Political Training Grounds:
Students and the Future of Post-Military Nigeria

By

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Abstract

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This dissertation is an ethnographic investigation of experimental forms of political practice among Nigerian university students. With limited avenues for participation in Nigeria’s turbulent democracy, students imagine the campus and its urban environs as “political training grounds” which offer opportunities for political leadership—and aspirations to this effect—that are only newly available in the post-military era after the civilian transition in 1999. I analyze the ways in which this notion of higher education as a political training ground was experienced during a critical turning point in Nigerian politics when both constitutional democracy and student unionism activities were experiencing revitalization after many years’ absence. I argue that the emergence of the “politician” as a professional identity among university students is specific to the post-military era, when politics became a legitimate and particularly lucrative “profession,” after students had for generations acted as agitators against the state through student activism. The reinterpretation of the purposes of higher education indexes the ways in which “precariousness” has come to define the experiences of young Nigerians: students view schooling as a time for gaining non-academic experience because earning educational credentials no longer guarantees economic mobility or full social participation.

Based on over three years of ethnographic fieldwork, over one hundred interviews, and focus group discussions between 2006-2012 in Ibadan, Nigeria’s third largest city and a key site for educational development, political administration, and urban mobility, the dissertation is organized into five thematic chapters that capture the most significant elements of campus political activity, as well as the different domains in which students attempt to acquire political experience and influence. I describe the historical relationship between the University of Ibadan and the city of Ibadan, arguing that the evolving relationship between the university and the city points to important transformations in how students understand their roles on campus and as citizens of Nigeria (Chapter One). I analyze important differences in student political cultures across different kinds of educational institutions by broadening my focus to three Ibadan campuses: a private university, a federal university, and a state polytechnic, which signal the ways institutional factors influence the professionalization activities students participate in to develop political identities (Chapter Two). Shifting to the relationships between campus and national politics, I analyze the most critical event of Nigerian politics—elections—with a focus on student and national elections in 2011 (Chapter Three). These events reveal the significant role of apprenticeship within the political system students are trying to gain access to, and the
ways students move beyond the campuses to participate in wider political networks, many of which are defined by illicit economic relationships with political “godfathers,” who are important power brokers and elders in national politics. I highlight the emerging role of new media technologies in the political activities of young people, which offer spaces free from the authority of elders that dominate other political domains. In particular, I focus on the strategic use of the Facebook social media platform in the formation of political community and a public sphere, which offers students alternative ways of engaging in political discourse and ensuring the transparency of elected student leaders (Chapter Four). The dissertation also analyzes the role of campus and urban protests in student political expression with a discussion of the social movements, Occupy Nigeria and Occupy University of Ibadan in 2012, moments in which student politics transcended the campus to mobilize around broader urban and national questions and which also made deliberate connections to global social movements under the rubric of “occupation” (Chapter Five).

In contrast to the focus of much of the existing literature on African universities as sites merely for reproducing privilege, or failed institutions that no longer guarantee social mobility, this work shows that higher educational institutions in Nigeria are more than institutional enclaves: they are key nodes within urban landscapes and the national political arena, in which students develop ideas about, and modes of practicing, future citizenship and political engagements. This move pushes scholars of politics and youth in Africa, and elsewhere, to consider the critical role of universities in the politicization of youth and nascent processes of democratization and other forms of political transformation in countries like Nigeria, whose post-colonial identity has been defined by the existence of military rule.
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INTRODUCTION: Political Training Grounds

Higher education is a training ground for future leaders and experimental forms of politics in Post-Military Nigeria. For much of the history of Nigeria, as well as of other African nations weathering the transition from colonial to post-colonial statehood, it has been the case that educated elites formed the core of the national ruling body and civil service. In this dissertation, I argue that the 2000s are an especially productive time for re-examining the relationship between campus politics and politics at other levels, due to the combination of civilian rule, the advent of new social platforms and communication technologies, and new ways of claiming the urban spaces that are crucial to political life, since the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999. Among this generation of youth, being a “professional” politician has emerged as an aspiration and identity, after students for decades served as “activists” and a key oppositional force against the military state. Today, students leverage organized campus politics and forms of activism to learn the game of politics and to acquire leadership experience, which they envision to be practice for desired futures in which non-political elites and non-elders will hold meaningful roles. The reinterpretation of the purposes and future horizons of higher education indexes the ways in which “precariousness” has come to define the experiences of young Nigerians, who view schooling as a time for gaining non-academic experience because earning educational credentials no longer guarantees post-graduate economic mobility or full social participation, as is increasingly the case among global youth. Student political activities signal a transformation in the imagination of what is possible for politics and the future among Nigerian youth, as well as a perspective on the micro-practices forming Nigeria’s “young” democracy, in which student politicians, like their counterparts in national politics, grapple with the challenges of developing a culture of representative politics after decades of military rule.

This work appears at a critically important moment in Nigeria’s political history when both constitutional democracy and organized student politics are experiencing revitalization after many years’ absence. Similarly to other African countries, the university campus in Nigeria has historically been the single most significant site for political struggle on the national scene, through the pioneering leadership of the “students’ movement.” Organizationally led by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), student activism took off in the 1970s, when educational institutions first began their transformation from colonial institutions for aspiring elites to “mass” institutions for citizens of the rapidly expanding—and newly oil-wealthy—Nigerian state. In the 1980s, a succession of military regimes, coupled with the implementation of economically punitive neoliberal economic policies, further radicalized students in higher educational institutions (and laborers outside them) to protect the idea of education as a public rather than a private good, and to support broader social movements against the authoritarian state. Under military rule, which succeeded after independence in 1960 unabated from 1966 to 1999, with only a brief civilian interlude in 1979-1983, the campus was one of the few spaces where representative governance could be practiced, given the dearth of formal avenues for civilian political participation. However, beginning in the early 1990s, university authorities colluded with the Federal Military Government to fragment and suppress vibrant student unionism through divide-and-rule tactics, draconian disciplinary actions, extralegal detentions, and violent actions against student leaders.
When I first traveled to the University of Ibadan, Nigeria’s first university and the primary site for this research, in October 2006 as a recent university graduate, it was to research the history of student unionism and how student political culture in Nigeria continued to develop in the absence of student union politics, which had been the most important organizational body within campuses. For UI students during that period, the student radical tradition that defined the schooling experience for much of Nigeria’s post-colonial history was but an idea from a long-gone “golden era” that their parents and lecturers, some of whom had been active student unionists, regarded with nostalgia, but of which they had no personal memory. The UI Student Union was unofficially banned, for nearly five years then, due to a protracted legal battle between the university and a student union presidential candidate, who was initially declared the winner of the 2000/2001 elections. The litigation was precipitated by the decision of university authorities to annul the election results. Instead, administrators imposed a “Student Union Transitional Committee,” composed of students appointed by the Office of Student Affairs to serve in the role of “caretakers” for the union, in lieu of democratically elected representatives. For most of the following decade, activist UI students struggled to re-establish an elected governing body. Student unions around the nation suffered a similar fate in the 1990s and 2000s: most held precarious institutional status due to similar legal issues vis-à-vis university administrations that used legal technicalities to keep them at bay, or outright dismantle them. The opportunity for doing so was in part offered by the violent turn taken by many student unions in the 1990s, particularly through campus secret “cults.” The cult phenomenon dates back to the 1960s, when these societies were founded as fraternities, but in the 1990s they began to function more like urban criminal gangs based on campus (Rotimi 2005), within a broader national context in which politics as a whole had turned more violent (Falola 1998; Ihonvbere 1996).

When I returned to Ibadan for my doctoral dissertation fieldwork in December 2010, the UI campus was abuzz with the unexpected news—to me—that student union elections would be held early in 2011, following the appointment of new university leadership, and particularly a Vice-Chancellor who was himself a self-professed former unionist. In a broader context in which Nigeria itself had (constitutionally) transitioned from its military past, and was cautiously opening up to electoral politics, the University of Ibadan, along with increasing numbers of federal and state universities and polytechnics, was preparing for a return to representative governance. The prospect of developing a democratic political culture in all spheres of society is critical to understanding this historical moment in Nigeria, whose post-colonial identity has been largely defined by the existence of military rule. It is also critical to understanding why Nigerian students so often insisted on the idea of a professional political identity, though, as I discuss later, not without ambivalence, after having for generations acted as agitators against the state.

“Leaders in Twenty Years”

The conceptual framework guiding this work, the notion of the political training ground, draws upon an encounter I had with a well-known student politician at the University of Ibadan during my final weeks of fieldwork. In June 2012, I ran into the President of the Faculty of Arts, who was better known by the nickname “Roadmap” on the walkway in front of the Student Union Building, where union executive and legislative offices are located. “The semester is choked,” he complained. At the time of our encounter, school had resumed for the second semester a few days earlier and a palpable anxiety lingered over the University of Ibadan (UI) campus, Nigeria’s premier university, due to the “Occupy UI” protests that had taken place just
weeks before. The immediate cause of the unrest was prolonged power blackouts on campus, which exacerbated existing scarcity, in the days leading up to final exams. In the two days of demonstrations in late April, hundreds of students blocked the main campus gate and the busy thoroughfare that runs parallel to the University, their bodies obstructing academic and commercial activity on campus and in the neighboring community of Agbowo. The occupation of campus and urban space thrust the University of Ibadan into the national spotlight. Images of the “usually calm” UI students carrying placards and surrounding a police vehicle appeared on the front page of national dailies and international news websites.¹ Campus administrators regarded the unrest as an act of disobedience and an affront to their authority, which students were punished for with forced expulsions from residence halls and a compulsory recess of nearly two months. Students returning to campus had a sober air, after the collapse of another political protest, the third in less than a year following the mass rally to the downtown headquarters of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, the federally-controlled electricity provider, in protest of similar blackouts in June 2011, and the Occupy Nigeria protest movement against the federal government’s removal of petroleum subsidies in January 2012, which I discuss in Chapter Five.

As Roadmap insinuated, students were, quite deliberately, “choked,” or pressed for time. With the shortening of the academic calendar after the school closure, avoiding what students referred to as “tsunami,” or flunking out of school, required focused attention to academics, rather than turning to the residual grievances that had incited the protest. For campus politicians like Roadmap, there was an additional burden. With the truncated schedule, he had even less time to fulfill his political programs before the end of the academic session and his tenure. This pressure was partially self-inflicted. Roadmap had rooted his public persona, signaled by his chosen political appellation, in the promise that he would devote his term and his very identity to establishing a pathway for improved learning conditions for students in the Faculty of Arts. To continue to exist politically, he needed tangible results to show for his time in office.

This dilemma called to mind another incident, the Association of Faculty of Arts Students (AFAS) Debate Night in July 2011, where I first met Roadmap. Elections were one of the two most important events within campus political life, apart from protests, and departmental, faculty, student union, residence hall, and club elections were serious, somewhat ritualized affairs around which all student political activities were oriented. Debate Night was one of the most critical events within electoral proceedings, where candidates for the student government presented their platforms and fielded questions from members of campus press organizations. As became the norm for these events, aspirants, including Roadmap in this instance, requested that I videotape their speeches and share the digital files with them to enhance their public profile and performances. At the time, I was one of the only students on campus with personal access to video recording equipment and, apart from my identity as the “Black American comrade” researching student politics, I was also known to have a preference for this form of reciprocity. It was at the Debate Night that Roadmap unveiled his manifesto, which included: the annual AFAS banquet during Faculty Week at the end of the academic term; and capital-intensive projects in the Faculty complex that included the construction of a student learning and IT center, and new toilets to supplement the existing two, which were always either flooded or fetid. These projects were rather lofty goals that many seriously doubted he could execute, since they depended on

funding and infrastructural support from the campus administration and external patrons, over which he was unlikely to be able to exercise control. They were, nevertheless, becoming expected components of political platforms, even at the level of student politics, due to the institutional crises besetting most de-funded schools.

In our meeting in front of the Student Union Building, I asked Roadmap how he would manage both classes and the fulfillment of these ambitious promises. Surprisingly nonchalant about the fate of his grade point average, Roadmap said that it was not a degree, alone, that he was seeking from the University of Ibadan, Nigeria’s first and premier university. Political training—he claimed—would be the most rewarding outcome of his education:

Leaders in twenty years will be the ones leading campus now. [As Faculty President] I’m working out the script that I will act out later and playing politics in the real sense. I’m learning all the strategies that I will use later. […] Soon, the current crop of leaders won’t be there. Young thugs won’t be there. New blood will come and being part of the political elite will be a disadvantage.

The idea that the “real” value of university education is the opportunity it presents to “play” or experiment with politics, becoming proficient at the game and, thus, a professional at it, was a common sentiment shared among students engaged in campus politics. Well aware that university degrees no longer guaranteed post-graduate employment, students re-articulated the purposes of higher education and its future horizons. For student “politicians,” as they self-identified, the university campus is a “political training ground,” which offers opportunities for leadership and aspirations to this effect that are only newly available in the post-military era. In contrast to the focus of much of the literature on schools in Africa as mere sites for reproducing privilege or “failed” institutions that no longer guarantee socioeconomic mobility, in my analysis, educational institutions are more than institutional enclaves: they are key nodes within urban landscapes and the national arena, in which students develop ideas about and modes of practicing political engagement and leadership.

Another compelling reason to examine the political activities of students in educational institutions is the centrality of higher education to Nigerian politics. Unlike many other African countries where there is one primary state university, Nigeria has a crowded educational landscape filled with over a hundred postsecondary institutions, dozens of federal and state universities, an increasing number of secular and religious private universities, and other types of institutions, which include colleges of education and polytechnics. This is because higher educational institutions have been key components of federal, regional, and municipal statecraft since Independence in 1960, and have a complicated relationship with Nigeria's political system, in which federal, regional, and state power regimes overlap and often conflict. As I discuss in greater detail in Chapter One, the university as an institution has been central to understandings and claims of citizenship beginning with the establishment of the University of Ibadan under British colonial rule in 1948, and again after independence when the Nigerian people insisted that the abundance of oil wealth justified highly subsidized public education and, as a result, state actors attempted to secure their political base by supporting the expansion of the educational system, and of free education for all.

Before moving to the conceptual and empirical structure of this study, I situate it in the context of the extensive anthropological literature on youth in Africa, in which over the past two
decades inter-generational and political themes have gained prominence. Some of this work is in response to recent scholarship on the experiences of global youth in late capitalism, under post-Fordist regimes of production, and with the globalization and consolidation of financial institutions on an unprecedented scale. Together, these conditions spell out increasingly precarious futures for the young making their way in society, particularly in the global South. The concept of precariousness is one that is particularly relevant to the analysis in this dissertation, which I discuss in what follows. I also frame in this chapter the geopolitical context of this study with a focus on the particularities of this moment in Nigeria’s political history, the post-military era, and why Ibadan, Nigeria’s third largest city, is a particularly compelling site to explore the relationships between educational institutions, political processes, and urban livelihoods. Finally, I discuss methodological considerations and summarize the thematic concerns of the chapters to come in addition to the scholarly debates that will be engaged throughout the dissertation.

**Young Africa**

Africa is, demographically, the youngest continent in the world. Youth, defined by the United Nations as those between the ages of 15 and 24, represent nearly two-thirds of Africa’s population and their ranks are expected to double by 2045 (African Economic Outlook 2012). Decades of political and economic crises precipitated by kleptocratic regimes, excessive indebtedness and dependence on external aid, and structural adjustment programs enacted by international donors to ameliorate these conditions have produced a situation where social mobility and adulthood elude most African youth. Largely under-educated and under-employed, they are often unable to cross the threshold into social adulthood, a condition signaled by secure employment, marriage and parenthood, and the ability to support dependents, rather than continue to depend on others for one’s own subsistence. Scholars and policy analysts over the past two decades have written extensively about the economic and generational contradictions that emerged in the wake of post-colonial civil war, military regimes, and the devastating adoption of neoliberal economic reforms, which disproportionately and adversely affected young people.

However, changing conceptions of age, maturity, and full social membership are not entirely new considerations within African societies or Africanist scholarship. The present attention to youth notwithstanding, “youthful predominance” has characterized African societies for more than half a century and, alongside conceptual categories like generation, age grades and age sets, was the central concern of many classic anthropological texts of the early-to-mid twentieth century (for a useful overview, see Burgess and Burton 2010; Aguilar 1998). Yet, as Burgess and Burton argue, even these early works tended to gloss over the radical changes that the cultural institutions and understandings structuring inter-generational relations had been undergoing. Young people, the “no-longer but not-yet”—to invoke Turner’s (1967) classic description of liminality—were then also experiencing profound changes with migration to towns and cities, which opened up new ways of being and forms of subjectivity. These often undermined gerontocratic orders of authority and forms of governance, and have echoes in contemporary Nigerian society.

What may be distinct about the present moment, and the past several decades, is young adults’ uncertainty—and scholars’ focus on them as living in a prolonged state of youth. Since
the mid-1990s, a major sub-section of social scientific research on Africa has focused on the so-called “lost” (Cruse O’Brien 1996) or “sacrificed” (Sharp 2002) generations of African youth, who claimed social and political space from the power-hoarding gerontocracy, at times violently. This literature covers many areas of social life, including the susceptibility of the young to violence as victims and perpetrators (Argenti 2007; Bozzoli 2007; Richards 1998), disease (Parikh 2000; Smith 2004b); and economic insecurity (Hansen 2005; Mains 2007; Masquelier 2005). Despite their vulnerability to various kinds of risk, this scholarship, nevertheless, suggests that youth are both “makers and breakers” (Honwana and De Boeck 2005) and that their distinctive role in society is as key elements of social reproduction as well as of potential disruption. However, some have pointed out that contemporary youth are not so much a generation “lost” to the failures of nation-building projects in the decolonizing world, as a generation that, despite better access to formal education and participatory democracy, finds its economic options circumscribed in this young millennium (Hansen 2014, 1). For these reasons, more recent works have emphasized inertia as a key characteristic of the present, both in temporal and in spatial terms, coining expressions such as “forever youth” (Hansen 2014), “waithood” (Honwana 2012) and, more bluntly, “stuck” (Sommers 2012) to characterize this generation in different parts of world. Engaging with the theoretical direction of this scholarship, rather than conceiving of African youth as either “liberal actors” or “overdetermined victims” (Durham 2000: 118), I consider how youth navigate the social exclusions of gerontocratic regimes, with openness to the sometimes new arenas in which they are able to exercise political and other forms of power.

Part of the reasons for the precarious prospects of African youth is obvious in the realm of formal politics. Though young people under the age of twenty-four represent close to seventy percent of the continent’s population, the average age of political leaders in African states is around seventy. A young continent with old leadership offers limited avenues for young people to exercise political power, especially through positions of formal leadership. The discontent produced by this situation has generated perhaps too much scholarly attention on youth protest and violence (see Bay and Donham 2006, 16-33). One significant exception to this pervasive tendency to exclude the young from formal politics, however, is university campus-based activities. In the absence of direct avenues for civic participation in the national political arena, young people, students on campuses around the continent and especially in Nigeria, experiment with political leadership and activism through elected office and political activities in school. For all the recent interest in political agency among youth in Africa and elsewhere, only cursory attention has been afforded the university campus as a key site for the politicization of young people, despite the significant historical role of universities in social movements and processes of democratization in Africa (notable exceptions include: Adejumobi 2000; Federici et al. 2000; Zeilig 2013, among others)—a theoretical gap which this dissertation critically intervenes.

Formations of the Precariat

The experiences of social exclusion and economic insecurity elaborated above are not unique to young people in Africa’s most populous nation. Uncertain, even unimaginable, futures

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are now integral to the life worlds of young people around the world (J. Cole and Durham 2008). Millennials, most broadly defined as the generation born between 1980 and 2000, appear to be saddled with greater burdens than perhaps most generations in recent history, given the normalization of economic insecurity and its disproportional impact on global youth. While the scholarship on global youth of previous decades has emphasized the political apathy and alienation of young people, the youth of the 2010s have struck an entirely different chord.

Widespread economic vulnerability has helped catalyze expressions of political action among young people that are increasingly common and often enduring. Such expressions have assumed various forms, especially agitative—if not openly violent—political demonstrations, which have engendered social and cultural movements led by young people in Greece (2010-12), Tunisia (2010-11), Egypt (2011), New York (2011), Nigeria (2012), Mexico (2012), and Brazil (2013-14), among numerous other locations. A number of these movements were sparked by shrinking economic opportunities and growing inequities (e.g., the 1% versus 99% rhetoric in the “Occupy Wall Street” movement), though the precariousness of young people’s individual futures were also linked to the failures and unaccountability of the political system, particularly under autocratic regimes such as the North African ones swept away by the tide of “Arab Spring” protests. But exploitation at the hands of political and economic elites is not mutually exclusive. These linked political and economic complaints were critical to the most far-reaching political uprising of this young century, the Arab Spring, which influenced mobilizations in many other places around the world, including Nigeria, and specifically among Ibadan university students, who developed social media-based political communities and urban “occupations” in conversation with these global movements, as I discuss in Chapters Five and Six.

Precariousness has also emerged as one of the more compelling ways of conceptualizing the experiences of economic and social instability characteristic of the present, which I find useful in framing the conditions structuring the experiences of uncertainty among Nigerian youth. With its post-Fordist implication of “just in time” labor and production, outside the context of employment security and union protections, “precarity” (précarité) first came into use among European labor activists in the 1970s as they identified this disturbing trend in industrial employment practices. It emerged again in the early 2000s, and has more generally been used to describe the changing conditions of late capitalism, which has shifted towards contingent, flexible and irregular labor. However, as Allison writes in Precarious Japan (2013), the widening of the semantic field of “precarity” in the present moment is revealing in other ways. On the one hand, precarity “marks the loss of…something that only certain countries, at certain historical periods, and certain workers ever had in the first place” and, at the same time, demonstrates the overlapping of “multiple precarities” of labor, but more widely, “of sociality, of life (and death)” (9). Precariousness, in this sense, moves beyond the description of changing relations of production, to what Nielson and Rossiter have called “a more general existential state” (2008, 52). This recognition of “ontological precariousness” follows the distinction in Butler (2006) between precariousness as a shared human condition and precarity, its uneven distribution among the most vulnerable, most targeted and most abandoned by state institutions. Within these processes, what is sometimes referred to as “the precariat” emerges as a “radically new political subject” (Allison 2013, 15). Here, I extend its definition to include, with
reservations, one of the most (economically) vulnerable segments of the world population, young people.

The Politics of Post-Military Nigeria

As much as this study is about emergent modes of thinking about and practicing politics, it is also about the present, a moment in Nigeria’s history that is experienced and understood as a kind of epochal shift that offers new possibilities. In this work, I advance the “Post-Military” as a “periodizing rubric” for the present in Nigeria (Piot 2010, 14). This framing, in some ways, takes it cue from Piot’s use in his analysis of contemporary Togo, of the “post-Cold War” as an index for “Togolese longing for a future that replaces untoward pasts, both political and cultural” and “elusive” desires for “a different future and a new political” (20), which were also sentiments shared by most young Nigerians I encountered. Before turning to a discussion of the characteristics of the Post-Military present, it is important to note a few key turning points in Nigeria’s political history, which provide context for contemporary experiences in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous nation of over 173 million people (see political map of Nigeria, Figure 1). They are: British colonialism (1861-1960); the short-lived First Republic and the Biafran Civil War (1960-1970); the onset of the Nigerian military petro-state (1970-1999); and, the Fourth Republic brought on by the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999.

British Colonialism (1861-1960)

The violence of British colonization over the course of a century produced the territory of present-day Nigeria, as well as patterns of ethnic, religious and class animus that continue to be salient today. Formal colonial claims were first established by the British beginning with the annexation of the Lagos Colony in 1861 and the Oils River Protectorate in 1884 after the Berlin Conference inaugurated the “Scramble for Africa” in the Southern coastal region. In 1900, the Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates came under direct control of the British Crown, after violent military campaigns against the Northern Sokoto Caliphate and other kingdoms resistant to conquest. Under the authoritarian hand of Sir Frederick Lugard, Nigeria was the key testing ground for the “dual mandate” of British “indirect” rule in Africa (Lugard 1922), through which a “native administration” acted as intermediary between the native population and the

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3 Nielson and Rossiter are unconvinced about the analytical or political purchase of the notion of “the precariat,” or those ensnared in the grips of precariousness, as a “new kind of political subject” or “common cause” (2006: 52). For one, they contend that the emergence of precarity as an object of academic inquiry coincided with the decline in its utility as a platform for legitimate political radicalism. Moreover, inasmuch as precarity is a shared ontological experience, its effects are differentially distributed and, thus, incapable of being bound to “a single set of experiences, social situations, geographical sites or temporal rhythms” (64). To the extent that what the authors call “translation” across these diverse experiences is possible, it cannot be posited as “some stable, undivided subject position (the working class, the multitude, the precariat, etc.)” (65). Though I take seriously this intervention and do not aim to posit “global youth” or even “global students” as an undifferentiated social category, I do find it useful to foreground the shared experiences of uncertainty among young people, which do seem to be manifest in the increasing incidence of youth “social disruptions” as I will argue in the final chapter. It is also worth noting that the analysis of students as a new kind of proletariat is not without precedent, as in the case of the monograph, The Knowledge Factory (Horowitz and Friedland 1971), which posited students as a revolutionary class.


5 See Falola and Heaton (2008) and Eghosa (1998), for more comprehensive accounts of Nigeria’s political history.
Figure 1: Political map of Nigeria
British colonial administration, undermining the potential for resistance. Effectively, the three colonial sub-regions—Northern, Western, and Eastern—were only loosely affiliated and functioned autonomously (see Figure 2, a late colonial map of Nigeria).  

![Late colonial map of Nigeria's three regions (1954)](http://www.waado.org/nigerian_scholars/archive/pubs/wilber1_map1.html)

**Figure 2: Late colonial map of Nigeria’s three regions (1954)**

Image: Urhobo Historical Society website

After the First World War, organized nationalism began to develop, mainly in the Southern region, after British-educated Nigerians, many of whom participated in pan-African groups like the West African Students Union in the metropole (Garigue 1953; Olusanya 1982), began to seek greater participation in colonial administration. The years following World War II saw the expansion of organized labor and largely ethno-regional political parties in urban areas, as well as a widening generational gap between older gerontocratic native leadership invested in incremental decolonization and younger educated leaders advocating for a faster transition towards self-governance. The establishment, in 1948, of the University of Ibadan in the Western region to train “high-level manpower” to assume leadership and the enactment of regional autonomy within a federal parliamentary system were both indications of the twilight of British

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6 Officially, the Colonial Civil Service centrally administered the Colony with a staff of British expatriates and foreign-educated Africans, who were limited to assistive roles and, in some respects were the first cohort of “professional” politicians (Ayandele 1974). In the northern region, the political structure revolved around the Islamic authority vested in emirs, who were able to bar Christian missionary activity in the region and harmonize colonial education endeavors with existing Quranic schools. In the southern region(s), traditional rulers—including those appointed by British agents—were the primary vehicles of colonial authority. However, the establishment of Christian missions and, especially, schools where English, the official language of southern regions, was taught undermined the legitimacy of native kings and chiefs.

colonialism, which ended formally in 1960. Significantly, in the last four years of colonial rule, oil was commercially discovered in the Niger Delta region and exportation began—though oil revenue would remain marginal to the economy until the 1970s.

**The First Republic and Biafran Civil War (1960-1970)**

The political structure of post-colonial Nigeria continued the ethno-regionalism operationalized under colonialism (Adiele E. Afigbo 1991). The federal government maintained the three autonomous regional governments of the colonial territory and political parties conformed to the three major ethnic-regional hegemons: Muslim Hausa-Fulani in the Northern Region, mostly Christian Igbo in the Eastern Region, and the Yoruba in the Western Region. Divisions were further politicized by the political dominance of the North, which held as many parliamentary seats as the Western and Eastern regions combined, and the economic and educational dominance of the southern regions, where agriculture, trade activity, and British-modeled schools were concentrated. The First Republic quickly descended into unrest centered in Ibadan, the capital of the Western region, after opposition leader Obafemi Awolowo was unjustly imprisoned for treason by the federal government, and fraud during the 1965 election resulted in a majority of pro-federal government representatives (Uzoigwe 2010). This unrest laid the groundwork for three military coup-d’états in 1966, during which the federal (military) structure was further fragmented into twelve states to accommodate greater autonomy for minority ethnic groups. The massacre of thousands of Igbo people in the North during this period moved the military government of the Eastern Region to secede, declaring the Republic of Biafra in May 1967. The ensuing Civil War (July 1967-January 1970) resulted in the deaths of more than two million civilians, many children, due to forced famine and armed conflict. The factionalism of the First Republic and the devastation of the war, characterized by some as ethnic “genocide” (Okpoko 1986), cemented ethnic suspicion and division during a critical time of nation-building.


The entrenchment of the oil-rich military state defined the next three decades and this period figures most heavily into experiences of contemporary Nigeria, as I argue with the notion of the “Post-Military.” After the Civil War, the “re-unified” Federal Military Government set about an ambitious plan of development, including the “Nigerianization” of foreign-controlled businesses (Ogbuagu 1983) and expansion of national infrastructure and social services, including state-subsidized education. The rapid growth of the military state—the administrative units within the federation and state institutions—was fueled by global spikes in oil prices during the 1970s, which left the country awash in “petro-naira” (Barber 1982), a term used to describe Nigeria’s “oil complex” (Watts 2005) and the shift from the economy being organized around agricultural production to oil production. Oil money became the central logic of statecraft, supporting the spectacle of Nigeria’s internationalization as “The Pan-African Nation,” which was signaled by its hosting in 1977 of the Second World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC; see Apter 2005). Also during this period, Nigeria’s “military coup culture” (Siollun 2009) was solidified with the 1975 bloodless coup that removed the Gowon military regime (1966-1975), the assassination of his successor in an abortive coup in 1976, followed by the Olusegun Obasanjo military regime (1976-1979), which handed over power to the
democratically elected leaders of the short-lived “Second Republic,” which was overthrown by Muhammadu Buhari after 1983 elections were marred by violence and rigging.

The 1980s, in which another bloodless coup installed the Ibrahim Babangida regime (1985-1993), saw the onset of a prolonged period of economic crisis in Nigeria and throughout the region that was amplified by devalued currency and stringent austerity policies. It was during this period that Nigeria gained notoriety as one of the world’s most corrupt states, a showcase for the “criminalization of the state in Africa” (J.-F. Bayart, Ellis, and Hibou 1999), and the “open sore” of the African continent (Soyinka 1997). As I discuss in the next chapter, the economic hardships of this period radicalized the national student union along with labor unions—pitting students against the military government. As was the common practice among military heads of state, the unpopular Babangida-led military regime, for years, promised a return to democracy. However, after the June 12, 1993 presidential elections, widely believed to be Nigeria’s fairest, in which Yoruba businessman M.K.O Abiola won decisively, Babangida annulled the results of the Third Republic under the pretense of electoral illegalities, launching one of the darkest periods in Nigeria’s history. After months of political unrest, General Sani Abacha took power and immediately dissolved all democratic institutions. Abacha’s regime was noted for widespread corruption and human rights abuses, including the 1995 sentencing to death by hanging on trumped up charges of nine Niger Delta environmental activists, including writer Ken Saro-Wiwa. Abacha’s death in 1998 paved the way for a return to constitutional democracy the following year.

Nigeria’s long history of extended military dictatorships, short-lived civilian regimes, and the more insidious practice among military governments of forestalling a return to democracy gave rise to skepticism concerning the permanence of constitutional democracy, a perception that Nigeria may continue to undergo a democratic “transition without end” (Diamond et al. 1997) and that democracy in Nigeria is, itself, an “experiment” (Bratton and van de Walle 1997; Nwabueze 1985; Oyovbaire 1987). These views speak to the tensions between the long, and recent memory of military dictatorships and Nigeria’s fledgling democracy.

The Fourth Republic (1999-present)

The notion of the “Post-Military” posits the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999 as a critical temporal shift in Nigeria’s political history, and the political practices and imagination of young people. To be clear, my use of the concept is not to advance what would certainly be a premature argument that the vestiges of decades of military rule have been upended by the mere presence of democratically elected political leadership. Theorizing shifts, what Piot describes as ruptures, is “necessarily fraught” because “momentous breaks” rarely lend themselves to consensus that the present is “qualitatively different” from the past since there are always continuities across epochs, which may even supersede apparent discontinuities (2010, 13). One could, indeed, make this argument about Nigeria after the transition. Despite the appearance of democratic elections and civilian regime change, the conflict and malfeasance that plagued Nigeria under military rule has continued unabated in state institutions, among civil servants and elected leaders, and in the course of public proceedings. Since 1999, Nigeria has been plagued by two widely publicized conflicts, in which young people have been key political actors. One is centered on the Niger Delta, where unemployment and protests against environmental destruction have fueled youth vigilantism against oil companies and state actors (Pratten 2008; Smith 2004a; Watts 2007). The other is unfolding in the predominately Muslim
North, where violent religious extremism is on the rise, as was brought to international attention when terrorist group, Boko Haram, kidnapped more than 200 schoolgirls in April 2014.

Nigeria has experienced similar instability in the realm of formal politics, where the tensions between the vestiges of the military “past” and the present civilian regime are most evident. Nigeria’s first civilian leader after the democratic transition in 1999 was a former military head of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo, and, in every election since then, former military rulers keenly contested for the presidency. In fact, it was the failed presidential aspiration of General Muhammadu Buhari, who ruled from 1983 to 1985, which incited widespread post-election violence in 2011, after he unsuccessfully ran in 2003 and 2007 with eventual success in 2015. Broader incidence of inter-ethnic factionalism, electoral misconduct, post-election violence, and a culture of impunity in which blatant corruption goes unchecked have also troubled the era of civilian leadership (e.g., Abdul-Jelil 2009; Alapiki and Ukiwo 2013; Edigin 2010; Smith 2010, among others), raising questions about the relative desirability of democracy. It is in this sense that the temporal framing of the Post-Military signals the preoccupation embedded within the political imagination of students and, indeed, the nation more broadly: concerns with the extent to which Nigeria is bending towards “democracy” or not in this latest turn with civilian leadership.

Nevertheless, despite these forms of social upheaval, the contemporary moment is also popularly construed as generative of previously unknown possibilities, due in great part to Nigeria regaining its prominence as a beacon of cultural and economic innovation within the African continent. Nigeria’s film industry, popularly referred to as Nollywood, is a multi-billion naira transnational industry, which has propelled the emergence of creative economies that have been the subject of immense scholarly interest, with its videos exported and avidly consumed across Anglophone West Africa (e.g., Adejunmobi 2011; Strong and Ossei-Owusu 2014; Ugor 2009). These industries have rebuilt Nigeria’s status as both continental and diasporic hegemon in the cultural field, echoing its earlier “renaissance” epitomized by FESTAC 1977. Though not regarded in the favorable light of the internationally beloved Nollywood, Nigeria’s noted “industry” of online scams, or 419 schemes (Apter 1999; Smith 2010; Melvin and Ayotunde 2010), known locally as “yahoo yahoo,” is an equally innovative realm of entrepreneurship, indicative of new, communication technology-enabled survival strategies in a nation beset with widespread economic insecurity and rampant unemployment, especially among youth. Young people dominate both industries and look to their growth as indications of new opportunities that can be replicated in other areas, including formal politics. The belief that the present is ripe with possibility is also, undoubtedly, inflected by the “Pentecostal revolution,” which promises the social and political redemption of Nigeria, now the international hub of influential mega-churches with satellites throughout the African continent and world (Marshall 2009).

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8 As I discuss more in subsequent chapters, among students, there was ambivalence about Nigeria’s current political system and, at times, nostalgia for the “discipline” of military rule. High profile Nigerian politicians have made similar claims, such as the President of the Nigerian Union of Local Government Employees, who said local municipal governments fared better, economically, under the military. Source: Femi Makinde, “LGs were better off under military — NULGE president,” The Punch, May 5, 2013, accessed June 10, 2015, http://www.punchng.com/news/lgs-were-better-off-under-military-nulge-president/.
The aspirations guiding student political activities are rooted in hopes for a future whose certainty is tempered by the precariousness that pervades global youth experiences, but equally in the precariousness of Nigeria’s political system, which is only loosely democratic and questionably post-military. Uncertainty about the direction of the nation’s political development remains an open question that is important to keep in mind in the course of my analysis of campus politics and how student politicians understand its role in their futures. This work offers a possible forecast of the future of political leadership in the country, as well as a perspective on the micro-practices forming Nigeria’s “young democracy,” in which student politicians, like their counterparts in national politics, grapple with the challenges of developing a culture of democratic politics after decades of military rule.

Methodological Considerations

In this dissertation, I make claims about political activities, actors, and events that are by their very nature ambiguous, contested, and often covered by secrecy. In this section, I disclose, to the extent that I am able, the basis upon which I make such claims. My research is based on over three years of ethnographic fieldwork in Nigeria from October 2006 to June 2012, during which I collected hundreds of archival documents related to the history of higher education and student unionism in Nigeria; lived as a student in university residence halls; participated directly in student political culture as an elected officer (albeit in a minor, administrative support role) and official observer of electoral proceedings; and interviewed, formally and informally, students, faculty, administrators, alumni, elected officials, political “godfathers” (national politicians who offer financial sponsorship and mentorship to current student politicians), and many others, who shared their political experiences and ideas with me.

The city of Ibadan was selected as the location for this research because Ibadan has been particularly important to the development of higher education in Nigeria, as well as the urban and political processes that are central to this study. Though other cities have become the focus of discussions of urbanization and politics in the context of Nigeria—most notably Lagos and the capital city of Abuja—it is the city of Ibadan that has historically been most central to the relationships between formal education, urban dwelling, and notions of citizenship, mobility, and cosmopolitanism in Nigeria, as I discuss in greater detail in the next chapter. Ibadan was once the military and political center of the Yoruba region, and a critical colonial outpost where the first Western-style university (in 1948) and the Western Region’s first technical institution (in 1960) were established. It is now home to numerous other post-secondary institutions, which together create a rich educational and political landscape.

In October 2006, I started ten months of research on student politics in Nigeria funded by a Fulbright fellowship at what would become my primary institutional home, the University of Ibadan (UI). The UI Student Union was then banned, so I was at the time interested in the memory of radical student unionism and the generational differences between student politics of the mid-2000s, and what was conceived as the “glory days” of student activism in Nigeria, the 1980s and early 1990s. I lived on campus in a bungalow beside the Vice Chancellor’s compound, which was normally reserved for senior faculty, but which was rented to me and two other American students on Fulbright fellowships. During my fellowship period, I attended classes with students, began Yoruba language instruction, talked to anyone who was willing to entertain my interest in campus culture and student politics, and spent many weeks in the
National Archives, housed at UI, consulting archival material related to the Nigeria’s educational institutions and student politics.

After beginning my PhD in Anthropology at UC Berkeley in 2007, I returned to Nigeria for three months in the summer of 2008, and again in 2009, to continue learning the Yoruba language. I also used the opportunity to visit other educational institutions in Nigeria and become familiar with campus politics in other regions, given my growing interest in conducting a multi-sited ethnography of higher educational institutions. Though these early research stints exposed me to everyday (campus) life and the rich history of student unionism in Nigeria, I was still very much an “outsider” to contemporary campus political activities, which were only discernible to me in moments of crisis, such as campus protests against tuition fee hikes in 2009 and the repeated strikes of faculty and non-academic university staff in 2007 and 2009. These mobilizations closed down academic activity for several months during my research.

By the time I returned to Ibadan for long-term fieldwork in December 2010, UI campus politics was in the midst of significant change, with the return of the student union after a ten-year absence and upcoming national elections in April 2011. Questions concerning representative politics, elections and new political possibilities were topics of keen interest among all members of society, especially students. During an additional 18 months of doctoral fieldwork through June 2012, the University of Ibadan was again my primary research base, where I lived in the PhD dormitory, Tafawa Balewa Hall. However, my research design also included extensive fieldwork in two other Ibadan institutions, Polytechnic Ibadan, a state technical institution, and Lead City University, a private university, to gain some comparative perspective on political activities in different kinds of post-secondary institutions. In Chapters One and Two, I discuss the history of university-city relations in Ibadan as well as how the different forms of prestige, resources, and student qualifications associated with each of these institutions offer uneven opportunities for political participation and leadership in contemporary Ibadan. Here, I only preview the more extensive discussion of the political scenes among the three institutions upon which this research is based, and the nature of my participation within them (Figure 3 below depicts the campus areas of the three institutions in the city of Ibadan).

The University of Ibadan (UI) was established in 1948 as the first university under colonial rule. With a population of nearly 34,000 students, UI is distinguished for its academic rigor, high admissions standards, and the abundance of extracurricular activities. As it has done in the past, UI still serves to reproduce the nation’s socioeconomic, political, and cultural elites, as Bourdieu (1984) suggested was the case for the “grandes écoles” in France. As I discuss more extensively in the next chapter, UI is the historic center of the national student movement, where student unionism was birthed. I was fortunate to be there during the return of the union, subsequent national elections, three major political mobilizations, and the growth of a UI political community on the social media platform, Facebook—all which indicate the revitalization of organized student politics.

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9 This 2013 figure includes undergraduate and post-graduate students, as well as part-time, external degree students matriculated through the Distance Learning Centre. For the most part, my analysis focuses on the undergraduate population, who are most actively involved in campus politics. Source: Damilola Oyedele, “UI Receives Biggest Allocation of Intervention Funds,” This Day Live, September 8, 2013, accessed June 1, 2015, http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/ui-receives-biggest-allocation-of-intervention-funds/158465/.
Figure 3: Zonal map of the city of Ibadan and three Ibadan campuses
The Polytechnic Ibadan (Poly), on the other hand, was established in the first year of independence (1960) to train technicians for the development of what was, then, the Western Region of Nigeria. Poly was conceived to train “mid-level manpower” to complement UI’s “high-level manpower,” and is therefore linked conceptually and spatially, through a shared campus border and gate, to UI. Though Poly was established as a separate but equal institution within a broader educational mandate, over time the National Diplomas that Poly grants in lieu of a degree have become stigmatizing documents, marking the lower symbolic and cultural capital of an education there, in contrast to the status conferred by UI degrees. The 15,000 Poly students, who complete short diploma programs in technical and applied training, often study part-time, live off-campus, and have limited time to participate in campus life, including politics. Poly, like other technical institutions, has a reputation for harboring the secret “cults” mentioned in the opening section, which are used by national politicians during elections as thugs deployed to intimidate opponents and canvass for votes. In 2011, during my fieldwork, Poly students engaged in a series of protests against fee hikes, which threatened to push tuition to double the level of more prestigious institutions like UI, because these institutions do not benefit from the same high level of government subsidies as the latter. This caused the school to be closed down by authorities. Thus, an institution that is often the reservoir for young “thugs” in the service of national electoral politics witnessed a radicalization of its students, who mobilized on their own behalf, once the cost of attending soared to levels that were incommensurate with the potential benefits of their education.

Finally, Lead City University (LCU) is one of the recent additions to the ranks of Ibadan tertiary institutions. Established privately in 2005, LCU offers its 3,500 students degrees in management studies, information technology, law, and applied sciences, which are designed to promote the university’s vision of “knowledge for self-reliance.” With tuition fees over ten times the cost of a UI education, LCU offers a unique window into the experiences of the economic elites that have prospered in spite of, or perhaps because of, the severe economic turmoil besetting the nation and continent especially since the 1990s. Organized politics at LCU are extremely limited, in part due to the decision by campus authorities to ban student unionism other than academic representative bodies, and to limit any form of protest to written complaints. Unlike student grievances at Poly and UI, which are related to tuition fees and the inadequate provision of services like water and electricity, LCU student grievances are directed mainly at the code of conduct, which imposes restrictions on attire, and the precarious status of the university’s accreditation, which was the only recorded instance of LCU student protest in 2012.

Though I rotated my time among the three institutions, the depth of my participation in student politics across these campuses was unevenly weighted in favor of the University of Ibadan, where I lived, and where I had more established institutional ties. Only a few months into my residency in the Tafawa Balewa Hall for PhD students, I was asked by the outgoing President of the hall government to contest for the position of the General Secretary in the upcoming hall elections. While I was initially reluctant to directly participate in campus politics, his insistence that the only way to understand politics in Nigeria is to participate compelled me to “run” for the position, though none of the hall executive positions were contested, with the exception of the presidency. This decision turned out to be crucial to my access to student political culture, as I eventually became an accepted participant in political activities on the UI campus and beyond. I was co-opted into the first administration of the revived union as one of the two international student representatives on the Student Representative Council appointed by
union executives. With a group of students, I filmed a documentary chronicling the electoral events leading to the return of the Student Union in February 2011, with an “official observer” status, and continued video recording important events through another student union election and dozens of other campus elections. Like my participation in elected campus leadership, this was not a planned component of my research methodology, but became an important form of reciprocity with student politicians and university officials, who were interested in archiving campus political activities for future use.

At the other institutions, I did not have such opportunities to directly participate in campus political life. However, I attended political and social activities, systematically observed public gathering spaces, and conducted 109 informal and semi-structured interviews with students, faculty, and staff at these institutions, including focus group discussions with recognized campus politicians at UI and Poly. Also, given how student political networks extend well beyond the individual campus, I followed students as they moved across different campuses to regional and national student gatherings, including the 2011 convention to elect the national leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in the Niger Delta, and to government offices that were their key nexus with the national political arena. I also got to know and frequent some of the political godfathers, or senior power brokers in national politics, who offer mentorship and financial resources to campus politicians.

Before moving on to a description of the chapters that comprise this dissertation, it is important to clarify a few points related to my encounters with Nigerian student politicians. For one, I do not conceive of my relationship with politicians as one between informant and ethnographer. Perhaps by virtue of the fact that I research politicians who are also students in higher educational institutions—a dual role I myself have filled during my own academic career—the students with whom I engaged with were truly my interlocutors and expressed a desired to be represented in my research as such. They shared their personal experiences with me as well as their critical insights on my research and wider issues concerning politics and the future in Nigeria, even after I concluded my doctoral fieldwork. For this reason, as well as the fact that most campus politicians are “public figures” whose identities could be easily verified, I refer to my interlocutors mostly by their real names or political nicknames. Interlocutors, who otherwise wanted their identities to be known, sometimes shared experiences and insights “off the record,” with the expectation that their identities would not be linked to this information. In such cases, I created pseudonyms for such individuals and others, who did not wish to be known, which I indicate by using quotation marks with the name at its first appearance in the text.

