific cohorts[20] or for campus kids based in a particular country. Beyond a space for reflection on a shared past, these networks have a social function as they have been effective in supporting members through difficult life events, as well as providing a network for professional collaboration. In the event that someone's parent dies, members of these networks contribute money and attend the funeral if they can. In an instance described to me by Chuka Umeano, a campus kid who had relocated to Germany had a breakdown and was largely isolated from friends and family. When details of what happened to him circulated among campus kids, they began fundraising and raised enough money to finance his return to Nigeria and pay for his medical treatment, medicine, a house help and his initial upkeep. Members of this network who were based in or visiting Nigeria would spend time with him and share photos and details of his progress with the rest of the campus kids group. He made a steady recovery and is now reportedly in good health. In the collective efforts to assist a fellow campus kid, their network on social media grew as information was shared with campus kids outside the group. These informal affiliations replicate existing social structures in Nigeria, namely those of kinship groups in which there is a sense of collective responsibility for their members. While there is a significant number of Igbo members within these groups, the groups' makeup reflects the cosmopolitan constitution of the post-war University of Nigeria: within them are members who trace their heritage to other parts of the world, with members based both in Nigeria and across the globe. This diverse group of people have developed and maintained a shared identity which is rooted in their earlier lives on campus, and the sustenance of this community is facilitated by maintaining contact through social media. This sense of community is often mobilised when needed and reflects a particular iteration of the University of Nigeria's motto, "to restore the dignity of man", albeit in a way that differs greatly from its original conception.

The movement from the physical university compound to a "digital compound", where those spread across the globe are able to maintain contact with each other and a connection to home, provides an online reconfiguration of the home-town improvement union. Based on a study in Enugu in 1961, Josef Gugler describes eastern Nigerians in town as living in "a dual system: they belong not only to the town they live in, but also to the village they have come from" (Gugler 1971, 413). The commitment to the village was formalised:

> Igbo diaspora communities formed "home town" improvement unions that had two principal aims. The first was to look after the welfare of kin affiliated to the group abroad

> (the most important function being help with transporting the body of deceased members or their close family "home" for burial). The second was to improve the welfare and development of the home town community through the construction of schools and hospitals and sometimes contributing to scholarship funds to enable "illustrious" sons of the soil to become doctors and lawyers for the greater glory of the village community. (Uduku 2002, 304)

The home-town improvement union or association also played an important social function in holding diaspora communities together. As the University of Nigeria created a space for the development of kinship-like bonds, the maintenance of these relationships away from the "home" of campus with the purpose of supporting and strengthening the community marks out these campus kids' networks as an iteration of the home-town association. The varying nature of who lives on campus has meant that efforts to improve the welfare and development of the home-town community have not necessarily corresponded with a movement to improve the university campus, although this forms part of the discussions held online by campus kids. Instead, these networks have chosen to assist their communities, wherever their members may be. Through campus kids' communities on social media, the idea of the campus home has been sustained even if the physical home is no longer accessible, with the feeling of being at "home" largely manifesting in the relationships that are re-established and in the exchanges that take place among campus kids. These assemblies online usher in another chapter in the reconstruction and rebuilding of the University of Nigeria, with a primary focus on the rebuilding of communities.

Notes

1. I would like to express my thanks to Yvonne Mbanefo and Chuka Umeano for sharing with me their experiences of growing up on campus and engaging with campus kids' networks. Thanks also to Yvonne Mbanefo for translating the abstract and keywords into Igbo.
2. The use of "compound" or "family compound" here is from Nigerian English, in which it signifies dispersed dwellings within a particular family, often enclosed by walls.
3. Taken from Steven Jervis's blog "Nigeria 72." Accessed 26 November 2022. http://stevenjervis.com/Nigeria72.html.
4. Others involved in establishing *Nsukkascope* included Okechukwu Emodi and Chimere Ikoku.
5. There has been very little scholarly attention paid to *Nsukkascope*, but we know that it launched in 1971, and in its first year it published two issues. The publication of *Nsukkascope* continued into the late 1970s. The fieriness of *Nsukkascope* also extended beyond the walls of the institution. In an issue published in 1978, Chinua Achebe writes an open letter to the military government highlighting the government's lethargic response to the issue of repairing federal roads in Anambra and Imo state, concluding that they are "given low priority in Federal projects" to the extent that "the few projects promised may not be realised" (Achebe 1978, 90).
6. This sentiment was expressed to me in conversation with Professor Obiora Udechukwu, who joined UNN as a student after the war and went on to become a professor in the department of fine arts.
7. "Nsukka Is Burning." BBC Radio 4, 1 September 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000m5lt.
8. These families were primarily those of academic staff, many of whom resided on campus.
9. These insights came out of a discussion with Chuka Umeano in January 2022. Chuka's grandfather settled in Nsukka after the Nigeria–Biafra war, establishing a business that supplied vehicles to the university, while his parents were graduates of UNN. He describes how his

entire childhood revolved around UNN, and while his family lived off campus, his primary, secondary and tertiary education took place at the university and his childhood friends were largely campus kids.

10. Other factors that led to the departure of significant numbers of academic staff included a declining economy, particularly in the wake of the International Monetary Fund's and World Bank's Structural Adjustment Programme, political instability in the midst of protracted periods of military rule, and the increasing clampdown on freedom of expression.
11. In this article, I focus on Adichie's creative non-fiction as I am interested in the shaping of Adichie's memory and the representation of her lived experiences of campus.
12. From the late 1970s to the early 1990s, Yvonne's father, Dr Richard Tagbo, was a lecturer in haematology at UNEC and their family lived on campus.
13. Yvonne Mbanefo's Facebook post of 29 October 2018, "#foreveracampuskid." https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/foreveracampuskid/.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. "Nsukka Is Burning." BBC Radio 4, 1 September 2020. https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m000m5lt.
17. In Yékú and Ojebode's article, the NNP Facebook group is described as follows: "a popular culture identity-focused organization" that "aggregates digital images, documents, sound bites, and video footage from a plurality of public and private sources" (Yékú and Ojebode 2021, 502).
18. See Ike Anya's 2018 tweet "The Children of Nsukka Anthology." https://twitter.com/ikeanya/status/1022426736158539776.
19. There are multiple Facebook groups for UNN campus kids in addition to the kind of Facebook posts that have been referenced in this article.
20. The organising of groups along the lines of age or cohort mirrors the "age grade" organising structure in many parts of Nigeria in which people born within a certain period are grouped together. These groupings have particular functions in society: particular age grades might be called upon to complete certain tasks.

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