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INTRODUCTION

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# Nigerian Campus Forms

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This special issue is the result of a long-running collaboration between the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* and the Lagos Studies Association (Figure 1). The Lagos Studies Association, through its annual conference held at the University of Lagos, has made a name for itself for the sustained attention it pays to the development and professionalisation of younger scholars.[1] Panels around the theme of Nigerian Campus Forms were first convened at the 2019 conference, and the call invited participants to develop arguments related to any aspects of university life in Nigeria. The research project has at various times consisted of more people than are represented in this special issue, but not all in the end were able to submit their research (Ayalogu, Cheng and Ojudun, Fasan, Nwako and Ogunoye, all with unpublished work in progress, were active participants in the reading group and meetings we had). The current special issue is one of three themed issues published by the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* devoted to African universities. This issue follows the volume guest edited by Anne Gulick (2023), and a bilingual English/French issue "Campus Forms / Le campus sous toutes ses forms" is forthcoming, guest edited by Ruth Bush.

The collective project on Nigerian universities invited scholars to reflect on the conditions under which knowledge was produced, from a specific place and community. The infrastructure of the University of Lagos campus, where the conference takes place, was a useful starting point from which to document and analyse the remnants of the idealism and beauty of what Tim Livsey in his influential monograph has called *Nigeria's University Age* (2017). This beautiful campus, with its buildings that allow fresh air to circulate, and with the lush gardens extending to the lagoon, shows signs of the challenges faced by scholars working and studying there. Kolawole Charles Omotayo's striking conference presentation was delivered at the 2019 LSA conference. His work documented and analysed the lack of toilet facilities on university campuses, something which was made very concrete for those of us attending the conference and which accurately reflected our experiences struggling to find facilities. In these articles, there is a repetitive refrain of decay and decline, as infrastructures have not managed to keep up with the rising numbers of students seeking higher education alongside other economic challenges facing Nigerian institutions.

This special issue provides snapshots of the campus experiences across Nigeria, historicising campus culture, and considering the gendered, religious and international aspects of campus life. Authors present the distinctions between public and private universities,

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**Figure 1.** The statue of "The Scholar" by Ephraim Kelechi Ugochukwe, on the campus of the University of Lagos. The statue is placed so that she faces away from the lagoon, intent on her studies. Photograph by Carli Coetzee 2019.

and analyse the ways in which the university contributes to the formation of an elite class, whilst also examining the unequal power relations on campus. The campus as a place of connected cultures is a feature of the Nigerian campus novel, as Kayode Gboyega Kofoworola writes: "The Nigerian campus novel depicts the Nigerian university as an ambiguous place of interaction and cross-cultural contact" (2023, 299). The intercultural dimensions of campus life are extended by Olayinka Solomon Elusoji, who juxtaposes the Confucius Institute at the University of Lagos as a marker of Chinese soft-power with the *japa*[2] impulses of many students who engage with the institute, revealing what Elusoji calls "the complex intermingling of Nigerian and Chinese aspirations" (2023). Louisa Uchum Egbunike's exploration of "campus kids" presents a campus diaspora of sorts of the children who grew up on the University of Nigeria campuses, and who are now dispersed around the world and who converge online (2023). For this group, the campus served primarily as a home, and these online communities formed by campus kids present a virtual replication and recollection of the community they once lived in.

Many of the contributions in this special issue engage with campus life beyond the classrooms, and provide insight into the various forms of alternative education, either situated on campus or as a counterpoint to campus. Adeyemi Balogun's discussion of the Muslim Students' Society of Nigeria's (MSSN) women's programme shows how the MSSN assists women in navigating life on campus, and preparing for life beyond campus (2023). With a focus on the Ahmadu Bello University in Northern Nigeria, Balogun shows how the MSSN supports women in acquiring both "Western" and Qur'anic education, providing skills-based learning opportunities and supporting women in helping to identify a potential spouse and to prepare for family life. Balogun notes that the MSSN and their affiliated programmes represent "an important shift from the existing order in which religious authorities, community leaders, and families are responsible for providing guidance to the women". In Omotola Okunlola's analysis of Nollywood campus films, the campus in the TV series *Jenifa's Diaries* is depicted as presenting barriers to those who originate from outside urban settings, and who occupy a lower social status. In contrast to the campus as a site of learning, Okunlola reads the beauty salon off campus as "a pedagogical space where education is mediated by non-institutionalised figures who tap into culturally shared and situated sources of knowledge" (2023). The salon not only provides alternative forms of knowledge, but it is a space of inclusivity which is accessible to larger segments of the population.

The university's public face and private politics form the basis of discussions around sexual harassment, gender disparities on campus and sanitation facilities. In Omotayo's aptly titled article "'Shotputting' and Other Dirty Secrets: Nigerian Students' Everyday Struggles", the beauty of campuses such as that of Obafemi Awolowo University masks "the deplorable condition of student hostels" (2023). For Omotayo, the normalisation of inadequate sanitation facilities, which disproportionately affects its female students, "is [now] best understood as a constitutive part of a student's university education" (327). The gendered dimensions of campus life form the basis of Rosemary Oyinlola Popoola's engagement with the "sex for grades" discussions which gained traction following a widely viewed BBC documentary on the subject (2023). Popoola's feminist engagement with the gendered coloniality of "campus as a site of normative older male authority" (263), brings to light the ideologies and culture which have sheltered and emboldened

male perpetrators. Morolake Dairo shows in her exploration of dress codes on campus how the male-centred foundations of the university system in Nigeria have had an impact on women's approach to what they wear on campus. Dairo draws a link between the self-policing amongst the first generation of women students in their choice of attire "to prove their academic worth" (2023, 346), and the later introduction of dress codes on campus which largely focus on women's bodies. Dairo notes that, whilst the introduction of dress codes in some institutions was intended to decrease the incidents of sexual harassment of female students, this strategy was not only ineffective; it also reveals an institutional perception of "women's bodies as disruptive" (346), whilst placing the burden of responsibility on victims rather than perpetrators of sexual harassment.

This is an ongoing project, and in the months and years to come the *Journal of African Cultural Studies* will publish further scholarship that reflects on the infrastructures and ecosystems from where knowledge is produced. While many of the articles describe and analyse the contrast between the idealism of the great University Age and the current under-resourced present, the inventiveness of the analyses gives cause for optimism about the next generation of Nigerian academics. The scholarship that is being produced by this new generation of scholars will develop new frameworks for understanding the complexities of thinking about and researching home from elsewhere. Tejumola Olaniyan, the great Nigerian scholar whose works have shaped our field of African cultural studies, described the ideal intellectual as an "interstitial scholar", someone able to think about and from many places at once (2018). The work contained in this special issue, and coming out of the Lagos Studies Association, is making clear what the investments will be of such interstitial scholarship, as researchers reflect on the politics surrounding the conditions of knowledge production, at home, or in the connected worlds of the Nigerian diaspora.

## Notes

1. See https://www.lagosstudies.org/.
2. *Japa* is a commonly-used Nigerian expression used to refer to the wide range of reasons for wishing to leave Nigeria. At the 2023 conference of the Lagos Studies Association, a number of panels were devoted to analysing the phenomenon from a range of disciplinary and thematic perspectives (https://static1.squarespace.com/static/630afcab31f1c61c6a285f5c/t/6484a127a7a1b86bb3c7badb/1686413614057/Final±Program.pdf).

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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