The informant-ethnographer relationship implies to some extent a uni-directional flow of desired information from those “in the know” to the questioning researcher. By contrast, by virtue of my political offices, of my own experiences in campus politics in the United States, and of the relationships I had established with a wide variety of political actors during several residencies in Ibadan over the span of six years since I myself was a recent college graduate, I eventually came to be recognized as a campus “stakeholder” at the University of Ibadan and someone whom students sought out for political support, information, and favors. In some ways, this role was an unusual one, particularly as I accompanied student politicians and national political actors to off-campus gatherings among more senior figures in national student politics and municipal and state government. As I discuss in Chapter Three, being recognized as a stakeholder is not, itself, a remarkable feat. However, I was often the only woman attending what were otherwise gatherings in which men were exclusively in attendance. Those I accompanied
explained my participation with reference to me being a “foreigner” researching student politics. The implication was that, despite physically presenting as Nigerian, the presence of a woman in spaces associated with organized politics could only be explained by me being an “outsider.” This is because contemporary politics and elected leadership is overwhelmingly male-dominated in Nigeria (e.g., Agbalajobi 2010; Charles and Ikenna 2009; Ebohon 2012; Shettima 1995), though women have historically wielded institutionalized political and economic influence. Since 1999, women have been elected to a mere 1-7% of seats within the National Senate, National House of Assembly, and State Houses of Assembly, and have never been elected as Governor or President, though Nigeria’s first female presidential candidate ran unsuccessfully in 2015. Student politics similarly reinforces the notion that politics and leadership are a “man’s game,” though the campus presents opportunities for political training for women that are unavailable in national politics. Female residence halls, for instance, elect executive leadership and representatives to serve as union legislators. As I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, social media is beginning to play an important role in attenuating the risks that often limit women’s participation in campus leadership and activism. Nevertheless, student politics and the figure of the “politician” remain a gendered set of practices and identity that are, at times, quite hostile to the participation of women.

Outline of Dissertation

The constitutive parts of the conceptual framework guiding this dissertation, the political training ground, anticipate three arguments I develop throughout this work. First, student experimentation with different forms of political practice and leadership signals an expansion of ways of thinking about and practicing politics in Post-Military Nigeria, particularly among young people. Students attempt to imagine beyond the “allocative” politics associated with military rule and party politics, which are premised upon self-aggrandizement and control of resources, and experiment with “generative” approaches to leadership that are guided by public service and the creation of resources (Jeffrey and Dyson 2014). Second, the idea of student politics as a long-term trajectory of training speaks to a view of politics as a “profession.” Rather than politics being organized around charismatic and “personal” forms of leadership, as is commonly the case in African political systems (Jackson and Rosberg 1984), relationships and routinized practices are seen as key requirements for becoming a successful politician. The idea of “career” trajectories within campus politics, itself, speaks to hopes about the permanence of constitutional democracy, as well as new intersections between formal politics and education. In a global context of rapidly declining economic returns for higher education, political activities are one of the many ways students in Nigeria re-imagine the time of schooling in response to their experiences of socioeconomic precariousness. Finally, campus as the grounds in which such processes are rooted compels a re-examination of the meanings of education, as well as a

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10 This was the case among Yoruba market women (Denzer 1994) and female chiefs (Awe 1977) as well as the famed Aba’s Women’s War of 1929, in which thousands of primarily Igbo women in southeastern Nigeria protested the restricted role of women in the colonial government, among other grievances, and secured representation within the Native Courts (Van Allen 1975; Van Allen 1972; A.E. Afigbo 1966).

view of educational institutions as more than institutional enclaves. In contrast to the focus of much of the literature on schools in Africa as mere sites for reproducing privilege or “failed” institutions that no longer guarantee mobility, in this analysis, educational institutions are key nodes—sites of convergence rather than isolation—between campuses, urban landscapes and the national arena.

The following work is organized in five thematic chapters that capture the most significant elements of campus political activity, as well as the different domains in which students attempt to gain political training:

In Chapter One, “Ibadan: the University and the City,” I discuss the relationships among university, city, and society in Nigeria, where higher educational institutions, like cities, are physical and imaginative spaces invested by young people with aspirations of full social participation and socioeconomic mobility. In this chapter, I provide historical context for Ibadan, the university and the city, and describe the transformation of the University of Ibadan from an institutional enclave for aspiring “elites” on an urban periphery to an increasingly central, but under-resourced political battleground for radicalizing students in the midst of an expanding city. In my analysis, I relate the four key phases of higher educational development in Nigeria—the “elite,” “boom,” “bust,” and “reconstruction” eras—to the evolving relationship between the Ibadan university community and the neighboring urban community of Agbowo, as well as to the expansion and contraction of the oil-fueled economy, particularly from the 1970s onward, coinciding in part with the autocratic rule of successive military regimes, and their demise. I argue that the changing relationship between “town and gown” points to significant transformations in the ways in which students understand their roles on campus and as citizens in the broader society, which frame contemporary student political activities. Conceptually, I situate my interests in the roles of schools, cities, and political processes in the context of two important bodies of social scientific literature: the body of work concerning schools, social re/production, and power (e.g., Bourdieu and Passeron 1990; Willis 1977); and, more recently, the work relating educational processes, citizenship, and formations of (political) subjectivity in schools and their (urban) social contexts (e.g., Levinson 2005; Levinson et al. 1996).

Chapter Two, “The Professionalization of Politics,” analyzes the different political scenes at the University of Ibadan, Polytechnic Ibadan, and Lead City University. Though the analysis in this dissertation favors the University of Ibadan for methodological reasons, in this chapter, I describe the broader terrain of Ibadan campus politics in order to capture the institutional nuances associated with public/private, federal/state, and university/non-university education in Nigeria today. I offer ethnographic support for my claim that the emergence of the “politician” as a professional identity among university students is specific to the post-military era, when politics became a legitimate and particularly lucrative profession. In this, I draw upon the distinction in the work of Max Weber between politics as a “profession” and a “vocation” to think through the ways in which Nigerian students are negotiating this critically important shift in the political landscape of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic and the different approaches to political leadership that have emerged in the post-military era. I argue that the wide range of political professionalization activities that campus politicians participate in, with varying future prospects, are crucial to the notion of training embedded within the concept of the political training ground, and call to mind the significant literature on the role of “communities of practices” (Lave and Wenger 2002) in social practice, which I extend to political processes in educational settings.
Chapter Three, “Producing Politicians,” examines the notion among students that politicians are not merely elected, but they are “produced” through networks of relationships and political practice. I focus on the two categories of practices that most affect this production: elections and relationships, both lateral and hierarchical, with people of political influence, in particular, “godfathers” and “stakeholders.” In this chapter, I continue my engagement with the work of Jean Lave, whose theory of apprenticeship (2011) I draw upon to show the ways in which students deepen their participation in political communities of practice and formed relationships of apprenticeship with national actors. In the first section, I focus on the first election of the resuscitated University of Ibadan student union in 2011, in which a weak candidate gradually became a formidable contender and eventually winner of the presidency through careful mentoring by stakeholders and a political godfather. Rather than an occasional high-stakes occurrence as in national politics, I show how student elections are “everyday” phenomena, through which student politicians attempt to build incrementally from one election season to another professional political careers. In the second section, I shift my focus to the imbrication of students in national politics and how students negotiate what are conventionally patrimonial relationships of financial sponsorship with “godfathers,” who act as power brokers within political networks. The navigation of these relationships demonstrates the tensions between “generative” and “allocative” forms of politics, which students must negotiate to participate in campus politics and wider networks. In particular, I present the figure of Segun Olaleye, better known as “Radical Brother,” a former UI student union and National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) president in the late 1990s and early 2000s, who was elected to the Oyo State House of Assembly in 2011 and 2015. Thanks to the close relationship I developed with him, this chapter offers a perspective on the work of a political godfather, the successful transition from campus to national politics, and his attempts to supplant conventional patrimonial relations with more meaningful relationships of mentorship with aspiring student politicians.

Chapter Four, “The University of Ibadan Social Mediascape,” takes as its focus the political uses of social media and technology among Ibadan students. Unlike the other political domains described in this dissertation, which act in service of gerontocratic regimes of power, the Internet represents an emerging arena for social and political experimentation, in which young people occupy positions of authority. Facebook, in particular, has evolved into a critical component of Ibadan students’ political practice after the establishment of the UI Student Union Facebook group in April 2011 as a gesture of solidarity with the progressive work of social media in the Arab Spring. Here, I examine the nature of dialogue on the Facebook group, particularly its evolution from "abusive" discourse to more deliberative forms of critique, surveillance, and, eventually, direct political action. This work draws on the literature associated with the role of media—both “old” and “new”—in the formation of political community (Anderson 1991) and the public sphere (Habermas 1989), which has received new attention with the development of the Internet and Web 2.0 social media platforms in relation to online political deliberation and advocacy (e.g., Bernal 2014; Kendzior 2011; Lievrouw 2011). Rather than seeing African technology adopters as “invisible users” (Burrell 2012), I argue that Nigerian students innovatively weave new media and technology into their daily practices and understand the relationships between both “new” and “old” media as essential to their political professionalization and relationships—a move which contributes to a wider conversation concerning the ways in which new media create avenues for political engagement among youth typically sidelined from participation in national politics.
In Chapter Five, “Ambivalent Activism,” I grapple with the most visible form of youth political engagement in Nigeria, protest and other forms of social disruptions. The chapter conceptually circles back to the discussion in Chapter One of the relationships between the campus and the city. Following the analysis of the role of social media and UI students’ political community, I discuss the leadership of Ibadan students in the “Occupy Nigeria” and the later “Occupy University of Ibadan” protests in 2012, which was facilitated by the use of social media on the Facebook group. I argue that, while Ibadan Occupy mobilizations strategically aligned with the global occupy movements in technique, strategy and underlying causes, there is a striking banality to the urban-based unrest in the Nigerian context. This is because the participation of Ibadan students, in both cases, draw upon practices rooted in a much longer history of political action enacted by students in Nigeria, and engaged with local problems (e.g., failing urban infrastructure, power blackouts, lack of water, political corruption, and lack of future employment opportunities). This articulation of global precariousness due to crises of late capitalism with local and regional Nigerian specificities is framed within the African post-colonial condition, particularly insofar it is characterized by the profound grievances of young people towards political and economic elites, and their ambivalence about political belonging within the nation. Occupy Nigeria and University of Ibadan demonstrate another form of ambivalence discussed earlier in this introduction: the tensions between competing political strategies and subjectivities associated with the military era of “activism,” and the future of professional “politics” under civilian rule.

The Conclusion, “Students and the Future of Post-Military Nigeria,” returns to the discussion of precariousness started in this Introduction in relation to the ways in which Nigerian students imagine their individual futures and the political future of Post-Military Nigeria. I re-consider the notion of the political training ground and its promise of a desired future in which Nigerian youth meaningfully participate in the political arena, in light of developments that have transpired in the three years since I concluded my doctoral fieldwork and with a focus on the paradoxes and tensions within student politics, which fundamentally call into question the possibility of student aspirations for developing a culture of representative politics after decades of military rule in the campus—or launching site—for the transformation of Nigerian society.
CHAPTER ONE:
Ibadan: The University and the City

This chapter historically contextualizes the emergence of the campus as a political training ground in contemporary Nigeria. Though the political training ground is analyzed in this dissertation as specific to the Post-Military Era, the campus, city, and nation have shared a long and entangled relationship since the establishment of higher education in Nigeria. This chapter considers these relations, historically and conceptually, in the context of the primary location of this research, the University of Ibadan, and its relationship with the city of Ibadan. Throughout Nigeria’s colonial and post-colonial history, the overlapping physical and imaginative spaces of the university and city of Ibadan have been central to state legitimacy and popular aspirations. The history of Ibadan offered here is the story of the evolution of Nigeria’s preeminent university from an institutional enclave for aspiring “elites” on an urban periphery to an increasingly central, but under-resourced political “battleground” (Adejumobi 2000) for radicalizing students in the midst of an expanding city. At the same time, this is also the story of how evolving social relations and spatial practices between “town and gown” articulate with shifting ideas about the work “the university” and “the city” as projects perform within society and as the basis of political struggles over social inclusion.

The chapter begins with an overview of higher education in Nigeria followed by a review of two bodies of scholarship which inform my analysis: the literature concerning schools, social re/production, and power; and more recent work relating educational processes, citizenship, and formations of political subjectivity in schools and cities. The major focus of my discussion is the structural transformations of the Nigerian university, which I describe in four phases: (1) the “elite” phase of higher education during the late colonial and early independence era, during which idea(s) and ideal(s) of the university were concretized; (2) the “boom” phase of higher education fueled by the growth of oil production and the early military state, during which the proliferation of educational institutions was central to nation-building; (3) the “bust” years during which austerity measures slashed state funding for education and transformed campuses into political battlegrounds; and (4) what might be considered the “reconstruction” phase of the last fifteen years of post-military rule when the university and the city re-emerged as the focus of Millennial youth aspirations. Equally crucial to these institutional transformations is the relationship between “town and gown,” which signals the relations between the university and neighboring communities.

My analysis of Ibadan, the university and the city, serves three purposes within the overall argument of this dissertation. First, this chapter shows how the University of Ibadan came to be such a central institution to processes of regional and national development, urbanization, and political struggle. Second, the reconfiguration of relations between the campus and city as well as the university and the Nigerian state point to important transformations in the meaning(s) ascribed to higher education as well as how students understand their roles as political actors within Nigerian society. In particular, the radicalization of students in the midst of protracted military rule and de-prioritized educational access helps contextualize the continued relevance of student activism in Nigeria today. Finally, discussing the development of the University of Ibadan in relationship with its urban context supports one of the main interventions of this work,
which is a view of educational institutions as important nodes, or spaces of interconnection, linking the campus to the city, national arena, and other emerging domains of social practice.

Higher Education in Nigeria

Though oil production tends to dominate understandings of the workings and failures of the Nigerian government, the establishment of higher educational institutions and the production of an educated elite have also been central to statecraft and popular self-imaginaries in Nigeria. In its early stages, higher education in Nigeria was limited to a handful of federal universities and colleges of technology. However, after the 1970s oil boom and a 1993 federal law, which allowed for the private establishment of universities, the postsecondary educational infrastructure rapidly expanded. Today, most postsecondary institutions, which include universities, polytechnics, monotechnics, and colleges of education, are public institutions under the control of federal and state governments. Spread across every sub-region within the nation, albeit unevenly, there are now over five hundred tertiary institutions split between 128 degree-granting federal, state, and private universities, 78 polytechnics, 27 monotechnics, and 281 colleges of various educational and vocational disciplines, with new institutions being established every year (Clark and Ausukuya 2013).

In line with the global trends of “massification” (Altbach et al. 2009) and “commercialization” (Bok 2009) within higher education in recent decades, education in Nigeria has also become big business. Lucrative transnational industries have developed around the establishment of private schools at all levels of education, as well as local small and medium scale commercial enterprises, which offer standardized test preparation, educational consultation services, and domestic and international admissions “assistance,” which sometimes include illicit forms of aid involving the “fixing” (forging) of credentials or “working” admissions to desired schools through bribery. Such enterprises are clustered in urban areas and large towns, where tertiary institutions are typically located, making these urban and semi-urban spaces important hubs for rural-urban and cross-national migration, as well as other forms of commercial circulation that overlap with the academic calendar.

In Nigeria, the experience of schooling and the attainment of educational credentials are normative phases of young lives that are fiercely pursued in most parts of the country. The Southwestern region, predominated by the Yoruba ethnic group and where Ibadan is located, is especially known for education and has the highest concentration of schools. This is due to decades of Christian (mainly Anglican and Catholic) missionary activity in this region as well as the British colonial policies associated with indirect rule, which helped establish the current

12 Nigerians are known for their pursuit of educational credentials: they are the single “most educated” ethnic group in the United States, and are among the largest non-European foreign student populations in the United Kingdom, the US, and Ghana, among others (Casimir 2008).

13 Higher education is administratively split between the university and non-university sector. The National Universities Commission (NUC) is tasked with accrediting universities, which is often a highly contentious process given the number of institutions seeking this status, especially private universities. Of the 128 registered universities, there are 40 federal, 38 state, and 50 private. Non-universities fall under the Federal Ministry of Education.

14 “Massification” refers to mass demands for educational access and the proliferation of educational institutions to meet these demands. As I discuss later in the context of Nigeria, institutional proliferation typically has the effect of lowering academic standards and overburdening infrastructures ill-equipped to absorb increased demands.
dynamics of ethno-regional incorporation within the nation-state, with the Northern region producing the bulk of military leadership and the Southern region producing the largest population of “lettered,” or degreed, citizens (Aguolu 1979; Asiwaju 1975; Bassey 1991). As such, participation in formal education has been critical to Yoruba mobility and cosmopolitanism since the 19th century, and central also to its ethnogenesis (Peel 2000) regardless of religious, sub-regional, and gender differences. Urban dwelling has been equally crucial to popular representations of Yoruba identity, particularly in the city of Ibadan. As early as 1955, the Yoruba were described as “undoubtedly the most urban of all African peoples” (Bascom 1955, 446), and were oft-cited examples of agents of social change in the early anthropology of urban Africa (Cohen 1969; Kuper 1965; Miner 1967).

Though higher education in Nigeria exceeds the university—in fact, non-universities are responsible for educating a larger population of students—the university nevertheless dominates federal and state policy, commands the most resources, and occupies a central place in popular ideals concerning higher education. In the discussion that follows, the university is treated as a specific category of educational institutions, but also a metonym and archetype of higher education more generally. At the risk of magnifying the relative privilege of universities within higher education policy, resources, and scholarship, this discussion nevertheless emphasizes developments associated with the university for two reasons. One, the university, especially the first generation of federal universities, remains emblematic of the aspirations associated with education. For instance, it is not uncommon for graduates with various certificates from polytechnics and even state universities to pursue additional degrees, even switching disciplinary focus, in order to obtain degrees from “desirable” universities. Second, the University of Ibadan, where I conducted most of my fieldwork, is the single most central “social institution” (Tamuno 1981b, 2) to the geography of Ibadan as both an educational landscape and an urban environment.

The relationships among universities, the post-/colonial state, and political struggles have been the subject of significant attention among scholars both in and out of Nigeria (for instance, Atteh 1996; Beckman 2003; Beckman and Jega 1995; Jega 1995; Lebeau and Ogunsanya 2000; Van den Berghe 1973). However, the co-emergence of the university and the city has not been studied as an articulated phenomenon, as I analyze here. Though the university and the city might appear to represent distinct social milieus, cities and universities have shared a symbiotic relationship dating back at least to the Middle Ages (Bender 1988, 4). This is, in part, due to their shared iconography as emblems of distinction, in the sense in which Bourdieu (1984) describes the class re/production of sophistication, as well as the historic relationship between the rise of an educated bourgeoisie, urban governance, and the formation of a critical public sphere (Habermas 1991). Contemporary African cities have been described as “stages” upon which young people project and enact hopes about the future through the physical, social and economic circulation that urban landscapes make possible (Hansen 2014, 4). The university, too, offers the potential of socioeconomic mobility upon which futures can be built. Both are key terrains where the gap between ideals and realities, and particularly what Appadurai and Holston call “disjunctions between the form and substance of citizenship” (1996, 190), are worked out. For these reasons, analyzing the relationships between universities and their urban social contexts is critical to understanding young people’s aspirations and situated struggles for belonging. To be clear, here, the concept of citizenship does not purely denote a formal status that endows rights within a nation-state, but instead a broader sense of belonging, which is variously territorialized,
and which confers a more elusive set of social privileges that are now among the chief anxieties of youth as well as a major focus of scholarship within the anthropology of education on the relationship between politics and schooling across cultural contexts (e.g., Banks 2007; Benei 2007; K. Hall 2002; Levinson and Stevick 2007; Lukose 2005; Luykx 1999).

**Power and Citizenship from the School to the City**

Despite the historical and regional particularities of Ibadan, the trajectories of higher educational institutions vis-à-vis the Nigerian state and broader society are largely consistent with scholarship on educational institutions within the global context. Beyond their role in transmitting specific kinds of knowledge, scholars tend to agree that schools have been central to imperial and post-colonial forms of power and statecraft, as well as key sites for the production of “citizens” in liberal democratic nation-states. Within anthropological and social scientific approaches to formal education and non-institutional forms of learning, this dissertation is most closely engaged with two strands of this literature: the body of work concerning schools, social re/production, and power; and, more recently, the work relating educative processes, citizenship, and formations of political subjectivity in schools and their urban contexts. Before discussing the structural transformations of the university and the city in Nigeria, I critically examine these bodies of literature and how they frame my approach.

**Schools, Social Re/production and Power**

Anthropologists have long been preoccupied with the moral and cultural training of the young broadly construed. Formal education, in particular, has figured heavily in understandings of the re/production of society, the circulation of power and authority, and the incorporation of members within societal groupings. Before the mid-twentieth century, a central concern of theorists of education was the relationships between the family and the school, and their implications for societal integration, given the cultural shifts engendered by urbanization, industrialization and colonization that the founding of schools accompanied, with somewhat divergent views on the effects of educative processes.\(^\text{15}\)

Among structural functionalists and Marxist social scientists of the 1970s, questions relating more explicitly to power relations, the re/production of relations of production, the legitimation of capitalist ideologies within social institutions, and the capacity for human agency amidst such powerful structural variables became a primary focus. Though many of these works adhere to the “correspondence principle” that suggests that schools mechanistically reproduce the economic relations of capitalist class structures,\(^\text{16}\) this study follows in the footsteps of those works that take into account the dialectical relationship between “domination and resistance,” and “structure and agency,” as this literature typically framed it.\(^\text{17}\) In particular, the classic

\(^{15}\) For instance, within Emile Durkheim’s foundational framework of education, the public school facilitates the integration of secular French society and acts as the primary means through which a general morality can be inculcated among the young (1961, 144–45). For Malinowski, on the other hand, the (colonial) school acts as a corrupting and extraneous influence on the educative processes of the family (Malinowski 1936).

\(^{16}\) Bowles and Gintis (1976), Harris (1982), Horowitz and Friedland (1971), and Sarup (1982) are representative examples of this approach.

\(^{17}\) See, for instance, Althusser (1971), Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), and Willis (1977).
ethnography of schooling, *Learning to Labor* (Willis 1977), stands as one of the most important critiques of the mechanistic economism underlying earlier works and exemplifies a critical aspect of my analytic approach to the ethnography of schools and students. In his analysis of “how working class kids get working class jobs,” Willis shows that, although working class boys’ counterculture disrupts the intended socialization intent of the school, it ironically reproduces labor power and the lads as working class subjects, without losing sight of the radical potential of the lads’ practices. In a subsequent elaboration that is worth noting here, Willis (1981) cautions against the presumption that cultural practices must necessarily reproduce existing relations; though capitalist structures may set certain limits for cultural production—even reproducing “limiting forms” such as authority, racism, and classism (49)—cultural practices and social structures are inherently dynamic and contested. The critical point to be gained here is that, even within social institutions that are, by their very nature intended to reproduce hierarchizing power relations, the creative processes embedded in the countercultures that form within and through these institutions may yield different outcomes under different conditions.

This tension between the tendency to re/produce particular power relations and the potentiality of alternative possibilities is a crucial dimension of my analytical approach to doing ethnography within social institutions like schools in Nigeria. While the correspondence principle has itself fallen out of fashion, there is often still an analytical cynicism about the imaginable and enactable possibilities within institutions that appear to be either highly efficient at reproducing the status quo, or woefully incapable of doing anything but compounding the weaknesses of post-colonial African states (for a particularly cynical take, see Bayart et al. 1999). Certainly, skepticism about the possibilities for political practices within schools in a country as notoriously “corrupt” and institutionally inefficient as Nigeria is understandable. How could a student that strategically develops a relationship with a self-proclaimed political “godfather,” as several of my interlocutors in fact did, be participating in anything but the reproduction of political patronage networks? Or, how could a student who used illicit means to gain university admissions and is suspected of being a member in a campus occult group be taken seriously as a political ideologue? In what follows, I provide the historical and political-economic context for addressing these questions. Nevertheless, my approach takes seriously these critiques—grounded, as they are, in an understanding of the powerful social structures that would tend to reproduce existing relations—while also maintaining an analytical openness to the radical imaginative potentiality of seemingly predictable courses of action. This openness is premised on an ethical commitment to taking seriously the interpretive understandings of my interlocutors about what they themselves are doing in practice.

This position of openness is without romanticizing the well-studied role of schools in the production of elites and various modes of power (labor, political, social, etc.). In the classic text, *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault ties the production of “docile bodies” and “moral subjects” to the birth of the modern prison system and its attendant forms of punishment, processes of discipline and a “new micro-physics of power” (139) that worked alongside other seemingly “minor” (138) processes located within the monastery, the barracks and, more to our

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18 Godfathers are political elders, who function as gatekeepers within national politics and offer financial sponsorship and sometimes mentorship to less senior political actors in exchange for their allegiance. In Chapter Three, I discuss the relationship between Ibadan godfathers and students more in depth.
purposes here, the school. Schools, Foucault notes in his discussion of the French collèges, introduced a classificatory and organizational shift into space, time and networks of relations: through time tables, class ranks, seating arrangements, and the like, pupils become part of a “machine” for learning, but more insidiously, “supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding” (147), in effect, disciplining. More relevant to the post/colony, Mitchell (1988) describes how schools (also streets, armies, and “model” villages) articulated the social, physical, and political order required for the formation of the “modern” Egyptian state. Where urban planning sought to discipline the minds and bodies of Egyptians as they moved through space, civilian (as opposed to religious) schools intended to produce “the individual citizen,” inculcating him or her into a “common economy of order” and a “system of discipline” (68, 71). In line with Foucault, Mitchell posits these disciplinary forms, internalized by subjects, as productive forms of power that produce, within the institutions commonly associated with modern nation-states such as schools and factories, “the modern individual, constructed as an isolated, disciplined, receptive, and industrious political subject” (xi). Yet, distinct from Foucault, Mitchell questions the “coherence” of disciplinary technologies, which he argues can “break down, counteract one another, or overreach…offer[ing] spaces for maneuver and resistance, and can be turned to counter-hegemonic purposes” from outside but, crucially, within the “organizational terrain” of colonized spaces (xi).

The last point is of critical importance to the framing of this work as it acknowledges the ways institutions like the school organizationally produce docility and political impotence and, yet, recognizes that these totalizing projects are never complete, always creating gaps that can be redirected by individuals seemingly caught in their grasp, strategically and even unintentionally. Particularly when we take into account institutions in post-colonial settings that can never be “total” institutions anyway given the ineptitude of the state, which is selectively present at best (Ferguson and Gupta 2002), there exists a fundamental gap between the kinds of citizens the institution is trying to produce and what is actually produced by actors in practice. We will see this clearly throughout the course of this dissertation in the latitudes students take while forming political identities and engaging in practices that are ambivalent towards the nation and democracy as political objects.

**Citizenship in the City and the University**

More recently, the emerging field of anthropological approaches to citizenship has explicitly tackled questions of power and the creation of “political subjects” and “citizens” in two domains that are relevant to the present study—urban and educational anthropology, fields that share both empirical and conceptual resonances that are analytically generative here. As I alluded to in my early invocation of Bender’s *The University and the City*, the forms of circulation, exchange, and cosmopolitanism, which helped evolve the city and the university into its modern forms also facilitated the emergence of the other.¹⁹ So also, discourses and practices

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¹⁹ Early (European) universities can be defined primarily as urban institutions (Hyde 1988; Klotsche 1966). The university shared with the city mobility, which distinguished urban life from rural life, where movement was more restricted, and the university from the studium, tied as it was to a specific place. These early institutions, like the people who inhabited them, were potentially mobile and often moved to different locations, as did the scholars within them that moved from teacher to teacher and from school to school.
of political struggle oriented towards greater social inclusion resonate with contemporary studies of urban spaces and educational institutions.

Perhaps more than any other context, cities have developed a substantial literature related to struggles for rights and, specifically, citizenship. This is likely because cities, though posited as ideal social formations that can be engineered for social transformation and equality (like schools), more often, cities are sites where difference is re/produced through spatial divisions, both imposed and appropriated. Nevertheless, these imposed organizational regimes also catalyze oppositional practices that threaten to subvert forms of order. For these reasons, cities have emerged as unique sites for the development of distinctly urban political cultures related to demands for full “citizenship” because specifically urban concentrations of “the nonlocal, the strange, the mixed, and the public” stimulate political movements which reconfigure the very framework of citizenship and prompt a renewed interrogation of the idea of (national) belonging (Appadurai and Holston 1996, 188; see also Zhang 2001).

As Mitchell argues in *The Right to the City* (2003), the struggle for the city itself constitutes new forms of political practice oriented toward the creation of a democratic political culture. In his examination of how the right to the city and its public spaces is determined both legally and in practice, the city is conceived as a collective project—an *oeuvre*, borrowing from Lefebvre (2002)—through which new modes of urban life are created through struggles over the city. In his study of the urban peripheries of Sao Paulo, Holston (2008) strikes a related note. As Holston argues, though cities have historically been the site for the development of ideas and practices related to citizenship, global urbanization produces “especially volatile conditions” for the development of citizenship (4). Through the “insurgent” practices of auto-construction, Brazilian urban dwellers articulated a novel formulation of citizenship, which both perpetuated and contested entrenched modes of differentiated (or non-inclusive and partial) citizenship. In this framework, the city is not simply the site for political struggle, it also provides the substance: the process of urbanization is itself transformative, though new forms of civic participation and political practice exist in tension with entrenched forms.

Though much of the conversation concerning urban citizenship is sited in cities outside of the African context, it is worth remembering that Africa was the primary site of early anthropological explorations of the relationships between cities and social and political change at a time when American and European cities were receiving sociological attention and the majority of anthropologists were focused on “remote” village life outside of the Western world. In Africa, among other colonized territories, urban colonial subjects experienced the paradoxes of urban inclusion and exclusion and developed political practices that would challenge colonial rule, as anthropologists described in numerous monographs. In recent years, African cities have received renewed attention among scholars who take interest in, on the one hand, rapid processes of urbanization within the continent, particularly in mega-cities like that of Nigerian metropolis Lagos, which, in part, has helped fuel the resurgence of what has been identified as the “African middle class” (Enaudiou 2013). On the other hand, with the retreat of the state and the attendant

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20 For studies of how imposed regimes of spatial segregation re/produce racial and class stratification and related cultural practices, see: Bourgois (2003), Caldeira (2000), Gregory (1999), and Margolis (1994), among others.
infrastructural challenges of rapidly growing urban spaces, “improvisational” practices have developed to enable urban residents to eke out an existence in African cities, giving order to seemingly disorderly urban spaces. As has been noted elsewhere, such practices have important implications for how we understand whether and how African cities “work” (Simone 2004), but also how we understand the agentive capacities of Africans themselves (Mbembe 2002).

Conversations related to (democratic) citizenship have taken on a growing role within the anthropology of education as in urban anthropology. In recent years, American anthropologists of education have tended to focus on the relationships between achievement and race, ethnicity, and culture as they relate to identity and learning orientation. This tendency is opposed to what Levinson (2011) describes as more explicitly political questions concerning the "political implications of schooled identities: What kinds of citizens, for what kind of democracy, with what kinds of intercultural sensibilities, deliberative competencies, and political agency are being shaped in schools, and how do students, perhaps, draw on alternative political imaginaries to resist such shaping" (283)? However, this seems to be changing as anthropologists examine the role of schools in identity formation, social belonging and affiliation, and political participation (for instance, Benet 2008; Levinson and Stevick 2007; Lukose 2005; Sharp 2002). Nevertheless, a problematic assumption, within much of the research and policy on formal education and citizenship is, one, that democracy is the “implicit horizon” of citizenship (Levinson 2011, 281) and, two, that there is a "good" or ideal citizen and, as such, the charge of education is to produce this democratic subject. As Biesta cautions in the essay "The Ignorant Citizen," in conversation with the work of Rancière, the danger inherent in this position is that "education is maneuvered into a position where it contributes to a domestication of the citizen—a 'pinning down' of citizens to a particular civic identity—and thus leads to the erosion of...interpretations of citizenship that see the meaning of citizenship as essentially contested" (2011, 142). Thus, part of what is at work in discourses of education "readying" so-called “newcomers" to be incorporated into normativized models of democracy are understandings of the political subject as rational, impartial, and configured prior to the "event" of democratic politics.

My conception of citizenship and its connection with educative processes de-naturalizes this idea of the pre-formed citizen in favor of a perspective on citizenship as a set of practices that emerge within contested processes of becoming, not at a prior moment, but in and through the acts of politics. This work shares such concerns with the way educational institutions, educative processes, and ideas concerning formal schooling shape political actors, practices, and processes with reference to the nation and its associated imaginaries. Nevertheless, my engagement with citizenship and education, here, concerns itself not with a kind of static political socialization, or the teaching and learning of pre-conceived political identities, but rather political subjectivities engendered through experimentation with “democracy” and other forms of political practice that are ambivalent towards the state, in this case Nigeria, as a desired framework of belonging and democracy, itself, as a political project. As I am engaging the concept, with reference to both its academic and popular uses, citizenship offers a manner of thinking about the political subjectivities and practices of actors in fraught relationships with the
“nation,” “political power” and authority, who nevertheless make claims upon the nation (or other frames of belonging) and engage in forms of struggle in the service of such claims.23

In sum, in the previous review of the literature related to schools, the city, and citizenship, I have signaled two important claims underpinning this dissertation: that schools are sites of social and political contestation as opposed to mere institutions for the social reproduction of power and post-colonial state regimes; and that both schools and cities are terrains where the meaning and horizons of social inclusion, often conceived as “citizenship,” are negotiated through practice. Now, I turn to an analysis of how these claims unfold in the context of the university and the city in Ibadan.

“Elite” Aspirations

From its genesis, the University of Ibadan has been at the center of struggles over elite aspirations and class relations, social privilege, and the relationship between state and society. Established in 1948 as University College Ibadan, Nigeria’s first university was a political compromise on the part of the British colonial regime. For more than half a century before its founding, Sierra Leonean reverse migrants24 and, later, the larger class of native Western-educated “elites” mobilized for the expansion of higher education beyond technical training at the Yaba Higher College, a colonial institution founded in 1934 that trained native Nigerians for assistantship to expatriate bureaucrats (Onabamiro 1983).25 In the interwar period, when political nationalism was beginning to take hold in the colony, the first mass political party, the Nigerian Youth Movement established in 1933, made one of its chief targets the educational policy of the colonial administration. So intense was the pressure from educated elites, who viewed university credentials as all that stood in the way of the full privileges of civil service that, in the midst of World War II, colonial authorities convened the Elliot Commission for Higher Education in the Colonies in 1943. The commission recommended the establishment of a university in Ibadan with degrees awarded externally from the University of London.26

23 Political "activism" would be another way of framing this, however, citizenship signals the desired end of more meaningful inclusion in the nation-state, the notion of "rights" and the "public" that are associated specifically with education and educational institutions in this context, as well as the specific centrality of higher educational development in decolonization and the establishment of the postcolonial state.

24 These were former enslaved people, who were freed by the Sierra Leone-based British Navy after abolition and returned to settle the colony of Lagos as educated Christian converts.

25 The Yaba Higher College, established in what is now a suburb of Lagos, was initially restricted to colonial subjects within the Southern Region amid plans to establish a similar institution in the Northern Region. The college offered vocational training for assistants for colonial departments and private firms and was widely criticized for offering “inferior” credentials, which compelled qualified and wealthy Nigerians to attend Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone or universities in the United Kingdom.

26 The struggle for full education privileges should not presume a radical agenda on the part of educated elites, even those who eventually became celebrated nationalists. As Ayandele argues, “The chief ‘grievance’ of the so-called nationalists [including Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Obafemi Awolowo] was that they should be taken into greater partnership in the distribution of offices, particularly in the civil service. None of them advocated a policy of Nigeria for Nigerians until after the Second World War, and even when this slogan came into vogue what it meant in effect was Nigeria for the educated elite” (1974, 74).
Figure 4: Contemporary map of University of Ibadan campus
Up until that point, two social groups almost universally condemned educational expansion at the university level. They were the colonial administration, “for fear of creating a politically troublesome class,” to quote Sir Frederick Lugard, Governor-General of Nigeria (1914-1929), and the general public of “unlettered” masses, who viewed Western-educated “elites” as quasi-natives who had been “de-civilized” through their adoption of Western culture, a sentiment which colonizers, ironically, shared (Ayandele 1974, 15–16). However, in the post-war period, the broader spirit of political change throughout the colonial world forced the hand of both British colonizers and the wider population. With the end of formal colonialism looming, British colonial administrators strategically wooed educated aspiring elites to play a central position in the fortification of the cultural, economic, and political legacies of the colonial era. The establishment of university education in Nigeria should be understood, in this light, as only resignedly and then tactically accepted: first by colonizers who recognized the instrumental role of universities as vehicles for the transfer of power within the overarching strategy of “gradual and controlled decolonization,” which would produce the agents that, working “in partnership” with colonizers, would also entrench the “structures needed for a modern liberal state, more or less in the British image” (Hargreaves 1973, 27); and only later by the broader native population.

The selection of the, then, outskirts of Ibadan town was also a careful calculation on the part of the colonial regime, negotiating the required infrastructural needs of a university subjected to immense public scrutiny, if not outright suspicion, as well as the political desire to minimize anti-colonial influences percolating in urban landscapes like that of the nearby capital, Lagos. The town of Ibadan was established, it is said, as a war camp in 1829 by Lagelu, the commander-in-chief of Ife, who fled Ile-Ife the center of Yoruba cosmology, in the midst of intense warfare within the region that eventually fractured the Oyo Empire. Ibadan was a widely recognized urban commercial center and “powerful military polity” (Watson 1999, 8), even before becoming a British Protectorate in 1893. At the time of the first university’s founding in the “bush” far removed from the central commercial and civic activities of the town, Ibadan was Nigeria’s most populous city, whose activities centered on farming, trade, craft specialization, and chieftaincy politics characterized by “civil disorder” (22). However, by the late 1950s, the

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27 It is important to note that the “unlettered” population was by no means an undifferentiated category or an uneducated group of native Nigerians. Though the group did not hold Western education credentials, this category also included natives educated in non-Western traditions, including the significant population of Muslims educated in Arabic through Quranic schools (Gbadamosi 1967; Hiskett 1975).

28 Following Ayandele (1974), I adopt the nomenclature “unlettered” to distinguish between the minority of Western-educated Nigerians from the majority. Early adoptees of Western education were largely former slaves or their descendants, who returned to Nigeria and understood themselves as superior to the larger native population. Widespread rejection of western education was, in fact, a rejection of the attempted leadership of this class of “semi-Nigerians,” which turned to “sullen resignation” as these strategic elites collaborated with colonizers, and eventually “inevitable acceptance” as the wider population themselves attempted to enter the elite class (2).

29 This attitudinal shift also marks a shift in colonial administrative logic to one of “trusteeship,” wherein colonial powers professed a moral obligation to the “backward nations” (Mojuetan 2000: 15). Development programs that emphasized social and economic development were prescribed and funded, including the first higher educational institutions. The significant costs of this agenda were not lost on British authorities and the push to self-governance should be understood, following Louis and Robinson (1994), as a reflection of the economic non-viability of sustaining a developmentalist agenda.

30 Ibadan’s militarism and the peculiarities of its urbanization, as Watson (2003; 1999) argues, are crucial to contemporary Yoruba political identity and the making of its civic culture.
“modern, up-to-date” University and teaching hospital were a particular source of local pride (Smythe 1960, 145).

From 1948-1962, the pre-autonomous era when University College Ibadan (UCI) still functioned as an academic affiliate, the institution epitomized the notion of an ivory tower: the unapologetic production of cultural and curricular British-ness was the watchword of the day. As Ayandele notes with his characteristically unsympathetic perspective on educated “pseudo-elites,” “Ibadan Campus, more or less a chip off Europe in its physical expression, [...] proved a successful hybridizer, completing the process of transmogrification of Nigerians into a motley of trousered and frocked burlesques with a veneer of Western culture” (1974). However, despite the powerful influence of imperial ties, the relationship between colonial and nationalist logics as they articulated within the university can still be described as provisional.

At its founding, UCI was temporarily located at the Military Hospital in the Eleyele area of Ibadan where students and staff of the first session inhabited “ramshackle” accommodations fronted by air-raid shelters (Ellah 1981), as they awaited the development of the permanent site. Similarly, the imagined and institutionalized role of the university was in flux at this time. Even after the physical space of the university was anchored with the establishment of a permanent site in 1949, the production of the university in relation to and in tension with colonial attachments, “society,” and eventually the nation-state, was being negotiated. The assemblage of these relationships created a highly contentious identity for UCI as it vacillated between the winds of social change” that animated the independence era and what Stoler (2013) has called “imperial debris,” or the active remnants of colonial entanglements. Leading nationalist ideologues of the era such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Obafemi Awolowo disparaged the institution as a politically benign colonial device designed to keep Nigeria in perpetual subjugation to the British. Yet, as former Vice Chancellor of University of Ibadan, Tekena Tamuno, recounts, faculty and students sought to transcend UCI’s colonial foundations and strongly advocated for “a complex role for their institution: both as an object and means of social reform” (1981b, 11).

Though initially resistant to the very idea of an educated elite class, pragmatically, the broader native population recognized the inevitability of the imposed leadership of educated Nigerians, and increasingly pursued Western-style educational opportunities for their children as the most direct manner of opting into the nation being built and self-positioning within the shifting landscape of power. As founding UCI lecturer, British expatriate John Omer-Cooper noted, “With independence, a previously almost closed society had overnight become almost incredibly open...It was a common thing for a pregnant Nigerian woman of the time to remark, ‘I get minister for belly.’...Everyone was sure he or she was going somewhere, [and] the future was going to be better than the past” (1981, 134–35). Unlike its predecessor in the Yaba Higher College, the university offered a pathway to incipient arenas for the exercise of “power and privilege” (Van den Berghe 1973) within a nation believed to be freeing itself from British rule—imagined returns which still persist despite drastically changing outcomes.

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31 UCI’s status as an academic outpost of University of London was the subject of intense debate amid concerns about the institution being “colonial” in nature despite the push for political independence. It was only in 1962, shortly after independence, that University of Ibadan become a full-fledged independent university, though by that time other universities like University of Ife and University of Nigeria at Nsukka had already been established as decidedly un-“colonial” institutions as the ethno-regional projects of Awolowo and Azikiwe respectively.
In both the colonial period of University College Ibadan and the early independence era of University of Ibadan, higher education aligned with elite paradigms of colonial and, later, national development. At this time, the education of students was heavily subsidized and students were given significant privileges that are still regarded with nostalgia such as single rooms, laundry service, and a full chicken at dinner. Today, the attribution of privilege to university education, even if the substance of such privilege has been recalibrated, is thoroughly naturalized into the national psyche as both inherent to “higher” education itself and inherently valuable in its own right.

In aligning the origins of the university with the precarious position of educated elites as a social class, whose existence as an accepted “elite” was denied for nearly a century, my point is twofold. First, even if one accepts the notion of the university as site of elite reproduction to which aspirations of mobility and full social privileges are assigned, it is important to recognize that the educated elite the institution is said to produce has historically been an aspirational social class, whose role as such was only tentatively embraced. Second, and more fundamentally, if one accepts the provisionality of the educated elite as a social category, then one must equally recognize its desired emergence and, by extension, the very values ascribed to higher education as sites of political struggle, which are obscured in the naturalization of the existence of a specifically “educated elite” even despite the tangible privileges afforded this group. In other words, the renegotiation of the idea(s) and ideal(s) of education that we see in the contemporary moment are less an appeal to a glorified past and more the continuation of contestation over (the terms of) aspirations routed through the university, not to mention the imagined relationships between the university and society.

The University Boom

In the reconstruction period after the Biafran War (1967-1970), which coincided with the oil boom of the early 1970s, national developmental principles shifted from elite education to rival demands for mass education. The period 1972-1977 can, thus, be described as an era of meteoric federal university expansion, and a quantitative rather than qualitative proliferation of educational access. The impact of the “superficial financial buoyancy” of the oil boom on the educational system was dramatic (Adesina 1983, 32). Given the massive profitability of the oil

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32 The provision of a full chicken per student is a source of intergenerational grievance sometimes invoked by contemporary students to substantiate claims about the failures of their elders, who relished a university education characterized by such perks, and to whom they assign blame for the ruin of the educational sector. It is worth noting that, though “privilege” defines characterizations of schooling during this period, relative to the present, early Ibadan students remarked on the restrictions associated with colonial education, which was regarded by some as a glorified secondary school despite the attendance of “mature” students (for first-person accounts of the foundational years of University of Ibadan, see the following collections: Mojuetan 2000; Tamuno 1981a).

33 The Nigerian Civil War, better known as the Biafran War, during which the southeastern region attempted to secede from the polity, was responsible for the deaths of upwards of one million civilians due to fighting and famine from July 1967-January 1970. Apart from other lasting effects on national cohesion, the exodus of Igbos from places like the University of Ibadan permanently changed the ethnic diversity of federal institutions. This is because, with the near-break of the Nigerian polity in the Civil War, post-war reconstruction emphasized the even spread of infrastructural and, especially, educational access throughout Nigeria, which had the effect of entrenching the ethno-regionalism we see in state institutions today.
sector, citizens insisted that the abundance of “petro-naira”\(^\text{34}\) (Barber 1982) justified free public educational services and, as a result, state actors attempted to secure their political base by supporting free education at all levels.

While the Second National Development Plan of 1970 focused on the reconstruction of damages from the Civil War and the problem of the regional and ethnic educational disparities, the Third National Development Plan of 1975 was the most comprehensive and expansive for the education sector, calling for Universal Primary Education and massive growth at the university level. The first step in mass university education came in 1972 under the Gowon military regime, which transferred this sector to Federal Military Government (FMG)\(^\text{35}\) control, giving the FMG sole power to create new universities. State universities had the option to remain state universities, but the fact that the FMG contributed up to 50% of capital costs and 30% of recurrent costs compelled University of Nigeria Nsukka and University of Benin to request being taken over by the FMG. Bringing university education under centralized control was the cornerstone of the official state policy of “national unity” justified on the basis of the “tribalization” of universities, their unchecked proliferation, and fears of the soaring costs of federal responsibility (Ajayi 1983). However, the transfer of power over university development to the FMG also meant that, while the government assumed greater responsibility for funding education, at the same time, its decrees could not be easily challenged, all while claiming to be a ‘neutral’ body with no vested interests in any particular state, region or ethnic group.

By 1980, the number of higher educational institutions had grown thirty-eight times since 1950, with enrollment mushrooming from 1,395 students to 53,000 in the same period (Adesina 1983). The instrumental role imagined for the university in this period of state expansion resonates with the earlier vision of education for colonial and later national development. However, a key transformation lies in the “mass production” model of the university in this era, which stands in sharp contrast to the logic of care and exclusivity that characterized the foundational years. Though the university had become a key component of the taken-for-granted logic of statecraft, the “university for all” approach took on the character of a political tool, which would be abandoned as the federal coffers dried up with the debt crisis of the 1980s.

By the mid-1980s, every state of the Federation had at least one university campus, one or more colleges of education and one or more polytechnics within its territory. As Akpan notes, however, 91% of higher educational institutions were located in either state capitals or local government headquarters (1987, 548–50). Part of the tendency towards siting universities in urban areas was arguably pragmatic: as large consumers of water and electricity and other services such as transportation, printing, telecommunication, and banking, such facilities could typically be found only in towns and cities. Just as campuses depended on the infrastructure and service amenities of towns and cities, the commercial activities of surrounding towns and cities hinged on the industries spawned by universities, which were the largest employers and consumers in many regions. Yet, despite this seeming interdependence, the concentration of

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\(^{34}\) This describes the shift from the Nigerian economy being principally organized around agricultural production to oil production, such that “oil money” becomes the central logic of statecraft, and economic and political power.

\(^{35}\) Nigeria experienced military rule for much of its postcolonial existence: from 1966-1979 (under four different military heads of state) and 1983-1999 (under four different military heads of state) with the most recent return to civilian rule in 1999.
benefits in towns and cities tended to re-entrench rural-urban distributional unevenness and create the conditions for the massive rural-urban migration that would ensue in the years of economic downturn.

In the city of Ibadan, the university is surrounded by neighboring communities including: Agbowo opposite the main gate; Orogun nearly opposite the second gate; Ajibode to the East; and Sango and Apete to the West. Of all these communities, Agbowo shares the closest relationship with the University of Ibadan, acting essentially as a “satellite community” (Oguntomisin 2000, 259). For our purposes here, the relationship between the campus and its immediate neighbor from this point onward marks a critical shift in town-gown relations: as the university sector multiplied and the existing infrastructure was overstretched to meet new demands, the campus became less an isolated ivory tower set apart from urban movements and, increasingly, a companion in the experience of day-to-day struggle.

With the changing mission of higher education and the rise in student populations, campus infrastructure was stretched beyond their limits. Residence halls brimmed over with students and the prided on-campus accommodations that previously separated universities from surrounding towns were de-emphasized in favor of off-campus accommodations—early signs of institutional under-capacity which were exacerbated by the imposition of austerity measures (Ogunsaju 1983; Akpan 1987). As highly subsidized campus room and board was phased out nationally, in Ibadan, staff and students turned to Agbowo for provisions and accommodation alongside other survival strategies like 0-1-1 and 1-0-1\(^3\) to cope with new experiences of hardship. Noted Ibadan historian B.A. Mojuetan has described the relationship between the University of Ibadan and Agbowo as “embodying the contradictions of ‘bourgeois’ and ‘proletarian’ cultures, both of which co-exist in symbiosis, albeit in uneasy sociability” (2000, 269). Students and staff came to rely on the informal economy of the neighboring community for subsistence, accommodation and leisure in the changing climate of mass education, just as the commercial activities of market women, property owners, and other service providers, which made Agbowo a “hive of activity, and a highway of human and vehicular traffic virtually on a twenty-four hour basis” (273), hinged on the needs of the campus community. Over time, this instrumental, essentially commercial, relationship would be succeeded by shared experiences of “(structural) adjustment,” which again narrowed the imagined gap between the campus community and the broader urban population (see Figure 5 below).

From one perspective, the transformation from “elite” to “mass” education can be understood as widening access to higher education. However, the logic of “mass production” made students of this era little more than matriculation numbers. From this point forward, students, who had only selectively and insularly engaged in coordinated political action—which, as I will soon discuss, dealt mostly with the provision of campus services—began to radicalize and connect rapidly deteriorating university conditions to the broader economic and political crises mounting in a nation adopting neoliberal economic policies and extending the reach of the military regime (Austin 1980). As such, despite the seemingly progressive aspects of federal policy towards higher education during this period, the structural transformation that these policy changes index represent a crucial prelude to the institutional free-fall in the 1980s that educational institutions continue to recover from today. Next, I describe the nature of this shift in

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30 The terms refer to survivalist meal planning whereby students skip breakfast and consume lunch and dinner, or skip lunch and consume breakfast and dinner (Oguntomisin 2000, 263)—which many students still partake in today.
detail because the infrastructural stagnation of higher educational institutions combined with targeted policies that sought to defund and de-radicalize education, students, and faculty help contextualize why the analysis of universities and students from the 1980s onward demands a fundamental conceptual shift from educational institutions as bastions of social re/production and (state) power to a framework that takes seriously their role as sites of political struggle.

The Radicalization of the Ivory Tower

After the 1973 spike in oil prices by Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) members that financed the mass expansion of education gave way to the debt crises of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the sweeping development projects pursued by the top-heavy state were hastily suspended. As oil rents dwindled, the role of the university on the national priority list was drastically scaled down and austerity programs were introduced by the military state. In particular, the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1986 prompted an extreme reconfiguration of the imagined role of education, and the specific role of the university in national development. For the Nigerian university, SAP signified a decisive downsizing of higher education, with emphasis shifted towards cost recovery, rationalization in
educational enterprise, and the alignment of the knowledge acquisition with market demands. In this schema, the university essentially became “excess weight” to be structurally “adjusted” by the state throughout the 80s and into the 90s—education policy decisions that were further compounded by the instability of successive military regimes, which entrenched repressive political misrule at all levels of governance, including university administration (for regional perspectives, see Federici et al. 2000; Lebeau and Ogunsanya 2000).

The basic economic philosophy of SAP follows the neoliberal dogma that the public sector is responsible for diminishing economic growth, given that social welfare services consume considerable public funds with purportedly disproportionately small returns to the economy. According to this logic, it is economically irrational to insist that states bear the brunt of the financial burden for education, since education consumers receive private rates of returns that exceed the social rate of returns (Godonoo 1994; Psacharopoulos 1981a; Samoff and Carrol 2003). International financial institutions, most especially the World Bank, argued that education ought to be subject to private participation and market rules, because they were essentially private goods, which yielded direct benefit to consumers. It was, thus, strongly recommended, through the imposition of coercive fiscal conditionalities, that previously unknown economic rents be applied to educational services to keep the costs of these “services” above normal efficiency levels, effectively cutting public subsidies for non-instructional expenses including housing and meal subsidies, which were sharply reduced or eliminated altogether (Fadahunsi et al. 1996; Psacharopoulos 1981b). Crucially, this policy shift severs the previously assumed complementarity of the social and individual benefits of education. More broadly, its strident conditionalities slashed government funding of social services, devalued currencies, and eliminated essential subsidies for food, education, and health care.

Though all levels of education were hard-hit during the Structural Adjustment Period, postsecondary education was explicitly targeted by international lending institutions, which argued, perhaps not unreasonably, that Africa’s limited resources would be better spent on basic education, in the interest of alleviating poverty. While SAP as a specific policy within a much larger economic paradigm shift is often described as the imposition of foreign powers and their financial institutions, it is important to note that the strategies of international lenders and the Nigerian state were essentially compatible. The rationalization of the higher education system was, admittedly, part of the Babangida administration’s 1987 “overall objective of removing waste and avoiding the production of a vast pool of unemployable man-power related neither to discernible national needs nor to ascertainable opportunity for the gainful application of intelligence and skill in the economic system” (Okoye 1989, 379). With this alignment of the interests of both national and international actors, federal government cuts were felt harshly as universities depended on government grants for as much as 90% of recurring expenditure (Atteh 1996; Jega 1995; Oduleye 1985). As a result, the adoption of SAP had an immediate and tangible impact on the survival possibilities of students and staff (Olugbade 1990), resulting in the creation of a “new poor” (Beckman and Jega 1995) among academics, which facilitated the massive brain drain of the late 1980s and 1990s and a more lasting de-professionalization of the academy. Students were not left out as systemic deprivation united them with faculty members and the broader population.

The abrupt change in material conditions had a radicalizing effect among students and faculty, who fought to defend their organizational rights and to protect the university, whose apparent destruction these groups discursively linked to a more pervasive unraveling of the
The seeds of authoritarianism, which had been sown with the transfer of university autonomy to the FMG, were only exacerbated by the general militarism associated with SAP: university administrators (“despotic sole administrators”) deployed strong-arm tactics to silence student and staff dissent and blatant corruption increased among officials who saw their positions as unchecked opportunities for financial aggrandizement, in line with the general “moral decadence” and culture of impunity among political figures within the FMG (Adejumobi 2000). The implementation of the widely unpopular economic regime coupled with such abuses of power catalyzed the relatively tame institutions, which were just beginning to develop radical activism, into battlegrounds of resistance thanks to the growth of the student popular struggle led by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), whose centrality within the “students’ movement” I now take up.

From the mid-1980s to date, every year underpaid faculty and staff members and students organized major strikes and protests. In the section that follows, I detail the development of the student radical tradition during this period. The structural transformations and “adjustment” of higher educational institutions discussed above, I argue, had the larger effect of further narrowing the gap between the campus and the city as students extended their political practices beyond the boundaries of the university through political activism. More fundamentally, radical student unionism consciously rearticulated the scope of students’ interests and the imagined relationship between the university and broader society. Where educational institutions were once ivory towers of privilege in which students were coddled by authorities and pampered with highly subsidized provisions and the prestige of the life of the mind, students of the mid-1980s and beyond recognized the shared structural conditions producing scarcity, corruption, and vulnerability in educational institutions and the nation’s urban spaces.

“Aluta Continua”: The Birth of the Student Unionism Tradition

The prior discussion of the structural transformations of the university alludes to shifting ideas concerning higher education and the radically changing context of student experiences. The development of student radicalism, itself, is worthy of closer scrutiny, as the legacy of student unionism is the single greatest influence on the culture of campus politics today, and students’ understandings of the relationship between campus and society. Student unionism as a specific mode of political practice, sometimes referred to as “aluta-ism” following the protest rallying cry “Aluta continua: victoria ascerta,” is also the foundation of the stylistic repertoires students mobilize in their activisms, which I describe in greater detail in the final chapter on student protests, “Ambivalent Activism.” Before the era of student radicalism catalyzed by SAP, it is critical to take note of two foundational phases within the development of the students’ movement in Nigeria. The first corresponds to an era of relatively small-scale political mobilization, largely confined to the campus, which coincides, not incidentally, with the early era of the University of Ibadan as the exclusive domain of an aspiring “elite.” The second corresponds to the period of mass educational expansion, during which students organized more consistently against the degrading quality of their education, and were just beginning to find the means to effectively transcend the particularities of the student experience and articulate struggles within the university to broader social problems.

Though University of Ibadan students prior to the Civil War were a privileged lot by all estimations, who nevertheless grappled with the ethnic, regional, and class differences that
pervaded the newly independent nation-state within campus associations, concerns insular to the university were capable of uniting students long enough to protest. Then, grievances almost always related to campus policies, especially food services and the mismanagement of student union funds by union officials. Nigeria’s first student union, the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) established in 1956, coordinated student political action like demonstrations and lecture boycotts, which were premised on non-violence. Students only occasionally weighed in on national and international issues, and carried out peaceful demonstrations condemning the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact (1960), the Sharpeville massacre in South Africa (1960), the assassination of Patrice Lumumba (1961), and the National Census exercise (1963). These latter incidents suggest an engagement with issues of broader national and Pan-African concern. However, the student “struggle” of this period was characterized by a discernible lack of struggle. Even as students navigated the ambivalence of institutional elitism and post-colonial promises of development for all, organized campus politics reflected a “safe” culture of insularity reinforced, if not entirely prescribed, by the colonialist educational paradigm.

Beginning in the early 1970s and rapidly accelerating in the early 1980s, student activism as a practice evolved from a relatively passive exercise to an increasingly radical and organized practice of power, which coincided with the period of mass educational expansion and state militarization. Initially, it was the coercive tactics of the militarizing state that aroused student activism. During the 1971 academic session, students protested the catering at Nnamdi Azikiwe Hall by launching a hunger strike, a tactic consistent with the culture of non-violence. However, a confrontation between demonstrating students and police summoned to the university by administrators escalated into a riot, during which police opened fire, killing one student, Kunle Adepeju, the first student casualty in history of student political activism in Nigeria. In the years that followed, the “Kunle Adepeju Affair” would propel student radicalism, as student commemorations of Adepeju’s death became recurring occasions for violent confrontations between students and authorities such as university administrators and the police. Students first attempted to memorialize Adepeju in 1973 with a march through the city of Ibadan to his gravesite, efforts thwarted by police teargasing students and a campus riot in response. This cycle of excessive police force and student riots was repeated the following year, though the violence escalated with police detainment of twenty students and students responding by holding a campus police constable hostage (Preston 1981, 55). Though this era stands in sharp distinction to the previous phase with the increased frequency of violent confrontations between students and authorities, radical student activism would reach maturity only after the economic crises beginning in the late 1970s.

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37 Predecessors to this first student union include the West African Students Union formed among mainly Nigerian and Ghanaian students studying in England in the interwar period (Garigue 1953; Olusanya 1982), and the early nationalist Nigerian Youth Movement formed during the same period in the colony (Sklar 2004, 48–54).

38 One exception to the use of violence, specifically as it relates to the destruction of property, was unrest in November 1957. After the death of a female student in one of the residence halls during a failed abortion, the principal, Dr. Parry, had protective fencing installed around the ground floors of halls to segregate the sexes, which students greatly resented and then forcibly removed. In the aftermath of this incident, the entire class was sent home for the rest of the first term as punishment (Ferguson 1981, 120; Preston 1981, 48)—the first time such punitive measures would be applied, though they would later become routine.

39 The catalyzing effect of state violence on the students’ movement in Nigeria bears a striking resemblance to the 1970 Kent State Massacre, which escalated the Anti-War Movement on and off campuses in the United States.
As oil revenues dwindled, students seized upon the contraction of state funding for universities as a primary target for student activism. In 1978, the Nigerian Universities Commission increased meal charges for students from 50 kobo to N1.50k per day and accommodation charges from 30 Naira to N90, which resulted in the 1979 student unrest referred to as the “Ali Must Go” crisis in which students rioted on campuses around the nation and called for the resignation of Colonel Ahmadu Ali, the Minister of Education (Adejumobi 2000). Such austerity measures, years before the implementation of the IMF-sponsored SAP program, ushered in a new era of student activism that was increasingly framed by material deprivation. As Federici et al. note, “The main difference between the new student movement and those that have preceded it concerns its changed class character, as determined by the status of university students as a social group, and their future economic and political destination. On both counts, it is clear that African students have been proletarianized” (2000, 93). To put the increased intensity of student political activism into perspective, keep in mind that, in the first three decades of higher education (1948-1979), there were approximately twenty major student protests. In half that time, between 1980 and 1996, there were over thirty-six nationally coordinated student political campaigns and over three hundred individual incidents of unrest (Adejumobi 2000).

For these reasons, we might consider the political and economic crises of this period, felt most sharply after the implementation of SAP, to be both a gift and a curse to the budding students’ movement. The experiences of hardship students organized against were countered by the full weight of a military regime that was unsympathetic to students’ demands and ruthlessly punished students for voicing them. Between 1985 and 1993, military riot police routinely used live ammunition on unarmed protesters during demonstrations, killing more than one hundred students and imprisoning over one thousand under harsh conditions, according to official records (Atteh 1996, 37). University administrators, for their part, suspended and expelled hundreds of students without fair hearings. Yet, despite the substantial price students paid with exposure to such draconian reprisals from authorities, the apparent crisis of the state and its legitimacy provided a more stable bridge between student interests and “society” than ever before, as SAP and the excesses of the military offered a clear organizational purpose to the student struggle especially in major cities and towns.

Though students organized major national demonstrations throughout the 1980s against the political and economic policies of military heads of state Shagari, Buhari, and Babangida, it was against the Babangida regime of the late 1980s and early 1990s that students leveled their most effective organizational and ideological campaigns. The sustained student unrest of 1988-89 coupled with organized resistance to SAP’s “political Siamese twin,” the transition to civil rule program, are instructive here. Coordinated by the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), which replaced NUNS in 1980, the 1988-89 student protests, later christened the “anti-SAP riots” skillfully linked the economic crisis aggravated by SAP to the illegitimacy of the military state and the collapse of the educational sector. This series of protests was among the most profound and well coordinated by NANS as campuses around the country, particularly in the major cities Lagos, Ibadan, Ife, Zaria, Port Harcourt, and Kaduna, jointly protested, also

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40 NANS was formed in July 1980 at Yaba College of Technology (formerly, Yaba Higher College), as an outgrowth of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS), made defunct by the Obasanjo military regime in 1978 after nationwide student unrest that year.
drawing the general (urban) public into the unrest, which included confrontations with the police and property destruction (Adejumobi 2003, 242). According to NANS official statements, the national protests targeted SAP, given its exposure of the “criminal insensitivity of the Babangida regime to the worsening plight of the people,” including but not limited to the deliberate defunding of the educational system. At the same time, the protests served as a “categorical rejection” of a more insidious policy: that is, “the package of diversion and fraud called the transition programme,” which the organization argued, “the regime smartly contrived to confer political legitimacy on SAP” (217).

What is most significant about the national “anti-SAP” student demonstrations is the ideological scope of this wave of student protests, which extended well beyond the narrow interests of previous unrest and even SAP as an economic policy itself. Though previous incidents such as the Kunle Adepeju murder and the “Ali Must Go” crisis may have garnered national support amongst students, the issues underlying students’ mobilizations were specific to students. In sharp contrast, concerns that directly implicated all members of society were the catalyst for the 1988-1989 actions. Student demands to the FMG were similarly broad in scope: increased educational funding, but also more jobs and allowances for workers. At the same time, discursively linking the economic policy with the wider anathema of the military state enlarged the contribution of the student body to national political discourse and the growing voice of civil society associations, such as trade unions and faculty and staff unions, who also warned that a transition-to-civilian rule program premised upon the prevailing neoliberal economic paradigm would only deepen the authoritarian state and ensure its perpetuation, serving as a disingenuous political diversion that was destined to fail—which it indeed did.

Beyond the organizational effectiveness of the national student body during this period, students proposed an ideological alternative to the existing political structure. The NANS Charter of Demands, originally introduced in December 1982, advanced a vision of governance, national development, and education grounded in “social justice.” The Charter had, as its primary aim, improved access and funding for education at all levels, but also the cultivation of democratic culture through “participatory decision-making and the autonomy of institutions” (NANS cited in Adejumobi 2003, 238-39). No doubt fueled by the anti-capitalist ideological disposition of the most radical wing of student activists, NANS linked problems endemic to the educational sector with the broader culture of authoritarianism engendered by the “neocolonialist” military regime, noting that the “crisis of the education sector itself is a reflection of the crisis-ridden, neocolonial capitalist economy [where the] capitalist ruling class has continued to shift the burden of the crisis onto the back of the working people and the youth” (237-238). Further and perhaps more significantly, NANS pushed the anti-military discourse calling for the return to civilian governance beyond narrow framings of “western democracy,” stating, “We believe the aim of democracy is not just the four yearly electoral ritual. […] The various governments should see democracy beyond the form of western democracy. Socio-economic justice should form the basis of democracy” (239). This agenda would form the basis of NANS’ visibility among a number of other social justice-oriented organizations including: the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), ASUU, the Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), and the Campaign for Democracy (CD), an umbrella “pro-democracy” organization with whom NANS aligned from 1992-1993 in the struggle to oust the Babangida regime.
Even after the official end of SAP in 1990, the politico-economic structure it had produced continued to hold sway, as did its effects. NANS was again spurred to action after the single most important moment in the “pro-democracy struggle,” the June 12th 1993 presidential elections, widely acknowledged as the nation’s most free and fair, after which Babangida annulled the decisive victory of MKO Abiola. Student activists around the nation, then sidelined by a four-month nationwide strike of university faculty union, ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities), provided leadership to the Campaign for Democracy, which compromised several other civic associations in condemning the botched transition to civil rule program, and later launched a series of mass demonstrations (Jega 2000). Over the next years, NANS would lead or lend support to the broader effort to revalidate the June 12th mandate and, after the 1993 coup that ushered in the tyrannical regime of General Sani Abacha and the arrest and death in prison of Abiola, a new wave of massive protests against the military government.

Though I have suggested that the political and economic crises of the SAP and pro-democracy era provided clarity to the student radical vision, which conferred previously insular student activism with broader social legitimacy, in the final analysis, the culture of authoritarianism cultivated within federal educational institutions, as in the nation more generally, de-radicalized student political culture and co-opted its primary instrument, NANS. Unwilling to meet the demands of students and staff, university administrators with the collusion of the military state chose “strong-arm tactics” to suppress students’ demands, mainly by targeting student union leadership, who were detained, expelled, brutalized, and sometimes killed. The legitimacy of NANS as a student organization was also undermined, by the outright banning of the organization, the restriction of student union activities, and prolonged campus closures in response to sustained student demonstrations. The suppressive efforts of university and state authorities would eventually de-fang the students’ movement by the mid-1990s. More broadly, widespread state repression of political dissent combined with the almost total cutting of educational expenditures marked the 1990s as a “lost decade” for higher education in Nigeria, as elsewhere in Africa. The Federal Military Government closed the entire Nigerian university system for 1992 and 1996 as faculty members fought the devaluation of their salaries and the diminished support for higher education through ASUU. The devastating effects of lost years of school closure were compounded by massive increases in student enrollment to overcompensate, which provided the basis for further state cuts to the previously generous stipends for students.

The Post-Military Era: A New Dawn?

The establishment of the Fourth Republic in 1999, the long awaited return to civilian rule under the political leadership of former military head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo ushered in a new era of higher educational development. On the one hand, the Obasanjo-led federal government in its first months established its commitment to educational policy reform with the establishment of the Universal Basic Education program, which broadened the scope of prior programs of its kind to include a specific focus on the education of women, girls, and other

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41 For instance, in 1991, NANS President Mahmud Abdul Aminu was detained along with activist Bamidele Aturu, who wrote about their inhuman conditions under military detention in a prison essay, “Before we die.” Later in 1992, then NANS President, Olusegun Maiyegun was kidnapped and detained for 19 days and later charged with treason for pro-democracy activities.
under-served groups like child laborers and migrant workers, but also non-formal educational opportunities for youth and adults. More specific to higher education, Obasanjo promised to respect the university autonomy that was eroded in sixteen successive years of military rule (Andoor 2001). Yet, the seeming re-establishment of goodwill between the federal government and the university has proved tenuous since autonomy, in this moment, also includes financial autonomy. According to the federal government, its capacity to fund university education at previous levels, which included comprehensive subsidies and fair wages for workers, is fiscally unsustainable. This strategic slippage between the merits of administrative autonomy and the obvious quandary of financial autonomy within the larger discourse of “university autonomy” should be understood as a continuation of neoliberal policies, which naturalizes shifting the burden of education onto students and their families, albeit with a benevolent facade.

More insidiously, this shift also has the effect of suppressing political dissent to the “new normal” of privatized higher education, understood here not just as the proliferation of private institutions but also acceptance of the logic of education as a “private” good. As a representative of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), Mr. Seddoh, glibly noted, “When students pay for their studies, they go out on strike less often. They want value for their money” (quoted in Bollag 2004, 5). And, when students and workers do indeed go on strike, they are assigned blame for creating the very “crisis” that their actions target. Though both organized student and faculty unions insist that the federal government should increase funding to the benchmark proposed by UNESCO, such demands are rarely coordinated and campus political actions remain atomized. The failure of the government to implement its agreement with ASUU has been one of the most frequent sources of instability over the past ten years, as striking lecturers force the closure of schools on an almost annual basis: the organization announced upcoming strike actions in August 2015, after closing federal universities for nearly six months in 2013. Students, for their part, also routinely engage in disruptive demonstrations over tuition fee hikes, as I describe in the final chapter. Yet, there is little mutual support for these related efforts. For instance, amid reports that NANS publicly supported the continuation of the 2013 ASUU strike, a September 2013 press release rather vehemently insisted:

Why would the students that ASUU national leaders never consulted nor carried along […] in their plans and struggles till date instructed [sic] them to forge ahead with their ongoing strike? Which students? The students whose future are [sic] being ruined by their strike? The students whose success is being delayed by their incessant strike? […] The strike that has turned many female students to prostitutes leading to them contacting [sic] sexually transmitted disease, STD, and HIV/Aids? The strike that has turned many male students to father of unwanted babies? The strike that has dwindled [sic] the intellectual sagacity and erudition of Nigerian Students? The strike that has added to the burden of needy parents and guardians? No way! (National Association of Nigerian Students 2013)

42 Since the beginning of my fieldwork in 2006, ASUU or its non-academic staff equivalent NASU has carried out or at least threatened a full labor strike no less than five times, resulting in school closures for a few days up to several months.
Though NANS’ position as a legitimized “voice” of students has long been disputed, the statement does reflect a general disarticulation of the interests (and activisms) of students and university workers, including academic faculty and non-academic staff.

The wider context beyond federal universities presents an even more complicated picture of higher education in the post-military era. With the weakening of the centralized military bureaucratic structure and the decentralization of power into state and municipal political regimes, the number of brokers implicated in educational administration has multiplied astronomically, now including state governments and private benefactors, who are rapidly establishing (religious and secular) private universities. This heterogeneous educational landscape contributes to students’ sense of precariousness and anxiety over the potential costs and benefits of different educational choices. Though the federal government provides minimal resources to its universities, federal universities remain the most highly subsidized public institutions. Meanwhile, relatively less prestigious state universities, state polytechnics and monotechnics, and private universities rather ironically carry costs that are even more prohibitive than federal institutions.43 The educational landscape is further crowded by non-formal educational institutions, which offer apprenticeships for young people in various artisanal trades including computer-related training in the innumerable cyber-cafes of cities and towns. Where the pursuit of education was once connected to the certainty of post-graduation employment, the pursuit of credentials today is motivated by the uncertainty of life after schooling and the fierce competition for few employment opportunities. Though educational institutions are as overcrowded as ever, postsecondary institutions only have a gross enrollment rate of 10% (the percentage of postsecondary school age youth enrolled) and accommodated less than 30% of the 1.7 million students that registered admissions examinations in 2005 (Clark and Ausukuya 2013). Relatedly, the Nigerian youth population suffers from a staggering 54% unemployment rate, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (Vanguard News 2013), which is still at a high rate of 23% among university graduates (Makoni 2014) and at least 40% among secondary school graduates (Bakare 2013).44

Migration to urban areas like Ibadan is a related trend among young people pursuing opportunities in the post-military era. Though Ibadan itself is not newly urbanizing, patterns of urbanization have only intensified through the country as elsewhere in the African continent, where the population spike has been tied to the massive growth of large towns and mega-cities like neighboring Lagos, which have invited the analysis of the so-called “post-colonial African city” (Freund 2007). The allure of urban Nigeria is undoubtedly due to the expansion of the “informal economy” concentrated in cities that has developed as formal employment opportunities have dwindled. For Ibadan students, the entanglements of the campus and the city, which were initially motivated by the institutional collapse of educational institutions in the 1980s, now reflect a more deliberate re-articulation of mobility through both the campus and the city. While pursuing educational credentials, it is not uncommon for students to moonlight as

43 For instance, while a student at a federal university might pay approximately N40,000 (approximately US$245) per annum in tuition, depending on the course of study, a student at a state university or even polytechnic could pay N50,000 per annum (US$305), while a student at a private university could pay more than N450,000 (US$2750), not including admissions, acceptance, and accommodation fees.

44 The reliability of these reports cannot be confirmed. Other sources suggest the unemployment rate, even among graduates is between 60-80% (see Kolawole 2012).
musicians, event promoters, caterers and traders of consumer goods obtained from nearby urban markets to help offset living expenses or as a career back-up plan. These forms of entrepreneurship and trade apprenticeship relate to alternative educational traditions within the West African context that have become newly attractive in the neoliberal era (Lave 1997), and which align with the forms of political apprenticeship I describe in the next chapters. Prospective students similarly migrate to urban areas where educational institutions are located to find employment on or around campus, for instance, as mobile phone recharge card sellers or cyber café attendants while seeking admissions.

Where town-gown relations may have previously been described as instrumentally reciprocal, today the relationship between the campus and the city emphasizes circulation rather than separation, among students who traverse both domains in pursuit of opportunity. In the realm of politics, student politicians equally leverage their leadership positions to take advantage of the mainstream political networks concentrated in political nodes like Ibadan where municipal and state houses are located. The previous sections have offered an account of the transformation of higher education from an only reluctantly embraced vehicle for the production of a native “educated elite,” which promised socioeconomic mobility, to an institution strategically reproduced by the military state, whose subsequent abandonment catalyzed the development of radical student unionism. This, in turn, connected campus struggles to broader political movements emerging in urban centers. These historical trajectories are tied to considerations of citizenship and what can and should be expected of the state and its instruments. From its early role as a guarantor of social status and emerging forms of power to its more contested imagined role in the present moment for various sets of stakeholders, including state actors, students, faculty, administrators, and the general public, higher education has been closely linked to the idea of the nation-state and, more specifically, the expectations of citizens for tangible social returns from the colonial and later post-colonial state. As I will argue in the chapters that follow, the historical articulations of the university and the city continue to inform student political practices as well as imagined future possibilities.

45 In the previous discussion, the notion of citizenship is used without specificity to a particular genre of citizenship, as there are many. It is worth noting that my use of citizenship as a conceptual framework is somehow anachronistic: for Nigeria and Nigerians, who have been engaging in nation-building processes, rather unsuccessfully, for over half a century, the notion of a citizenry, citizenship, and the “nation” itself is only of limited use, as there are, arguably, many imagined nations with the Nigerian nation-state (as there often are, anyway) and many types of rights claims being made upon the nation (for instance, the Niger Delta, the Northern Region, customary ethnic affiliations). Discourses around “citizenship” and even the use of “citizen” as an identity to adopt do not, in the current moment, have quite the same allure as would have been the case in 1960 on the eve of independence, or in 1993 at the height of the struggle for civilian, democratic governance. So while empirically absent, my use of citizenship here is nevertheless heuristically useful from a historical perspective.
CHAPTER TWO: The Professionalization of Politics

This chapter introduces the reader to contemporary campus politics, following my discussion in the last chapter of the historical entanglements of the campus and the city, students and society in the colonial and military eras. Here, I discuss one of the central threads of my argument, that students reimagine schooling as a time for political experimentation for the future. I examine political activities at the three Ibadan campuses that were my focus: University of Ibadan, Polytechnic Ibadan, and Lead City University. Though the analysis in subsequent chapters, for methodological reasons, favors the activities and movements of University of Ibadan students, in this chapter, I offer a rough outline of the broader terrain of Ibadan campus politics in order to capture the critical institutional nuances associated with public/private, federal/state, and university/non-university education that might otherwise be neglected in the analysis of a single institution or group of actors. Differences across these binaries inflect the schooling experience, educational policies, and socioeconomic im/mobility, in Nigeria as elsewhere globally. They also produce distinct campus political scenes and prospects for leadership.

Equally vital to the horizons of students’ political practices is the investment of post-military Nigerian youth in formal leadership as an aspiration and subject position, particularly through activities that are “training” for desired careers in positions of power. I identify traces of this penchant for leadership experience across the three institutions, where students envision campus activities as a precursor for what are likely disparate futures. Indeed, the desired ends of political training remains an open question with more possible outcomes than I am able to account for here. This work concerns itself primarily with the hope carried by many students that campus politics will lead to professional careers as elected politicians—a development which complicates the longstanding position of politically active students as agitators against the military government.

Conceptually, I draw upon the distinction in Max Weber’s work between politics as a “profession” and “vocation” to think through the ways Nigerian students are negotiating and, in fact, constituting what is a critically important shift in the political landscape of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic, not to mention the (youth) political imagination of Nigeria’s fragile “democracy.” Weber’s analysis of different kinds of “bearers of power” provides a useful analytical framework for considering the ways in which Nigerian students reimagine the ideas and practices of political leadership in the post-military era. I also begin my engagement over the next several chapters with the work of Jean Lave, whose theories of “communities of practice” (Lave and Wenger 1991) and apprenticeship (Lave 2011) inform my analysis of the connections between political and educative processes in urban and educational contexts. In my engagement with the above scholarship, I introduce two central considerations of the larger work: the ways that Nigerian students are reconfiguring the processes, relations and domains of learning within and beyond institutionalized "education," as well as the shifting aims and boundaries of "formal" politics in Post-Military Nigeria.
The Time for Politics

Student politics in other contexts and previous moments in Nigeria’s history might imply amateur extra-curricular activities. For today’s self-identified Nigerian student “politicians,” however, campus politics is a pre-professional supra-curricular venture that one enters into at great sacrifice of financial resources and, perhaps most obviously, time that could otherwise be devoted to students’ ostensible mission of obtaining educational credentials. The concerted focus on political life predictably invites the question of how students that attend educational institutions find time to so purposefully and, at times, narrowly engage in campus politics, given these other academic responsibilities. Before delving into the individual campus scenes, this query demands attention. Why student politicians view postsecondary schooling as the time for politics and the ways in which such students make time for politics is only intelligible in the context of the peculiarities of schooling in Nigeria and post-Structural Adjustment Africa.

The classic description of institutionalized education as ordered through “disciplining” regimes of time (Foucault 1977) does not befit the de-skilled and de-funded contemporary African university where the time of schooling is better characterized as prone to disruption. Daily (campus) life is rife with uncertainty and structures students’ movements, subjective experiences, and survival strategies. Most students of public institutions depart their residence halls or off-campus accommodations in the morning without the assurance that their classes will start on time, that their lecturers will be present, or that scheduled academic activities will be conducted at all. Rather than going to classes according to class schedules, students spend their day in waiting at faculty buildings, in public spaces, cyber cafes, and reading rooms, perpetually available for academic activities that are likely to take place, but just as likely may not.

Unpredictable power outages, a reality of life in Nigeria even in urban areas and state institutions like universities, magnify this uncertainty. Better-funded institutions like private and federal universities typically have resources available to incrementally generate their own power and maintain a loose timetable for power-sharing between academic and administrative areas of campus during business hours, and residential areas after the hours of instruction, though scheduled electricity is still disrupted or withheld without notice. Resource-strapped institutions like state universities and polytechnics typically lack the means to regularly generate their own electricity, so power outages on campus for long stretches of time (days and even weeks) are the norm. Making do with—or, as Nigerians popularly say, “managing”—classrooms, laboratories, and reading rooms, without the regular availability of electricity undermines the learning process, creating now-normalized hardship for students, faculty, and staff alike. Still, worker indiscipline and inadequate infrastructure are minor disturbances compared to the most significant cause of educational insecurity: recurring school closures due to frequent strikes by unionized staff, and student protests in response to these conditions, which prompt the closures of public schools on at least a semi-annual basis. Such disruptions of daily and institutional life

46 Erratic power supply, along with other infrastructural woes like lack of potable water, contribute to the institutional challenges of schooling and are among the most frequent catalysts of student grievances and campus protests, as the discussion of Occupy University of Ibadan in the Introduction and later in Chapter Five demonstrate.

47 In December 2013, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) called off its five-month-long strike, which began in July 2013, the third time in five years that they had closed campuses, given the Federal Government’s failure to implement a mutual agreement between the two bodies. The Non-Academic Staff Union (NASU), for its
were less so in private institutions, which do not have unionized faculty and have regularized academic timetables, instruction, and electricity provision, which are among the reasons why students, who can afford them, elect to attend.

Adverse institutional conditions of the sort have come to define schooling and signal the unraveling of order and purpose in public institutions, which once cultivated them. It is not uncommon for degree programs that are meant to be four or five years to take five or seven, due to school closures that last for weeks and months—irregularities that can have repercussions for students’ futures beyond the time to degree or diploma. For instance, Nigerian postsecondary graduates are required to do a year of service through NYSC (National Youth Service Commission) and when the release of final results are delayed due to disruptions of the academic calendar, students are often forced to have a gap year in which they are unable to be formally employed because a certificate of post-degree national service is a prerequisite for most formal employment. In numerous conversations on the state of education in Nigeria, students I spoke with lamented that schooling in Nigeria was both shame and sham. Once the centerpiece of nation-building and popular aspirations, as I discussed in the last chapter, the state of the educational sector is now popularly regarded as a national embarrassment after being abandoned by successive military regimes, and understandably so. Nigeria has the largest out-of-school child population in the world and, despite global and regional literacy rates increasing over the past twenty-five years (Huebler and Lu 2012), since 1997, the number of illiterate adults in Nigeria has actually increased by ten million, according to the Minister of Education.48

Students bemoaned the hardships they faced during the course of schooling by questioning the inherent value of education itself, which many thought only simulated a meaningful learning experience. Rarely did I meet students who were admitted to their desired courses of study: perhaps they did not meet the cut-off mark for the admissions exam, or have the requisite financial and personal connections to make inadequate scores "work" in their favor. Students contemplated, what is the value of an education acquired with outdated textbooks or class materials composed of handouts from the instructor’s personal files,49 which students compulsorily had to pay to photocopy? What good is a credential that you have no option of making practical use of, a sentiment that was especially pervasive among technology students who had never seen or operated some of the equipment they read about in textbooks?

The lack of what were once basic forms of institutional support created profound feelings of resentment, reflecting a sentiment shared more widely among the broader population concerning the failed promises of the Nigerian state and its institutions.50 Still, despite

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49 On more than one occasion, I was told of a particularly troubling practice among some lecturers of requiring students to buy photocopies of notes the lecturer had handwritten during their own undergraduate education.

50 According to a March 2015 poll by the Pew Research Center on public opinion in Nigeria prior to the national elections, 74% of Nigerians believed the country was headed in the wrong direction, and had less regard for the government than all other institutions, including the media and the military. Source: Jacob Poushter, “6 facts about public opinion in Nigeria before election day,” Pew Research Center, March 24, 2015, accessed August 1, 2015, http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/03/24/as-nigerians-head-to-the-polls-6-facts-about-public-opinion/.
impassioned critiques about the hardships of contemporary schooling, most young Nigerians retain a deep investment in the idea of education, just not its current form. This sentiment is, no doubt, influenced by the social fact that the acquisition of educational credentials is still necessary in Nigerian society, even despite their diminishing economic returns. The students I encountered in southwestern Nigeria’s overcrowded educational institutions still count themselves quite fortunate to be enrolled, since a mere 10% of those who sit for post-secondary entrance exams are offered admission to higher educational institutions.51

For these reasons, the incongruity between investment in the ideal of education, and disenchantment with the burdensome challenges of schooling compels students to approach education with the recognition that their time will be wasted, and to actively re-purpose the time of schooling for the pursuit of other contemporaneous endeavors. Students I encountered across different kinds of educational institutions adopted an entrepreneurial and improvisational approach to their education, since frequent disruptions require students to formulate “backup” plans for their futures (and backup plans for those backup plans). The management of these uncertainties calls to mind Vigh’s engagement with the concept of “social navigation,” which he suggests, “encompasses both the assessment of the dangers and possibilities of one’s present position as well as the process of plotting and attempting to actualize routes into an uncertain and changeable future” (2009, 425). This theory of trans-temporal practices meant to manage a multiplicity of escape “routes” is particularly resonant here. The uncertainties of the educational experience, and life itself, make school a means to an end, with expected, yet unforeseeable bumps in the road that students must prepare to navigate. Students do so by developing entrepreneurial skills and trades as music artists, clothing designers, cake makers, jewelry designers, IT specialists, event planners and hosts, and emcees, among many other ventures. Disruption and uncertainty creates an environment in which students are compelled to “multi-task” while schooling, pursuing multiple options that they hope will lead to fruitful livelihoods. In this sense, students could make time for politics and other non-academic pursuits because the utility of making time for academics is increasingly uncertain.

I focus here on the ways students engage in activities related to politics alongside academics, but it is important to appreciate that student politicians are not alone in imagining the purpose of education and the time of schooling in new ways. Politics, like other alternative uses of the schooling period, is a survival strategy necessitated, in part, by debased educational institutions and economic precarity, which both oblige students to pursue different life trajectories at once. Students who identify as leaders are an especially visible minority within campuses. However, students who pursue elected leadership positions are not entirely unique in their interests in leadership and professional experience. Though not all students, or even most students, are interested in playing the game of formal politics with its distractions and risks, most are interested in leadership as an idea and skill set to acquire.

De-Institutionalizing Student Politics

This chapter offers a broad analysis of the way organized political activities are institutionalized (or not) across the different Ibadan campuses. To understand the campus

politician, it is critical to take stock of their position within the broader student population, which tends to be largely disinterested or skeptical of participating vigorously in the organized campus political process beyond their roles as members of the electorate. Relatedly, individual campuses ought to be viewed here as neither isolated nor interchangeable research "sites" for analysis, but rather nodal points in the broader political, educational, and urban geographies of Ibadan. Though the idea of campuses as political training grounds was applied to many different kinds of institutional contexts, the pathways for acquiring political experience vary greatly across institutions and produce vastly different campus political scenes.

The title of this section, “De-institutionalizing Student Politics,” signals my view of the analytical purchase of thinking about student politics beyond the institution, which I mean in two ways: un-tethering the campus from the educational institution and accommodating a view of politics beyond the "formally" political. First, de-institutionalized student politics suggests a conceptualization of the campus as more than an educational institution territorialized in a particular place. So far in my discussion, I have referred to the campus as a node, which signals a move away from viewing the location(s) of students’ “situated practices” as what Moore calls “hermetically sealed sites of autonomy” and instead as “relational spaces of connection and articulation” (1998). Student politics is indeed shaped by the idiosyncrasies of individual institutions and the campus territory. As I discuss in the next sections, differences related to physical infrastructure, institutional policies, and access to public versus private resources are among the reasons why Lead City University, Polytechnic Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan diverge in the character and intensity of political activity among students. However, what a perspective of the campus as a node or “relational space” allows is a view of the spatial practices and mobility across different campuses and their urban milieux that are equally crucial to understanding student politics. In the last chapter, I described how the University of Ibadan campus transformed from an isolated enclave of aspiring “elites” to a political battleground imbricated in broader urban and national struggles. In this chapter, I continue these considerations in the context of the three contemporary Ibadan campuses. In particular, I consider how student political activities are increasingly routed through many other domains beyond the campus, including government offices, urban meeting places, and the “social mediascapes” afforded by new media technology that I discuss in Chapter Four.

Second, campus politics is de-institutionalized in another way. For most Nigerians, the assumed connotation of "campus politics" is student unionism, or organized campus political activities that are channeled through the student union body, which serves as the collective voice of all students above and beyond the academic departments and faculties where students are also represented and pay dues. This conflation of student politics with student unionism is a product of the legacy of the National Association of Nigerian Students and the students' movement during the military era that I discussed in the last chapter. However, I employ a broader, more inclusive definition of the political, which accommodates its various forms in the present, and the kind of openings that are available in the post-military era, which are distinct from the coupling of politics with unionism during the military era. With the suppression of student unionisms around the country over the past two decades, other types of social and political associations gained greater relevance, including academic, ethnic and state associations, international service organizations, social clubs, and campus cult groups. For these reasons, my framing of post-military student politics accommodates these as well as other emergent and non-normative forms of political practice, and begins from the assumption that students partake in many different
types of activities simultaneously to enhance their leadership acumen and future prospects. The simultaneity and diffusion of political practices associated with "leadership" is enhanced in the post-military era. The transition from military to civilian rule represents the most significant shift in student political practices in recent decades, as in the larger national political arena, given the broadening of opportunities for political participation since the transition to democracy. And, despite continued economic hardship among the majority of the population, entrepreneurship and industry (e.g., entertainment, telecommunications, and finance) have been sources of significant economic growth and aspirations for social mobility. In line with global trends, the over-credentialization of the workforce relative to available formal employment compels young people to create economic opportunities for themselves, which often involve establishing small businesses or self-promoting trades and services. These political and economic limitations, which are nevertheless seized upon as openings, are among the reasons that students understand "leadership" as a particularly attractive skill set to acquire. Leadership, in this sense, encompasses elected positions of leadership and organized politics, but also a more comprehensive proficiency necessary for successfully navigating the uncertainties of the future.

From here, I turn to campus political life at Lead City University, The Polytechnic Ibadan, and the University of Ibadan and three stories of students navigating the three campuses, before discussing in greater detail the figure of the "Political Professional," which is a distinctly Millennial, post-military aspirational category among Nigerian students. I link these developments to the idea of politics as a profession and campus politics as "communities of learning" within and beyond Ibadan educational institutions.

**Lead City University**

One of the recent additions to the ranks of post-secondary institutions in Nigeria, Lead City University (or LCU) was established privately in February 2005 and offers its roughly 3,500 full-time and part-time students degrees in management studies, information technology, law, and applied sciences. Described in promotional materials as “world class with local content,” its urban location and curricular focus on entrepreneurship and technology signal the desire for a cosmopolitan, progressive institutional self-image that is common among new generation institutions carving out a niche within an already crowded educational landscape of decades-old, mainly public schools. The founding of Lead City coincides with the rapid expansion of private education and a broader shift in Nigeria educational policy away from subsidized public education. Private university education, in particular, is the fastest growing sector within postsecondary education over the past decade: since 2005, the number of institutions has grown from less than ten to approximately fifty, compared to seventy-eight total federal and state public institutions.

Proliferating private universities are “elite” insofar as they cater to the needs of well-to-do Nigerians, who can afford the astronomical tuition rates of between N350,000-N600,000

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52 The original charter of Lead City University bestowed the institution with the name “City University, Ibadan,” which calls to mind other city-based universities, which forge a deliberate relationship between the university and its host city (e.g., City University of New York, University of London, among others). The choice is ironic, in this case, because LCU is the most remote among the other Ibadan institutions, poised on the outskirts of Ibadan.

(US$ 1758-3014) per semester, which places them beyond the socioeconomic means of the average citizen. It is worth noting that the recognition of private universities as elite institutions represents a post-austerity de-coupling of economic and social Nigerian “elite culture.” Private institutions like Lead City are only accessible to the economically wealthy, including provisional members of the *nouveau riche* who have come upon fleeting economic windfalls such as email scammers, better known as “yahoo boys.” Still, they have yet to be embraced as academically meritorious enough to count among the prestigious first-generation public universities, which are still regarded as arbiters of the “educated elite,” whose foundation I described in Chapter One. In other words, while economically elite institutions, they are not socially elite. Signs of new construction around the recently established institutions, such as the image below (Figure 6), reinforce this notion that private universities remain in a state of becoming, only approximating the stability of older institutions.

In fact, the deluge of private institutions and obscure accreditation process for new institutions by the federal government is a cause for popular contempt, since most Nigerians do not stand to directly benefit from the expansion of educational access through private universities, since they cannot afford to attend them. An opinion that I commonly heard was that obtaining a degree from private institutions is akin to buying versus earning a university education. Still, such institutions are an at-home “abroad.” By this, I mean they function as an intermediary strategy for those-with-means to circumvent the delays that have become synonymous with public education without the peculiar challenges of seeking visas, admissions, and resources to pay international student fees. Nigeria’s oldest universities, “first generation universities,” which were established between 1948-1965 in the first wave of educational development, are still the most academically respected. That aside, the challenges associated with even the most respected public institutions deter families from sending their children there if they can afford private institutions. At institutions like LCU, there are no school closures, power outages, water shortages, or strikes from underpaid lecturers, so students are very unlikely to protest and are, thus, able to finish their courses on schedule. "You won't find six year students there. A three year course is a three year course," a professor at an urban public university, who moonlighted as a part-time lecturer at a private university in the region, told me, of the institutional appeal of private universities despite the criticism surrounding their legitimacy.

Lead City is distinct among private universities as one of the only *secular* private universities in Nigeria within a sector that is dominated by universities established by Nigeria's numerous religious denominations. The contrast between secular versus religious private schools is important to differentiating campus politics in public versus private universities generally, and Lead City from its peer private institutions, in particular. Even at the post-secondary level, private universities, especially religious ones, are dismissed as "glorified boarding schools" for children as opposed to young adults, because of stringent restrictions placed on student conduct.

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54 Schools like Lead City are rumored to be hubs for “yahoo boys,” or those who participate in advanced fee fraud via email. “Yahoo yahoo” is practiced widely among young men, including students and those of economic means. In fact, the participation of young people with wealthy parents in email frauds is one of the open secrets of the “industry.” See the following blog post as one example of how such rumors are associated with LCU in particular: “Lead City Varsity not a ‘den of Yahoo boys,” *Nigerian Tribune*, June 30, 2014, accessed February 1, 2015, [http://tribune.com.ng/letters/item/9262-lead-city-varsity-not-a-den-of-yahoo-boys/9262-lead-city-varsity-not-a-den-of-yahoo-boys](http://tribune.com.ng/letters/item/9262-lead-city-varsity-not-a-den-of-yahoo-boys/9262-lead-city-varsity-not-a-den-of-yahoo-boys). Apter (1999) is also useful on the wider phenomenon of “419” scams in Nigeria.
which are said to make them closer experientially to secondary schools for children. This criticism calls to mind my discussion in Chapter One of colonial and early postcolonial higher education at the University of Ibadan, which many argued infantilized adult students with strict codes of conduct, including curfews in residence halls and a restrictive dress code, that, among other institutional edicts, contributed to the social and political insularity of early Nigerian universities. In most private institutions, students must adhere to a dress code, which forbids “indecent” or “immodest” attire and unevenly targets female students. Some private institutions have also imposed controversial bans on mobile phones and secular music, as was the case in recent times at Covenant University operated by the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria’s largest Pentecostal church. Such draconian measures are purported to instill “order” and “morality,” as a deliberate counterpoint to the “moral decadence” and misbehavior, by students and staff alike, within secular and public institutions. At secular private institutions, there are limitations on student conduct but there is also a wider range of permitted activities in these institutions than religious private institutions.

Figure 6: Undeveloped site of a proposed sports arena at Lead City University (2011)
Photo: K. Strong

55 There may be additional credence to the claim that private institutions are more like secondary schools: students, of private universities are often younger than those who attend public institutions because their education has likely never been disrupted by strikes. For the parents of attendees as young as sixteen or seventeen, the restrictions are welcome limitations that help “protect” underage children from the freedoms and risks of public institutions.

56 These gendered measures are becoming a broader practice beyond private institutions. In 2012, the Oyo State legislature attempted to pass an immodesty law targeting indecent attire, which was viewed as a specific effort to police the behavior of women. In 2015, Lagos State University and Kwara State University, both public institutions, established indecency edicts targeting “lewd” women’s attire such as high heels, spaghetti straps, and low-cut tops.

57 This is a term used popularly to describe the preponderance of immorality and corruption, often with a generational critique of youth behavior.
"This school is a dumping ground, they'll accept anything. Honestly. They don't give two fucks. Just don't abuse the lecturers! I'm telling you, this school is fucked." These were the words of “Obi,” who was prone to such expletive-laced rants concerning the management of Lead City University, where he was a transfer student. After flunking out of the University of Ibadan, where his dad was on the faculty, he gained admissions in InterRel (International Relations) at Lead City, where his family managed to foot the hefty tuition fees. Somewhat of a socialite at the University of Ibadan, Obi became a serious student at Lead City, garnering good grades and academic distinctions. Whether this was voluntary or circumstantial was unclear to me. Perhaps the embarrassment, to himself and his parents, of flunking out of UI was a wake-up call. More likely, Obi was forced in this direction because his middle class background that afforded him distinction at the federal university could not keep pace with the social habits of the children of economically wealthy elites, who make up the majority of Lead City students. He was among the socioeconomic outliers: those whose families could put together enough resources to pay school fees there, but barely, though his father’s academic post made him the holder of “cultural capital” above his socioeconomic station. Such students were not typically among those whose new imported cars lined the school parking lot, or who could afford to live in the on-campus accommodations, or the well-outfitted apartments in the adjacent area of the city where other students leased. For these reasons, Obi was not, or perhaps could not be, invested in what he deemed the avaricious campus culture.

"Let me tell you about this Awards nonsense," Obi began another one of his characteristic rants. We were standing in the middle of an area of the compact campus, known among students as “Zanga da Hood.” It was a long rectangular-shaped paved area sandwiched among three of the four small residence halls on the campus, which mostly served commuter students. The area of the campus housed two eateries, and a building that was a makeshift bar with pool tables and flat screen televisions. Late in the afternoon on a Tuesday, it was still within school business hours, and yet the campus "hood," or social zone, was abuzz with social activity. Obi said he was nominated for several awards at the annual InterRel Department banquet that year, including "most fun," "most popular," and "most brilliant," the latter owing to his earning the second highest grade point average in his cohort. The social accolades were familiar territory for Obi and he seemed most proud of receiving recognition based on academic merit. However, in order to accept the nomination, he would have to pay 2,000 Naira (US$15) and an additional 15,000 Naira (US$100) per award, if he won. "Look, I'm well known. But, I'm not interested in all these politics," he said. "Otherwise, I would clearly collect [win] the awards."

Zanga was a strategic and especially befitting backdrop for Obi’s story. Having to pay to receive a purportedly merit-based award signals the disproportionate influence of money and its conspicuous display, which the social zone, Zanga, also represents. Emphasizing this very point, at the tail end of his story, Obi pulled an acquaintance, a young woman walking by us, by the hand to where we were standing. "Show her," he playfully instructed. She opened her mouth wide to reveal two metal tongue and gum piercings, "this one from London, the other from Lagos," she noted. "She wants tattoos next," Obi said as the young woman strutted off. “These

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58 This is a pseudonym.
people like being different." He informed me of a recent bulletin released by the university announcing that students were permitted to have tattoos as long as they "registered" the tattoo with the Student Affairs office. "Can you imagine this at UI," he exclaimed? "They don't give a shit about what you do as long as you pay your fees [at LCU]."

**Party Politics**

At Lead City, the “politics” that Obi registered his disinterest in participating in does not refer to organized student politics but rather what I am calling “party politics” due to the centrality of social clubs to campus life. To the extent that there is a discernible, recognized political culture at LCU, it presents as an apolitical one in stark contrast to what I will describe at Polytechnic Ibadan and University of Ibadan, where political interest is enthusiastic, palpable, and on the upswing. Like most private educational institutions in Nigeria, this has to do with the decision by the campus administration to ban student unionism and allow “student societies,” which encompass clubs and associations designed to promote “personal development and training,” and social, sporting, religious and cultural activities. “Strictly” ethnic or “extremist” religious activities are similarly prohibited, not to mention the striking categorical omission of "political" activities and organizations from recognized student societies.

According to the 2008 Edition of the University Handbook, the rules governing student affairs permit selective, chaperoned quasi-representative governance: the university officially “recognizes” approximately thirty student societies, referred to as “democratic” organizations “run by students, for students,” because such activities "create opportunities for students to work with the community and generate an extensive support and development network" and “really” offer “a chance for [LCU] students to express themselves.” These opportunities to participate in associations and student representation on the five major university committees are described as institutionalizing an “open door system” for students, which nevertheless attempts to protect them from the risks of political participation, including those associated with Nigerian politics’ well-studied economic patronage systems. Rather than require that students pay annual dues to be members of their departmental student associations—levies that are common at public institutions—students are automatically made members free of charge and such associations are given a university bursary to fund activities in order to "shield students from unnecessary exposure to unwholesome practices and behavior in the name of soliciting funds from outside sources to execute their programs.” In the same vein, in the instance that there are opportunities for external sponsorship, student associations are required to channel such funds through the university for disbursement, and only with the written consent of the university management.

A generous interpretation of these policies might read their establishment as a cautious and inherently paternalistic attempt to provide space for students to acquire leadership experience, socialize, and “express themselves,” without money-seeking guiding the activities of leaders, as was the case among students at Polytechnic Ibadan (discussed later in this chapter) and the University of Ibadan (discussed in Chapter Three). There are those who view this as an honorable aim: the incursion of “outside” or mainstream politics into campus politics is

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59 I did not confirm this. In the 2008 Third Edition of the University Handbook, this was not permitted, according to the dress codes for male and female students (p. 52, 53).
undeniably linked with the turn to violence and flagrant corruption within student politics. However, private institutions like Lead City are largely dismissed as key terrains for political training and are deemed inconsequential “non-factors” within the student political landscape and among students who identify as “politicians” because student organizations there lack the autonomy that has been so central to the student radical tradition. Let me state outright that I am skeptical of this interpretation, given its narrow reading of the political, and the irony that many of the graduates of these institutions, we might predict, are or will be well-positioned in the future to occupy positions of influence in Nigeria by virtue of their family background and access to social and economic capital. This skepticism also informed my decision to incorporate a private institution into my fieldwork in Ibadan, even against the advice of well-meaning interlocutors, who thought this to be a waste of time given my interest in “campus politics” and “student activism.”

Moreover, barring explicit political activities and circumscribing the role of economic resources in student associational life did not actually diminish their influence or their incidence. At Lead City, it forced such activities underground and off-campus. Lead City students were permitted to organize their own associations, which had to meet certain institutional criteria to maintain formal recognition. Chief among these student-initiated associations were rave clubs, run by “party chiefs,” who regularly organize all-night parties in Ibadan clubs. On the surface, the social organizations are similar to social clubs that exist, on some level, at most educational institutions in Nigeria. At Lead City University, however, affiliation with social clubs was the primary source of distinction and status within the student population, as opposed to the marginal activities that they were at public institutions. “Elected” leaders of departmental associations were not recognized as the major student influencers, as is typically the case elsewhere where organized political activities are permitted. One of my early contacts at Lead City University, who I would describe as a middle class outlier ran unopposed for the class representative position in the International Relations Department, Chief Diplomat. Unopposed elected offices, particularly at the departmental level in the absence of a student union, would be unthinkable at most public institutions, since such positions of power are keenly contested. There are two ways of interpreting the marginalization of elected leaders within circles of influence at LCU. On the one hand, because student politics is banned and limited, students who are “elected” to departmental leadership positions, are not respected because there is no rigorous process of vetting this form of student leadership. In some departments, students were appointed or nominated by faculty and administrators, in lieu of formal elections, so these are not conventional democratic exercises, as the handbook promises. At the same time, there is a more subtle form of class distinction at work here. Most middle class, by this I mean, well-to-do but non-wealthy students, were those who were in such positions of leadership, not the children of political and economic elites.

At Lead City, it is the “party chiefs,” who wield the influence typically associated with elected student leaders at other institutions. Where elected student politicians purport to represent and serve the interests of their constituents, party chiefs are campus socialites, representing wealth, social influence and affability. Rave clubs are exclusive entities perhaps most akin to fraternities and sororities at American universities, though the organizations are gender-inclusive in their composition, though not their leadership, which is dominated by young men in most cases. Lead City students are forbidden from organizing nighttime activities without the express permission of the school management. Rather than derailing students’ participation in such
activities, the campus restrictions drove such activities off-campus, as was the case with the major rave club associations at Lead City at the time of my fieldwork, who were in open competition with one another for influence.

Campus gossip around Lead City University that I was privy to revolved around these rave club activities. In early 2012, there was the story of how one club organized the first party caravan that took members and paying guests from Ibadan to Lagos two hours away for a trip to the beach that involved a chartered yacht, followed by a nightclub outing. There was another bit of rumor concerning the competition for the most popular (at Lead City, the richest) student in the school. The same semester, I was told, a student emerged to claim this title at one a rave party in an Ibadan club that a Lead City student was said to own and manage. As the story went, it was a typical night of students “popping bottles,” or ordering bottles of expensive, imported champagne and quite literally making a show of popping the bottles open and spraying champagne in the style reminiscent of American rap videos. Popping bottles was another form of competition: whoever popped the most bottles had the most “swag” (swagger). At this particular party, in the middle of the revelry and conspicuous imbibition, the male student who was thereafter crowned "Most Popular" ordered two bottles of Ace of Spades champagne, made popular within hip hop culture by U. S. Rapper Jay-Z. After the bottles were delivered to his VIP section, he was then said to have used the champagne to wash his feet. I never met this student or witnesses who could confirm that this actually happened, though the rumor was itself repeated to me more than once. Regardless of its veracity, its legitimacy as a feasible occurrence speaks to how Lead City students understand power and influence in relation to this type of conspicuous consumption during off-campus outings and in trendy urban spaces.

On several occasions, Obi facilitated introductions to some of major players of the rave club scene at the central bar and club house in Zanga da Hood, where most of these groups gathered during the school week. With the exception of one party chief, “Opsy,” a young woman who led the rave club, Meltdown, young men led all Lead City social clubs. At the group level, rave clubs sought the notoriety of the champagne-bathing student and accumulated influence based on who hosted the largest parties, and whose members were the most talked about with the most expensive cars. My introduction to members of rave club groups inevitably involved the exchanging of a BlackBerry “pin,” a code unique to all BlackBerry mobile phone devices, that allowed contacts to communicate via the native instant messaging app, BlackBerry Messenger or BBM. At the time, BlackBerrys were the most sought after cell phone in Nigeria, inspiring a Nollywood series by the name of “BlackBerry Babes,” which offered a comedic take on the lengths young “babes” would go to acquire the expensive smartphones, often from sugar daddies (older men who financially sponsor young women in exchange for companionship and sex). Unlike the University of Ibadan, which relied heavily on Facebook groups for virtual student community, as I discuss in Chapters Four and Five, Lead City University students did not have a visible online community, mainly because they made use of more technologically exclusive, private, and individuated social media platforms like BBM.

My mobile communications with rave club members hinged on the dissemination of text-heavy advertisements for upcoming parties. Each group hosted a major overnight party each semester, and circulated “broadcasts” over BBM like the sample below to arouse interest and generate anticipation. A member in the club FastForward circulated the following three de-personalized advertisements to me, and others, leading up to the “Blackout” soiree hosted by “FastForward Entertainment” in April 2012:
1. FastForward ►► EnTerTainment Presents #BLACKOUT# with a repertoire of tricks guaranteed to make you spend your last cash for mad fun. Just ask around, we RUN ►► this city!
   TeamFFwD: Ahead of The Game!!
   Signed: Mr Fun

2. The most high class event in the month of April where PERFECTION, INITIATIVE, PASSION, VALUE and EXCELLENCE seemingly meet to create an OBJECT and MEDIUM of VALUE........Its no [other] Event than FASTFORWARD ENT # BLACKOUT#......APRIL 26......RECOGNIZE!!
   Signed: Damsel FFWD

3. Make Up to look Nyz (Nice)
   Nice Hair Do
   Sexy Dress
   SEXY JEWELS
   PATRON ON ICE
   CHILLED MOET
   PRADA STILLETTO's
   Don't be left out when the light goes off!! ;)
   #BLACKOUT#....TEAM FFWD....Ahead of The Game!! RECOGNIZE.
   Signed: Posh Lady FFwD

These forms of publicity amplify the work of money and materials goods, to quote the second advertisement, as both “objects” and “mediums of value.” Cultivating one’s physical appearance through gendered self-grooming and “sexy” adornment (dresses, jewels, stilettos) allowed students to stay “ahead of the game,” avoiding “be[ing] left out”—to paraphrase, keeping up with the Joneses—who “run” the city and spend their “last cash” for enjoyment. Though involved in activities that are imagined to be forms of entertainment, students connected this form of socializing to “running” the city, or extending their influence beyond the campus within its urban setting. This also includes future aspirations for leadership, as the following party invitation suggests (Figure 7 below).

The Finesse Club invitation for the May 2012 night event, "CEOs and Office H*e$" at local Ibadan nightclub, Club E Bevande, asserts Finesse Club’s preeminence within the field of rave clubs at Lead City University. The exclusive invitation notes that Finesse Club was recognized by the Lead City Press as organizing the best party of the year, and for being the best overall club with the best leadership in their party chief in 2011. That such distinction was given at the “Cool Awards” once again emphasizes the currency of popularity, premised here on socializing in festive public gatherings, within the student population. The specific titling of the party as “CEOs and Office Ho*$” is both telling and troubling. On the one hand, the headless image of a well-dressed man with a white tuxedo jacket, contrastive black pocket square and polka dot bowtie presents a sophisticated, gendered impression of the event and its desired guests with a sartorial aesthetic that was especially common at the time among young men. That current
students are posited as CEOs (Chief Executive Officers) also indicates the purported feasibility of entrepreneurship and business success in the imagined futures of students. However, that the figure of the CEO is paired with the Office “hoe,” or whore, suggests that women are not necessarily imagined as members of this cohort of present and future business owners, but rather in positions of sexual exploitation. As I will discuss at the end of this chapter on the masculinization of organized campus politics, even in institutions where formal politics is not practiced, leadership continues to be gendered and limits the participation of women to “second fiddle,” subservient, or exploited positions (Adeniyi-Ogunyankin 2014, 165–212).

Figure 7: Invitation for Finesse Club event, "CEOs and Office H*e$"
Printed invitation obtained by K. Strong

The extent to which Lead City University and institutions of its kind produce CEOs remains to be seen. However, entrepreneurialism is very common among students while they are schooling at private universities at a level that is unmatched in public institutions. Among students who were already wealthy, there were students said to own local nightclubs and formal businesses, unlike the services and artisanal trades students at public universities sometimes used to supplement their income. Students of less means, too, dabbled in one venture or another. Philip, a middle-class student whose parents were teachers, helped a friend market medical products imported from China such as vaginal self-tests, sanitary pads, and magnet therapy contraptions. One of the most respected campus businessmen, who won the Best Entrepreneur Award at the 2011 Cool Awards, Toyin, owned the Poise Clothing outfit. In illicit ventures, Lead
City students were also said to be heavily involved in “yahoo yahoo,” or email scamming, activities not for survival but for “trips,” which are frivolous expenditures and forms of showboating on top of their family allowance, that were necessary for maintaining social relevance in the school. Unbeknownst to their parents, who often set children on generous but nevertheless fixed incomes, such students were said to buy cars and other goods and park them in Ibadan, hidden from family surveillance.

Lead City student interests, on the whole, revolved around class aspirations and material consumption, and influence among the student population as understood on these terms. Though social, party-related activities that students themselves recognize as wasteful were the basis for campus leadership and prestige, Lead City students, on the whole, cultivated experiences in entrepreneurship and financial self-reliance that their access to money and institutional resources permitted. Moreover, while seemingly apolitical given the banning of most forms of organized political activity, students experienced a more class-exclusive form of professionalization and politicization, which hinges on the leveraging of economic resources for desired aims. While incompatible with more conventional forms of politicization in a context of representative forms of governance, in the Nigerian setting, such acumen is perhaps most relevant to the current political system premised on "brown envelope" bribes and "sharing of the national cake" (i.e., malfeasance). Moreover, despite a lack of an explicit “politician” or even “political” identity among most students—with perhaps the exception of positions like the Chief Diplomat, which itself suggests a broad horizon of influence beyond the nation—students still imagine themselves as the future leaders of businesses and “big men” (gendering intentional) in the political process, essentially bypassing the campus politicization process associated with student unionism that has produced most of Nigeria's political activists and respected leaders.

The Polytechnic Ibadan

The Polytechnic Ibadan (or Poly) was established in 1960 as the first technical institution in the city and the second in the region to train “middle level manpower” in technical education to complement University of Ibadan’s “high-level manpower” in university education. The motto of Poly, “ise l’ogun ise” is a Yoruba proverb, which translates to “hard work is the antidote of poverty.” The model of hard work as a path to social mobility is reflected in Poly’s “practical oriented” training in applied and environmental science, engineering, and commerce across five faculties and thirty departments. The student population, of roughly 20,000, is ethnically homogenous with mostly Yoruba students and indigenes of Oyo State. Students at Poly are emphatic about the significance of the article preceding Polytechnic Ibadan, which indicates the sense that “The” Polytechnic in Ibadan is first among equals. However, while initially established as a “separate but equal” institution within a broader educational mandate, over time, the National Diplomas (NDs) and Higher National Diplomas (HNDs) in technical training that Poly grants in lieu of degrees have become stigmatizing credentials, which mark the lower cultural capital of an education there. Polytechnics are generally attended by students, who did not benefit from private secondary education, federal government colleges, or the booming exam preparation industry, which offers secondary students critical support in navigating the higher

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60 This is similar to other non-technical, state-owned institutions, including state universities.
educational terrain, where demand for admissions outstrips the number of available seats, and so scarce resources are strategically used to secure admissions at desired institutions. For these reasons, polytechnics are also often imagined to be “pass through” institutions en route to degree-granting institutions.\footnote{I had many conversations with graduates and current students of polytechnics, who repeated the phrase that they “passed through” such institutions. Over time, I began to understand that this was in contradistinction to other institutions (namely, federal public universities) where instead of “passing through” the institution and obtaining credentials, the institution was also said to “pass through” students, imparting forms of distinction and learning beyond academic coursework. It is worth noting that, though many students hoped to merely “pass through,” such institutions, obtaining admissions at desired institutions often required multiple years of attempts and mobilization of resources, often still ending without the desired outcome of gaining admissions.}

The student affairs policies of The Polytechnic Ibadan encourage “student-directed,” “self-governing” organization among Poly students “as an effective means of training in mature leadership.”\footnote{This is the language used in the Students’ Information Handbook for Part-Time Students published by the Students Affairs Division. The Deputy Rector of Poly, who I interviewed, gave a photocopied version of the handbook to me in the absence of a copy of the Handbook for Full-Time Students.} The network of seventy recognized clubs, societies, and associations at The Poly are further “designed to provide education outside the classroom,” and encompass academic clubs associated with departments and faculties, as well as press, social, religious, and service clubs. Despite the extensive organizational network, student leaders described the campus as “dry” or lacking vibrancy, largely because, most Poly students live off-campus and a great many work full-time. For these reasons, most students lack deep interest in, or perhaps time for extra-curricular campus activities. However, the institutional support for “leadership” activities beyond the classroom is a subtle departure from the stance of private institutions, which has tremendous effects on the permissibility of political activities emanating from Poly’s campus. Here, the distinction between university versus technical is less crucial than that of private versus public and, specifically, state-owned as opposed to federal.

Poly students insisted that politics at the neighboring campus, University of Ibadan, was vastly different and that Poly politics was exactly like national politics, as opposed to some idealized, intellectualized form of politics that was out of touch with the way Nigerian politics “really works.”\footnote{To be clear, Poly students and others student leaders more grounded in “real student politics” were dismissive of schools like UI, which they felt had gone “soft” with over a decade of banned student politics, not to mention the intellectualized culture, which some felt blunted the force of student politics. This idea is present in my framing of “professionalized politics,” though I am not dismissive of the purposeful intellectualism and idealism that is a constitutive component of student politics at the University of Ibadan.} Tellingly, private universities like Lead City were never referenced by students in relation to campus politics, so inconsequential were they imagined to be. One Poly student leader shared that, just like outside politics, “we have mudslinging, lobbying and trying to bring down opponents.” Participation in politics at schools like Poly is not to be treated with levity. Students take “the game” and its risks very seriously for reasons having to do with Poly politics’ connection to a distinctly student union “government” framework; its role as an immediate as opposed to deferred economic survival strategy for students with access to limited institutional and personal resources; and, because student politics at public institutions like Poly exposes students to the threat of violence, making elected office a carefully calculated risk.

Indicating the centrality of student unionism to campus political culture, rather than other
forms of elected student leadership, the Student Affairs Division distinguishes student organizations on the basis of whether or not they are affiliated to the student union: those who choose to register as “independent” organizations, “shall not receive special services or [financial] support from the institution or Students’ Union” (Poly Handbook 41). Perhaps most indicative of the Polytechnic’s deeply rooted culture of student unionism, which is a specific history of militant student radicalism within the Nigerian context, is the designation of the campus body as a “Student Union Government” (SUG) rather than Student Union. As student unions around Nigeria attempt to recover from the institutional attacks of the 1990s and early 2000s, the nomenclature of campus political bodies as student unions versus student union governments is more than semantic. At many institutions, including the University of Ibadan, authorities were adamant that student unions were not student governments, or fully self-governing bodies, but rather subordinate to the school management. At The Polytechnic, however, the retention of the word suggests both the connection of contemporary student politics at the Poly to the history of militant activism rather than "professionalized" politics, as well as the desired relevance to local state power as peers rather than subordinates. As one would expect for a legitimate government, the Poly SUG controls several campus buildings, manages the transportation workers union, whose members’ green vests bear the words “SUG Poly,” and other ventures, which generate revenue for the student body.  

The resemblance of Poly’s political culture to national politics is undeniably linked to the recurrence of violence within the political process. In the 1990s and early 2000s, most public institutions were subjected to the infiltration of “campus cults” into student politics, which turned most campuses around the country into “war zones” (Adejumobi 2001) between student groups battling for supremacy, which were often funded by university authorities and military state actors. Cult groups were initially founded in the 1960s as fraternities, but began to function more like urban criminal gangs in the late 1980s, when national politics as a whole had turned violent. By dismantling student unions, cultism was drastically reduced at many campuses. However, cultism is said to remain active at Poly.  

Student leaders shared stories of violence and jujú (“charms” and “black magic”) being deployed for protection and sabotage during the electoral process. A Poly student leader told me with a wave of his hand that, “You can wake up in the night and feel something but no one will be there. People will threaten your life.” A student at another institution warned me that, at Poly, students “carry cutlass [machetes]” during elections. Indeed, in July 2012, the election for representatives for the Department of Computer Science had to be cancelled because a ballot box was stolen after a fight erupted between supporters of opposing candidates. When I inquired about the rumored use of machetes, yet another Poly student laughed, “Here, they use guns.” Beyond the campus, cult members at Poly are often employed as thugs by local politicians during elections to intimidate opponents. This is commonly the case with state institutions, given the overlap in political practices and jurisdiction between student and local municipal governments. These occurrences are among the reasons that Poly authorities banned the Student Union "Government" for two sessions between 2010 and 2012 before resuscitating the SUG after protests from students.

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64 Vibrant student unions normally have such ventures. The Poly SUG owns one building for photocopying, though the Student Union Building (SUB) building itself is small. Perhaps due to the banning of the union, the building grounds were unkempt, surrounded by high grass.

65 This was also reported to be the case at the other Ibadan campuses though not as openly.
The “hard work” of Poly students’ hands referenced in the school motto is evident all around the campus, which is split between the North side closest to the University of Ibadan border where administrative offices are located and the South side closest to the main gate and the Sango and Apete urban communities. Ornate metal structures in the shape of people and objects are repurposed by students of Fine Art and Industrial Design, and beautifully displayed (Figure 8 above). The transformation of metal pipes, rods, gears, and other materials that would otherwise be spare parts or rubbish is a fitting metaphor for the ways Poly students make creative use of relatively limited resources. Discussion of Poly politics in the press and in conversation, perhaps justifiably emphasizes the role of cult violence, risk, and deprivation in students’ political activities. Institutional neglect is acutely experienced by students of the Poly, who exist quite literally in the shadows of institutions like the University of Ibadan. However, what is often lost in such discussions is the unexpected openings created by the paucity of institutional resources. Compared to Lead City where political activity is completely prohibited and other forms of association are closely monitored, and what I will describe at the University of Ibadan where political activity exists but with significant oversight from university authorities who keep student politicians on a short leash, Poly students have significantly more control over the built environment of the campus as well as latitude to occupy campus spaces in unconventional ways. On the North side of the campus, there is a corridor on an eroded dirt path of wooden shacks and
kiosks owned by students who operate business ventures for photocopying, shoe and cell phone repair. At other institutions, there is much more institutional oversight of vendors, which makes it difficult for students to simultaneously be students and campus business owners, even when students do moonlight in ways not linked to the utilization of campus spaces.

As a public institution under the control of Oyo State, whose state government house is located nearby, the administration of The Polytechnic (its management, resource allocation, and key policy shifts) is inflected by the nuances of local state politics and culture. Unlike the other Ibadan campuses, Yoruba is spoken not just informally, but very often in administrative offices and in classrooms during instruction. Students I interacted with were sometimes only moderately fluent in English, reverting to Yoruba or a mix of the two, making the support of Jibola, the University of Ibadan student who became a research assistant in the final six months of my fieldwork, useful in communication. Many of Poly’s building structures were dilapidated, which was not unique to The Polytechnic, but more pronounced there as at other state-owned institutions. Newer structures that stood out among the older, more rundown ones, displayed placards recognizing non-institutional funding sources including private patrons, as in the case of a Faculty car park, and a cyber café building donated by African-American actor Mekhi Phifer, both on the south side of the campus.

In early 2012, several weeks into my intensive fieldwork at Poly, the campus was under the leadership of interim principal officers, newly appointed by Oyo State Governor Abiola Ajimobi, who was inaugurated in 2011. The move to appoint temporary leadership, itself, was a sign of broader institutional uncertainties related to the funding and future of the institution, indicated by the introduction of two controversial policy changes by the Oyo Governor just months after the interim appointments. The first in November 2011, six months after assuming office, was to halt the proposed tuition fee increment announced by the past governor, Alao-Akala, which called for a 50% tuition fee increase of between N10,000-N14,000 (US$67-$93) per academic year. The decision to revert to previous rates was, in part, the fulfillment of his campaign promises to maintain tuition rates at the state institution, but also a response to the activism of Poly students, whose protests on campus and at the State Secretariat forced the closure of the school, and the new governor’s hand.66 The second move, proposed in June 2012, was that Poly be converted into a state university bearing the name, Oyo State University, the first of its kind for Oyo. Governor Ajimobi cited as reasons for this bold move, the tremendous demands for higher education in the state, the costs of establishing a separate university versus converting the polytechnic, and, most contentiously, the reality that, “polytechnic education is no longer fashionable in the world.”67 Both the struggle over tuition fees and the possibilities for more dramatic structural changes illustrate the intensity of institutional insecurity at state-owned non-university institutions at the level of leadership, resources, and the very premise of their existence. Effectively, Poly students pay more than federally funded institutions for credentials that are less respected. Though students and staff would likely welcome Poly’s conversion to a university, these plans have not progressed since the initial proposal. Though the proposal may eventually amount to nothing more than political pandering, it captures the relative inequity of

technical education within a university-centered educational policy environment, and corroborates the feeling among students that Poly credentials, and those who hold them, are also relatively inadequate. This sense of deficiency is in the backdrop of student political associations, survival strategies, and how students understand the role of a Polytechnic education in future trajectories in political leadership, as was the case with one of my primary interlocutors at Poly, Double Speaker.

Double Speaker
June 2012

Deji went by the nickname “Double Speaker.” A Higher National Diploma student in Computer Science at The Polytechnic Ibadan (Poly), Deji was the Speaker of the department legislature. He was also a student at the University of Ibadan, a double enrollment that was technically forbidden and punishable with expulsion. Deji had already started his program at the Poly before gaining admissions to study engineering at UI, so he decided to complete the short diploma and five-year degree simultaneously, unbeknownst to both institutions, on top of seeking elected offices on both campuses.

The day after I met him, Deji invited me to go on an excursion with the “Seeds of Africa” press club, an organization that he was also an officer for, and which was in the process of fundraising for their major event for the year, some six weeks away. A group of about a dozen Polytechnic students and I took a rickety bus held shut with a rope that the students had chartered to the town of Ife about 90 minutes away where Obafemi Awolowo University is located. The group intended to meet with a retired professor of Yoruba culture, who the students hoped would support the event with a donation. The group had already printed an expensive glossy poster with the Prof’s name advertising the event, which was designed to be a celebration of African cultures, as evidenced by the theme, “You and Your Culture.” The sign identified the Professor as “Mister.” The indirect dis-honor appeared to be lost on the group and the seeming casual approach to the “official” fundraising trip would not be the last I witnessed. Prepared for an official visit, I’d worn a skirt, collared blouse and dress shoes. The Poly students, with one exception, were dressed in casual wear: jeans, t-shirts and one student with a particularly flashy belt with a dollar sign buckle, an especially fitting though likely unintentional signal of the students’ intent. A few had a woven stole with the words “Seed of Africa” stitched around it.

The students had never met the Prof, but they managed to get his number and arrange a meeting with him in Ife. They hadn’t told him the details of their visit, but hedged their bets that seeing his name emblazoned on the poster in person would convince, or more likely cajole, him into agreeing to be their keynote speaker, which would of course imply a financial contribution to the club. Such tactics were common among student leaders at public institutions. I accompanied University of Ibadan student union leaders on many such trips to solicit local politicians and other prospective patrons in influential positions, often successfully. The Poly students’ trip, however, was a resounding failure. When we reached Ife, the Prof summoned us to meet him at a local watering hole where he was drinking beer and, despite the students’ best efforts, The Prof rebuffed their request. “Look, I am a retiree. I go to campus to play with my friends and then to the beer parlor. My wife owns a shop in town. I don’t have much to give you except a token.” He reached into the breast pocket on the front of his tunic to scavenge for money before counting out N2500 (US$17). Double Speaker, interjected then, “Please sir, our program costs N500,000 (US$1667).” “You can’t just jump on me like that,” The Prof declared.
To my ears, the Prof put a curious emphasis on the word "You." You students, in particular, cannot solicit me in this manner. The unfavorable response was likely influenced by the messengers themselves: students of a state-owned polytechnic, who were often not taken seriously by virtue of their association with public technical institutions.

The lack of institutional resources compels students of public institutions like Poly to seek outside patronage, which can bring disappointment as was the case with the Seeds of Africa club trip to fundraise from the Prof. Weak leverage within the prestige economy of student politics compels Poly students to become entrenched within local politics that is notoriously “bloody” and “dirty.” Nevertheless, when students are successful at gaining financial sponsorship, ironically, they are able to introduce infrastructural changes that would not be possible in other kinds of institutions where university authorities manage such donations and the contracting of capital projects. At Poly, capital projects for infrastructure including relaxation areas, notice boards, and signage were executed by the administration of student associations themselves, development projects that would have likely been institutionally discouraged or abandoned at the planning stage in public and private universities where such projects are contracted by university authorities. Roadmap’s plans for UI, for example, from the Introduction, were abandoned.

![Figure 9: Structure commemorating department leaders at Poly (2012)](image)
Photo: K. Strong
When Poly students do successfully execute such works, the development projects immortalize the “regimes” of Poly political organizations. The following images are of several recent projects executed by the leadership of Poly student associations. In Figures 9 and 10, both erected by the elected leaders of the National Association of Banking and Finance Students, commemoration and function are joined. In the first image (Figure 9), the names of the departmental executives and legislators are displayed in a structure planted in the middle of a footpath. In the second (Figure 10), a massive notice board with a corrugated tin roof provides shade, space for the display of announcements, and artistic flare with sculptured Naira, Dollar, and Euro symbols flanking the edges of the glass-encased notice board.

![Figure 10: Notice board erected by Poly Banking and Finance students (2012)](image)

Photo: K. Strong

Elsewhere, in The Department of Accountancy, the 2009/2010 National Association of Public Accountancy Students (NAPAS) administration provided a new signboard identifying the department (Figure 11 below). To the right of the concrete structure, erected by the administration of Jimoh Ibrahim, which branded itself the "Era of Making a Difference," a subsequent student administration added what are popularly referred to as "relaxation gardens," or shaded seating areas, which provide sorely needed public spaces for students to socialize with protection from the elements.
As the first image illustrates, Poly student leaders embrace the title of “comrade” as opposed to politician as a marker of political identity, in line with the history of militant student activism in Nigeria, premised on agitation against the state. The practice suggests that Poly students see themselves as more versed in "real" or gritty politics, as opposed to intellectualized and professionalized politics that I will describe next. Less obviously, the practice may also anticipate that Poly students will remain marginalized within the positions of formal leadership in the country. The social dismissal of Poly credentials and the unsuccessful visit to reluctant patron, The Prof, perhaps foreshadow that, as national politics leans towards a professionalized political aesthetic—as opposed to the flagrant strong-arm tactics of the military era—Poly students may remain shut out of the upper echelons of political power and influence.

A New Generation

May 2012

Samuel was waiting for me by the car park opposite of the University of Ibadan’s Institute for African Studies. Thirty minutes or so before then, the two of us crossed paths there with Dr. Sola Olorunyomi, a lecturer in African Studies with whom I had been trying to arrange a formal meeting. Dr. Olorunyomi was active in student politics as a UI undergraduate and co-
founded the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) in 1980, after the banning of the first Nigerian student union by the military government. An activist to the core, he was known to be somewhat of a free spirit, almost always outfitted in "native" attire regardless of the occasion. Having discovered my research interest in student activism, he said we should discuss politics sometime. So that afternoon, I followed him up to his office and we finally did.

Samuel, likely in his late twenties or early thirties, was a recognized student politician in Oyo State. He'd completed his Education degree two years prior, after being “victimized” by the administration of the Oyo State College of Education and his results arbitrarily withheld for two and a half years, due to his activism as Student Union President—a common form of reprisal against student activists. To my knowledge, Samuel was not an enrolled student at the time of our conversation, but he was nevertheless serving as President of the Federation of Oyo State Students Union (FOSSU), an organization based in the town of Oyo, the other nodal point of politics in Oyo State, apart from the capital city, Ibadan. I met Samuel almost a year earlier at the convention to elect the leadership of the Oyo State wing of NANS, held in the Student Union Building of the University of Ibadan. It was the second attempt to elect state leadership, and my first exposure to sham electoral politics (though not the last, as I discuss in the next chapter). The do-over convention was called by a faction of the state NANS body, a collection of student union leaders, influential former students including Samuel, and political “godfathers” proximate to the state government. The provisional alliance didn't agree with the results of the first convention, I gathered, because the elected chairman was a student of a state-owned monotechnic institution, an affiliation they deemed unbefitting of the official spokesperson for student interests in the state, particularly in an election year, when student leadership would have the audience and, potentially, resources of elected politicians in the state government. So they had arranged a shadow convention on the premise that the first was unconstitutional and, as was often the case with NANS, simply held another election to produce a more “desirable” candidate, in this case a student at the University of Ibadan, a federal university.

Continuing, Samuel admitted, “They [the older generation] say we've derailed and, sure, many of us have derailed,” acknowledging the common critique that these forms of patrimonialism and underhandedness had tarnished the reputation of the national student body. “But at the same time,” he insisted, “our approach is different because their own style is too rigid for today. It's not about idealism but realism. Look at the way that lecturer was dressed. Those ones are used to looking tattered,” he said, alluding to Dr. Olorunyomi’s choice to pair slacks with a tunic made of native ankara fabric and well-worn leather sandals. “They rarely wear suits,” he said, lifting the lapels of his pressed jacket to accentuate this point of distinction. Drawing a parallel between sartorial choice and political technique, Samuel said, "They were more confrontational then," breaking off into an off-key chorus of the protest chant "Solidarity Forever." "We still sing but now it's all about ‘ADR.’” Unfamiliar with the acronym, he explained to me that it was shorthand for "Alternative Dispute Resolution," an approach he’d discovered in his readings in the field of Peace and Conflict studies, a discipline gaining traction in universities like UI, among students and professionals continuing their education and interested in executive and political leadership. "As SU [student union] President, I used diplomacy. The lecturer with the tattered clothes, that is the old school. Obama can’t use Lincoln’s tactics.”
The Professional Politician

This idea of “new” versus “old” school politics articulates fundamental generational differences in the political tactics and aims of Nigerian (student) politics. Discourses, both academic and popular, concerning youth activism in Nigeria identifies this generational change from military-era, confrontational student politics to contemporary student politics, which is regarded unfavorably as a distortion of an honorable legacy, and as ideologically debased as corrupt national politics. However, Samuel's alternative framing of present-day student politics as diplomacy-oriented, pragmatic and cosmopolitan with millennial panache aligns more with my interpretation of contemporary student politics. Jettisoning the conventional evaluative approach to the political choices of young people in Nigeria, which dismisses student political practices for failing to uphold the radical student political tradition formed in the context of military rule, I am more interested in examining Nigerian student politics in recent years on its own terms. From this vantage point, I understand generational differences to be evidence of a broader epochal shift, which aligns with what I am calling the Post-Military. For students previously limited to activism against the state or co-optation by the military, civilian rule has opened up unprecedented possibilities with which student activists-cum-politicians experiment. They do so through a new aesthetic and ethic of “professional” politics, which borrows from the Nigerian student unionism legacy without being beholden to it.

In Max Weber's seminal essay, "Politics as a Vocation" (1965), politics is distinguished as avocation, vocation and profession. Though the work is best known for its elaboration of a theory of the state as monopolizing the legitimate use of violence—a position that I am not here endorsing—I find more relevant to the present discussion its typology of "bearers of power." Bearers of power are among the vessels through which the domination of those subjected and obedient to state power is legitimated. There is "devotion" to charismatic leaders like monarchs, prophets, warlords, and gang leaders, for whom politics is a vocation and "calling." There is also the figure of the politician, who comes in two forms: the "professional," who earns a living working in the service of charismatic leaders within the modern state, for whom politics is a profession around which life is built; as well as the most inclusive group of leaders, "occasional" politicians (e.g., voters, protesters, heads of voluntary associations, etc.) for whom politics is "neither materially nor ideally 'their life,'" to be entered into when the need arises. What I find useful about this framework is that "politics" and power are not exclusive to those in positions of formal leadership, and that "leadership" is understood to be a diffuse category differentiated by purpose and positionality vis-à-vis state apparatuses.

The students I encountered on Nigerian campuses were negotiating monumental changes in the structure of the Nigerian state and a subtler reconfiguration of the idea(s), purpose(s) and practice(s) of political leadership. Able to participate in purportedly democratic processes in multiple domains (campus, municipality, city, state and federal governments), students selectively, or "occasionally" participated in politics by voting in elections and attempting to hold elected leaders accountable with zeal. The efforts of students who sought a higher "calling" in the form of campus political offices call to mind Weber's description of the bureaucratization of the state, which resonates with aspects of the political evolution of Post-Military Nigeria. For Weber, "professional" politicians are vital to the development of "modern officialdom into a highly qualified, professional labor force," and politics as an "organization" which demands "training in the struggle for powers." What I am calling, here, "the professionalization of politics" aligns with this idea of organized politics producing a "trained," "qualified" labor force.
The recent civilian transition has created hope for the possibility of the emergence of the professional politician. With recognition that politicians remain Nigeria’s “big men," political activities, in particular, are understood to be lucrative and, thus, especially attractive. Among students, there's a palpable sense that participating in university-level student politics is a precursor to a political career post-graduation. It remains to be seen whether this will indeed be the case. My point here is that, rather than viewing student politics purely in relationship to "activism" against the government, it is increasingly important to situate the politicization of young people on campuses within an emerging cadre of professionalizing leaders as well as evolving structures of state bureaucratization. Though interest in various modes of leadership was expressed across all the Ibadan campuses, as my above discussion suggests, nowhere was the idea and aspiration of the "professional" politician more pronounced than at the University of Ibadan, to which I now turn.

University of Ibadan

Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan (UI), is the most ethnically, regionally, and economically diverse of higher educational institutions, with a population of approximately 34,000 students. Distinguished for its role in the reproduction of the nation’s socioeconomic, political, and cultural elites (as I discussed in Chapter One), its institutional identity centers on the “first and best” mantra often repeated by students and staff, which pervades student sociality and the reality that UI graduates have historically and will likely continue to enter positions of national prominence. The university offers certificates, diplomas, and undergraduate, masters and doctoral degrees in a broad range of disciplines with eleven faculties including courses in the Arts, Law, Social Sciences, Science, Technology, Agriculture, and Medicine. Though most higher educational institutions are still recovering from years of state dis-investment and underfunding, over the past decade, a sense of optimism and revivalism has become palpable at the University of Ibadan, due in large part to successive administrations that have prioritized infrastructural development and external partnerships with international funding sources like the MacArthur Foundation and Google.

The socioeconomic profile of UI students lies somewhere between the extremes of Lead City University and the Polytechnic Ibadan. UI students I encountered often benefitted from private secondary schooling and a "middle class" background—by which I mean, students' parents could often afford to privately school their children through secondary school, but lacked the resources to send their children abroad to the United Kingdom and the United States, where most extremely wealthy Nigerians send their children. Still, students of more humble means were also prominent within the student population. Such students often came to UI, after attending state higher educational institutions first, or after repeated attempts to gain admissions, which are often required of students who lack the personal connections and financial means to secure one of a limited number of admissions openings. The relative socioeconomic diversity of the student population has helped UI retain its position within the popular imagination as a meritorious socially elite institution, in contrast to many private institutions, which are sometimes described as shortcuts for the wealthy. Though the University of Ibadan remains the "crown jewel" in the prestige economy of higher educational institutions, ironically, the cost of attendance is much lower than private universities and other public institutions, such as state universities and polytechnics, due to federal funding and subsidies.
Among the Ibadan campuses, the University of Ibadan had the most developed and well-rounded extracurricular life and student political culture. This is, in part, a result of UI's long institutional history and its structure as a residential institution split between its two campuses, the main University of Ibadan Campus and the satellite College of Medicine, where the University College Hospital is located. Over 135 distinct student organizations are registered with the Student Affairs Division, covering state (of origin), religious, service, literary, professional, residence hall, academic, sports, and social organizations, among others. Many such organizations have branches in other Nigerian campuses, but were first established at the University of Ibadan, which remains a point of distinction among members. Since the majority of UI students live on campus for part or the entirety of their schooling, student associational life is vibrant, with most students participating in multiple organizations. After the hours of instruction, this vibrancy is discernible sonically. During my fieldwork between 2010-2012, I lived in Tafawa Balewa Hall for PhD students (Figure 12). The building was situated among four of the twelve campus residence halls and, on a nightly basis, these halls hosted meetings of religious fellowships, sports clubs, and social clubs. At most other campuses, after the hours of instruction, the campus was largely vacant. At UI, such associational ties were crucial to students' identity and practices much more so than other institutions that were largely commuter campuses and, thus, lacked its robust extracurricular culture.

Residence halls, in particular, were said to politically socialize students, who are assigned to the two postgraduate (both co-ed), six male undergraduate, two female undergraduate, one co-ed undergraduate and master's hall, and one for medical students at the satellite campus. Though the assignment process is largely "random," students believed hall affiliation to be somewhat of an indicator of political ideology: (male) students who lived in the residence halls closer to the central administration buildings, which bear the names of early British university administrators (Lord Tedder and Kenneth Mellanby) were said to be pro-establishment and pampered given their literal proximity to university authorities; (male) students who lived farther away across the shallow "Zik River," in halls named in commemoration of the end of colonial rule (Independence Hall, and Nnamdi Azikiwe Hall after the head of state), were said to be anti-establishment. Female residence halls, bearing titles that indicate a similar divide between colonialism and independent rule (Queen Elizabeth II Hall, Queen Idia Hall), did not have such connotation.

More than anywhere, political life at the University of Ibadan is associated with the legacy of national student unionism, largely because student unionism was established and developed at UI and national union activism was also centered on the leadership of UI students. In the Student Handbook (2008/2009 edition), officials note, "From its inception, the University has encouraged Student Unionism and the Student Union has thus been an important feature of the University existence." This seeming embrace of unionism as part of the university's identity obscures the fact that the UI Student Union was unofficially banned for nearly a decade after a prolonged court case between university authorities and a presidential aspirant for the 2002/2003 student union race. In the absence of the union, students' aspirations for positions of elected leadership were limited to departmental, faculty, and residence hall associations, which have always been critical within campus political life but were subordinate to the university-wide Student Union. In its place, university authorities established the Student Union Transitional

68 These function similarly to ethnic organizations, which are not officially recognized by the university.
Committee to advocate for student interests with "representatives" from each faculty that the Dean of Students appointed. This move, in particular, was a bone of contention between authorities and student leaders, who clamored for a return of the union with diplomacy and campus protests that addressed this issue as well as proposed fee hikes between 2006-2010.

Campus politics was described as "dull" and "stifled" in my early fieldwork (2006-2009) at the University of Ibadan, which shaped my decision to pursue a comparative historical project on the history of student union activism at federal universities. However, when I returned for fieldwork in 2010, the campus was bubbling with excitement related to news about the reinstatement of the student union government, under the leadership of a new Pro-Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, who himself identified as a unionist, and the advocacy of faculty, who believed the absence of a viable student representative body to be at odds with the post-military democratic era. Still, remarks later in the Student Handbook in a chapter on the student union offer a representative picture of what has been the position of university authorities to reinvigorated student unionism: "There is no doubt, whatsoever, that student unionism is desirable in the University. What the authorities expect, however, is mature and responsible leadership…Towards this end, and in order to have responsible and visionary student leadership, the authorities have put in place a number of quality control measures for those who are aspiring to be student leaders" (123). Officially, these "quality control" measures—the wording itself suggestive of the administrations' authority and the idea of leadership as a commodity subject to corporate regulation—include requiring a minimum grade point average. However, in practice, most students felt authorities attempted to keep them on a short leash in order to prevent the
growth of student radicalism, but also what had become in the late 1990s a culture of violence and corruption within the UI student union.  

During 2010 and 2012, I witnessed at close hand the return of the student union and the election and administration of two sets of union leaders, as well as the tenures of dozens of other student political administrations at the department, faculty, and campus association level. I eventually was recognized at the University of Ibadan as a political "stakeholder," which is a role I explain more in the next chapter. This unexpected role was facilitated by my participation in two different capacities in the campus political community. The first emanated from my election as the General Secretary of Balewa Hall, which I imagined to be a minor administrative note taking role, quite similar to my practices as an ethnographer, that was uncontested by other members of the postgraduate community in residence. The second was my work producing a video documentary project with a team of students chronicling the return of the union in February 2011. As accidental a student politician as I was a filmmaker, I was approached by a longtime friend to make use of my video equipment to capture the historic moment, for which the Division of Student Affairs gave our team of five students sole "press" access, including closed door sessions during which candidates were screened and votes were painstakingly counted. In this capacity, in particular—that of videographer/chronicler—I began to recognize the professionalization of politics among students, as I myself was being professionalized as an ethnographer and academic. After filming election events and interviewing candidates, in a manner that was surely reminiscent to students of mainstream news coverage of elections and politicians, student leaders began to seek me out to film their performances at debates and speech nights as part of the cultivation of public political personae.

Through both sets of activities, as participant and witness, I discovered the extent to which "politician" was an identity embraced and mobilized UI students after the return of student unionism. Just weeks after the popular uprisings in Northern Africa in December of 2010, which Nigerian students closely followed through news and social media, students saw the return of the UI student union as holding the possibility of a larger wave of political change in which they desired to participate. The working title of the documentary, suggested by one undergraduate on our team, "The UI Spring," makes explicit this hope. Though revolution was one imagined aim of this change, election to positions of formal leadership was another. Among students, there was the sense that participating in campus politics could be a legitimate precursor to a political career post-graduation. Students' practices, particularly their liaisons with national political actors suggest that this is a reasonable expectation. The Student Union President, especially at an institution with the reputation of UI, for example, could likely make two phone calls and be talking directly with the aide to the State Governor, or the Governor himself. Add two more phone calls and, I was told, the Student Union President could be talking to the aide to the President of Nigeria.

Students forming relationships of financial sponsorship and mentorship with national politicians is not unique to contemporary student politics or even privileged institutions like the University of Ibadan. However, the practice of "professional" politics is. Unlike state institutions

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69 People described campus and the area around the Student Union Building as particularly dangerous during this time. Gunshots could be heard on the campus at night, and even during the day. Cultism was openly practiced within unionism as well.
like Poly, in which students are implicated in the most debased and violent mode of national politics, campus political culture remains relatively “refined” and “intellectual,” akin to the Habermasian bourgeoisie public sphere (1991). Somewhat at odds with "real" Nigerian politics, the UI political scene nevertheless facilitates the cultivation of what I am calling political communities of practice and activities that students like Roadmap describe as political training for the future. Students actively participate in activities such as public debates, the development of public personae (e.g., the selection of political nicknames like Roadmap), and the production of sophisticated media such as jingles, social media support pages, and glossy posters and handbills. The campaign media, often produced at great financial cost to political aspirants, reinforces a view that participation in such activities is required to be successfully elected, proficient at politics, and eventually professionals at it. Such activities are also understood as indispensable to the development of “public” political identities and the successful election to political office, premised on rational choice—a glaring deviation from political office seeking at the national level, which has been defined by the accumulation of power by force and a view of politics as a “do or die affair,” to invoke the words of former Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, when he sought, unsuccessfully, to amend the constitution to permit a third term for himself in 2007.

**Political Communities of Practice**

The idea that one can train to be a leader is an important one, though it remains at odds with existed models of political leadership in Nigeria. Note, for instance, that the major contenders for the highest office in the land, the presidency, have been former military heads of state, General Olusegun Obasanjo and General Muhammadu Buhari, who seized power during Nigeria's troubled military era. The only outlier to this trend, Nigeria's immediate past president, Goodluck Jonathan, was popularly viewed as an “accidental” head of state. After reportedly earning his doctorate in Zoology and holding a lecturer position, Jonathan served as Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State for two terms, beginning with the 1999 civilian transition. In 2005, after Bayelsa Governor Alamieyeseigha was impeached for money laundering in the United Kingdom, Jonathan was sworn in as Governor. The good luck did not end there: in 2007, Jonathan was selected as the running mate of Umaru Yar’Adua, who was elected President of Nigeria. However, when the sickly Yar’Adua died in office, Jonathan again emerged as acting head of state in 2010, only running for office for the first time in 2011 with the full weight and resources of incumbency behind him. For these reasons, Goodluck Jonathan is an unusual politician, even by Nigerian standards. However, he shares with other public leaders the reality that the processes through which elected leaders actually acquire their powers are largely mysterious, even despite the performance of transparency within purportedly democratic proceedings.

The obscurity surrounding elected leadership and ascendance to positions of power in Nigeria is why students’ deliberate practices of training to be leaders is worthy of critical attention. The idea that leadership can be "learned" is a novel one that is gaining currency within the region, with the establishment of educational courses in executive leadership and initiatives like South Africa's "African Leadership Academy" to "develop the next generation of African leaders." I approach the Ibadan campuses as distinct political communities of students within a larger body of Nigerian youth. Joined by a common set of practices—the pursuit of educational credentials and, less obviously, processes of politicization and leadership training—students
constitute what Lave and Wenger describe as "communities of practice," which I amend here, as *political* communities of practice. The theory of communities of practice and its accompaniment “situated learning” untether processes of learning from formal instruction and the false notion that learning has a beginning and an end. In their writings on non-traditional learning communities (e.g., Liberian tailors, Yucatan midwives, U.S. butchers, among others), processes of learning involves deepening participation within shared practices, knowledge, and social relationships through increased levels of competence that enable participants to move from peripheral to full participation (Lave and Wenger 2002; 1991). In this framework, learning shifts from being conceived as an individualized process to one involving collective participation in social worlds, which is not dependent on "formal" institutions, but rather collective practices that involve any common endeavor. Knowledge and learning, then, are inherently relational and guided by the "whole person" acting in the world, with "agent," "activity," and "the world" mutually constituting each other (1991: 33).

This view of learning as tied to collective practice and deepening participation in a common endeavor aligns with the ways Nigerian students re-imagine the experience of schooling and develop practices that unsettle what we might assume "education" and "learning" entail. My use of the concept, here, in the context of Ibadan students engaged in campus politics captures the ways students are reconfiguring the domains of learning within and beyond institutionalized educational settings. As I discussed at the beginning of the chapter, the challenges of contemporary schooling compel students to re-purpose the time of schooling in ways that de-center the role of the classroom and credentials as the primary focus of the educational experience. Similarly, across the various Ibadan campuses, student activities on campuses and within their urban milieu suggest a de-coupling of the kinds of learning that students deem necessary for their respective futures from educational institutions. For these reasons, there is little mention of the classroom in this manuscript because my interlocutors insisted that "student politics" extended beyond the classroom, the campus, and locality. Further, their belief that politics and leadership are areas in which one can acquire "training" through active, ongoing, participation in service of a future professional aspiration suggests that the boundaries of formal politics, like processes of learning, is also being renegotiated. In the next chapter, I engage more directly Jean Lave's theory of apprenticeship, which offers another articulation of the ways learning situated in space, practice and relations deepens participation in a given community (or set of communities). The practices associated with students' political training, in the course of running for elected office (Chapter Three); forming relationships with national political actors (Chapter Three), in online political communities (Chapter Four), and in urban and campus protest (Chapter Five), indicate new horizons in the youth political imagination and the desire for alternative ways of thinking about and practicing leadership.
CHAPTER THREE: 
Producing Politicians

The title of this chapter, “Producing Politicians,” is an expression I often heard during campus election seasons at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria. Students actively involved in processes of electioneering as candidates and “stakeholders” would often say things like, “Our hall [of residence] must produce a candidate” or “Last year, So-and-so person produced a candidate.” This reflects a belief among students that politicians are not merely elected by eligible voters. They are also produced—in essence, made—through networks of relationships and practice. To be elected denotes the seemingly transparent process through which members of a polity are declared eligible to run for office, campaign, and are subsequently voted into positions of leadership by a majority of their peers. However, to be produced as a politician is a far more complicated process, which is not tethered to being declared the winner of an organized election. Rather, it refers to positioning oneself within concentric networks of political practice that include but also extend beyond the campus.

A key argument of this dissertation is that the campus is a critical context to explore the professionalization of political leadership in post-military Nigeria, in part, because campuses were the only sites where democratic practices such as elections and oppositional politics could be performed during nearly three decades of military rule (1966-1979; 1983-1999) when representative governance was precluded at the national level. Indeed, it was due to the threat of radicalized students organizing against the state in the 1990s that the federal military government and university authorities attempted to undermine or ban outright student unions around the country. Post-military Nigeria, an era which began with the most recent transition to constitutional democracy in 1999, has witnessed a resurgence of student unionism, though the relationship between campus and national politics is still a fraught one because of the perception among students and the broader public that the national political arena is corrupt. Nevertheless, Nigerian students view campus leadership positions as potential stepping-stones to elected office in national politics. While campus politics once positioned students as agitators against the military state, today constitutional democracy offers student politicians the possibility of eventual incorporation into the state through elected office, after graduation. Thus, experience in campus politics works as an avenue to acquire leadership training for future political careers, and “leadership” becomes a skill set that can be cultivated by students through specific campus-oriented practices that are said to “produce” them as politicians.

Being a “politician” for students is both an aspirational category and a social identity, which is especially pronounced in post-military Nigeria. It is an identity developed over time, in relationship with other political actors, and across different political terrains. In this chapter, I focus on two categories of practices that effect this production: elections and relationships with people of political influence, in particular “godfathers” and “stakeholders.” I also continue my engagement with the work of Jean Lave and the theory of “apprenticeship,” which I apply to the “production” of politicians and students’ deepening participation in the shared practices, knowledges, and social relationships associated with organized politics, which grant “apprentices” increased levels of competence in ways that make participants move from peripheral roles to full participation over time (Lave 2011). From this point, the dissertation focuses primarily on the University of Ibadan, which is the institution where I conducted most of
my research, and where I lived in a graduate student residence hall and participated in its governance between February 2011 and June 2012. In late 2010, when I started the most intensive period of my fieldwork, UI was preparing to reinstate its student union, which had been banned for nearly a decade due to prolonged litigation stemming from a contested election, whose results were annulled by university authorities. For UI students, the eventual ban of the student union evokes the memory and loss of “June 12th” (a reference to the cancelled 1993 national ballot, discussed below). The return of student unionism during the period of post-military democratic rule, on multiple registers, suggests continuities between campus and national politics.

Elections and Post-Military Politics

Elections, in many ways, are the most critical events in participatory democracy, through the routinized constellation of party platforms, public debates, and press scrutiny that constitute “the liberal fiction of a public sphere in civil society,” and a key periodic staging of the political (Ferme 1999, 164; Habermas 1989). The spectacle and dramaturgical practices of political events like elections have been of particular interest in the study of African politics because they contrasted so dramatically in practice with the liberal democratic ideals of “free and fair” ballots. In particular, anthropological contributions to this literature have emphasized their ritual nature and the seeming incongruence between liberal democratic traditions and electoral practices perceived as riven with ambiguity, secrecy and occult practices, rather than being expression of free and rational choices (e.g., Apter 1999; Geschiere 1997; Smith 2010). In Nigeria, the mere existence of competitive elections is widely regarded as a sign of progress, after decades of military rule. The occasion of elections and the promise of “democracy” in particular are entangled, in part, because of the specific legacy of national elections conducted on June 12, 1993. These were the first presidential elections since the 1983 military coup that ended the Second Republic (1979-1983), and brought Muhammadu Buhari and later Ibrahim Babangida to power. Though characterized as Nigeria’s freest and fairest elections to date, the results of the 1993 elections were annulled after it became apparent that opposition candidate Moshood Abiola had won. This annulment was regarded, in both scholarly and Nigerian popular circles, as one of the country’s greatest missed opportunities for political change, as it led to the brutal dictatorship of Sani Abacha, yet another military ruler.

The five cycles of national elections since the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999 have also generated criticism concerning their freeness and fairness, including the 2011 exercises during the course of my fieldwork, which observers criticized for electoral misconduct and post-election violence (International Crisis Group 2011). However, there appears to be measured optimism on the horizon for Nigeria’s beleaguered political system after the recent April 2015 elections, during which General Buhari was elected President. This outcome marked the first time an opposition candidate defeated an incumbent at the ballot. The decision of sitting president Jonathan to publicly concede defeat after the official announcement of the electoral results was a striking reversal of the 2011 proceedings, when the defeat of Buhari by Jonathan

70 This move will perhaps re-cast the legacy of Jonathan, whose tenure in office was beset with crises including the 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests that I discuss in Chapter Five of this dissertation, and the international shaming following the government’s failure to rescue nearly three hundred schoolgirls kidnapped by Boko Haram in 2014.
resulted in widespread post-election violence in some Northern states, which also intensified the activity of Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram. That Buhari, the frequent post-military aspirant and former military head of state could be construed as an “opposition” candidate and, perhaps more tellingly, “The People’s Dictator,” suggests continuities between the era of military dictatorship and the purportedly civilian era. More relevant to the present discussion, the re-ascendance of the military leader via democratic elections suggests that civilian rule, of a kind, may be a continuing feature in Nigerian politics, and that elections will be as well.

Elections are important to the political life of universities for other reasons, more specific to the campus. While elections at the municipal and national levels are typically the focus of analysis of electoral proceedings, until the recent demise of military rule, campuses were the primary sites where key elements of participatory democracy could be substantively practiced. During campus elections, the lining up to cast one’s vote in clear ballot boxes, the painstaking semi-public account of each individual ballot paper, and other techniques of transparent democratic proceedings are particularly meaningful experiences for students, because electioneering at the national level is regarded with mistrust.\(^\text{71}\) Campus elections, which more closely align with the expectations of democratic processes, thus, remain a revealing context to explore the work of electoral proceedings in Nigeria’s evolving constitutional democracy. These exercises also offer insight into the participation in electoral politics of Nigerian youth, who despite forming the majority of the population, are limited to relatively passive support roles in gerontocratic national politics, for instance as hired thugs in canvassing trips to the opposition’s territory, or as more benign “youth” wings of national political parties.\(^\text{72}\) Now that participatory democracy, for the first time in decades, informs political practices both on campuses and on the national stage, aspiring student politicians can experience electoral politics (i.e. campaigning, contesting for office, seeking support, voting, etc.) as preparation for the future.

To be clear, what I am calling here the “production of the politician” exceeds the occasion of the Election Day as well as the singular figure of the lone politician, which is why I find compelling Lave and Wenger’s notion of communities of practice and apprenticeship as opposed to a theory of individual transmission of training and knowledge. In a similar manner, the temporality of electoral practices extends beyond casting ballots and tabulating results, to encompass seasons that anticipate these moments and their future implications. This expanded temporal horizon makes possible an analysis of the ways in which individuals attempt to build incrementally from one season to another their political careers as politician, stakeholder, and godfather. The production of politicians both anticipates and continues beyond elections, which are understood here not merely as contests between individual political actors, but their extensive networks and a more elusive constellation of political forces put to work on campus and among

\(^{71}\) The 2015 elections appear to be shifting this perspective. Though rigging was rampant in the South-South (Niger Delta) and Southeast regions, the wide participation of the electorate and, especially, its commitment to grassroots monitoring of official conducting of local elections through online media bolstered their popular legitimacy.

\(^{72}\) The fluid boundaries of youth as a social category in this context complicate the possibility for such roles and organizations to provide avenues for the meaningful incorporation of young people into formal politics beyond the campus. As the case of the 40-year old student elected as National President of the National Association of Nigerian Students in 2014 suggests (Today 2014), age-based seniority and other indicators of the persistence of gerontocratic preference remain active even in purportedly “youth” spaces. For the rich scholarship on the social significance of the “Big Man, Small Boy” syndrome in Africa, see Nugent (1995) and Price (1974).
broader publics. More than an individual process of political professionalization, it is also a collective process of recognition and validation.

Amongst the reasons for thinking about African electoral politics as ritual as much as a particular kind of democratic political practice is the obsessive attention paid to symbols, jingles, and party attire, to which considerable expenses are often devoted. In this respect, too, campus politics are a training ground for national politics, where a similar attention attends all the surface symbols of political parties. My analysis of political events on campus and in the nation was carried out at the campus, regional and national student governance level, and at the level of national politics, in which a prominent former student leader was elected to the Oyo State House of Assembly and became a “godfather” to several student politicians. Unlike national politics, in which electoral proceedings are conducted every four years, student elections are conducted annually at multiple levels of governance within the campus (i.e., department, faculty, student union, hall of residence, club) and nationally (i.e., state, region, and Nigeria-wide). This means that students engaged in politics as candidates or supporters (“stakeholders”) are virtually always preparing to launch political campaigns, or actively campaigning. Rather than an occasional high-stakes occurrence as in national politics, student elections are “everyday” phenomena, around which student politicians orient their activities and relationships. Thus, elections were understood as the time for politics, or the key temporal markers of campus political life. This frequency makes possible the analysis of political practices on multiple scales, and the continuities between individual elections. These revealed over time the ways in which students deepened their participation in political communities of practice and formed relationships, including those of apprenticeship, with political actors on the national scene. Both are crucial components of the notion of producing politicians.

The Making of a Student Leader

In order to better analyze the relationship between processes of apprenticeship and electoral politics, I focus in this section on the student election at UI that unfolded between January and February 2011, in which an apparently non-descript, weak candidate gradually became a formidable contender and eventually winner of the UI Student Union presidency through careful mentoring by stakeholders and a political godfather. This will allow me to examine the figures of “stakeholders” and “godfathers,” which are the focus of this particular section. I then go on, in the following section, to examine the transversal relations among campus, regional and national student elections, as well as their imbrication in national politics. Godfathers and stakeholders are the key links among these different levels.

On a January Friday night, the student union campaign train came to Tafawa Balewa Hall. After months of anticipation, the campaign season had been declared open earlier in the week, giving candidates and their supporters the freedom to canvass for votes. Every night brought to campus the sounds of the intensifying election season. Campaign jingles blasted from the stereos of cars circling among student residence halls. Glossy posters and handbills began to adorn the pressboards of faculties, residence halls, and other public spaces. And, the names of rumored aspirants were also circulating among students. That Friday night, a small caravan of roughly twenty students included a drummer, trumpet player, and a chorus of singers. They sang the words to a Christian hymn, but substituted “President” every time “Jesus” came up in the original. The group continued making noise but hesitated at the gate to Balewa Hall, my dorm,
which was the only campus residence for PhD students. I could only assume that they were
deciding among themselves whether it made sense to mobilize the much-older graduate students,
who were eligible to vote but had low interest in the student union elections—essentially an
undergraduate preoccupation. No student politicians had bothered to campaign at Balewa until
then. After the small crowd entered and did a round of “gyrations,” the term used to describe
chanting and noisemaking in the course of political activities, they settled in the reception area. I
sat in an armchair by the TV room, a few paces away from the group, trying unsuccessfully to
distinguish the candidate from the throng of supporters.

A half-dozen Balewa residents, middle-aged men who’d been watching the football
match, came out to the reception area to see about the commotion, which was uncommon for the
quiet hall. “This is a PhD hall and any effort to support this candidacy would be achieved
through an appeal to intellect rather than rabble-rousing,” said one. I recognized the voice as
belonging to Comrade Tusin, a 50-something PhD student well versed in campus politics from
his days as a UI student unionist in the 1980s. He had gone on to engage in local politics in
another state in southwestern Nigeria, where he was an active party member after unsuccessfully
running for municipal chairman. He was accompanied by the Hall President and a few others,
who were elected to hall government positions a few weeks later. The candidate supported by
that night’s “campaign train” was Tokunbo Salako, or “T Cool,” a third year Psychology student.
His campaign poster had appeared earlier that week at the Student Union Building. Aesthetically,
his publicity was striking. “Think Positive, Think T Cool,” the poster read below a professional
headshot. In the image, T Cool wore a blue tunic and Yoruba fila cap, a departure from other
candidates who donned suits and ties. His sideways profile pose and quiet confidence made him
look the most “presidential.” But he did not stand out in person among the crowd of supporters.

The Balewa “elders” took turns vetting T Cool by posing a series of questions about his
motivations, qualifications, and political platform. In so doing, the Balewa residents assumed the
role of “stakeholders”—current or prior office holders. In some cases, stakeholders are
candidates who unsuccessfully sought elected office, but managed to parlay the alliances formed
in the process into continued political prominence. Stakeholders are part king-makers, part expert
counselors: individuals that candidates consult in private meetings or the kind of ad-hoc public
gathering described here, with the objective of eliciting support among the constituencies over
which stakeholders are believed to wield influence. Minimally, consulting with stakeholders is a
form of tribute, intended to convey respect to the stakeholder, even in cases when it is known
that the influence of the stakeholder is of little instrumental value in the moment. This was the
case among Balewa graduate students, who were barred from running for student union offices,
but were eligible to vote for undergraduate candidates. Ironically, though graduate students were
significantly older than undergraduates (typically between the ages of late 20s and 60s), which
might suggest their political and developmental maturity, the graduate student union had shown
itself less able to manage its affairs than its junior counterpart. Indeed, it had been banned years
earlier due to mismanagement of funds and allegations of embezzlement. Thus graduate students,
whose numbers among the campus residents were relatively small because many had families
and full-time jobs elsewhere, lacked representation on campus and were largely apathetic to
student politics.

Among the other members of the campaign train were young men who described
themselves as friends of T Cool, but also used their association with him as leverage for political
projects of their own. For instance, Lekan, a friend of T Cool who sat down in the chair beside
me, claimed that his reason for backing T Cool was their friendship and political affinity, but later went on to contest for the Hall Chairmanship of the Nnamdi Azikiwe undergraduate dorm that both resided in. In our initial conversation, Lekan told me that his support of T Cool included monetary contributions to offset campaign costs, which signals another crucial aspect of the role of the stakeholder: access to financial resources, which are particularly attractive to candidates launching what are often expensive campaigns for elected office. Although supporters like Lekan had a peer relationship with T Cool during his candidacy (though not after the latter’s electoral victory), they are included in the category of “stakeholders” because they offer time and financial resources to candidates, with the expectation that these forms of support will be reciprocated in the event that stakeholders, too, become candidates.

Throughout his conversation with the Balewa stakeholders, T Cool appeared to be unrefined: he slouched, meandered in his responses, and was excessively soft-spoken. When asked for an example of the types of problems he would tackle as President of the Union, T Cool cited a recent increase in student registration fees that had made his own life financially difficult. The reaction among the Balewa residents was to suggest that T Cool use less personal examples, because there were students who had the resources to pay escalating registration fees, and he needed to broaden his electoral appeal. If T Cool wanted to succeed in politics, they advised that he broaden his base by focusing on common infrastructural complaints like the provision of electricity, which was frequently the cause of student protests, including two large-scale ones in 2011 and 2012, which forced the closure of the campus. I discuss these protests, which were inscribed by their participants within the global wave of “occupy” movements, in Chapter Five. The guidance of Balewa hall residents shifted the tone of the dialogue from vetting a candidate, to mentoring him on how to improve his candidacy. The Balewa residents adopted the posture of politically experienced elders who had an interest in shaping the next generation of student politicians. Given the ten year hiatus prior to this election, during which there had been no student union, these more experienced elders viewed their juniors as wholly disconnected from the legacy of past student unionism.

Comrade Tusin, mentioned above, exemplifies another critical dimension of the role played by stakeholders in campus politics: guidance based on prior leadership experience. He offered the undergraduates gathered in Balewa a primer on student unionism based on his tenure as a former UI student unionist, advising anyone with presidential ambitions to begin immediately to act as a president. Tusin, who always insisted on being addressed as a “comrade,” indexed a form of political leadership associated with the vibrant history of militant student activism in Nigerian higher educational institutions before it was suppressed under military rule. Those who use the title of “comrade” are assumed to have earned the right to do so in the political struggle to end military rule, mostly during the 1980s and early 1990s. The activism of that era offered students the most visible, organized form of leadership training available in a nation under authoritarian rule.

In this respect, Comrade Tusin approximates an aspect of the “godfather,” a figure who emerges from among stakeholders, and who occupies a senior hierarchical position in this schema of political relationships. But unlike the example of Comrade Tusin, in the national political arena, most political godfathers offer patronage, which I distinguish from the type of mentorship that can also shape political apprenticeship as it is discussed in this chapter. They do so on the basis of the authority conferred by their elected office, and/or the means to provide financial sponsorship that comes with political power. Campus politics present an alternative
possibility for the role of the political godfather that combines the financial exchanges of conventional patron-client relationships with forms of substantive mentorship that are, by and large, unavailable in national political culture. I discuss this role in greater detail in the next section on the godfatherism of “Radical Brother,” a prominent former University of Ibadan and national student leader, who was elected to the Oyo State House of Assembly in 2011 and 2015.

T Cool eventually emerged as the 2011 University of Ibadan Student Union president and leader of the first set of elected student representatives in over a decade. "The Pathfinder Set," was the name university officials chose to mark this first cohort of student union executives. On multiple registers, finding one's path is an appropriate metaphor for how this group of politicians navigated unfamiliar relationships and forms of power in the first year of the resuscitated student union. In the weeks after my first encounter with T Cool in Balewa Hall in January 2011, he underwent a remarkable transformation from an unconvincing aspirant to an elected student politician with previously unknown forms of leverage, who managed to expand his political influence at the campus, national student, and Oyo State levels.

The Student Union elections held in February 2011 set the tone for a fresh era of student political activity at UI, in both the mechanisms through which aspiring politicians contested and the political relationships that the fierce competition produced. All but one of the eight positions within the Executive branch was keenly contested. Yet, just as in national politics — where power is concentrated at the top — the race for the Presidency attracted the most scrutiny, and remains the most memorable. This was particularly so because T Cool defeated his opponent Adelabu "Labzy" Adeola, considered the front-runner prior to voting, by a mere twenty-five votes out of more than 6,000 cast. Both camps ran sophisticated campaigns, which relied heavily on new political media, and which elevated expectations for the cost and conduct of subsequent campaigns.

Former UI student leaders from the 1980s to the early 2000s to whom I talked in the course of my research suggested that political interest in student campaigns during the military era was largely issue-based, tethered to radical study groups that functioned like campus political parties and public gatherings like town halls and rallies, where candidates relied on oratorical prowess to persuade voters (Adejumobi 2000). UI student politicians after the 2011 return of the student union participated in similar spectacles during electioneering, including a moderated Debate Night where candidates responded to questions posed by members of the campus press, and Manifesto Night, which followed the form of conventional open-air political rallies where candidates give spirited speeches to large crowds. In this last aspect, student politicians retain fluency in the charismatic mode of “vocational” as opposed to “professional” politics (Weber 1965), which relies on affect as opposed to demonstrable proficiency in the bureaucratic techniques of leadership to secure allegiance. This dexterity is, no doubt, necessitated by the prevailing reliance on charisma and clientelism to secure elected office within national politics.

Preparation for such public spectacles proved especially critical to the electoral victory of T Cool and reveals an additional role of stakeholders as “crisis managers” available to intervene in moments of political crisis as opposed to merely advise. At the Debate Night two days before the elections, when asked about his plans for office, T Cool appeared to have taken the advice of Comrade Tusin to develop a cogent platform. He offered a rehearsed shortlist of priorities, which included, among other things, holding administrators accountable for providing stable electricity and water provision. These points generated sustained cheers from students in attendance. However, T Cool, who was known to be an unconvincing public speaker, struggled with the
question and answer format with which his competitor, Labzy, a strong orator, excelled. According to members of T Cool’s campaign, the declaration by the campus press that Labzy was the front-runner after T Cool’s lackluster performance propelled his extensive network of stakeholders to step in to offer emergency peer guidance. They did so because expectations for T Cool were especially high due to his association with the Nnamdi Azikiwe “Zik” residence hall, which historically produced “activist” student leaders, who adopt an anti-establishment stance towards authorities. In the years preceding the return of the union, elected leaders of Zik Hall led a 2008 protest against proposed tuition fee hikes that prompted the closure of the campus and the authorities to rescind the proposal. Zik Hall leaders were also the loudest voices advocating for the return of the UI student union, so many felt it appropriate that the Hall “produce” a candidate in the revived union’s first elections. For these reasons, Zik Hall stakeholders were highly invested in the outcome of the election, including recent alumni that served as hall leaders and had returned to the campus to witness the revival of the union for which they had struggled. I was told that, after the Debate Night, a group of respected Zik Hall former and current leaders coached T Cool for hours until the early morning in preparation for his performance at the Manifesto Night. The rally format, which involved delivering a short address without subsequent dialogue, allowed greater control of the outcome. In comparison to his weak-voiced and hesitant demeanor at the Debate Night, at the Manifesto Night T Cool was confident, interacting spiritedly with the crowd, which included “planted” members of his campaign team who ensured that the gathering repeated key phrases from T Cool’s speech in the call-and-response style. Perhaps complacent from the performances of the previous night, Labzy lacked his normal charisma. This form of support, a kind of peer advisement, can also be a component of the stakeholder’s role, which proved to be critical in the case of T Cool to his victory by the slim margin of twenty-five votes.

However, student politicians also participated in activities that seem at odds with mainstream Nigerian politics. The Debate Night, for instance, reflected a growing interest among students in public oration, as evidenced by the growth of public speaking clubs and training institutes, as well as the “Super Bowl,” an annual campus-wide oratory competition sponsored by a number of high profile corporations. In the context of student politics, the Debate Night provides an avenue for students to articulate ideological positions on issues related to student welfare, and demands that students cultivate a political identity as leaders, which is rarely required of politicians beyond the campus in any meaningful way.

Crucial, too, to the development of students’ public persona is the production of political media like campaign jingles, print media such as posters, handbills, and propaganda, and social media support pages, not to mention the organization of teams of supporters to amplify the presence of aspirants on foot, and by word-of-mouth. At first glance, these media appear to “mimic” the practices of national political actors in the course of campaigning. To be sure, campaign posters and jingles, for example, attempt to approximate as closely as possible a “professional” political aesthetic that anticipates students’ desired futures in mainstream politics. These artifacts also rely on what Grätz (2013) describes as the “changing styles of public communication” among urban African “new media entrepreneurs” in Nollywood, the Nigerian film industry, and Pentecostal media, among other “media genres.” What I find most compelling about these practices and their relationship to political processes is that students understand them to be indispensable to the development of identities as public figures and the successful election to political office, premised on rational planning, a glaring deviation from office-seeking at the
national level. Where students devise campaign strategies, which include political media, canvassing, and public spectacles noted above, in order to persuade voters to participate in what is a transparent, trusted voting process, at the national level, such rituals have been described as “magical” affairs (Hoffmann 2010), masking “electoral brigandage” (Suberu 2007) and the accumulation of power by “hook or crook” (Baba 2015; Osinakachukwu and Jawan 2011).

Figure 13: Campaign posters at the University of Ibadan (2012)
Photo: K. Strong

Even so, campaign media are often produced at great financial cost to aspiring politicians, which has generated a local industry of sorts related to running for elected office. To produce political jingles, students usually hire local musicians, sometimes themselves students, to compose original songs and accompanying beats, to publicize their candidacy and platform. To circulate the song for public consumption, students must hire or borrow a car to circle campus residence halls and play the jingle on a nightly basis. Most candidates produce two or more original campaign posters, which require paying a studio for a photography session, hiring a graphic designer to design a logo and slogan, and commissioning a printer to make banners, posters, and handbills. This project, in particular, is often the most costly for students: printing campaign materials in color on glossy paper can cost between 10,000-50,000 Naira (US$70-$330), which exceeds the annual cost of tuition at the upper range (see Figure 13 above).

Other campaign-related costs include formal attire for canvassing events, and the provision of refreshments for campaign workers and supporters. Such exorbitant campaign expenses reinforce the view that financially wasteful political campaigns are required to be
successfully elected. More to our purposes, here, these costs also compelled students, many of whom lacked surplus financial support from their families to expend on extracurricular political activities, to seek the sponsorship of stakeholders and local politicians. The best-case scenario for such candidates was often to establish a formal godfather relationship with the primary purpose of securing the financial resources needed to launch effective political campaigns. Mentorship in the form of political guidance was a secondary consideration.

To be clear, my position on the relationships between politicians, stakeholders, and godfathers is that these are relationships of apprenticeship predicated on mentorship and financial sponsorship. In the background of any study of politics in Nigeria, even involving apparently idealistic university students, is the suspicion that the ultimate goal of political participation is a self-serving project of wealth accumulation and not to acquire leadership skills for an imagined future when corrupt elites won’t be in power. The compulsion that students form financial relationships with local politicians, the very “corrupt elites” referenced above, in order to finance their political campaigns would seem to suggest that financial gains over-determine the nature of such relationships and fit neatly into the by-now familiar narrative of African patrimonialism. However, though the need for financial sponsorship in the context of political campaigns may provide the catalyst for these relationships, they do not necessarily sustain them beyond the occasion of the election.

Here is where it is important to bear in mind that students are engaged in routinized, collective political practices that are also practice (in the sense of rehearsal) for future leadership. This means that, though these activities are politically consequential, they are also understood as important avenues for political training regardless of the outcome. Given the frequency of elections, after entry into campus politics, every subsequent election is a new opportunity to expand influence and form or reconfigure lateral and hierarchical networks among peers, stakeholders, and those with more political experience, power, or financial resources such as political godfathers. This is particularly so because political networks that include past and present student leaders are predicated on seniority based on experience, among other factors, including the influence ascribed to elected office. Therefore, actors within student political networks are uniquely positioned to offer resources other than financial ones and, by virtue of the existence of a defined political community of practice, acquiring experience to leverage within the multiple scales of students politics, is not as elusive as the process of acquiring political power in national politics, which Andrew Apter has described as an “elaborate simulation of the democratic process” and a “politics of illusion” (2005, 224). I discuss this distinction, between politically senior figures merely offering financial resources and offering both sponsorship and mentorship, in the next section where I discuss two different styles of “godfatherism” in apprenticing students politicians.

The Political Godfather at Work

“Godfathers” have been identified as the key figures in Fourth Republic politics since the 1999 transition to constitution democracy in Nigeria, which has long been described as a patrimonial state, in which state actors privatize political power and public resources, and generate personal support through the distribution of benefits to supporters in a patron-client system (Ikpe 2013, 112; see also: Alapiki and Ukiwo 2013; Diamond 1992; Ekeh 1975; Ekpo 1979; Joseph 1987). Though specific to Nigeria, the “godfather” figure is familiar to the analysis
of African political systems, in which “personal ruelship” (Jackson and Rosberg 1984) or “big man rule” (Price 1974) concentrates power in executive political leaders, who rely on such relationships to accumulate wealth and retain power. Godfathers are “gatekeepers” or “power brokers” that “dictate who participates in politics and under what conditions” (Albert 2005, 82; see also: Hoffmann 2010; Ogundiy 2009; Olarinmoye 2008; Omotola 2007). The godfather is largely deemed a negative role, which threatens the democratic process in Nigeria and fuels conflict. For instance, political godfathers have been identified as the main instigators of several cases of intra-party crisis, electoral misconduct, misappropriation of funds, and political violence throughout the nation, most often after electoral proceedings (e.g., Abdul-Jelil 2009; Adeoye 2009; Edigin 2010).

However, Onwuzuruigbo (2014) suggests that discourses surrounding godfatherism in Nigeria only explore its recent manifestations, ignoring its pre-colonial sociocultural origins, which offer the possibility of entrenching “responsive and responsible leadership and promoting development” (25). In the practice of Igbo merchant apprenticeship, for instance, the Ogaranya (godfather) is not a “patron” but rather a “benefactor” or “mentor” to the Odibo (godson), “who trains the godson…on the path of achieving success, skill and excellence in the aspirations or professional calling of the godson” (30). Onwuzuruigbo also cites other models of the godfather relationship, including the Hausa/Fulani maigida figure captured in the work of Cohen (1969), who acted as brokers within migrant Hausa trade activities, as well as the Yoruba Baba-ogun “war patron,” who trained soldiers in warfare (Onwuzuruigbo, 32-34).

These alternative models, grounded in what are essentially apprenticeship practices, align with my use of Lave’s theory of learning as apprenticeship, which is similarly based on work among tailors in Liberia. In these examples, the godfather does not form “parasitic” relations for the desired outcome of personal aggrandizement, as is commonly described in contemporary Nigerian politics, but rather creates “stability” and “growth” within the community (of practice) (Onwuzuruigbo, 37). One of the godfather relationships I describe below is consistent with prevailing notions of godfatherism in national politics as guided by material exchange. The other emphasizes mentorship alongside financial sponsorship. Both are forms of apprenticeship: the former apprenticing student politicians into the more nefarious aspects of money-driven national politics; the latter approximates the type of apprenticeship described by Onwuzuruigbo and Lave, which is premised on long-term, deepening relationships based on co-mastery of practices, which unsettle a hierarchical relationship between “apprentice” and “master,” or politician and godfather. This hybrid model, I argue, offers a relatively transparent pathway for young people to gain entry into political leadership and training compared to national party politics, and holds the promise of undermining the prevailing use of political office to “chop money,” or accumulate and re-distribute resources to supporters, in favor of more substantive considerations like performance in office and the fulfillment of campaign promises. As I discuss in the conclusion to this chapter, the two apprenticeship models also reflect an important distinction in the imagination and practice of Post-Military politics between the prevailing practice derived from military rule and conventional party politics of what Jeffrey and Dyson (2014) refer to, in another context, as “allocative” politics premised upon self-aggrandizement and control of resources, and the possibility of more “generative” approaches to leadership that are guided by public service and the creation of resources, with which campus politicians are experimenting.

Now, I turn more directly to an analysis of the role of the political godfather in UI campus politics. For both T Cool and Labzy, the 2011 student union elections were an important
practical exercise in campaigning for office, which is a critical component of political leadership. More to our purposes here, the elections also provided the catalyst for forming different kinds of relationships with godfathers and stakeholders. T Cool and Labzy respectively leveraged their campaigns for the student union presidency to form beneficial relationships with Oyo State politicians: namely, the incumbent governor of Oyo State, in the case of the former; and in the case of the latter, former student politician turned Oyo State legislator, Radical Brother, who I earlier mentioned. The differing approaches of these political godfathers bring into focus the contrast between conventional relationships of political apprenticeship that are focused on financial sponsorship, which is indeed a form of grooming into the more patrimonial aspect of national party politics, and what I have suggested is as an alternative model emanating from campus politics, which combines needed sponsorship and mentorship.

The 2011 student union elections immediately implicated T Cool and his rival Labzy in relationships of apprenticeship with key campus and national political actors at the level of campus and state politics. In part this had to do with the specific location of the UI campus in the Oyo State capital city of Ibadan, and the temporal coincidence of student union elections with national elections. In particular, 2011 saw municipal and gubernatorial contests, which took place two months after the February campus elections. UI occupies a strategically important location within the political geographies of Ibadan and Oyo State. The University of Ibadan campus is situated less than five kilometers away from the Oyo State Government Secretariat and, not coincidentally, its residential population of mostly students makes up a significant portion of the Ibadan North II local government constituency that elected to the State House of Assembly political godfather, Radical Brother. Due to its location within the overlapping local and state government infrastructure, UI is quite literally a launching pad for the participation of student politicians into local, state, and federal levels of national politics. Student politicians make use of their close proximity to government actors to make demands of the state “on behalf” of their constituents and government politicians are compelled to listen because student leaders have the ability to galvanize the student and broader youth population in service (e.g., with their vote), or against the interests of the state (e.g., in mass urban protests).

Political godfathers are most often shadow, behind-the-scenes figures, whose alliances with student politicians are often undetectable to those not directly implicated in these political networks. These liaisons only become visible in strategic moments through public announcements of exchange or public appearances, as was the case with T Cool and Labzy. For instance, I first was made aware of the collaboration of UI students with Oyo State politicians through a satellite television dish. In April 2011, two weeks before the gubernatorial elections, news spread among UI students that the incumbent governor of Oyo State, Christopher Alao-Akala, who was running for re-election under the ruling People’s Democratic Party, was to make a generous “donation” of a flat screen television, satellite dish with pre-paid subscription, and an accompanying generator set to all residence halls. Though T Cool never admitted to me that Governor Alao-Akala financially sponsored his presidential campaign as was widely rumored, controversy concerning the donation of the televisions and satellite dishes confirmed a godfather relationship between the two. Days after this initial news, it became evident that the purported “gifts” for University of Ibadan students would not be distributed equally among them. Notably, the graduate student dorms and the halls that supported the candidacy of T Cool’s rival, Labzy, were not among those given satellite televisions.
The donation of the governor is consistent with patrimonial relationships premised on financial exchange tied to political support. It conveys the expectation that students would reciprocate the governor’s gesture by offering their vote, an agreement signaled by the display of the cable satellite dish, which bore the image and campaign slogan of the governor seeking re-election (Figure 14 below). This expectation also correlates with another implied agreement—between T Cool and the Governor Alao-Akala—that, in exchange for supporting his student union campaign, T Cool would help deliver the crucial “student vote.” The petty gift of entertainment, as opposed to educational resources, is characteristic of a particular kind of godfather relationship. Reliance on money and goods was most common among political actors, like the incumbent governor, who acquired influence primarily through post-military party politics. In this instance, T Cool served as a gatekeeper, not unlike his godfather, between students and access to desired resources from the Oyo State coffer, which he marshaled strategically to reward constituencies that supported him.

Such arrangements can be unpredictable, however, as proved to be the case with the Oyo State governorship. According to election poll results, despite accepting the televisions and satellite dishes, the UI campus voted overwhelmingly for the candidate of the Action Congress Nigeria (ACN) opposition party, Abiola Ajimobi, who was eventually elected Governor, in a move consistent with elections results in the southwestern region where governors in six states
were elected from the ACN party. Still, the distribution of goods directly implicates T Cool, a campus politician, in Oyo State politics and, indirectly, in a formal relationship with the Governor. Though not the type of mentorship to which I now turn with the figure of Radical Brother, the relationship of financial sponsorship is a kind of apprenticeship into a pattern of leadership familiar to scholars of politics in Africa. Jean Francois Bayart has described this as “politics of the belly,” a dimension of regional politics, which involves the distribution of goods for consumption in exchange for loyalty. As such, T Cool’s role as gatekeeper for goods and financial resources here is also one axis along which one might see campus politics as preparation for political careers in national politics where this type of practice is expected.

I now turn to the activities of Honorable Olusegun Olaleye, a.k.a. “Radical Brother,” who took an interest in my research, and shared with me his work as what he described as a “progressive” political godfather. In particular, I discuss his mentorship and sponsorship of multiple UI students, and his unsuccessful attempt to support the candidacy of one protégé in 2011 for a position within the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the national student union. In June 2011 when I first interviewed him, Radical Brother was only publicly known as a prominent former UI student unionist who had successfully transitioned to Oyo State politics. Despite having been elected to the State House of Assembly just weeks earlier, Radical Brother nevertheless described himself in this meeting as a key figure in national student politics. His résumé, which he presented to me during this conversation, referenced extensive leadership in student politics both in the military and post-military eras. In 1994, he began his political career as Health Minister for his residence hall, before being elected in 1995 as President of the UI Student Union. In 1997, he was elected Vice President of National Affairs for the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), and in 2000 became the first post-military President of NANS. His campus political career encompassed nearly the whole period referred to as the “lost decade” (Hansen 2014) of Nigerian higher education, in which school closures prolonged the time to degree, particularly among student activists, whom authorities targeted for disciplining (Adejumobi 2000; Beckman and Ya’u 2005). It was in the course of these activities that Radical Brother acquired this appellation, which he carried forth into national politics, further underscoring the centrality of student politics to the identity of some professional politicians (see, for instance, the prominence of campus politics in Radical Brother’s stated political experience in his 2011 campaign materials—Figure 15 below).

I discovered the extent of his continued involvement in Ibadan student politics as an explicit “godfather” when Radical Brother sent Labzy to accompany me to visit him on one occasion. Despite having lost the Student Union presidency to T Cool, Labzy had remained active in campus politics, and later moved into Oyo State politics. Like the satellite dish that became the visible markers of another godfathering relationship, Labzy’s errand on behalf of Radical Brother revealed his place in another network of political relationships, this one routed through Radical Brother, who ran on an Action Congress Nigeria party platform along with the new governor, Abiola Ajimobi. Despite Labzy’s loss, the relationships established while campaigning with senior state political actors such as Radical Brother, who did win elections, extended his relevance within campus and state politics.

Radical Brother embraced the title of “godfather,” but distinguished his approach from those of other godfathers, who used financial sponsorship to exert control over youth leaders. I heard of and personally witnessed many occasions when Radical Brother offered small and large forms of direct and indirect sponsorship to Ibadan students. At The Polytechnic Ibadan, which is
also under his jurisdiction, he commissioned a recreational “love garden” for the Faculty of Accounting and Business Management (captured in Figure 11), which bore his name and provided a covered area for students to congregate. He donated several motorcycle taxis to the UI Student Union to help relieve the over-extended campus transportation infrastructure. These donations differ from that of the defeated Oyo State governor, in that they prioritize student welfare over petty forms of consumption. However, Radical Brother, too, participated in gestures that would fall into the conventional style of godfatherism. In most meetings with students, he engaged in the exchange, ubiquitous among politicians, of what is called “transportation fare,” in which sums of money are distributed most often in a brown envelope as a gift expected by visitors. Radical also donated significant sums of money to at least five student political campaigns that I am aware of, including Labzy and another one, which I will describe next, in which he spent close to one million Naira (~US$6,700) in support of a candidate. Nevertheless, Radical insisted that both forms of sponsorship did not serve to generate “loyalty” among students for his own benefit, but rather to support and groom promising student leaders, some of whom had worked on his own 2011 political bid, for more senior leadership positions, with the expectation that such experiences would lead to professional political careers beyond the campus. Participation in campus and national politics require proficiency in navigating both relationships of financial sponsorship and mentorship.

Figure 15: 2011 Campaign Flyer of Radical Brother
This was the case during the August 2011 national elections of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), conducted in the capital city of Bayelsa State in the Niger Delta, when Radical Brother supported the candidacy of a UI student for the position of National Vice President. The decision of NANS organizers to locate the convention in the home state of then President Goodluck Jonathan was in itself an indication of the patronial relationship between leaders of the federal government and those of the national student body. Though NANS once was the most significant organizational threat to the military government, particularly in the 1980s and early 1990s, since then, it has largely mimicked the culture of corruption in national politics, particularly in its infiltration by campus “cults.” These are organizations that initially functioned like campus fraternities, but later became the primary instigators of violence on campuses during the 1990s and early 2000s. NANS leaders are known to make public pronouncements in favor of the government in exchange for monetary returns.

The possibility of financial benefit for NANS leaders exposed participants to significant risks, as conventions to elect the leadership were frequently occasions for electoral violence. Many former NANS leaders I encountered shared stories of gun battles and near-death experiences at the conventions. In 2011, three rumored cultists were killed during the course of the gathering. Radical Brother himself claimed to have been shot at during a late night meeting during the 2011 NANS convention, a danger he had prepared for by securing our accommodation in a secret location, and hiring a bodyguard. He nevertheless encouraged his apprentices to run for positions in national NANS leadership, in part, to help stimulate a change of culture within the organization, but more importantly to help the new generation of student politicians negotiate the gap between relatively transparent, democratic campus politics and what he called the “debased,” corrupt culture of national student and mainstream politics.

I accompanied Radical Brother to the NANS Convention at Yenagoa, where we traveled by private car and airplane. Three days earlier, a caravan of UI student leaders had traveled for nearly a full day by road to begin the process of campaigning and seeking the election of Toba, a Zik Hall Chairman who had worked for Radical Brother’s campaign. Elsewhere in my work, I describe in greater detail what I call “drive-by electioneering,” which Radical Brother adopted to attempt to secure Toba’s victory as NANS National Vice President on that occasion, in light of the fact that his candidate was unknown in national student circles. In contrast to the electoral proceedings of 2011 UI student union elections, the NANS elections were understood by all participants to be a sham orchestrated to give the appearance of transparency, while obscuring more critical “back-door” politicking. Over the course of less than twelve hours in Yenagoa, Radical Brother leveraged his prominence within the NANS organization and the financial resources that his elected office afforded him to attempt to “buy” the office of the NANS vice presidency, as other NANS stakeholders similarly attempted. In particular, I witnessed Radical Brother in multiple private meetings negotiate the distribution of what were supposed to be “elected” offices by paying senior NANS stakeholders, mostly former student leaders who’d retained a foot in campus politics, for their support in exchange for the vote of student leaders under their influence. Such negotiations to engineer the outcome of the elections made no reference to the qualifications of the proposed candidates. Rather, they were premised on the distribution of resources and the seniority of candidates’ political godfathers who advocated on their behalf within the political network.

In this we see a paradoxical dimension of the role of the godfather and the process of producing politicians from the campus into national politics. Due to the exorbitant costs of
political campaigns in both campus and national elections, the need for financial sponsorship is the initial catalyst for political actors to develop formal relationships of apprenticeship with political godfathers. Even within Radical Brother’s suggested alternative model of this relationship, which emphasizes mentorship, guiding apprentice student politicians into positions of more senior political leadership usually requires instrumentally adopting practices of patrimonial politics, in which money and material resources are distributed in exchange for various kinds of support. Still, defaulting to this register, where political actors like Radical Brother critique while also operating in it, is not guaranteed to produce desired results. Despite his efforts and significant financial expenses—and similarly to the UI students who accepted the televisions and voted for a different candidate—NANS stakeholders betrayed the agreement to elect Toba as NANS Vice President, and he lost the contest. Rather than view these patrimonial practices as undermining the ideals of political apprenticeship, I view these practices as increasing, in their own way, the dexterity required to cultivate “generative” leadership in a context in which unrepentantly malfeasant politics are condoned.

These financial constraints, like the patterns of official malfeasance described above, are residual effects of the military era. The resuscitated Student Union led by T Cool was financially dependent on the university administration and external sponsors like the Oyo State Governor, in part, because there was no institutional provision for the imposition of union dues on students, which had historically been the foundation of autonomous student unionism. The financial hand-tying of student unions first followed a 1987 provision of the Babangida-led Federal Military Government, which barred union dues from being mandatory, in a move widely regarded as an early government effort to undermine autonomous student unionism. The fiscal independence that compulsory dues afford student unions cannot be understated: compulsory dues provided unions with a financial base for programs and initiatives, and protected unions from the necessity of external patronage from university authorities and political godfathers with more resources at their disposal.

**Politicians and Pragmatism**

The general notion that elections are critical events, or indices, of participatory democracy has particular resonance in Nigeria, given its decades of military rule, and the lingering popular memory of the annulled June 12th national elections. Today, the conduct of regular elections is popularly viewed as an indication of the continued evolution of the country’s constitutional democracy. With the exception of the recent 2015 elections, since the civilian transition in 1999, elections have been a significant source of political instability and the occasion for electoral violence in the form of electoral misconduct, intimidation through the deployment of thugs, and more direct forms of physical force that have resulted in injury and death. The persistence of patrimonial relationships and the figure of the political godfather, in particular, have been cited as the major sources of electoral violence and political instability in Nigeria (e.g., Abdul-Jelil 2009). In the lead-up to the 2007 national elections, former military head of state General Olusegun Obasanjo, who served as the first president of the Fourth Republic (1999-2007), famously referred to the national elections that year as a “Do or Die” affair for the ruling People’s Democratic Party, after he had unsuccessfully attempted to change the constitution to allow for a third term. The statement, which was widely criticized for its implication that the outgoing president would resort to force, if necessary, to shape the outcome
of the exercise, reflects both the great importance given to the ballot in Nigeria, and the tendency for violent conflict to erupt at election time.

In my discussion of the “production” of university student politicians, in which students attempt to develop identities as political leaders and embark on what they anticipate will be future careers in “professional” politics at the national level, I emphasized two aspects of elections that have crucial implications for the trajectory of professional politicians and relationships among political actors. As I have argued in this chapter, elections are not mere “events” involving individual political actors running for elected office, but rather the more temporally expansive “seasons” in which political actors attempt to incrementally acquire more senior political experience and to develop relationships with broad networks of stakeholders and godfathers at multiple scales of political influence. First, elections permit the extension of the trajectory of political professionalization, which is always the goal of "career" politicians, through the acquisition of experience. Second, elections reveal the ways in which political actors establish, sustain, and reconfigure relationships of political apprenticeship among stakeholders and godfathers, who are key to gaining entry into and remaining influential with political networks.

I argued that T Cool’s participation in democratic practices such as campaigning, public debate, and political oratory under the guidance of peer and senior stakeholders within the political community were instrumental in his emergence as president, and more long-term goals in professional politics. In the process, relationships of apprenticeship with a political godfather was key, and in earlier sections I examined two—a former Oyo State governor and a state legislator—who mentored and gave material support to T Cool and his opponent Labzy. Political apprenticeship, a key concept developed here, troubles the characterization of relationships between junior and senior political actors (here conceived as candidates, stakeholders, and godfathers), which unsettle the logic of patronialism and patronage, with their attendant implications of political corruption. Though financial sponsorship is a key component of relationships between student politicians and their godfathers, the figure of Radical Brother suggests the possibility of a model of godfatherism in which students are financially supported but also groomed to incrementally acquire political experience in the course of political careers from campus to national politics. In this approach, Radical Brother departs from the predominant style of godfatherism within Nigerian politics, as he himself was groomed within campus politics by godfathers of his own. As a student politician who navigated both military and post-military politics at the campus and national student level, Radical Brother and those of his generation are uniquely positioned to understand how to negotiate between more idealized democratic practices made possible within campus politics, and the less transparent world of post-military politics. He is able to offer more than financial sponsorship to his apprentices because he acquired substantive leadership experience on campus for nearly a decade before running for elected office, which is a résumé that many of Nigeria’s current political leaders lack.

Still, making sense of the claims by godfathers like Radical Brother that engaging in both financial sponsorship and mentorship of less senior politicians is a departure from the prevailing culture of patronage-driven national leadership requires additional attention. In particular, the voluntary participation of students in what appears to be classic patrimonialism raises the question of the extent to which student politicians are at all different from the current cohort of national politicians. My position is that this seeming contradiction, between definitionally “corrupt” versus idealized politics, is not as much a contradiction as it is an articulation of the
challenges inherent in negotiating both the conventional ways of doing politics in Nigeria and the emergent forms that the rising generation of politicians imagine and attempt to realize through campus leadership and activism. Jeffrey and Dyson (2014), in their work among educated, but underemployed youth in North India, offer a useful vocabulary for these political logics: “generative” versus “allocative” politics. Unsatisfied with allocative politics, or the “self interest” and “predatory patronage” of the older political establishment of politicians and bureaucrats, young Indians engaged in an alternative form of “political work,” described as generative politics, which is principally concerned with “making and protecting resources” (967-968). Among Nigerian students, too, there was this distinction between conventional approaches to Nigerian politics and the possibility of a new kind of politics for Nigeria, which students experimented within through campus elections, new forums for political engagement like the social media platform Facebook (discussed in the next chapter), and mass urban protests (discussed in Chapter Five). However, while campus politicians experimented with political forms that undermine conventional Nigerian politics, they also found it useful to prepare for the possibility that the current way of doing politics may persist, which reflects a pragmatic dexterity many students believed to be necessary for negotiating political life in Post-Military Nigeria.

Understanding this perspective requires a shift from the normative association of African political systems and the post-colonial state with pathology (e.g., Bayart et al. 1999; Chabal and Daloz 2005), which is not entirely helpful in revealing the complexities of the ways individual actors navigate such systems, or the ways in which they may attempt to affect change. Daniel Jordan Smith’s (2010) work on Nigeria’s “culture of corruption” is useful in situating this ambiguity in context: in particular, his explanation of the seeming paradox of how “ordinary” Nigerians can be both the primary victims and most vocal critics of corruption in Nigeria, while also participating in its social reproduction. Most Nigerians identify corruption as inextricably woven into the fabric of their society, as the colloquial expression “the Nigerian factor” used to describe corruption’s endemic nature suggests. However, Smith shows that “corruption,” which encompasses a wide range and scale of activities from more notorious forms of bribery and graft, electoral rigging and fraudulent business dealings to more petty everyday forms such as examination malpractice, actually conflates practices that are popularly understood to have varying levels of social legitimacy. For instance, Smith juxtaposes the figures of the police officer collecting bribes at roadside checkpoints and the politician stealing from government coffers as socially unacceptable forms of corruption that are widely resented, with the well-positioned patron “pulling strings” to assist a relative in acquiring a job, whose actions are not only legitimate but “morally honorable” (18). Thus, activities that would fall within the general category of “corrupt” behavior are not deemed to have the same consequences, nor are they necessarily to be maligned. Jordan argues that this is because Nigerians are practical. Since the interests of individual actors are “tied ideologically and materially to the social groups to which they belong,” when individuals engage in apparently corrupt behavior, “they do so with a sense that their own failures to acquire resources will drag others down, and with the knowledge that their own success will be evaluated in terms of its contribution to the larger group” (225-226).

In fact, given the nation’s economic situation, young people I engaged with often found untenable the suggestion that leaders not derive some financial benefit from being in office, or that the influence of officials not be used to assist associates. What students do appear to find a productive exercise for the present and especially the future is trying out ways to make the political system work better for Nigerians, and not just those in positions of power. For some, the
moral compromises that participating in electoral politics would seem to require was too great (e.g., accepting money or goods from a political godfather, or condoning this practice in order to win an election). Such students abstained from politicking beyond the campus. For others, they reasoned that it would be better to be in such positions than the current crop of leaders, many of whom lack the substantive leadership experience campus politics offers students. The major stumbling block for such students was how to break into mainstream politics, which is why campus politics and the opportunities it affords to form relationships with national political actors was an especially attractive avenue. The pragmatism that Smith offers as an explanation for the seeming paradox of Nigerians’ ambivalent behavior concerning corruption is at work in the practices that I have described in this chapter and fittingly so, since elections are one of the key contexts for corruption in Nigeria. However, the point I am emphasizing here is that the question of whether students are corrupt politicians-in-the-making, detracts from a more generative consideration, which is the ways in which the practices of political apprenticeship and the re-articulation of the campus as a political training ground suggest the imagination among students that a different kind of politics is indeed possible, as well as a working through of how this could be made so within the challenging political terrain of contemporary Nigeria.
CHAPTER FOUR:
The University of Ibadan Social Mediascape

The previous chapter examined the ways student politicians approach elections and relationships of apprenticeship with elders as avenues for political training within and beyond the campus. Though these relationships were more mutualistic and unpredictable than conventional narratives of political godfatherism sometimes suggest, elections and political networks are established domains of organized politics and requisite entry points for participation in Nigeria’s political system, which ultimately act in service of gerontocratic regimes of power. By contrast, this chapter takes up an emerging arena for social and political experimentation in which young people occupy positions of authority: the Internet and associated technologies, including computers, mobile phones, and social media platforms. As I discuss here, new media is imagined by students to be essential to many forms of political engagement. Moreover, unlike other aspects of organized politics and activism, which have well-established conventions of engagement, the political uses of technology are only newly being constituted by young people, who dominate media and technology industries and develop cultures of techno-social practice.

In April 2011, just weeks after the revival of the University of Ibadan Student Union (UI SU), Franklyn, the newly elected Public Relations Officer (PRO), started the “Official Group of the Student Union, University of Ibadan” on the social media platform, Facebook, in one of his early acts in office. Conceived as the official online mouthpiece of union officials to the micropolity of students for the newly revived union which lacked a secure financial base, the Facebook group served as a convenient, low-cost channel for information dissemination that did not rely on long-term capital-intensive projects like print publications. Less obviously, the establishment of the Facebook forum was a gesture to smooth out the union’s legitimacy crisis and political factionalization stemming from the disputed 2011 SU elections in which T Cool narrowly beat out Labzy for the presidency, as I described in Chapter Three. This chapter examines how students at UI established norms for their political community through the use of social media platforms like Facebook. Through a contextual analysis of posts to the Facebook group, I discuss the evolution of dialogue on the page from "abusive" discourse to more deliberative forms of critique and eventually, direct political action. I consider the extent to which Facebook, in particular, has facilitated the development of a “digital” public sphere, overlapping and extending practices associated with “offline” public forums and political practices. This chapter also contributes to a wider conversation concerning the extent to which new media creates avenues for political participation, engagement and activism among youth typically sidelined from mainstream political participation—concerns which continue in the final chapter, “Ambivalent Activism,” on social media-activated campus and urban protests.

More than other geographic regions, the implications of technology for social transformation figure heavily into the semantic field of any discussion of technology in Africa. The dramatic increase in the penetration of technology in Africa over the past fifteen years, which has created the social and technological infrastructure for the practices that I discuss here, has generated tremendous academic and policy interest under the rubric of “ICT4D” (Information and Communication Technology for Development). In general, the rapid pace of technological development has been embraced with great optimism concerning the potential impact of mobile telephony, Internet connectivity, and social media usage for a continent
typically regarded as occupying the losing side of the “digital divide.” I remain cautious about adopting the technological determinism at work in some “ICT 4 Development” discourses, which deploy superficial (and often chauvinist) analyses about how the availability of technology will, itself, quicken the pace of “development.” This caveat aside, my concern here is how students, in particular, apprehend this technology and incorporate it into preexisting and emerging social practices to various (political) ends.

In this respect, this chapter joins the scholarship on cultures and practices of technology and media, which explores processes of “mediation” and “remediation,” which are theories that examine the ways technologies are embedded within, afford, and reconstitute social relations and processes within environments of communication, as the technologies are themselves being socially transformed. Thus, the chapter begins with a discussion of the techno-social context of Ibadan students as a precursor to my analysis of the specific role of social media in their political discourse and community. This approach aligns with the work of Madianou and Miller (2013), who suggest that, despite the convention of examining a technology (for example, a single social media platform like Facebook) and the practices that develop around it in isolation, in practice, the use of one technology typically entails the use of multiple others. According to their theory of “polymedia,” the uses of technologies form a rich tapestry of technology-mediated practices that, together, produce lived and “imagined worlds” that have elsewhere been interpreted as “technoscapes” and “mediascapes” (Appadurai 1989), concepts which I retool in this chapter as a single framework, social mediascapes, to account for the intersections of information technology and circulation within new media practices. The move to situate students’ technological practices within the specific landscape of Ibadan also intends to disrupt any assumption that these simultaneous, complementary and, often, improvisational practices of technological manipulation and media production and consumption follow the paths established by developers and users in the Global North, where most technologies in circulation were developed and gained their social mythology before being “rolled out” elsewhere.

Technical Specifications

This section prefaces my analysis of the University of Ibadan social mediascape and the political uses of Facebook among UI students with a brief discussion of important technological developments at the national and continental scale. Here, I signal points of convergence but also variation within experiences of technology in Africa and Nigeria, which cannot be seen as homogenous or singular, especially when accounting for critical variables in access such as gender, age, class, and urban proximity. Taken at face value, the rapid growth of mobile phone use, Internet-based technologies and growing access to social media in Africa can only be

73 My use of the phrase “digital divide” is not an adoption of associated discourses, which have been scrutinized for adopting a deficit model that focuses narrowly on questions of consumption and access as opposed to more generative questions of inclusion, concerning the contexts and forms of participations and production. See Burrell (2012) for a useful discussion of the problem with discourses of the “digital divide” in the context of West Africa and global peripheries more generally (p. 6-10, in particular).

74 This stance permits the abdication of responsibility for addressing the geopolitical power play that produces Africa’s un-development. This determinism also obscures the fact that NGO and corporate developmental initiatives that revolve around technology are often more in the economic interests of these bodies than the purported subjects of intervention (Ferguson 1994).
described as meteoric. At almost four times the global average, Internet usage in Africa grew by over 1000% from 2005 to 2015, which amounts to a growth of over 175 million new users or 15.8% of the total population in Africa. The rate of mobile phone use is even more impressive with a growth, in the same period, of almost 600 million new users or roughly 700%, which amounts to nearly 10% of the global mobile phone user population. With data at this scale of analysis, it is difficult to tease out more precise information on how the Internet is being accessed (e.g., in Internet cafés, on mobile phones, or laptops) and among which user demographics. The fact that the greatest areas of growth appear to be in the adoption of smart mobile phones with web access and more advanced technologies may suggest critical differences in usage on the basis of class and proximity to urban areas where coverage and access is more widely available. Growth in the area of mobile access, in particular, is one of the reasons analysts have suggested that the continent will skip over the personal computer (PC) “stage” of Internet accessibility and become the first “post-PC” region, \(^7^5\) largely accessing the Internet and related digital services on mobile telephones, which have been described as a “developing world technology” since the majority of mobile phone users are in the Global South and the impact of mobile phones is most dramatic there (Eagle 2010, 2).\(^7^6\)

In Nigeria, Internet usage and penetration eclipses that of any other sub-Saharan African nation in terms of sheer volume of users: the country’s approximate 76 million Internet users represent 42.7% of the national population, and more than double the continental average for Internet penetration (20.7% in 2015). Among mobile phone users (139 million people, or roughly 78% of the population), the usage rate of smart phones, which facilitate telephone, web, and social media access, is now one in four, according to a recent survey by the Pew Research Center.\(^7^7\) These trends speak to the ways in which ICTs and social media, in particular, are increasingly central to the lifestyles of Nigerians. According to a 2012 national survey, mobile phone and Internet usage was highest among users, who are young, educated (beyond secondary school), urban, and male.\(^7^8\) The survey also found that the growth in “connectedness” is largely due to a shift from “café-centered Internet culture” to mobile web access—a finding that was consistent with my experiences among student users in Ibadan, as I discuss below. Mobile forms of connectivity were also critical to the transformation of existing patterns of media consumption and the emergence of new media cultures: radio programs were widely accessed on mobile phones, which many users also used to subscribe to SMS text message news updates. A desire to access email and social media platforms, especially Facebook, was also reported to be one of the primary reasons users wanted to connect to the Internet, which follows global patterns. Social


\(^7^6\) This is also consistent with raced and classed usage of technology in the US where Black and Latino people, who are least likely to have access to home broadband connectivity, are “smartphone dependent,” relying exclusively on mobile phones for web access (Monica Anderson, “Racial and ethnic differences in how people use mobile technology,” Pew Research Center, April 30, 2015, accessed July 3, 2015, [http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/30/racial-and-ethnic-differences-in-how-people-use-mobile-technology/](http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/30/racial-and-ethnic-differences-in-how-people-use-mobile-technology/)).


media use is a key component of global increases in web penetration, especially mobile access. Facebook remains the most dominant social media network in the world and, according to Social Bakers, Africa is the “most dynamic continent” on Facebook, with more than 50% of its user population joining in the previous six-month period, which the 2011 report attributes, at least partially, to the attention social media gained during coverage of the “Arab Spring.” The Facebook group of the University of Ibadan Student Union itself was established in response to the North African uprisings. The growth of social media and Facebook, in particular, in Africa follows global patterns of Internet usage, which are increasingly centered on mobile forms of connectivity among predominately young, urban, educated populations. However, the growing significance of social media to Ibadan students’ political practices is also rooted in local practices of media and technology use, to which I now turn.

Part I: Situating Techno-Social Practice

The Official Group of the UI Student Union was established in 2011 as an “open” Facebook group, which means that details of the group are available in public search results and members’ posts are visible to anyone viewing the group. However, in true social networking fashion, members with read/write privileges have to be added to the group by other members. It is understood that no “legitimate” students are barred from participating in the group, though cohorts of alumni and even allies (myself included) are members of the page, though not necessarily active. At the end of my fieldwork (2012), the Official Group had roughly 6,300 presumably unique members, which is about half of the undergraduate student population. At the time of its founding, other mechanisms of information dissemination had well-established uses on campus, including pressboards and, in rare cases, print publications like newsletters and magazines. However, for the recently elected Union leaders, without a secure financial base, the paper options proved to be high cost and unwieldy. Several weeks after the swearing-in of the new executives, university administrators, who foot the bill for the revived Student Union (SU), had still not released startup funds. Among students, this administrative holdup was construed as a decisive message that the university gave the SU its power and could equally take that power away, by financially starving the union, limiting its power through regulatory constraints, or dissolving the body altogether—a threat thrown about during times of contention. With such financial constraints, official communication between the union executives and the student body shifted from print media to the online forum, since the Facebook group did not require the prohibitive financial investment of print publications.

Rather than constituting entirely “new” media cultures and practices, I argue that campus and the broader national culture(s) of media consumption, in fact, anticipate the sociality of information production, dissemination, and deliberation that are later elaborated through social media. In Nigeria, there is a considerable infrastructure for print and broadcast media, which has been well-documented (Haynes 1995; Larkin 2008). A common routine within everyday social practice involves large groups (of men, usually) publicly reading, listening to, and discussing...

popular news and politics around newspaper stands. Similarly, before the advent of the new generation of social networking sites like Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, which allow users to generate and widely disseminate many different forms of content (e.g., video, text, pictures, etc.), online message boards have been an important component of the Nigerian public sphere for over a decade. The most popular message boards like Nairaland, Nigerian Village Square, Motherland Nigeria, among many others, receive hundreds of thousands of daily visitors and posts. As I discuss later in this and the next chapter, these online forums, like offline ones, privilege the visibility and locutions of men. So far, campus media production and consumption have not been taken into serious consideration in analyses of media cultures, though campus-based press organizations and boards are highly active in most universities and help contextualize why students, in particular, find social media platforms appealing as outlets for social and political practice. The activities of campus journalists are especially relevant to my analysis here, because similar methods of information production are adopted and critiqued within online political communities. Moreover, though student publications are largely ignored as primary sources for academic research, press boards and their archives provide an important view of happenings “from the perspective of students” as opposed to official narratives by university authorities.

On campuses, print media production and consumption center around the activities of press clubs and the curation of pressboards. In the University of Ibadan, the extensive operations of press club organizations function under the umbrella body, the Union of Campus Journalists, which has chapters throughout the nation. Though newsletters and magazines appear in campus markets intermittently (in recent years, “Campus Times” and “UI Gist”), for-sale student-produced print publications rarely survive more than a few publication runs due to the unsustainable financial demands of daily or weekly print editions. Instead, student journalists affiliated with the dozens of press clubs “publish” on press boards, which are glass-encased bulletin boards that are located in most department, faculty, and residence halls and operate under the control of the various campus press organizations at those levels. These journalists or “press men and women” contribute handwritten, sometimes typed, and illustrated works, which are regularly showcased on press boards. These contributions cover the same genres as other print media outlets, including lengthy “write-ups” (often handwritten) of local, international and campus news, opinion pieces, pictures of events (as in Figure 16 below), sports news, gossip, insinuations, and more.

Given this media infrastructure, conventional print-centered media platforms were originally part of the desired information dissemination framework of the SU executives, who attempted to produce a new publication called “The Anvil,” which was abandoned after one issue due to financial constraints. Thus, the Facebook group helped mitigate the union’s financial dilemma by offering leaders a measure of autonomy from university authorities and their forms of surveillance, which were expected to be absent from the online spaces. The establishment of the Student Union Facebook group, in this sense, built upon the role of campus print media culture in the sociality of information circulation and meaning-making, while providing a convenient solution to the challenges of producing financially-autonomous media while limiting the surveillance of authorities who closely monitored the activities of the budding union.
The University of Ibadan Social Mediascape

The “social mediascape” framework that I adopt here lends itself to one of the orienting notions of this chapter, the idea that “online” and “offline” spaces are interconnected, fluidly experienced and increasingly indistinct, which has been a key contribution of ethnographic approaches to the Internet (e.g., Miller and Slater 2001; Hine 2000). The scape also lends itself to an analysis of culturally and spatially situated practices. For instance, though we know smartphone use and mobile, flexible uses of technologies to be global trends, the trajectory of technology in the “digital core” should not be naturalized or deemed inevitable. As anthropologist Daniel Miller (2011) insists in his work on Facebook users in Trinidad, the starting point for this analysis is the idea that technologies like mobile phones and the social media platform, Facebook, are not any one singular thing. Neither foreign imports nor isolated phenomena, new media must be understood as “the aggregate of [their] regional and particular use,” as opposed to signs of the homogenization of “global culture” under late capitalism, or technologies that can be appreciated outside of the specific practices through which they are given local meaning. In this, the present work is also in conversation with the approach to theorizing technology of and from the global periphery that is elaborated in Jenna Burrell’s (2012) ethnography of how the Internet is “distinctly materialized” in cyber cafés in urban Accra.
by “invisible users,” youth, who flexibly interpret, use and give meaning to technological artifacts in ways that are not predetermined by the origin or form of such artifacts.

The University of Ibadan social mediascape is the convergence of collective practices of consumption and production rooted in Nigerian media cultures, and technologies that are newly accessible in the African region and urban Nigeria, in particular. Perhaps less obviously, the materialization of the UI social mediascape is also preceded by the rise of Nigeria’s $3.3 billion film industry, Nollywood, which is now the second largest movie industry in the world (behind Bollywood, the Indian movie industry)—and similarly dominated by young people. Ugor (2009) argues that the growth of “small media” “democratized” the previously exclusive, gerontocratic landscape of media production in ways that bear a striking resemblance to my analysis of the political space the social media platform, Facebook, has afforded Ibadan students. In the absence of a strong media infrastructure (Larkin 2008), accessible, inexpensive and efficient technologies (i.e., digital video, VCR and VCD/DVD players, and portable hardware like laptops and mobile phones) allowed young amateur film producers, many of whom were university graduates (Ugor 2009, 397), the “social space” to create “an independent cultural field…to air their frustrations and angst against an adult cohort that has compromised the future dreams of younger generations” (401). As I discuss in the second half of this chapter, UI students similarly constituted the student union group on Facebook as a space for the subversion of gerontocratic power in which ideas about the forms and purposes of post-military political leadership and community could be worked out.

While the techno-social practices of UI students may share commonalities with other urban geographies in the country and continent, it is important to keep in mind that the technological practices of youth vary widely due to the idiosyncrasies of socioeconomic status, institutional resources, and the affordances of urban proximity just using the three Ibadan campuses as a case study. For instance, students at The Polytechnic Ibadan had more difficulty accessing the Internet on campus and were the least likely to use smartphones. Lead City students I encountered exclusively used smartphones, were more likely to use mobile apps to access social media like BlackBerry Messenger and Twitter, which was then only marginally used in Nigeria, mainly in large cities like Lagos and Abuja. Lead City students favored these platforms for student associations, while Facebook, which does not require a smartphone device, was far more common among University of Ibadan students. Now, I turn to a more focused discussion of the context of technology use among University of Ibadan students and trace changes in information technology provision over the course of six years of fieldwork from the centrality of the cyber café and collective “browsing” to more mobile forms of technology use. This diachronic perspective marks a critical shift from collective practices of technology to more individualized, flexible, and surveillant forms, which provide additional context for the investment of UI students in transposing their political community to the Facebook platform.

The Internet Café

In 2007 during my first fieldwork stint in Ibadan, “ICT” was the central hub for Internet users at the University of Ibadan. Named, straightforwardly, after the technology category,
Information and Communications Technology, ICT’s two-story yellow building, then freshly painted and new, stood apart from existing social and technological spaces on and around campus. The interior of the building, which looked like a large residence, had the bare minimum of socially acceptable furnishing. At the entrance was a small dimly lit lobby where a uniformed campus security guard was posted. A few paces beyond this, in a room sectioned off by a half wall, two workers monitored Internet activity from a central desktop computer and passed out slivers of paper inscribed with pass codes through security bars, in exchange for the designated amount of Naira notes. The security and cashier areas flanked the entrance to a larger space, which housed rows of seventy or so desktop computers astride small desks with plastic chairs. “Browsing,” as using the Internet is colloquially described, was a collective activity, then. Users might individually purchase browsing time, but one or two associates often made use of the same system in tandem. Accessing the Internet was also an inevitably public affair. Even when a user singly occupied a computer system, window-browsers sometimes circulated the aisles, casually peering over known and unknown shoulders to take in the latest “gist” (gossip) from the inter-webs. The café could accommodate only a limited number of users, which was triple or even quadruple the capacity of other campus cafés. Still, ICT was usually at least a third over this capacity, brimming day and night with students, more young men than women.

Before ICT, Internet cafés operated by private enterprises were the only economically viable option available for students, who frequented small-scale business centers in residence halls and the area surrounding the Student Union Building (SUB). These “business centers,” a term used interchangeably with Internet or cyber café, were staffed by quasi-professionals, who offered services priced within a standardized range. Students also ventured walking distance off-campus to the Internet cafés at the “Gate,” the area surrounding the main campus entrance that crosscuts into Agbowo, the densely populated urban neighborhood stretching several kilometers from Gate to the Expressway, which I discussed in Chapter One. These business centers offered more amenities than the campus options. Some had working televisions, which screened local films or hip hop music selections, depending on the age and sophistication of attendants, who browsed all day and, thus, were well-positioned to be in the know of local and international popular cultures. Internet café users, here, were more of a mixed crowd. Though still a predominately youth space, most were UI students, but also other school-age youth hoping to “process” their admission to university, search for employment and fast-money opportunities online, or simply while away the time in the absence of secure labor.

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82 As was the convention for Ibadan Internet cafés, the setting itself lacked the aesthetics of aspirational cosmopolitanism associated with the use of the Internet in the popular technological imagination (e.g., posters of international celebrities and landscapes, or the selection of Ibadan business names like “Platinum Internet Cafe” and “Global Link Cyber Cafe”). This propensity for bare bones construction and furnishing is often described as a peculiarly “Ibadan” phenomenon. Despite its size, long history of urbanization, and well-known elite, “uglification” is actually an aesthetic form here.

83 The admissions, registration, and fee processes of most Nigerian tertiary institutions are at least partially online, which often made for hours of frustration for students attempting to access institutional web portals that were unable to efficiently accommodate thousands of admissions-seekers. “Processing” admissions and annual registration often required multiple days of repeated effort before successful submission.
Size and novelty, perhaps more than services rendered, made ICT a refreshing alternative when it first entered this scene. It is worth noting that ICT was also an ambitious institutional project for its time, a hallmark of the Vice Chancellor Bamiro Era. Though all university vice chancellors serve a six-year tenure, these increments are constituted and continuously reconstituted, as all leadership tenures in this context are, as epochs of progress, inactivity or decline. Professor Bamiro’s own tenure would be later revised, due largely to the travails of succession, as a time of infrastructural expansion, made evident by tarred roads and refurbished buildings. ICT performed similar work as an emblem of progressive institutional momentum. In this era, we, campus users, would buy our time and prepare to bide our time, waiting in vain for network speed to match the pace of our ambitions. Like elsewhere in the country, the Internet speed was sometimes an exercise in patience and other times an exercise in futility. Loading the images on a webpage or sending an email with even a single attachment required minutes of time commitment. Downloading media was almost certainly out of the question.

For these reasons, in-person peer-to-peer file exchange developed as a routine practice of conviviality and strategic resourcefulness, primarily through the use of the mobile telephone. In these days, “May I see your phone?” was an expected and socially rhetorical question. Inquiring friends and acquaintances would inspect the device, assessing its technical specifications,
sometimes remarking on its newness and desirability. This evaluation would be followed by a careful survey of the device’s media storage. If desired, music files would be exchanged like goods and circulate further within campus social networks. As this practice suggests, the mobile telephone, whose social ubiquity among students was still provisional, served communicative purposes beyond mere calling and sending text messages. The flash was (and, to some extent, still is) a particularly astute mobile communicative strategy where users initiate a phone call to a desired interlocutor and terminate the call before the phone is answered and money withdrawn from the account, which functions on the basis of loaded airtime. The simple act of flashing can communicate a wide range of social meanings due, in part, to that fact that the identity of callers (i.e., their name and phone number), if previously stored, appears on the phone screen without having to answer the call. If two students have agreed to meet at the Faculty of Arts car park, a flash can indicate that one party has arrived at the agreed upon location. An unexpected flash can indicate that the sender urgently needs to speak with the receiver while multiple flashes can convey increasingly greater urgency. Decoding these contextual practices, of course, was not without its hiccups. A frequent source of frustration for mobile phone users, and this ethnographer in particular, was responding to a purportedly desperate series of flashes only to discover that the sender was just exchanging pleasantries, or worse, evading spending their own credit in order to exhaust yours.

Underlying this communicative mechanism, the flash, like peer-to-peer media exchange and shared browsing, was one element within a carefully reasoned economic logic that structures most uses of technology and the choice to make use of one set technologies versus others in any particular circumstance. For example, student users typically activated the call timer option on their mobile devices so they could monitor the call duration and, thus, how much money was being expended on calls, which were pro-rated by second or minute depending on the plan. This vigilance often made for rather hilarious truncations of phone conversations at the fifty-nine second mark, if the initiator of a phone conversation was on a per-minute airtime plan. Financial considerations mediated the decision also: to send a flash and risk conveying an unintended message or a text message with precise details; to start computer-based activity at a less secure off-campus location or an on-campus Internet café where power fluctuations could abort one’s work before it is successfully saved to a flash drive; or, to make a brief call using one’s own phone or locate a telecommunications kiosk where phone calls were billed at a cheaper rate but also entirely public—sometimes, resulting in embarrassing spectacles for the cash-strapped caller discussing the minutiae of a romantic relationship, for instance.

The Personal Computer and Mobile Phone

Like an abandoned state project, just four years later in 2011, the much beloved ICT was in disuse. The footpath that once connected the facility to the Kenneth Dike main library and the Faculty of Education was overgrown with grass thick enough to camouflage the garden snakes that terrorized unsuspecting short-cut seekers. By all institutional markers, ICT as a node of student technological practices was a thing of the past. In the absence of a central campus space, the burden of Internet access shifted to residence halls, where the price of browsing had nearly doubled. For the management of a few halls, ICT enterprises became lucrative commercial ventures. The Internet café at Queen Elizabeth II Hall (Queens Hall) was an oft-cited example: through commercial partnership, the Hall Warden had established the largest and most functional
Internet café in residence halls (about half the size of the old ICT), which reportedly generated one million Naira (US$ 6,700) in annual profit.

Still, Internet café usage, among students, was trending downward: with the growth of personal laptop ownership within the campus community, students and faculty universally desired Wi-Fi. At this time, to not own or have access to a personal laptop was a mark of negative distinction. Though these devices ranged in newness and amenities, basic laptops, which were exclusively PCs, had at least a web camera and could be customized with pirated software sold on campus. Having a laptop was so ubiquitous that students moved freely with laptops visibly on their person, which was a surprising development to me because, just a year before then, these items were almost always hidden from view, due to concerns that owners would be targets of theft. Laptops themselves were widely available in the city of Ibadan and promotions were often advertised in local newspapers and on flyers and billboards in the immediate campus area. In 2010 when I returned to Nigeria after a year’s absence, a reputable laptop (then, a HP, Dell, or Toshiba) had a going rate of upwards of 55,000 Naira (US$370). By 2012, the cost of laptops had dropped substantially to the 30,000-40,000 Naira range (US$200-$270) and netbooks were entering the market, with promotions for brands like HP and Asus in the 25,000 Naira range (US$170), and unbranded Chinese laptops and tablets going for as little as fifteen thousand Naira (US$100). But despite heavy demand, Wi-Fi remained a dysfunctional commodity. Though a few departments and faculties made private provision for Wi-Fi access among faculty and staff members, passwords for wireless Internet access were fiercely protected (perhaps due to costs and limited bandwidth), and so, unavailable to the general student body. Students sometimes scavenged around campus for open Wi-Fi access in the vicinity of the central administrative offices and could be seen with their laptops sitting under a tree or on the curb in the car park, at most times of the day. A university-wide campus network existed in name only as a carry over from the previous Vice Chancellor Bamiro, who retained a spectral presence through various Wi-Fi access points on campus, which still bore his name, “Bamsy xx,” though never functioned.

The lack of ICT resources institutionally available at the University of Ibadan had become a point of embarrassment for students, faculty and administrators. The sorry state of Internet connectivity (and electricity) was the topic of public “village meetings” between administrators and students, and private “stakeholders meetings,” between administrators and student leaders, which I attended in my capacity as General Secretary of Tafawa Balewa Hall. As I was leaving Ibadan to return to California in July 2012, the newly elected 2012-2013 Student Union Executive had centered their official platform on making inexpensive tablets available to students, with a provision for an incremental payment plan for indigent students. The University management, for its part, dangled a partnership that was said to be forming between the University of Ibadan and Google around a personalized suite of Google applications for the University of Ibadan, similar to Google partnerships with universities elsewhere. To my knowledge, this never materialized. Nevertheless, this change from central campus Internet service provision to decentralized and widely variant access in campus Internet cafés and other uncoordinated sources reflects what was popularly understood and, in effect, institutionally produced as a transference of the burden of student welfare and education, more generally. With regular threats to increase tuition and related fee rates, which had been the impetus for student protests in 2008, this move was consistent with the institutional message that the responsibility for education was solely to be borne by students (and their guardians), not the federal
government. This was also consistent with the neoliberal line initially set forth with the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programs in the late 1980s, as I discussed in Chapter One. This idea of the Internet as a private as opposed to public good also correlates with a remarkable change in the techno-social order that the demise of ICT also signals: a movement from collective, centralized patterns of technology-mediated practices to more personalized and mobile forms of consumption and, increasingly, production.

By 2011, the center of gravity of technology and its uses had also shifted to mobile forms, which allow for greater flexibility and a broader range of uses. In general, students were less interested in email and other “web 1.0” tools as communicative mechanisms and markers of technological sociality. Compared to the early stages of my research when exchanging email was the primary means of mediated networking, by 2011, social media-tethered forms of identification had taken precedence, such as Facebook usernames, Blackberry PINs (an eight-character identifier to each BlackBerry device) and, less commonly, Twitter usernames. An influx of telecommunications companies facilitated this shift to mobile forms of connectivity, by making more devices available for phone and Internet access and at a lower cost. The decision to select any one of these new options, whether mobile Internet, personal modem, or the existing public Internet café was guided by the financial considerations undergirding all decisions in an environment of economic survivalism, but also the desire for greater social and technological flexibility. The student in between lectures, rather than locating an Internet café on campus or in town, launches the web browser on any one of her mobile phones on which browsing is now standard, to check Facebook for messages or scan the activity of friends. Later on in the day, the same student may buy an hour of time in an Internet café to do more sedentary work; or, also likely, buy mobile airtime for a USB modem sold by the half dozen major telecommunications companies to be used with a personal or borrowed laptop.

The shift from the public Internet café to the personal computer and mobile phone among Ibadan students indexes a broader shift from collective forms of techno-social practice to more individualized, flexible and surveillant forms. In analyses of new media forms, one of the more controversial aspects of the growth of social media is this last point: the relationship between social media and surveillance, and its implication for privacy given concerns about the “public” visibility of “private” lives, especially as companies (surreptitiously) sell user data (Trottier 2012; van Dijck 2013; Barnes 2006; Fuchs et al. 2013), a practice for which Facebook has come under particular scrutiny (boyd 2008). The preoccupation with privacy, though critically important to the ways in which Internet usage is being monetized without the full awareness of users, hearkens back to a central assumption within early studies of identity and the Internet, that online identities are intended to be anonymous.85 While this may have been true among Global North users at a time, in this regional context and among Ibadan students, there is no established expectation of anonymity or “privacy,” especially given early practices of shared usage in public Internet cafés, the perceived “dangers” of anonymity (Bonhomme 2012), and the ways in which

84 Web 1.0 tools refer to the first generation of Internet platforms, which were static, “read-only” web pages, which limited the role of users to more passive forms of engagement such as clicking hyperlinks and signing guestbooks on websites. “Web 2.0” platforms, by contrast, allow users to generate their own content and to both interact and collaborate with other users. These include social networking sites, wikis, blogs, and video sharing sites, etc.

85 Turkle (2011) is a frequently-cited example of this move, which has been the subject of critique by subsequent efforts to theorize how online identities are “continuous with offline selves” (Kennedy 2006).
the performance of “real,” cosmopolitan selves are central to the appeal of the Internet (Burrell 2008). This is important to the present discussion for two reasons.

First, the lack of expectations for privacy and anonymity around technology use help contextualize what are often invasive self and collective forms of surveillance and accountability, some of which I describe in the second half of this chapter. Elsewhere, invasive forms of social connection associated with mobile devices have been described as a kind of “violence” (Muponde 2012). What Nigerian students call “pinging” is a related form of telephonic coercion, which sometimes blurred the line between social engagement and unwitting surveillance. A function of BlackBerry Messenger (BBM), pinging, allows users to send an “urgent” message to another user and produces a special alert that causes the phone to vibrate. Similarly, on the Facebook and BlackBerry messaging apps, senders are able to view the precise time when receivers have seen (though perhaps not replied yet) to messages. Among UI students, it was not uncommon for senders of such messages to virtually confront intended interlocutors on these platforms about why they had not yet replied to their messages. More insidious was the use of mobile phone recording capabilities, which students increasingly used as forms of self, group, and inverse surveillant practice. In political meetings, public or private, including those with authorities, student leaders routinely captured pictures and video recordings, sometimes clandestinely, which were later broadcast publicly on social networking sites.

Second, the centrality of public (as opposed to private, anonymous) forms of engagement also helps contextualize why Ibadan students would find Facebook, in particular, to be an especially useful platform for the extension of their offline political community given its connection to the “real” identities of users and the possibilities this would open up for the continuation of political professionalization (among politicians) and accountability between campus politicians and the broader student population.

Part II: The Ab/uses of Facebook

The role of new media in the political participation of youth has become a subject of great interest, particularly in light of the growth in recent years of youth-dominated political mobilizations such as the Arab Spring and global “Occupy” movements, in which social media has been an especially visible component. According to Loader (2007), social media platforms are instrumental to “networked young citizens,” who trouble the association of civic participation with electoral politics and civic voluntary associations, and instead experiment with alternative forms of engagement, including overt forms of activism and online participatory cultures, which do not always neatly map onto conventional political affiliations or domains of practice. Before the recent visibility of social media platforms in youth protest movements, much of this discourse centered on the political dis-engagement of young people, mostly in the Global North, and the possibilities the Internet holds for re-engaging young people in civic participation (e.g., Bakker and Vreese 2011; di Gennaro and Dutton 2006; Kann et al. 2007). As I discuss in this and the next chapter, the social media-facilitated mobilizations of young people in Nigeria are not so much a story of previously dis-engaged youth politically awakening, but rather young people experimenting with new ways to continue what has been a decades-long tradition of

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86 Among students, “pinging” was the language used to describe the use of BBM in general, transposing the specific urgency (and force) of the ping function to the messaging form in its entirety.
campus-based protests, and wider forms of youth social disruption. To the extent that online and digital political forms have been analyzed in the African context, much of this scholarship has focused on Africans in diaspora, who use online communities (such as message boards and political blogs) to participate in national political life (e.g., Bernal 2014; Tynes 2007). Thus, my discussion here contributes to broader conversations surrounding the role of social media in various modes of political engagement, and the growing literature on the explicitly political dimensions of new media use in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly among youth (e.g., Chiumbai 2012; Mudhai 2013; Mudhai 2013; Walton and Donner 2011; Wasserman 2011).

The initial impetus for the creation of the Official Group of the UI Student Union on Facebook was to establish an information channel between UI student union leaders and the student body. However, activity on the Facebook page quickly took on a life of its own, becoming less a passive conduit for information and more a vibrant, digital “public sphere” among members of the campus student community. Facebook was a social media platform that was especially suited for this development. The social network was already the most popularly used social media platform among young Nigerians. Facebook was a particularly attractive tool for aspiring student politicians to cultivate intentionally public, professional identities, since Facebook user profiles link directly to users’ “real” identities, unlike other social media such as message boards and Twitter where users can make use of aliases and remain relatively anonymous. Moreover, the very premise of Facebook is to virtually network existing “friends,” which also made the platform particularly useful to the pre-existing community of students.

Activity on the UI student union Facebook group centers on text and multimedia posts created by members, and the conversations such posts generates. These threads offer insight into everyday concerns and cover a wide range of topics, including common jokes, national and international news, and gossip. However, in line with the stated purpose of the group, my primary interest here is the type of postings that fall into the broad category of political topics. As I will discuss shortly, students sometimes policed the behavior of others based on the extent to which discourse on the page was “relevant” to the purpose of the political community, or off-topic and, thus, not worthy of occupying space on the page. Commentary was politically charged for another reason. As I indicated in the last chapter, the victory of Student Union President T Cool over his rival Labzy by a mere 25 votes resulted in a polity divided into two major camps. The appearance of the Facebook group just weeks after the election, during this time of factionalization, should also be read as an effort to smooth out the new executives’ legitimacy crisis. Establishing this “official” channel offered the possibility of defusing oppositional forces that were believed to be actively undermining T Cool’s administration.

The overt political interests of the SU Facebook group and my analytical focus on political discourse among members of the online forum call to mind the literatures on the public sphere, publics, and mediated forms of communication in the context of the Internet. The agency ascribed to new media in popular uprisings of the last five years speaks to widespread belief in the “liberating potentials” of the Internet (Rheingold 2000, 4) captured in the ideal of the digital

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87 A Facebook user profile can be disabled if users are reported to be using “fake” screen names. This has been described as one of the lasting effects of the rise of Facebook (and also Google): the shift from largely anonymous online practices to the linking of user data with public identities, which has allowed for the “commercialization” of personal information through the tracking of user behavior and preferences across websites (Rainie and Wellman 2012).
public sphere (e.g., Boeder 2005). Like the bourgeoisie public sphere (Habermas 1989), the Internet is often imagined as a model, or tool, of global citizenship and participatory democracy. Similar to the extensive critiques of the “public sphere” for its collapse and erasures of difference (e.g., Fraser 1990; Hanchard 1994; Warner 2002), scholarship on the reproduction of difference in “cyberspace” (e.g., Burrell 2008; Ebo 1998; Kolko et al. 2013; Nakamura 2008) and persistent barriers to and varying degrees of accessibility, inclusion and participation should trouble such celebratory narratives. Nevertheless, Ibadan students experimenting with the possibilities of new media took seriously the idea that the Internet could enhance their political development, and participation in the campus community and the national political arena. In what follows, I take up the discursive practices of students within the Facebook group and the online platform’s (imagined) role in collective processes of deliberation and, in the next chapter, decision-making. In particular, I work through several episodes in the first year of the Facebook page’s existence, which capture some of the ways the group became a constitutive element of students’ political practice, as well as a critical space in which students could make sense of ways of thinking about and doing politics, and its implications for their community.

My discussion of activity on the student union Facebook group is not intended to be exhaustive. Instead, what lies ahead may be construed as methodological “browsing,” to invoke the verb Nigerians use to describe accessing the Internet. I discuss two key aspects of the Facebook group’s development in, roughly, its first year of use among students: (1) the evolution of “political abuse,” a condemnatory form of critique towards student leaders and its relationship to expectations for political accountability and transparency; and, the establishment of “appropriate” behavior for the forum. As with all uses and observations of social media, the boundaries between the public and private can be tenuous. With this in mind, readers may have ethical concerns about making use of students’ postings on a semi-public Facebook group. I was invited to join the Facebook group by student union executives and countless other students to further my research on their political activities, which was popularly known among student leaders. As with the larger dissertation, I take care to protect the identities of posters, unless they fall under the category of “political figures,” whose activities are understood and carried out as public. When possible, I make use of political nicknames, which are prevalent among this group of students, who typically express their aspirations towards professional political careers by appending their given names with titles like “Senator,” “Comrade,” and “Honourable.”

“A Page Where People Are Painted Black”

**Political Abuse**

The SU Facebook group initially operated in its intended capacity as an information conduit from union leaders to students, with the posting of passive correspondence such as official minutes of meetings with school authorities, budget proposals, and statements of account, which were not meant to be fodder for discussion, but digital artifacts creating evidence of accounting and accountability. However, early in the life of the page, students began to use the forum to call out union and other campus leaders for their negligence, poor performance and misdeeds, often with the expectation of immediate explanations on the Facebook group. In this

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88 Thank you to Jason Price for drawing out this nomenclature from a draft version of this chapter.
In the section, I discuss the development of this communication form, which I analyze as political “abuse,” borrowing from a local expression, which indexes a discursive mode of vitriolic critique that intends to shame or ridicule.

Ironically, it was a face-to-face intervention that alerted me to the growing centrality of the Facebook forum to UI campus politics. In July 2011, while on a stroll around campus with two student politician friends of mine, one, the Faculty of Social Sciences President, expressed shock that I was not a member of the SU Facebook Group. An avid Facebook user in the United States, I found it inconvenient to use Facebook in Nigeria because the site loaded especially slow on my Apple laptop, the Facebook app on my Blackberry smartphone also loaded Facebook poorly, and I had stopped frequenting Internet cafés entirely. Thus, I was unaware of the growing popularity of the Facebook group and its burgeoning role in student political life. The Faculty President, more commonly known as “Crouch” for his uncommonly tall and slim stature, stated categorically that I would not be able to keep up with campus political activities unless I joined the group. Known for eschewing political drama, Lekan, a representative in the legislative branch of the Union, the Student Representative Council (SRC), countered, “It will be a waste of your time. All they are doing on that page is abusing themselves.” “That’s exactly why I’m saying she should join,” Crouch insisted. “You will find the debates interesting for your work.”

To be clear, to abuse someone in this context does not mean to inflict physical or emotional violence, though these could be indirect effects. Political abuse is also not to be confused with the online “subculture” of trolling, or making deliberately offensive online postings—usually anonymously—with the goal of upsetting someone or provoking an angry response (Phillips 2015). Here, abuse often aired on the side of incendiary language that rather undiplomatically questioned the motives, legitimacy, character, and intellect of student leaders, which, it was argued, leaders invited by virtue of being public figures. Though rumors and innuendos were always circulating on campus to a similar effect, official “write-ups” on campus pressboards and, increasingly, on the Facebook page allowed for a more direct calling out of leaders. Facebook, in particular, added an additional layer of urgency to responses that was not present in offline public forums. Conceivably, a student could evade public gatherings or wait for a publication on a campus pressboard to be removed. The Facebook group, on the other hand, compelled a response because provocations on the page were publicly archived. The ability to “tag” the name of group members in posts, which generated a notification message for tagged parties, created additional pressure for a timely response.

On the Facebook group, this style of critique was directed primarily at Union executives, who were the most visible figures of the new experiment with student unionism. Much of this abuse was heaped upon the Public Relations Officer (PRO), Franklyn, whose office was a convenient target since he acted as the Union spokesperson and was the primary administrator of the Facebook page itself. Franklyn was also a target because his ostracism from the Executive Committee of union leaders left him politically isolated. Here, I discuss a series of exchanges centered on the activities of the PRO in February 2012 in order to demonstrate the development of this particular style of critique. At the time, the SU group had been in existence for a year and

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89 According to personal communications, the PRO and T Cool, the union President, fell out due to differences in personality and political ideas. Though Franklyn was initially aligned with T Cool’s camp during the campaign season, after being elected, the two disagreed over leadership style and financial support for the Office of the PRO.
the union was two months away from elections and the first handover to a successor administration. Such times of transition are moments of critical public reflection on the performance of elected leaders. Political sensibilities were especially high because of the January 2012 “Occupy Nigeria” national protests against the government, which I discuss in the next chapter. On February 24, 2012, Franklyn posted the following welcome message to students, who had returned to campus for the new academic session the previous week:

I hereby formally welcome all fresh students into this great citadel. As u march ahead, we must never forget our primary responsibility as students and our duty to the society in the quest to purge her of all injustice and inequality. You are welcome.

The message was straightforward enough, and relayed a growing sentiment among students, in light of the national protests, that schooling ought to cultivate a sense of social justice and responsibility. However, comments over the next two days used the appearance of the welcome message to scrutinize the PRO’s performance, hinting at a growing sentiment that the PRO was inactive in his official duties, such as: “P.R.O hope u r doing good over there” and “Welcome bro. Long time no see.”

A generous interpretation of the comments is that the first refers to the fact that Franklyn, as a medical student, lives “over there” on the satellite campus where the University teaching hospital is located. However, combined with the second, “long time no see,” the posts subtly convey the criticism that the PRO was both physically and substantively absent from office. Another student, “Dele,” more openly condemned the PRO:

Inefficient yeye PRO. Since 13th of Feb [when school resumed]…You just deemed it fit to welcome Ultes [University of Ibadan students] after almost two weeks of resumption, it shows how efficient u are, pstcheeeew.”

The term “yeye” is a Yoruba noun and adjective describing someone deemed unfit or unfocused. “Pstcheeew” is a phonetic rendering of the sound of sucking one’s teeth, a non-verbal form of disapproval. This type of public reproach of a student leader and the dialogue it generates offer insight into the expectations of scrutiny in practices of leadership and political participation among students.

In response to the criticisms of his welcome message, Franklyn initially showed restraint in responding to the disparagement, stating, “It would be puerile of me to respond to the statements of some because I understand that eyes that look are many but that eyes that see are rare. But history shall be the judge even of my critics and I know I shall be vindicated…I remain your humble servant.” This response suggests that misguided scrutiny is to be expected even for the “humble servant” but that the hope of vindication could be tethered to a future, when history would judge critics and leaders fairly. Even so, the post operationalizes a familiar mode of patronization from leaders, who deflect criticism by appearing to take the high road without offering any substantive response to recrimination. However, in a subsequent comment after receiving additional criticism, this deflection gave way to a more serious engagement with the content of the scrutiny and a push for evidence of accountability, which the Facebook group helped facilitate. Franklyn wrote:

90 Emoticons like the bespectacled person above, which indicates the act of seeing someone, were common on the page as Internet shorthand.
Challenges define a leader but when issues are not objectively assessed, it portends grave danger for the polity…I have a duty to give Uites a detailed account of what happened during my tenure and I shall not fail to do that. (Emphasis mine)

To this promise, a member of the Facebook, Akin replied, “Uites [would] appreciate ur report. Many of u guys promised to do one thing or the other and that's d report uites are awaiting cos I can't remember anyone promising a condition of nascent or embryonic union. All said and done, those that performed will give report!” Both comments were endorsed by dozens of members in the form of “likes,” the mechanism of Facebook, which allows users to register agreement with or acknowledgment of content. The exchange also signals the possibility that the online platform could serve as a mechanism for transparency, if not in open dialogue, at least in creating space for archiving evidence of accountability in the form of responses from leaders and official reports. Though the last comment from Akin chided the executives for the “embryonic” condition of the student union, it is worth noting that the very expectation that there would be a presentation and archive of official tenure is at odds with national political culture where such mechanisms are virtually nonexistent. This is also an indication of the ways in which student political practices deliberately seek to depart from the conventions of national politics.

In late March, Franklyn provided a “detailed account” of his tenure to offset the belief among many members that he had “abandoned” his elected office. His report, published exclusively on the Facebook page, and responses to it from the campus community are considered next. In Franklyn’s post, published on March 20, 2012, the PRO claimed that he had not “absconded” from his office, but was unable to function in his official capacity because SU President T Cool had politically sidelined him. In the post, excerpted below, Franklyn wrote:

[Some said] I absconded from my duty post. [...] Throughout second semester, no kobo [cent] was allocated to my office even after several pleas. […] Yet some union executives were busy plundering the finances of the union. In first semester, when we started from zero account, I borrowed money to run my office. The reduction in price of transport, Diamond FM programme, reduction in the price of zoo and many others are all testimonies to this fact. I played a pivotal role in all these.

But when you don't get support or are deliberately sidelined, there is really nothing you can do. I could have raised my voice in protest to all these injustices but the union was too young to be fractured. (Emphasis mine)

The specific details of the devolution of the President and PRO’s political relationship are contested. My focus here is the idea that these factors are legitimate pieces of public information and relevant to official accounts.

Over the next several days, students questioned the information presented in Franklyn’s account of his tenure as PRO, and whether the information he shared constituted public “information” at all. Three representative contributions to the dialogue concerning Franklyn’s post are reproduced below (with emphasis added):

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91 The reduction of the price of campus taxi and bus fares, the creation of a Student Union radio program at the campus radio station, Diamond FM, and the reduction of the price of admission to the UI campus zoo were all cited as early achievements of the student union.
“Kunle” Franklyn, furnish us wit information on those union excos that have been plundering the union's finance, coz an incomplete information is as good as none. #allegations all the way

“Akeem” Soldier go, soldier come, barrack remain d same. U guys have done ur best. It is too late to shift wrong doings as d period 2 leave is knocking. [The] handing over and election should b in peace.

“Martins” Mr. Frank, […] you have only succeeded in appealing to my heart and emotion, but definitely not my intellect. You have written much, but you have given less information. […] Don't get consumed in the mess of your administration, come out and be frank. Give us facts and figures.

These comments indicate a concern, among students, with the relationship between postings on the SU page, and what constitutes “information,” “misinformation,” and being “informed” by leaders. The first and the third comments from Kunle and Martins suggest that “allegations” absent “facts and figures” are unacceptable or “incomplete” forms of public information that are effectively as good as offering none. Recognizing the “mess” of the first union administration, the second and third comments from Akin and Martins urge Franklyn and, indirectly other student leaders, to have their actions be guided by integrity, especially with the next union elections and power handover eminent. The comment that “soldier come, soldier go, barrack remain the same” also reflects a common suspicion that, regardless of who occupies positions of power, political office itself “corrupts,” making substantive change to the political system unlikely. The specific analogy of the campus community to a military barrack and student leaders to soldiers is particularly telling, and provides another indication of the hold of the military past in the purportedly post-military present and future. The extent to which students can produce alternative practices of political leadership remains an open question.

“Private Life Becomes Public Discourse”

This section continues with the intensification of scrutiny against Franklyn, the beleaguered PRO, whose public narrative of his time in office went on to incite one of the most heated episodes of “political abuse” in the history of the group. The battle was waged between Franklyn and Kay Bello, who was a former political ally of Franklyn. Exchanges between the two and responses from the broader community on the page to the online war of words provide additional insight into the implications of abusive discourse for the community beyond the creation of mechanisms for the accountability of leaders. In the posts that follow, the boundaries between public scrutiny and personal attack are debated, as is the desired role of the Facebook group in these practices.

In a comment to Franklyn’s post accounting for his time in office, Kay Bello posted a series of messages with increasing urgency and acrimony. He began by suggesting that Franklyn failed to acknowledge those who worked with him (“you know you didn’t work alone in that office”), and that he abandoned the Publicity Committee and Press Club, which were both under his purview as PRO (“you started on a good promising note but all of a sudden, you disappeared into thin air”). Kay Bello further alleged that Franklyn wasn’t a leader and that, the “majority of you [Executives] don’t know the real meaning of leadership, management, and administration.” A prominent member of the Facebook and broader UI community, Kay Bello had previously
served as the head of the Publicity Committee, an appointed office, which Franklyn oversaw. It was understood at the time of its creation that the Publicity Committee was a concession for Kay Bello, a Law Student and former Editor-in-Chief of the Union of Campus Journalists (UCJ), who worked on the campaign to elect T Cool and developed particularly impressive print propaganda that many believed to have contributed to the victory. Kay Bello was also said to be involved in the maneuvering that allowed Franklyn to emerge as the sole candidate for PRO, which was unprecedented for campus politics where all positions are typically hotly contested. This is to say that Kay Bello admonished Franklyn, not simply as a member of the UI student body, but also as a well-known leader with close proximity to the union administration.

Franklyn’s response to Kay Bello’s accusations did little to douse the spirit of Kay Bello’s attack on his performance. To his prompt that Franklyn did not act alone in his achievements while in office, Franklyn noted, “We started well. We made several sacrifices and used personal funds but things ground to a halt when we were sidelined.” To Kay Bello’s claims that he abandoned the Publicity Committee and the Press Club, Franklyn said the lack of funding caused both ventures to fail after his personal funds were “exhausted” and he slid into “chronic debt.” Going on the offensive, Franklyn waged an accusation of his own against Kay Bello, alleging that, “even when you knew my office was not funded, you threatened to resign because refreshments were not served at publicity committee meetings” and later “those whose opinions are guided by their appetite, know that you are on the wrong side of history.” He closed this initial response with an indirect critique of the abusive form of criticism levied against him by Kay Bello and presumably others on the page: “Hurling insults at people shows a profound lack of maturity and restraint and such people are not worthy to be leaders…I am not in the habit of exchanging verbal banters or hurling insults, *Res ipso loquitor* (the facts speak for themselves so I rest my case).” Though Franklyn claimed to find “hurling insults” to be beneath the actions of true leaders, his comments to Kay Bello, nevertheless, contained their own censorious accusations. The allegation that Kay Bello resigned from the Publicity Committee due to lack of “refreshments” is a subtle way of suggesting a petty form of corruption, as “those who opinions are guided by their appetite” is a familiar trope reminiscent of Bayart’s “politics of the belly” framework (1993) and the type of patrimonial politics student politicians claimed to be unsettling, as I discussed in the last chapter.

Before moving on to the larger showdown between Kay Bello and Franklyn, it is important to note that the abusive exchange between Kay Bello and Franklyn, while falling in line with broader forms of political critique of authorities in Nigeria, reflects more localized discursive patterns of critique within the campus. The relationship between the campus press, which Kay Bello emerged from, and student leaders like Franklyn is routinely and publicly pugnacious. In my numerous observations of press nights—an event in the days before campus elections where campus journalists have the opportunity to vet prospective leaders and make recommendations to the student body—press members predictably seized the occasion to embarrass candidates by asking questions intended to humiliate them. Thus, while political abuse represents emerging forms of engaging politicians “from below” via social media, it also refashions established patterns of “old” media that are translated into new forms. Kay Bello, himself, was a key proponent of this approach and become akin to a “whistleblower” on the Facebook group, advancing frequent editorial style critiques of leaders and events. He even created a separate Facebook account, under which he posted exposés as “Conscious Post,” before eventually outing himself as the writer behind the account.
On March 22, 2012 just weeks after the initial probe into the performance of the PRO, Kay Bello published a long-form essay, which could otherwise have been published in a print publication, but was instead posted to the Facebook page. Like a Nollywood film, having Parts 1 and 2, Kay Bello was forced to post his polemic in two separate posts, due to its voluminous nature (approximately 1750 words) and the limitations of Facebook, which sets a word limit for each post. This length in itself is remarkable considering the logistical challenges of submitting the piece: the author perhaps wrote it in longhand first, or in a separate Microsoft Word document, or in the window of the FB interface itself, amid the threat of power failure. Here, I excerpt key passages from the text and responses to it from other students. Though Kay Bello offers specific details about events leading up to his resignation, my interest is not teasing out “what happened,” but rather exploring how students express their understanding of the relationship between political office and public scrutiny.

Published under the title “Rejoinder: Failures, Deceptions of Franklyn Nnakwue, SU PRO,” Kay Bello wrote:

Mr. Franklyn could have been a normal Uite, whose business, failure, or success might not have been noticed, but the mere fact that he had come out to take a public position, and promised heaven and earth, to deliver his manifesto, his private life could become public discourse. Where his private life affects the performance of his duties, then his private life becomes public discourse. Situations like this abound in our polity. Take for instance, the private health life of the Late Umar Musa Yar’adua, the ex Nigerian President, which affected the performance of his public duty, where many Nigerians agitated for the invoking of the doctrine of necessity that the Vice President Goodluck Jonathan be sworn in as the Acting President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

[...] Let us have a rundown: Mr Franklyn saw going to [national party] Action Congress of Nigeria’s meeting as more important than his office duties, as even during his absenteeism from work he was still running after ACN with his accomplice, [name redacted]. He claims to have been sidelined, yet also sidelined people working for him and absconded to [satellite campus] UCH, as Yar’adua absconded to Saudi Arabia for treatment.

Responses from students over the next day, and eventually Franklyn himself are next given focused attention. A student bearing the nickname, ShadowKick, commented, “character assassination- I don’t believe you need it to win an election clean!” This claim suggests one interpretation of the attack on the PRO as part of a broader propaganda campaign to delegitimize Franklyn, who nursed the ambition of becoming Student Union President, before eventually retreating from campus politics altogether. Another round of discussion weighed the claim made by Kay Bello that, when one assumes public office, their private life becomes public. The comments were part of a more general deliberation on what “public” and “private” entails in the context of student politics and the online forum. Concerning the extent to which constituencies should be made aware of the internal wrangling of public officeholders, “Queen Victoria” asked, “Must you guys open yourself outside? When the going was good nobody knew what was going on.” Also at issue was the empirical basis for Kay Bello’s scrutiny of the PRO’s performance in office. During the course of his discussion, he offered as evidence of his allegations the claim that the General Secretary of the SU showed him text messages sent between the PRO and other executives, which Kay Bello said corroborated Franklyn’s “numerous deceptions.” An extended
discussion among students considered the basis of this claim in particular and whether it was permissible, given the source (private text messages between public figures).

One commenter, Yemi, congratulated Kay Bello “for this wonderful insight into the Union,” but cautioned that, “We need to be careful who we trust or call our friend. What credit goes to he who shows another fellow a private message sent to him? What kudos goes to a fellow who wants to make his garment relatively whiter by showing how disgusting his friend's [is]?” Senator Ariyo chimed in, in a similar fashion: “Someone called u a [friend] and confided in u and sent u a message that [was] supposed to be private and confidential…Even if Franklyn [removed himself] from the crisis rocking the incumbent SU excos [executives], that still doesn’t justify [the General Secretary] exposing the text message he sent to him.” Finally, with an eye to the upcoming elections, “MC” advised, “I'm shocked by these posts. Don't you guys realize that you can never make yourself look clean by exposing other people's secrets? I think this just goes to show that in this next election, we should elect people who are not only individually capable but are also efficient team players.” These contributions suggest that while “insight into the Union” can be of great use to the public, at the same time, there are limits beyond which scrutiny of the (private) doings of public officials does more damage than good.

The second half of the rejoinder, in which Kay Bello suggested that the PRO “must be suffering from a particular mental disease that is yet to be discovered in medicine” prompted the following responses that indicate students’ concern with this form of political “abuse” becoming overly personal and unintellectual, the opposite of desired traits for responsible unionism in distinction to national politics where personal attacks, both verbal and physical, are commonplace. Students offered the following pointed appeals to Kay Bello and Franklyn:

“Egbon [Yoruba, elder brother], let there be peace and unity for the common good of all.”

“UITES are watching, the world is watching…”

“Election is near […] but don’t forget election will go.”

Appealing to the intellectualism of their leaders, another student, Seun, expressed frustration with the “rejoinder” as a tactic of political abuse against perceived wrongs: “I did not read [Kay Bello’s] post in full, coz I see no sense in someone writing rejoinder over every issue raised against him, it's becoming too much. I believe intellectual men of this great institution should not subscribe to [this], coz it's immaturity of the first order that could make anyone behave in such manner, you can’t always be right.” In a more direct prescription of appropriate types of commentary on the page, Queen Victoria wrote, “You guys should stop all this rubbish, this page is not for insults & abuses.” Finally, in the most overt statement against discussion of this type and a surprising request for the intervention of university authorities, who were not active and only, presumably, lurkers on the page if at all, “Fola” wrote the following:

If I were the Vice Chancellor, I would order for the close of this page. It has served to distribute insults, break relationships and cause [more] havoc than good. A page where people are painted black, where u uphold ur supporters and bring down those against you.

There were many other such acrimonious moments on the page, which blurred the distinction between public office and personality, beyond the exchanges around the fallout of Franklyn and Kay Bello. The arc of this particular conversation reflects a common sentiment that, while accountability even in the form of personal abuse can be a productive form of engaging elected
leaders, there are dangers associated with personalizing political criticism and leadership. With the tendency towards “personal rulership” and “big men” in political systems in the region, political life is most inflected by the “rivalries and struggles of powerful and willful men, rather than impersonal institutions, ideologies, public policies, [etc.]” (Jackson and Rosberg 1984, 421; see also: Price 1974; Daloz 2003). In Nigerian politics also, elected leaders were notorious for this approach to politics: over the past five years, national legislators have had widely publicized physical altercations with each other and other authority figures. In 2010, eleven lawmakers were suspended and several more sustained injuries, including a broken hand, when a fight broke out on the floor of the House of Representatives, after the Speaker of the House was accused of misappropriating funds. In 2014, activity in the Senate was suspended when several legislators assaulted police officers at the Senate building, after which tear gas was dispensed to restore order. More recently in June 2015, members of the House of Representative again fought on the floor of the House over the election of officers. Thus, students were especially sensitive to the ways “political abuse” and personal attacks on the Facebook page could escalate offline. The popular opinion, among students, that this approach was counterproductive to their nascent student union, led to further deliberations on the Facebook group, concerning the desirability of establishing norms for participating in the (online) political community.

“This Page is an Official Page and Not a Religious Conflict Centre”

This section delves into deliberations on the boundaries of political discourse and the Facebook page as a venue for its production and circulation. I turn more specifically to ways students developed norms for their nascent political community through a deliberative negotiation of the rules that should govern activities within the group. Sorting out what counts as information dissemination, what is incendiary or appropriate language, and what appropriate critique should be were key subjects of debate. Students asked what purpose the SU Facebook ought to serve and how the online student political community could function differently from other national political forums, online and otherwise. These concerns are at odds with what has been identified as one of the major drawbacks of the Internet: what Suler (2004) refers to as the “online disinhibition effect,” which causes people to “act out” more frequently due to online anonymity and invisibility. Facebook was a platform well suited to these deliberative processes, among this group of students. Though discussion often became incendiary and highly personal, since users’ online identities were associated with their offline identities and the network, itself, is premised upon people with existing relations, the escalation of conflict was not aided by the ability to hide behind anonymity. Moreover, as the previous debates signal, conversations on the

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page—because they were associated with offline identities and relationships—permitted deliberation and reconciliation, as well as a working out of ideas about how the political community should function (online), with awareness that this process of negotiation is a critical component of political training, just as social media is a critical space for the development of political ideas and practices.

“#Watch Your Grammar”

The process of establishing norms for the SU Facebook group was first articulated as “grammar policing,” or scrutiny over language use as a marker of intelligibility and efficacy on the page. On a post to the group, it was typical to see students correct each other on misspellings of words, regardless of whether meaning was affected by the mistakes. For instance, in May 2012, a female student nicknamed Kemexy posted the following message:

This morning, I have fetched basins of water, washed plates and clothes, mobbed [sic] the corridor, swept and arranged the house...and some boys will sit there and ask ‘what do women do?’ I bet house chores are more tasky [sic] and energy consuming than any office work.

Though a few initial responses focused on the actual substance of the post—the gendered division of labor, which is worthy of consideration in itself—another poster, “Shola,” directed the following set of grammatical corrections to Kemexy “*mopped (not mobbed), *tasking (not tasky). #watchyourgrammar,” before commenting on the actual topic of the post, This unleashed a series of comments concerning proper etiquette for respondents to posts. Where the earlier discussion of political abuse concerned the collegiality of post content, the discussion around grammar focused on form and whether monitoring the form of content was worthy of group interventions. Gbenga, a poster whose grammatical errors were also corrected in the thread, advised Shola, “I think U need to get a LIFE. Is it at dis ma level [university student] U are gonna be monitoring ma spellings?” Kemexy similarly argued that communication on the page does not require strict adherence to the conventions of grammar: “If u want to go about correcting spellings I’m sorry it wunt be possible because here, people spell incorrectly not because they dnt knw the right spelling but because they prefer to type as little words as possible and be colloquial.” Another member, Esther, compared the policing of grammar on the page to the actions of school teachers: “If u wanna go about [correcting] misspelt words, find a classroom and dictate words to em so u can mark em. Lets have fun at max on fb [Facebook] and not be scared to commit blunders forgivable or unforgivable.”

These responses suggest that this form of critique reduced members to schoolchildren, with the implication that members were at an (educational) level where such critiques were belittling (“Is it at dis ma level U are gonna be monitoring ma spellings”?). Moreover, it is suggested that these “corrections” posit hierarchies among the users that are divisive and unnecessary. Perhaps this is because, as Kemexy notes, students use Internet shorthand not because they are deficient in English language, but because of the congenial brevity of social media language use. Though Shola insisted in a later comment that the purpose of the intervention was not to curtail the fun of the page, but to “sanitize” the page of “unnecessary” missteps, another student, Dapo, insinuated that this form of policing was un-African. In the comment stream for the post, Dapo posted the words of a traditional Yoruba song:
"ede oyinbo kin se ti baba mi, 
ede oyinbo kin se ti mama mi, 
Oyinbo mu tea, baba mi mu eko, 
yinbo wo trouser, baba mi wo kembe" 

The English language is not my father’s 
The English language is not my mother’s 
The foreigner drinks tea, my father drinks pap 
The foreigner wears trouser, my father wears kembe

Drawing attention to crude differences between British and Yoruba culture is especially suggestive in the context of the Facebook group. I take this intervention to signify that, despite the fact that the social media platform itself is a “foreign import,” for students, its usage in Nigeria should reflect values and interests relevant to their social context, without reinforcing divisions among members of the group.

Concern that practices as seemingly benign as correcting the grammatical errors of other members of the group could destabilize the student political community similar to more overt forms of abusive discourse suggests a growing anxiety that the online forum was not an inclusive or progressive space. For instance, days after the scandal involving Franklyn and Kay Bello, an irregular poster, “BHJ” posted the following message, excerpted below:

Going through posts & comments on this page with a neutral mindset & putting it in mind that this page belongs to the SU of the first University in Nigeria, I get heartbroken when my expectation of reading positive, intellectual, matured, progressive, & influential posts & comments is drowned. I used to know that the SU of all schools all over the country even serve as watchdog & influence state politics. It is now clear to me that the watchdog is now dining with the cats.

Support your own without prejudice to the other. 
Play matured & positively influential politics. 
Think beyond the walls of University of Ibadan. 
Politics play should not enhance enmity. 
What we do today will either make or mar our tomorrow.

Echoing the sentiment brewing on the page that critique could fracture the fragile community, BHJ suggests that the historic role of student unions in the country and at the University of Ibadan, in particular, fosters the expectation that the Facebook group that “belongs” to the SU would similarly reflect “positive,” “intellectual,” “matured,” “progressive” and “influential” posts, as opposed to more hostile forms of communication. The contrast of the page’s ideal form with mainstream politics “beyond the walls” of UI, as well as the call that members consider the role of their actions as either “making” or “marring” their collective futures further indicates the imagined potential of the forum as a critical space of political training.

“All Are Welcome on This SU Page”

Disillusionment with the broader implications of abusive language on the page was magnified during a controversy over religious difference, a particularly fraught subject matter in the Nigerian context. In 2011, the year of massive post-election violence propagated by domestic

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95 Pap is a local porridge made from corn. Kembe is traditional Yoruba pant.
terrorist group Boko Haram, social fissures surrounding the relationship between politics, religion, and ethnicity were especially pronounced. After the apparent victory of Acting President Goodluck Jonathan in the presidential election, the militant Islamic group claimed responsibility for scores of deaths against Christians, other Muslims, and Southerners. Though these activities had largely been externalized as a “problem” of the Northern region, the threat of Boko Haram’s activities was also beginning to reconfigure the social landscape in other parts of the country, including Ibadan. Months after the election and the bombing of the United Nations Headquarters in the capital city, Abuja, a letter purportedly sent by a Boko Haram affiliate threatened to bomb federal universities, including the University of Ibadan. While Boko Haram terror was often described as a “North versus South,” “Muslim versus Christian” issue, in southwestern Nigeria, Muslims are a significant part of the Yoruba community, making ethnic, religious, and political differences especially tricky to disentangle.

The controversy began in May 2012 when a frequent contributor, Tomi, posted the following short message after a deadly Boko Haram attack in a Northern state:

This looks like a fact to me: Not all Muslims in Nigeria are Terrorists. But all Terrorists in Nigeria are Muslims! Open to debate.

What interests me here is how students made sense of this type of comment and how this specific debate continued the larger deliberations on what purpose the Facebook group should serve, in light of its potential to exacerbate differences among members in ways deemed counterproductive to the student political community. It is worth noting that this single post received hundreds of comments, more than most popular posts, which typically receive dozens of comments. The post was generally met with shock and anger, with comments divided between offense, pronounced outrage, and a few outliers that deemed these reactions to be excessive. My focus here is how the controversy facilitated a discussion on the inclusiveness of the page and the role that communication (ought to) play in building (political) community.

Two days after the initial post, “Professor X” posted, “Forget all religious differences, all are welcome in Nigeria, on this SU page,” accompanied by an image, likely downloaded from elsewhere on the Internet. The image (Figure 18 below) extended the message that, indeed, all should be welcome on the UI Student Union Facebook page, without prejudice to size, color, age, culture, values, or religion. The sign quite literally marked the Facebook Group as a “safe” space. Though campus politicians often expressed the desire for politics to be truly inclusive, the process of reconciliation after this particular controversy was a striking example of how students seized opportunities afforded by participation in campus politics to both practice (rehearse) and put into practice political ideas and ideals that would likely be distorted in national politics. After receiving backlash for his provocative post, Tomi himself issued an apology to members of the Facebook group, admitting “I understand that what I posted concerning the issue of terrorism and the Islamic faith wasn't right, and a lot of people on this group found it offensive. I want to

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96 This was a particularly scary few days, when most students, myself included, were “stuck,” helplessly, on campus while we waited to see whether the threats were true. The threat proved to be an empty one, though the metal detectors and car searches the University of Ibadan instituted remained on ground for at least another year. At the time, we knew that this measure was largely performative because it is easy to enter the campus through numerous “bush paths” without using the main gate. Moreover, metal detectors could not stop a suicide bomb attempt.
apologize to anyone that felt offended at it. In any case, I insist that I posted it out of all innocence, not because I intended to provoke any religious sentiment.”

Most students seemed to accept this explanation, many even appending messages of understanding to his apology with the hashtag “I rep [represent] peace,” which reflects a desire to de-escalate conflict on the page and promote less rancorous forms of interaction. Still, words of caution were offered to Tomi and others who thought to dabble in divisive issues like those concerning religious differences. For instance, Azeez, a prominent poster who identified himself as Muslim, advised, “[always think] of d consequence of an action b4 making d 1st move... religion is so sensitive that u don’t play on sum1s else [someone else’s] emotion.” Another Muslim student, Mikail, similarly warned that religious issues are “extra-sensitive.” Yet another student, Aminu, who initially condemned Tomi’s actions in a strongly-worded rebuttal, said he was inspired by the display of “humility” and “maturity” to remove his own incendiary response: “Ur post inspired mine so as to make u feel the pain I go through when some ignorant folks speak about the religion al-islam. I just removed my post so as to make peace reign. I’m proud of you boy.... PEACE I REP.”
Though this particular firestorm was effectively defused, the episode continued to engender dialogue about the implications of hostility versus tolerance in discussions in the Facebook group. One student, Bukola, wrote in a reply to Tomi’s apology post, “This page is an official page and not a religious conflict center.” Striking a similar note concerning the jurisdiction and purpose of the page, Lawal posted the following directive to his peers:

The rate at which people post comments that go against other people's religion, [ethnicity] or culture needs urgent control or a stop. In this light, any comment that could affect or nullify other people's religion, [ethnicity] or culture should not be posted on this page. [...] As the future leaders, there is the need for peaceful coexistence among all ethnic, cultural and religious groups. Let us build a nation where there is no religious hatred, conflicts and riots. Let us love ourselves as people or Nigerians. Let us love people from other ethnic, culture or religion different from our own. Remember, by this, we can achieve the Nigerian Dream. God bless you, d University of Ibadan and d Federal Republic of Nigeria!

This comment echoes concerns about abusive language directed at individuals, and explicitly names the forms of intolerance (i.e. ethnic, religious, etc.), which threaten the “peaceful coexistence” of students on the page, as well as the nation that students imagine themselves to be taking an active part in constructing. The parallelism of the University of Ibadan campus and the Federal Republic of Nigeria articulated by Lawal is not a rhetorical flourish. By “loving” each other on the page, students are also engaging in acts of patriotism that hold the promise of realization of the “Nigerian Dream.” This suggests a higher concern with maintaining the cohesion of the student political community, so as to avoid falling into the same patterns of division existing in broader society. Here, we can discern a real concern with overcoming the forms of exclusion that are elsewhere cultivated given the sense that the campus environment, and students themselves, while emanating from society, ought to be different from and “better than” national leaders—sentiments that are also considered by students in the next chapter in the course of online and urban protests during the course of “Occupy Nigeria” and “Occupy University of Ibadan.” Temporally, the protests follow the earlier scrutiny of Franklyn the Public Relations Officer and precede the conflict surrounding religion on the Facebook page.

Conclusion

The Official Group of the University of Ibadan Student Union on Facebook illustrates the growing role of new media technologies, especially social media, in the cultural and political practices of young Nigerians. As my analysis of conflicts over the performance of political office holders, the usefulness of “abusive” public criticism, and acceptable forms of discourse sought to make explicit, the transposition of community, participation, and communication from the existing student polity online was (and still is) an unwieldy, untidy process. The acrimonious national political culture inflected the political community in its online and offline forms, particularly, the tendency to weaponize ethnicity, religion, class, gender, and other forms of difference. Nevertheless, members of the Facebook group took seriously the online forum as an important space in which they could cultivate alternative practices for the present and future, in stark contrast to offline contexts where students are still subjected to the authority and discipline of university administrators and national politicians. Though initially imagined by the founders
of the Facebook group as a passive conduit for information, a more vibrant space for political dialogue and deliberation formed. This development built upon existing practices associated with campus print media cultures, as well as tremendous changes in the accessibility and portability of new technologies, which reconfigured the techno-social practices of young people away from more sedentary forms of technology like the Internet café to those that are flexible and mobile, like the cell phone and the laptop.

The transposition of an existing, active political community to a social media platform offers an uncommon perspective to the literature on online (political) communities, which often focuses on strangers forming relationships around common hobbies (Boellstorff 2008), political ideology or culture (Doostdar 2004; Fattal 2014), and experiences of displacement (Panagakos and Horst 2006). That a group of students, already bounded by the territory of the campus, would find appealing an online forum limited to people they have the opportunity to regularly interact with is counterintuitive, particularly when one considers the obstacles to Internet access discussed earlier in this chapter. However, I have argued here that Facebook was a particularly attractive platform among Ibadan students for these very reasons. Rather than providing a space for anonymous practices, the appeal of Facebook is that it links offline and online identities, a feature that was especially desirable among campus politicians, who were already cultivating public, professional personas and showed interest in experimenting with the political uses of social media made apparent by the Arab Spring. The Facebook group also offered the possibility of establishing a space in which students could be unconstrained by the undue influence of authorities, whose permission, resources, and access shaped most other areas of political life. For most students, the period after the return of the student union was their first exposure to vibrant unionism and university-wide politics and, despite the influence of university administrators and national leaders, Ibadan students had few models of leadership that they were interested in emulating. As I discussed in the last chapter, student politicians were compelled to enter into liaisons with more senior political figures. However, they remained persistent subjects of critique, ridicule, and outright frustration. In this manner, reconstituting the student union Facebook group allowed members to experiment, in new and different ways, with the possibilities and limitations of political discourse, as well as alternative modes of engagement between leaders and constituents within the UI student political community.
CHAPTER FIVE:
Ambivalent Activism

_I just have to be on the street because I have no dual citizenship._
−Kola, UI Student and Occupy Ibadan protester

On January 3, 2012, massive protests erupted in cities around Nigeria, in response to the removal of the subsidy on petroleum products by President Goodluck Jonathan the day before. The removal of the subsidy, popularly viewed as the only tangible benefit citizens of Africa’s largest oil producer receive from the government, immediately doubled the cost of fuel and incited nearly two weeks of demonstrations in 17 cities, social media activism, an indefinite labor strike and international solidarity protests by thousands of Nigerians in the diaspora—actions that were hashtagged "Occupy Nigeria.” Like “Occupy” protests elsewhere, the geographic base for the Nigerian mobilizations was the city, the major organizational mechanism was social media, and the primary demographic of occupiers was young people born in the 1980s or later, including University of Ibadan (UI) student politicians, who offered support and leadership to the Occupy Ibadan node. Later in April 2012, days after the inauguration of a new student union government, University of Ibadan students again launched a series of protests this time aimed at university administrators. The renewed mobilization, similarly branded “Occupy University of Ibadan” or “Occupy UI,” also involved the occupation of urban space and the use of social media for both deliberation and strategic action. In two days of protests, students forcibly closed the gates to the campus and physically barricaded Awolowo Road, the major thoroughfare running beside the main entrance, barring both academic and commercial activities in the vicinity. After days of blackouts in the period leading up to final examinations, student demonstrators sought to bring attention to the intolerable conditions of higher education in Nigeria, and the failures of university and federal authorities in administering public institutions. After all was told, the “occupation” of campus and urban space attracted the attention of the federal government and the national press; it also prompted university authorities to ingloriously send students on a compulsory recess for two months, by forcibly expelling them from dorms.

For a nation that has not had such widespread protests since the 1990s pro-democracy movement sought to remove the military government, Occupy Nigeria might seem to be following in the winds of change that ushered in the Arab Spring and global “Occupy” protests, given the apparent similarities in political technique, media strategy, and root causes among these protest movements. Prevailing analyses suggest that these recent political struggles represent novel forms of political engagement (e.g., Castells 2013; Earl and Kimport 2011; Van de Donk 2004; Gerbaudo 2012) and an “awakening” of young people (Staeheli and Nagel 2013), who in recent decades have been described more often as politically “apathetic” and

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97 Despite being the largest African producer of oil, a succession of corrupt (military) regimes has allowed the petroleum sector to rot, despite tremendous profits, and as domestic refineries have fallen into disuse. The importation of refined oil back into the oil-producing country is popularly understood as an especially egregious form of state corruption, as the country’s elites, including state actors, earn fortunes profiting from this importation.
disconnected from conventional forms of civic participation (e.g., Eliasoph 1998; Farthing 2010; Sloam 2007).

This chapter examines the participation of Ibadan students in both Occupy Nigeria and Occupy University of Ibadan. I argue that the participation of Ibadan students in both movements draws upon practices rooted in the long history of student unionism and what I am calling youth social disruptions in Nigeria. This interpretive move goes against the grain of some takes on Occupy Nigeria, which hinge on its resonances with the global social movements associated with the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street. Rather than a more recent crisis of late capitalism, the Nigerian occupations represent a more specific crisis of the African post-colony, one which expresses the profound grievances of youth towards political and economic elites, and their ambivalence about belonging within the nation. Ambivalence inflects student activism in other ways. Occupy Nigeria and UI also illustrate tensions between two competing political methods and identities—activism and politics—which students negotiate as they activate their political training beyond the campus. In what follows, I discuss the participation of UI students in the Occupy Nigeria and the Occupy UI mobilizations. I begin by locating contemporary student protests within a wider culture of youth social disruption, which Branch and Mampilly (2015) recently described as a third wave of youth-led urban uprisings in Africa that have largely gone unnoticed over the past ten years. Then, I analyze the participation both online and offline of UI students in Occupy Ibadan and, to a lesser extent, Occupy UI with a view to how students negotiate the tensions between activism and politics, and how these activities fit into students’ ideas about the political future of Nigeria as well as their own trajectories as future leaders.

Youth Social Disruption

Since the military-to-civilian transition, unrest instigated by youth has received great public attention in Nigeria. The federal government and NGOs have created initiatives around various categories of youth “violence” and “at-risk” groups, which include urban and campus-based criminal gangs. Media outlets also routinely report incidents of rioting as well as more benign forms of disruptive action by youth. Such incidents include: violent, even deadly, vigilantism as in the case of the "necklace lynching" of the “Aluu 4” in October 2012;98 the construction of illegal road blocks throughout the nation to extort money from passers-by; and, physical confrontations with authority figures.99 The ubiquity of these forms of agitation has been further amplified by the rise of youth militancy associated with the insurgencies in the Niger Delta and the Northern regions, surrounding equity issues related to oil extraction in the case of the former, and on the rise of religious extremism in the latter. Scholars, particularly those based in the region, have described these disruptive acts as "youth restiveness" (Ejumudo 2014; Tenuche 2009), which carries the accepted explanatory discourse that Nigerian youth, under-educated, jobless, and abandoned by the state, are, perhaps justifiably, prone to disorder.

98 The incident of what is commonly referred to as “jungle justice” caused a public outcry, after the tire burning of four students suspected of stealing electronics in the town of Aluu in the Niger Delta was uploaded to YouTube via mobile phone and went viral. Writer Teju Cole (2012) penned a sobering piece in *The Atlantic* on the ubiquity of mob justice in Nigeria. See Pratten (2008) and Smith (2004a) for further analysis of youth vigilantism in Nigeria.
99 During Occupy Nigeria, there were social media reports about the near-assassination of four national senators traveling by car to Abuja through Ibadan, where a crowd of 10,000 protesters allegedly attacked them.
This framing is also consistent with the extensive literature on African youth, who have been characterized as “loose molecules” (Kaplan 1994), or particularly prone to unrest, violent or otherwise, both against and in the interest of the state (see Comaroff and Comaroff 2006; Honwana and De Boeck 2005; Philipps 2013; Richards 1998).

However, what I am calling “social disruptions” enacted by young Nigerians—and more specifically students—exceeds the explanatory capacity of these discourses. Youth social disruptions in my use here signals the forms of action often aggregated within the category of “youth violence” (also, unrest, uprising, agitation, etc.) in popular discourses concerning the seeming increase in random, senseless, and gratuitous episodes of violence enacted by urban-based young people (see Bay and Donham 2007 for a useful review of this literature). Yet, my specific use of disruption as a conceptual and empirical framing is intended to widen the scope of the expression of youth disaffection beyond exceptionally “violent” forms of action. Here, youth social disruptions conceptually cover a terrain of action that would include riots, armed insurgency, vigilantism, non-violent street demonstrations, and other petty disturbances. As seemingly diverse as these actions are, what ties these forms of action together and, significantly, what is missing from discourses that emphasize exceptional violence is their intent. Their intention is to disrupt the social order, even if temporarily, in ways that are often lost within the category of “violence” with its embedded moralism (Bozzoli 2007, 19). As Bozzoli argues in her study of a South African township rebellion, below the surface of violent rebellion may, in fact, lie “passionate idealism” which utilizes violence strategically to deliver the failed promises of “political liberation” and “social dignity” that were thought to be guaranteed by elders, the state, and institutions like schools, but which failed to materialize as expected (2007, 184). The predicament of youth within “economies” and "zones" of abandonment (Povinelli 2011) like Nigeria exemplifies the ambivalences of belonging for youth who are obstructed from meaningful social inclusion and who, as a result, attempt to disrupt the status quo of the social order with expressions of their disaffection at their lot as the so-called “lost," "stuck" or "forever young" generation. These overlapping categories signify arrested youth, which has gained critical scholarly attention since the mid-1990s (see Hansen 2014 for a useful overview).

In other words, what links the seemingly disparate phenomena of Boko Haram, the Niger Delta insurgency, Occupy Nigeria—and, less expectedly, campus protests—is the ways these forms of disruption render visible the experiential dimensions of the precariousness of Nigerian youth lives held in waiting by the inertia of the government and its institutional instruments. These disruptive forms also draw attention to what is produced by this experience of precariousness: grievance, disruptive action, conceptions of un/belonging, as well as emphatic demands for redress. My point here, in situating the involvement of Ibadan students in Occupy Ibadan and Occupy UI within the broader framework of youth social disruption, is to emphasize the following: at the aggregate level, the aims of the actions described above are broader than “violence,” as they intend to disrupt the social order; students’ political protests are entangled with urban youth agitation beyond the campus in genesis, purpose, and character; finally, the exceptionalism associated with the scale and sustenance of Occupy protests, especially when viewed in light of its global resonances, obscures their everydayness in the Nigerian context.
The University and the City Revisited

Social disruptions of the kind alluded to in the previous section remain the most visible form of youth political engagement in Nigeria. Though much attention is focused on the city as the primary domain of these forms of action, the university is a critical relational node to urban youth disruptions. Perhaps this appears counterintuitive as students are typically imagined as an elite, privileged and protected group within most societies. However, this has not been the case since 1980s austerity reforms financially gutted higher educational institutions. Campus disruptions such as protest activities, activism, and riots typically unite the wider populations of students beyond the elected leaders and campus activists that have been the major focus of this dissertation. Disruptive acts also link students to forms of action common within the larger youth population, whether in school or not, because student grievances are often shared by young people generally, and problems within educational institutions are often symptomatic of insecurities beyond the campus.

The relationships between the university campus and the city that I describe here bring us back, full circle, to the first chapter, “Ibadan: The University and the City,” where I traced the institutional transformation of universities over time and conceptually teased out the relationships among the university, the city, and frameworks of belonging that these spaces have been instrumental in producing over time (i.e. citizenship, mobility, elite membership, etc.). Here, I explore another dimension of the relationship between the university, the city, and belonging by linking urban youth social disruption, student protest traditions and contemporary practices of activism. My interest is in how we might understand the perilous state of higher educational institutions in relation to both the pervasiveness of student political agitation on campuses around the nation, and the urban youth-dominated social disruptions of the past several decades. Thus far, crises in Nigeria’s educational institutions and the broader category of youth (violent) unrest have been either treated as separate phenomena, or lumped within the general category of “restiveness.” Alternatively, I argue that student practices in the university and the city illuminate the ways in which students make sense of their social exclusion, while developing discourses and practices to shape their potential inclusion within the national body and beyond. It is worth remembering that, though the “Niger Delta militant” and the “Muslim terrorist” have became the archetypes of youth violence and political action in the country, long before the ascendance of these figures, students were popularly imagined as the prototypic youth political actor and, at times, social deviant (Adejumobi 2003).

Occupy the City

My discussion of Occupy protests in Nigeria spans three sections following an overview of both Occupy Nigeria and Occupy Ibadan activities among UI students. The first section examines efforts to build consensus over the legitimacy of the Occupy Nigeria protests and the desirability of students’ participation in the mobilizations. The second focuses on the nature of students’ activism within Occupy Nigeria, particularly issues concerning generation, gender, and risk. The final section tackles ideological questions with which students grappled concerning appropriate activisms for the moment, the role of protest in political life, and the complicated roles of “activism” and elected political leadership in the civilian democratic era. Though the series of mobilizations that would shape into “Occupy Nigeria” may have reached an unexpected scale, deliberations concerning what should be done when the government removed fuel
subsidies started several months prior to the protests. News coverage, debates, and political propaganda were widely circulated within the national press in the months preceding the removal of subsidies (including political cartoons like Figure 19 below). Nevertheless, on the eve of the removal of the subsidy when it became clear that the Federal Government would not retreat from its plan despite mounting criticism from civil society groups, the national trade unions, the National Labour Congress (NLC) and Trade Union Congress (TUC), threatened a labor strike.

![Figure 19: Cartoon depicting President Goodluck Jonathan removing the fuel subsidy](http://latuffcartoons.files.wordpress.com/2012/01/goodluck-jonathan-fuel-subsidy-end-nigeria.gif)

On Monday, January 2nd, a day after the implementation of the fuel subsidy removal, demonstrators gathered in Kano and Eagle Square in Abuja, which was built in 1999 to symbolize Nigeria’s Fourth Republic. The following day, tens of thousands of protesters

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100 At UI in July 2011, the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) hosted a panel discussion with participation from faculty, former Petroleum Minister Professor Tam David-West, and activists concerning the impending fuel subsidy removal and the necessity of resisting what was seen as a dubious ploy on the part of the federal government. Though in theory, many Nigerians agreed with the necessity of curbing corruption within the sector and that the $8 billion subsidy could be directed elsewhere, most questioned making ordinary Nigerians bear the brunt of these measures, when Nigerian legislators and other government officials receive unprecedented salary and perks. As one protester asked on Twitter, “How can you ask people to tighten their belts when you run an obese system?” (quoted in Gillian Parker, “Nigeria Paralyzed by ‘Occupy’ Protests over Gas Prices,” *Time*, January 9, 2012, accessed July 1, 2015, [http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2104053,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2104053,00.html)).


102 The venue is also the site of government inaugurations, national parades, among other events.
gathered around the country in major cities, Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Gombe, Bauchi, Kaduna, Benue, Abia, and Edo. In Lagos, Nigeria’s most populous city and the most prominent of the Occupy Nigeria nodes, protesters marched from the NLC Secretariat in Yaba to Gani Fawehinmi Freedom Park in Ojota, which was named in honor of one of the federal military government’s greatest critics. The Lagos movement was led by the labor unions, the Joint Action Front of civil society groups, ASUU representatives, student union leaders, social media-based organizations like “Enough is Enough Nigeria,” and several popular young Nigerian entertainers such as Banky W and Seun Kuti, son of music legend Fela Kuti. Over the next two days, larger demonstrations continued in at least twenty-five cities, and protest actions were shared on Facebook and Twitter in real time (see Figure 20 below for a map of Occupy Nigeria protests). The following week, on Monday, January 9th, the trade unions did in fact embark on a full-fledged labor strike, shutting down the domestic and international airports as well as banks, markets, and gas stations before President Jonathan partially rolled back the inflated fuel prices as a condition for the end of the labor strike.

Students at UI were actively involved in Occupy Nigeria demonstrations from their genesis. It is important to note that Occupy Nigeria occurred during a lull in academic activity, as it took place in the midst of both a holiday recess and an ongoing faculty strike, which closed down the campus before the New Year. With students mostly outside of Ibadan, social media platforms, especially UI students’ own Facebook group were critical to facilitating their participation in Occupy Ibadan, just as social media was crucial to coordinating protest activity within the broader population. Students used the student union Facebook group as their primary medium for information dissemination, deliberation, and planning during Occupy Nigeria, after nearly a year of vibrant, at times rancorous, activity on the page. The activities (both online and offline) that I examine here illustrate that what might have appeared to be the inconsequential minutiae of political infighting in the last chapter, nevertheless helped foment a culture of online and offline political practice among students. Previous debates on the Facebook group prior to Occupy Nigeria helped shape relationships of trust among frequent posters offline, such that when direct political action was deemed necessary, deliberation and actions could proceed. In the case of the fuel subsidy removal, students debated the issue and ultimately joined the larger protests, assuming leadership roles beyond the campus. The relationships between online debate and activism, and offline mobilization and direct action among students did not exist in a vacuum, as there were similar political debates happening in the broader Nigerian social mediascape, which had been ongoing before, throughout, and in the aftermath of the Occupy Nigeria events. Students’ (documented) participation in Occupy Nigeria spanned the nearly two weeks of activities outlined above. Several students, who were trusted posters on the Facebook page or recognized student politicians—often both—emerged as chroniclers of the activities of student “activists” within Occupy Ibadan, and it is their testimonies that I draw upon here. Their testimonies came in the form of hundreds of texts and visual posts, most uploaded on the go by mobile phone. These messages helped the student community stay connected to the organizing associated with Occupy mobilizations, despite being dispersed around the country due to the holiday recess and, in my own case, due to having returned briefly to the United States. Unless otherwise noted, the context of the posts that I discuss below is the UI Facebook group, which students used as their primary forum for discussions on Occupy Nigeria among their peers.
Figure 20: Occupy Nigeria sites of protest
On Day One of the general protest (Tuesday, January 3rd 2012), some student “protesters,” the term students most commonly adopted to describe themselves and other participants, many of whom were student union politicians, posted text and picture updates throughout the day. Some adopted the form of news reports, others that of testimony, concerning Occupy activities in Lagos and Ibadan—“live from the protest ground,” as one student put it. Most posts and comments had the specific goal of building solidarity among students, eliciting emotional support and prayers for participants, correcting misreports, and persuading other students to “join the train” in spite of a small yet vocal group on the page who doubted the merits, in both aim and tactics, of the budding movement. Amid concerns about violence against protesters by the police, precipitated by the circulation of the image of a young man killed in the capital of Kwara State in the southwestern region, Ilorin, students attempted to allay fears by reporting that there was no looting or bullying people into participation. Instead, they reported that more passive forms of disruption like bonfires and road barricades were being used, as is commonly the case in urban unrest. One student uploaded a picture of himself, standing in a crowd of at least a hundred young men and carrying a handwritten poster that read, “We Say No to Increase in Fuel Price. We are No Fools.” The crowd pictured there, comprised of UI students convened by the UI Student Union and a “coalition” of other local students and youth, had gathered at the Oyo State Secretariat to give the Federal Government a seven-day ultimatum to restore the subsidy “or else.” The UI Student Union President, T Cool, later addressed the crowd. Other threads were posted concerning the logistics of communication. For instance, with rumors that the government through the National Communications Commission would block BlackBerry Messenger service in an effort to undermine the national protests, students resolved to make use of other social media messaging platforms.

On Day Two (Wednesday, January 4th), students circulated on Facebook more updates about the “success” of the previous day’s activities to prime non-participants about the growth of the movement in major cities around the country. The core group of UI students participating in Occupy Ibadan, perhaps a dozen, posted live updates throughout the day. Adopting a different approach from the previous day, in which activities were concentrated at the state government house, students gathered at the UI campus gate in the early hours of the morning and took their activities to various neighborhoods in Ibadan including Agodi Gate, where one student uploaded a picture of hundreds of young people gathered, some carrying handwritten posters with the caption “Ibadan youths occupy the streets.” Yet another protester recounted that “spirits were high” and that the people of Ibadan showed their support of students and the protests by walking, singing, and sharing with them the “common goal” of restoring the fuel subsidy. There were reports shared via Twitter of violence against protesters, presumably students, by soldiers “beating and molesting” them in the University of Ibadan and Polytechnic Ibadan area. The Student Union also called on students to meet the following day for a “3-in-1 massive rally” of students, trade unions, and the “good people” of Ibadan.

Over Days Three and Four (Thursday, January 5th and Friday, January 6th), the largest reported days of protests before the full labor strike, students assembled not at the campus gates as in the previous two days, but at Sango Junction (a major transportation hub and midway point between University of Ibadan and Polytechnic Ibadan) where protesters then traveled to the office of the NLC trade union at Agodi Gate in the heart of Ibadan, before a larger rally at Iwo Road, the busiest and most extensive transportation hub in Ibadan with public transportation routes extending all over the city and nation. The move to designate the major urban site as the
launching point for their activities marks a critical shift in students’ political practice in the context of Occupy Ibadan. From that point, student leaders assumed a more decisive role in the leadership of the movement beyond the campus, and began to more consistently and collectively frame their participation as both a “patriotic” duty and a form of stewardship on behalf of “the masses.” As one student appealed to fellow students, “If you are not here with us on the street, you better join in spirit because God is about to bless those that are the Voices for the Voiceless Nigerians. This is a patriotic call that must be answered.”

Over the next days, student protesters would upload hundreds of mobile phone images of their activities. In several pictures posted, students posed hugging police officers, a signal that, in the eyes of UI students, attitudes toward the protest had shifted even among authority figures that had reportedly brutalized protestors in previous days. One student’s caption to such an image read, “Kudos to the Nigerian Police Force. The Police ensured maximum protection of protesters…It’s everyone’s cause” (emphasis added). Other live-action images showed respected campus leaders addressing large crowds of demonstrators. Continuing with this genre of postings that posited student leaders as caretakers for the masses, the Public Relations Officer of the Student Union posted a picture of a protester taking time from other disruptive activities to feed a “starving citizen” at Iwo Road, who barely was supporting her own weight at the location by the side of the road where she likely collapsed from hunger and heat exhaustion. The setting of the image was a familiar sight/site to students, as the roundabout is a well-known location where the disabled, maimed, and homeless settle to beg for food and money from the thousands of people who pass through the transportation hub daily.

Beginning on Day Five, Saturday (January 7th), activities shifted to preparation for the general labor strike that was to begin the following Monday. Students posted image and text updates from the Ibadan Cultural Center in Mokola, a large assembly hall, where Oyo State representative from Ibadan North Constituency, Honorable Awoleye Dada, called a town hall meeting. The arena was filled to capacity with hundreds of people, and text updates reported that the UI Student Union President again addressed the gathering “on behalf of the Nigerian youths in Ibadan.” An accompanying uploaded mobile image featured a contingent of hundreds of students from around the state carrying placards and “making their voices heard.” In the lead-up to the general strike that Monday, the leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) issued a press release disassociating itself from the impending labor strike, a move that most students on the Facebook page and other social media sites like Twitter viewed as a betrayal of the student movement and wider national interests—in addition to being a complete reversal of the position taken by NANS in the 1980s and 1990s, which I described in Chapter One. The following Monday (January 9th) and Tuesday (January 10th), Days Six and Seven of Occupy Nigeria, student protesters continued their active leadership in protests around Ibadan, which included bonfires, road barricades, and confrontations with soldiers in some parts of town. I will discuss this leadership in the labor strike in more detail below. Nevertheless, despite the calls for “Aluta” and “Revolution” on the page, the rapid spread of the protests nationwide was quickly truncated by President Jonathan’s decision to reduce the official fuel

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103 This was not so elsewhere in Nigeria and, notably, in global Occupy protests such as New York, Denver, Cyprus, and London where the police attacked encampments. The Nigerian Police reportedly attacked with tear gas thousands of young protestors, who camped out overnight on donated mattresses in “Liberation Square” in Kano.
price from N157 to N95 instead of the prior rate of N67 per liter that Wednesday, Day Eight of the unrest, after which trade unions called for the end of Occupy Nigeria.

**Deliberations on Consensus and Trust**

While the activities discussed above signal some of the ways UI students translated campus politics into leadership roles within the larger protest movement, Facebook posts from the beginning days of Occupy Nigeria show that the impetus among students to participate, vicariously and virtually, if not physically, was the result of consensus developed over time through extensive debate across many threads of conversation. These messages offer an intimate perspective on the genesis of the Occupy Nigeria mobilization among this group of political actors and the techniques advanced to build consensus, evaluate the emerging movement, and frame action and inaction.

An early approach to generating support for the Occupy Nigeria mobilization appealed to the “crowd effect,” or the allure of being among the multitude of participants in what was understood to be a critical historical moment in the nation’s history. For instance, after the first day of protest, one student posted an aerial image likely downloaded from social media of three bonfires preventing motor traffic on a Lagos road, with a caption that read, “Lagosians [Lagos residents] have started theirs, we have done ours here in Ibadan. What are we waiting for? […] Join any coalition group in any state you are and let’s together fight for our right.” Here, indiscriminate participation was encouraged (“join any coalition group”). Other posts similarly featured images of protests around the nation without commentary, suggesting that the optics of the protest itself were enough to incite thought and action. Yet, among a vocal minority on the page, the budding protest was “seriously uncalled for.” As reports poured in from Lagos and Ibadan on the first day of protest, one of the most prominent dissenters posted that, “Ignorance is a serious problem affecting us in Nigeria. The real issue is that [the] Federal Government over the years has created loop holes for corruption in the fuel sector.” A few other students agreed, sympathizing with the position of the Nigerian President, who they argued did not create Nigeria’s problems with corruption. For this group, the subsidy removal was the “right step” and evidence that the government was “looking at the future.” Even while recognizing the hardship its removal would impose upon everyday Nigerians, Occupy Nigeria detractors still insisted, “you can’t make omelets without breaking eggs. People must make sacrifices.” Proponents of this view urged students to “be reasonable” and patient in support of the government rather than taking immediate and “radical” actions against them: “Let us see what they can do with the money before nailing them. […]To lead isn’t easy.”

It is important to note that, even students that supported the Occupy Nigeria protests generally agreed with detractors that the fuel subsidy itself was financially wasteful: the subsidy had been put in place to principally benefit elites exploiting the petroleum sector for personal gain. Ideally, removal of that fiscal crutch would free up millions of naira for desperately needed social infrastructure. However, the divergence in opinions hinged on the different ways students understood both the role of political leadership and trust. Despite the hypothetical merits of streamlining expenditure in the petroleum sector, most students considered President Jonathan’s approach to be especially harsh. In their view, removing the subsidy that made fuel accessible for the majority of Nigerians without first implementing “palliative measures”—a phrase that gained purchase among students and the broader public during this period—was especially cruel. As one
student noted, the President “could have upgraded the [domestic] refineries for operations while only little fuel will be imported. By this, the pain will not be as much as it is now.” Another argued, “It is simply shooting the wounded Nigerian people, child, mother, and father, at the firing squad like they did to Ken Saro-Wiwa instead of bringing to book the few who milk us fat through illegality in the subsidy feed. Build refineries then remove subsidy! Cut government luxurious spending then tell the governed to [do so]. Charity begins at home.”

The comments reflect a common sentiment among posters on social media, that the choice to tackle corruption and excess within state expenditure by targeting a policy that benefitted the majority of Nigerians rather than excessive executive and legislative pay allowances, exposed the government’s allegiance to elites as opposed to the majority. As one student posted, “If he [President Jonathan] was serious [about] making a sacrifice, he could have cut the wages of his aids, ministers, and other political appointees as a start to save money for Nigerians then others follow.” The statement “if he was serious” identifies the underlying issue of trust towards political leaders in Nigeria. While most students agreed that the removal of the subsidy made logical sense, the corruption rampant within the political system did not engender trust towards leaders. Numerous comments to this effect were posted. One student wrote, “He who is not faithful over little, much cannot be delivered to his hands”; another cautioned, “Let’s hope very well that the money [saved from the subsidy removal] would not be diverted to their pockets”; while yet another stated more bluntly, “Nigerian leaders cannot be trusted and you know that. This is Nigeria, please wake up.”

Over time, the majority of students that supported the Occupy protests began to associate detractors of Occupy Nigeria, who supported the “anti-poor” subsidy removal policies, with class differences within the student population. Pointed comments to this minority accused them of enjoying a “comfortable” life, “uninformed” about the hardships of life for most Nigerians because they themselves were members of the elite class and “collecting allowances” from home. One student alleged, “Maybe your father or someone close to you is part of those few benefitting from the removal, and so you don’t know how it feels to take a bus of 200 Naira [US$1.33] where it was supposed to be 50 Naira [US$.33].” Another student made a similar argument that the personal comforts of students should not outweigh their understanding of the realities for most Nigerians, just as the implementation of fiscally “good” policies by political leaders should not outweigh considerations of the survival possibilities of the majority of the governed. One student posted the following message:

The fact that some of us are comfortable to an extent doesn’t mean we should close our eyes to the plight of others. Fine, I am for the removal of the fuel subsidy but certain measures should be put in place. […] Believe me sincerely, we [in support of the protests] are thinking of the multiplier effect this is going to have on the economy. Some people were practically begging for alms at major bus terminals in Ibadan yesterday. […] Fine removal of subsidy is good, so that at least our generation would be free from servicing foreign debts, but lets do first thing first, remove subsidy from government officials, government should stop promising jobs, let them create infrastructure, when they do that we would create more jobs. (Emphasis added)

104 In what is widely considered to be one of the darkest moments in Nigeria’s political history, the Federal Military Government hanged Ken Saro-Wiwa, an environmental activist for the Ogoni People of the Niger Delta.
These sentiments indicate a complete breakdown in trust of leaders, which scholars working on in Nigeria have shown to be deeply embedded within the country’s social fabric (Smith 2010). A complicating factor, in this case, is that many of the students taking aim at the political system aspire to become political leaders themselves, while feeling ambivalent about the possibilities for meaningful political transformation within the current political system. The sentiments similarly reflected a growing belief among students on the Facebook page that the removal of the subsidy was poor policy and leadership and, in fact, protesting the removal of the subsidy was tantamount to removing a more pressing subsidy: “the masses subsidizing the government and the rich” with their hardship and sacrifice. Over time, many of the initial detractors “joined the train” and the tenor of posts concerning the merits of Occupy Nigeria began to more consistently frame the necessity of participation with the claim that the masses were subsidizing the rich, allowing them to acquire wealth at the expense of ordinary Nigerians, through both legal and illegal means. As a post from one student, who likely “re-broadcast” or cut and pasted the message from elsewhere on the Internet noted, “This is more than a quest for economic rights, it [is] a quest for justice. This is not about fuel subsidy, it is about the ruling class’ war on the Nigerian masses.” The appeal to “justice” targeted common grievances against the Nigerian state; they also tied the necessity of action to the reality that most Nigerians were already suffering and, thus, had little to lose.

On the evening of the second day, a group member uploaded a disturbing picture of a young man, the apparent victim of a fatal gunshot wound, collapsed on the concrete, an arm stretched above his head, with blood staining his white t-shirt. The controversial image of what was deemed the first death of Occupy Nigeria served as a stark reminder of the significant dangers protest activities presented to students, many of whom had no practical experience in protests on this scale. This danger would soon be re-affirmed over the next days with reports of brutality against protesters coming from around the country, in particular, Abuja where an encampment of sleeping protesters was violently attacked by police in the middle of the night. While students generally expressed horror at the killing, the caption accompanying the image read, “Give me liberty or give me death! Unarmed, defenseless protester killed in Ilorin. They’ve killed us already with increase in fuel price hike because many will not survive it. We will continue to March peacefully until GEJ [Goodluck Jonathan] is kicked out of office and fuel price hike is taken back to status quo. No turning back” (emphasis mine). Here, accepting the subsidy removal is equated with accepting death at the hands of the state: the ever-present risk of death at the hands of authorities, but also a more insidious social death from those who would otherwise perish from the burden of “precarious life” (Butler 2004).

**Mediating Participation**

The previous section focused on online debates among students concerning offline participation in Occupy Nigeria. I now turn to the participation of students in Occupy Ibadan demonstrations. It is important to note that online deliberation and (offline) participation were

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105 On the first day of the labor strike, another young person was reported dead in Lagos by a police officer. Students cautioned one another to be careful while interacting with state agents: one student warned, “Reminder: A word of advice for those embarking on a protest. Please don’t be violent in nature when pursuing your goal. Our Law enforcement agencies are ‘not smiling’ when it comes to this.”
not understood as mutually exclusive categories of political practice. Students displayed an inclusive understanding of the relationship between online and offline practices and activism: practices and debates activated with, as opposed to mediated by, social media were not prior or incongruous events to those taking shape offline. Nor were they separate phenomena. The online deliberations and circulations of text and visual propaganda via social media platforms were themselves recognized as important components of participation in Occupy Ibadan, which frames social mediascapes and the “actual” world as fluid, interconnected landscapes. Participating in urban demonstrations and commenting, posting, sending solidarity, and even challenging popular ideas on the Facebook page, among other online spaces, were all recognized as valued contributions to Occupy Nigeria specifically, and the ongoing polysemic political project that is Nigeria more generally. As I argued in the last chapter, the imaginative and logistical openings of social media like Facebook afford this kind of multi-modal inclusivity of forms of political practice. However, political practices through social media also exposed the exclusions inherent within activist practices in Nigeria.

As much as Occupy Nigeria made claims to inclusivity and a unified “we,” logistical and financial barriers hindered many students from participating beyond commenting online. I highlight these obstacles before discussing some students’ leadership in Occupy Nigeria, as a reminder that the reasons for not participating were not always ideological. In the first days of the protests, students used the Facebook group to share information on planned demonstrations, and posted live updates on the moving locations of the protest grounds. However, some students who desired to participate in the protests complained that they lacked “T fare” (transportation money) to get to school, no doubt due to increased costs associated with the fuel subsidy removal. This meant that many students had to settle for online discussions and support for their “comrades” in the street. There were other, more insidious forms of exclusion. The protesters, who took to the streets in cities around Nigeria and were captured in images on the UI Student Union Facebook page and news media, were overwhelmingly young and male. Certainly, women and other age groups were involved, if not in some of the physical acts of protest, in the circulation of propaganda and in support via social media. However, protests in Nigeria—like local and national politics—are encoded as “too confrontational and turbulent for women to participate in” (Ukeje 2004, 609). Among UI students, young women were frequent commenters and posters of information concerning Occupy, but they were rarely the catalysts for organizing offline political action.

A telling exchange between a female student and several male students concerning the logistics of the public demonstrations reveals some of the specific risks and challenges protest activities present to women, who are already marginalized within campus and national political life. In a post, which presented information on the time and location of the protest on the first day of the labor strike, a female student who was actively involved in many of the previous week’s Facebook discussions asked if there were cabs for “some of us” to get to the protest location. The specific use of “some of us” as opposed to all of us might suggest that this question is indirectly asking if provision had been made for female students to participate in the arduous and

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106 Ukeje (2004) offers a useful history of women’s participation in social protests in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region. Women’s protests have historically been gender-exclusive and deliberately non-violent, emphasizing women’s identities as mothers and wives, for example, through the singing of songs and carrying of household utensils.
dangerous tasks associated with protest (i.e. treks across long distances; the construction of physical barricades; exposure to tear gas, bullets, and smoke; violent conflict with police and other protesters, etc.). Special provisions of this kind were not without precedent. In June 2011, when UI students blocked Awolowo Road and walked from the campus gates to the PHCN (Power Holding Company of Nigeria) office in Dugbe in downtown Ibadan, the student union bus and other campus buses were commandeered specifically to shuttle female students over the 14-kilometer (8.7 mile) distance to and from the office. However, on the occasion of Occupy Ibadan, this proposal was met with jest and dismissal. One student wrote, “No cab, everywhere is dry, except where protesters are, you go trek [will you walk]?” while others more bluntly advised her to walk (“Na foot sure pass” [your feet will carry you] and “Trek down”). In a more suggestive response, another student wrote, “I go carry my bike go, do you care for a ride? Lol.” The female student replied, “Don’t worry I will support those in my area.” The exchange illustrates the specific risks female students face and the seemingly innocuous gendering of public protest and political praxis more generally in Nigeria, which circumscribe the possibilities for women to engage, as they might desire. It is important to keep this in mind as I discuss the transformation of some student politicians into political organizers beyond the campus: that these are predominately young men is not merely a function of interest, but impediments that are structured into the logics of political practice, which make the participation of women both logistically difficult and socially objectionable.

Despite the recognition among students of many different kinds of political practice as productive contributions to the Occupy Nigeria protests, their chronicles on the Facebook group through both visual and textual media suggest that participation in the urban demonstrations was particularly transformative. Protesters posted pictures to the group that showcased the many different “everyday” activities within Occupy Nigeria. These included hundreds of pictures of crowds gathered around various parts of Ibadan, bonfires billowing smoke into the sky, and throngs of people carrying placards. Within this testimonial photography, student protesters began to develop a practice of posting images of themselves involved in “active leadership,” by which I mean live-action photographs which suggest a central role in organizing protest activities. In one mobile upload, the Chairman of Zik Hall, Toba, posted an image of himself under the bridge by the Oyo State House, perched on the shoulders of another student and addressing a large crowd with a loudspeaker. In another image, “Colossus,” then a recent UI alumnus and former Chairman of Zik Hall, was similarly sitting atop the shoulders of a fellow student and the SU President T Cool, arms outstretched above his head, as he addressed a crowd of several hundred at transportation hub, Iwo Road in Ibadan. The activities that these images chronicle and the circulation of these images themselves suggest that the leadership practices associated with Occupy Nigeria mobilizations were akin to a political “coming of age.” Inasmuch as these images were posted as both chronicle and archive to illustrate to members of the student body online that elected representatives were assuming a significant role in the protest movement taking shape, they also appeared to indicate another mark of progression in campus leaders’ political training, which further concretized the professional identities that campus politicians were attempting to form through campus leadership. The activities represented in the images also seemed to refine, as only practical experience can, students’ understanding of their own political practice and ideas about the political futures of Nigeria, the student collective, and themselves as individual actors.
The campus leader in the first image, Toba, wore a t-shirt with the text “Zikite” emblazoned on it in block letters. This shirt, which he produced in his capacity as Chairman of Zik Hall, was the official t-shirt of his administration, which all residence halls annually produce. It is unlikely an accident that he choose to wear the Zik Hall t-shirt, which functioned as a gesture of affinity towards Nigerian students and youth more generally. At the same time, the t-shirt was a specific marker of being a student at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria’s most respected institution, which is its own form of distinction among the other young people that were occupying Ibadan. After the incident, in a telling act of self-representation, Toba adopted the image of himself addressing the crowd with a loudspeaker as his profile picture on Facebook. Many other campus leaders followed suit. In displaying themselves engaged in active leadership roles in the Occupy protests, students appeared to align themselves with the “common man,” standing with the majority of Nigerians rather than the political and economic elites with whom Nigerian university students once sought association. Another student leader, Franklyn, the erstwhile Public Relations Officer (PRO) discussed at length in the last chapter, wrote of his participation in Occupy, “Let him who is a man of the people stand with the masses.” He apparently identified with this sentiment so much that he modified his Facebook name by inserting “Masses” between his given first name and surname. These choices of representation and identification suggest that students understood their participation in the Occupy Nigeria protests as a manner of assuming the mantle of responsibility for Nigeria’s political transformation. This “greater cause” appeared to galvanize the student political community around the common movement, even mitigating some of the divisions that had sidelined campus leaders like Franklyn in the previous months.

“I Just Have To Be On The Street…”

UI students interpreted the organizing roles that they assumed in Occupy protests as evidence that young people—and students, in particular—are destined, in a messianic sense, to “reclaim” the nation from gerontocratic elites. The national protests, which in the moment seemed to have the prospect of growing into a sustained social movement, appeared to actualize in the present the future leadership that the concept of the political training ground anticipates. Live updates from the protest grounds and calls to other students to join local demonstrations lent a prophetic dimension to the mobilizations, as protesting students used religious moralism and notions of civic responsibility to frame the “duty” to sacrifice for the nation. Amid the posts detailing the logistics of Ibadan protests and more substantive deliberations on Occupy Nigeria as a strategy for political change, students frequently contributed prayers and other religious messages to the Facebook group, such as the following message posted before a scheduled demonstration: “Now is the time to know who owns Nigeria: Lord we ask for your mercy and grace today. Be our guide and our guard. Help us as we occupy and take back the ruins of Zion (Nigeria) from our oppressors” (emphasis added). Student also remixed, or altered, the stanzas of the national anthem, common Christian prayers, and protest songs to galvanize students, as chants are typically summoned to do in the course of protest. Among UI students, the directive “Occupy until something happens!” also gained currency, which itself remixes a common refrain within Pentecostal churches, “Pray until something happens.” These articulations of civic duty and political struggle in the vocabulary of Pentecostalism, calls to mind what Ruth Marshall describes as the “political productivity” of religion in Nigeria, and the ways in which “power, redemption, sovereignty, and other political themes are staged in its practices and professions of
faith” (2009, 3). Yet, as I discussed in the last chapter, such discourses around religion also had the potential to be divisive within the multi-faith student community.

Student discussions on the Facebook group also emphasized the importance of the here-and-now as a pivotal opening and potential turning point in Nigeria’s political history, which required immediate action—in the streets—from young people. As one student implored in a post to the group, “The time is now! I am sure you wouldn’t sit back and watch Nigeria burning and see your people dying of pains. Rise up now and be part of the hope of 9ja [Naija, or Nigeria]!” These calls appealed to students’ understandings of history including those associated with historical eras in other geographic areas and radical traditions. For instance, referencing the American Civil War, which students associated with the emancipation of Africans enslaved in the United States, one student posted on the first day of the full labor strike, “To sit in silence when they should protest makes coward of men—Abraham Lincoln.107 We can’t wait to Occupy Nigeria. *Aluta continua.*” In my conversations with Nigerian students, U.S. slavery, the Civil Rights Movement (which most coupled with Martin Luther King, Jr.), and the election of Barack Obama were particularly evocative historical moments. This was due in part, perhaps, to their awareness of my identity as African-American, but also the narrative that a country, which once enslaved African people, would go on to elect as president Barack Obama, who students claimed as a fellow African. Students derived hope from their understanding of this trajectory and participated in Occupy Nigeria with the hope that Nigeria could undergo its own social and political transformation. To this end, they appealed to “dreams” and “hopes” of Nigeria’s political future. A student participating in the Abuja demonstrations on the first day of the labor strike posted a live update on the Facebook group of activities “taking shape in Abuja as NLC distributes materials for the protest.” He tagged this update as a “Report from Nigeria of Our Dream (NOD).” NOD as an acronym affords the imagined Nigeria of students’ dreams a materiality, which suggests that participation in Occupy Nigeria was akin to an “awake dream,” by this I mean, a projection of the political imagination for the future that is actively produced and inhabited through practice in the present.

Occupy Nigeria, for students, was also a specific demand that young people, who comprised the overwhelming majority of participants, assume control of a collective destiny being denied them by elders. The General Secretary of the UI Student Union better known as AAA posted a rather ordinary picture from an unexpected “protest ground” on Tuesday, January 10th, the second day of the full labor strike. The image was filled with a small crowd of roughly fifty people, mostly young children, who had erected a makeshift roadblock of bamboo planks, tires, and wooden materials. One child holds a bunch of leaves in her hand—a symbol of peaceful protest—and another raises a long stick in his hand, with no apparent target. Young people, including small children, teenagers, and young adults are gathered in a circle in what appears to be a central part of the street and neighborhood, given the presence of several boreholes, where members of the community fetch water in gasoline kegs. As AAA describes in his caption of the image taken with his mobile phone, “Even these kids of age ranging between 5-8 know that it’s time to take their destiny into their hands, as they ‘obtain’ any passerby going through their street” (emphasis added). The use of the language of “their street” and “take destiny into their hands” calls to mind my discussion of urban citizenship and “rights to the city”

107 Though sometimes attributed to Abraham Lincoln, especially on the Internet, this quote should be attributed to American poet, Ella Wheeler Wilcox, from her 1914 poem, “Protest.”
in Chapter One. It would not be strange to see some young people assembled in this manner on a normal day, but not this volume, not with this form of roadblock, and certainly not blocking what would normally be a passageway for vehicle traffic. Perhaps this is the desired after-effect of Occupy Nigeria: young people embracing public spaces as their own in new ways, overlapping old patterns of disruption, but with the purpose of making new kinds of claims for political belonging. Thus, what was once a disruptive act is re-articulated as a form of self-determination.

For students who were unable to engage in these forms of public occupation, the visual and textual testimonies of peers engaging in demonstrations and the dialogue posts concerning Occupy Nigeria stimulated had a similar effect. As one student noted in a Facebook post, seeing students in Bodija, a central neighborhood in Ibadan, oppose gun-wielding state security agents without fear made him understand the political power and potential of students and other young Nigerians. As he put it, “Nigerian Students get [have] power o! […] People no dey [do not] fear gun again o! GOD bless all the good people of Ibadan and Nigeria as a whole.” Yet another member of the Facebook group posted that viewing images of elected campus leaders, in particular, was further evidence that this specific group of students were leaders among peers:

Watching the protest by University of Ibadan students, I cannot but be proud of my school…When the Occupy Ibadan protest is mentioned, UI students must be mentioned unlike some other university in Lagos that just goes around parading themselves with ill-gotten money, half naked clothes et al. After them go say na only book we sabi [they say that we only know books]…1st and the best no be for mouth [is not just talk]!

These posts could be read as a form of campus nationalism, which is common among students across the different universities. However, this commentary also conjures the perception that students at University of Ibadan, in particular, still carry the weight of being labeled an “elite” and “colonial” university focused majorly on “reading book” or academics. This assertion carries the stigma that UI students are not as politically astute as other institutions such as regional rival Obafemi Awolowo University or even neighboring Polytechnic Ibadan, where students are well-versed in student unionism and local politics, as I discussed in Chapter Two. Here, the refrain that UI is the “first and the best,” which usually refers to academic prestige, is amplified and made more meaningful by the prominence of UI students within broader political struggles beyond the campus. As one student noted in a Facebook message, which captures a common sentiment among UI students, “Well done for reinstating the name University of Ibadan in national consciousness. [I] am proud to be a student.”

“…Because I Have No Dual Citizenship”

Though participating in Occupy Nigeria, in urban demonstrations and online in the UI student union Facebook group, seemed to help some students discover a sense of their potential as a generational cohort to affect political change, it also revealed their ambivalence towards

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108 The link between campuses and nationalism is two-fold. Universities in Nigeria, like elsewhere, generate pride among current students and alumni. Suggesting that UI students are contributing more to the protest movement than students at “some other university in Lagos,” in this sense, could be read as an articulation of school pride. However, campuses in Nigeria—particularly the first generation of universities—also correlate with different strands of nationalism within Nigeria (e.g., that of Obafemi Awolowo, that of Nnamdi Azikiwe) and relationships with the colonial/post-colonial state, which I noted in my discussion of University of Ibadan history in Chapter One.
Nigeria as a political project, as well as the desirability of various forms of political practice with which students were experimenting in the context of campus politics. In a particularly revealing discussion on the Facebook group during the first days of Occupy Nigeria, students debated the relationship between two categories of leadership, “activists” and “politicians.” In particular, students considered whether the integrity of the self-declared activists organizing the protests could be trusted. In a Facebook message, one student argued, “Please don’t get used by so-called activists who will just use you to gain more popularity, who will blast the FG [federal government] on the open and collect their share [of money] at your absence.” To this, another student responded, “So you can’t trust activists but you can trust politicians…what an irony.” This exchange is worthy of additional consideration here, as it illuminates an important concern among students in regards to forms of political leadership and the tensions between the identity students have long held (activist) and the emerging identity opened up with the transition to constitutional democracy (politician).

The first post expresses a suspicion, quite common among students and the broader population, which is that those purporting to be “activists” do so, not primarily because of a commitment to political ideals. Rather, they organize strikes and demonstrations because agitating against government authorities can be financially lucrative to “activists” willing to be co-opted, often after much collateral damage in the form of injury, legal sanctions, and even death. Such individuals make a business out of creating disturbances for the inevitable pay-off by the government. This underbelly of political activism is associated with the undermining of the power of both labor unions, including academic and non-academic staff, and student unions, whose politics, some say, have shifted more towards extorting money from the government for its leaders than achieving their professed aims of social justice (Ihonvbere 1997).

The second post explores an important distinction that has been woven throughout this dissertation: that is, between “The Politician” and “The Activist.” Some of the differences between these two roles are obvious. The Activist seeks political transformation in opposition to the system, while The Politician represents the system and makes changes from within, on behalf of the constituents that have empowered him or her. The question of trust vis-à-vis these two roles reflects a more general anxiety about changes within Nigerian politics that have both expanded and complicated the political landscape after the return of civilian rule. Of course, these roles are not mutually exclusive as many activists make the transition to being professional politicians: as I discussed in Chapter Three, Radical Brother, the former president of the UI Student Union and NANS, who was elected in 2011 and 2015 as Oyo State Senator is an example of this. Nevertheless, the politician remains a relatively new professional role within civilian politics with considerable skepticism associated with it. Activists, most commonly linked to Nigeria’s labor and student unions, at least, have an extensive track record of fighting for the Nigerian people against the government, while politicians have no such pattern, looting the government during the military era and continuing that pattern with the Fourth Republic. Nigerian students seeking political training in this fraught terrain negotiate the discrepancy between self-positioning (as activist, politician, or both) and “being positioned” vis-à-vis how these identities are more broadly understood (Hall 1990). As campus politicians, students are tasked with leading other students, experiences through which many seek to secure future careers as professional politicians. At the same time, student union leadership has been tied in the past to the adoption of “activist” as both an identity and set of political practices, since being incorporated into the government as a politician was not a viable role under military rule.
Students demonstrated differing associations with these political identities and their associated approaches. For instance, though elected student leaders often openly embrace the title of “activist,” being (positioned as) an activist carries significant risks and rewards, both social and individual. Some students merely employed the aesthetics and practices associated with activist traditions in discourse (e.g., using the term “comrade”), tone (e.g., the call-and-response style associated with protest chants), and method (e.g., the strategic use of protests and other forms of demonstrations). However, not all student “activists” or activist organizations are as trusted as others. Days before the start of the full labor strike, when the national leadership of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS) released a public statement in support of the removal of the fuel subsidy by the Federal Government, urging labor and student unions to suspend the proposed strike, their legitimacy as representatives of student interests were immediately questioned. As one student opined, “Who made him the NANS president [anyway]? Me I no know am o [I don’t know him]. Because I can’t remember me voting for him.” Perhaps justifiably, students and other observers assumed that NANS executives collected bribes from the Federal Government in exchange for their support, a common allegation against that organization and unions more generally.

The provocation that self-proclaimed activists should not be trusted generated a number of additional responses that are worthy of consideration. Aside from these comments’ illumination of the lack of trust towards leaders, whether activists or politicians, these debates raise more fundamental questions about the class composition of Nigerian society, both in terms of how classism frames students’ interpretation of events and the necessity of action, but also how class (and other social) distinctions reproduce the conditions that require intervention. In a Facebook message, one student cautioned, “This is the mentality that has made us powerless for so many years. If people in the Arab nations thought like this, do you think they’ll enjoy as many victories as they have in recent months. So what exactly do you suggest? That we fold our arms and let these people continue to treat us anyhow? For ordinary people to suffer for the sins of a few?” This comment captures the concern among many students about the challenges the fuel subsidy removal would pose for themselves personally, as well as for other Nigerians. Another student more deliberately suggested that those who disapproved of the protest had a political understanding that was rooted in class privilege and social immaturity:

I will like it if [name redacted] can take some lessons in international politics not mere Zik Hall politics…. Just imagine the untold hardship this would bring to the citizenry; sachet water is now 10 Naira, cost of watching matches at a viewing center will increase, go to a cybercafé and you will notice the increase, prices of goods, go to a salon to make a hair-cut and you will smell pepper [be enraged], food prices are now out of reach. … If you’re able to survive it, it does not mean millions of other Nigerians can, so don’t be selfish. Subsidy removal is a script that has been written long ago by IMF and World Bank and Okonjo-Iweala [the Minister of Finance] is here to execute it. She was sent from these Bretton Woods institutions to carry out a mission. So unlike you […], I can’t cope with subsidy removal and that’s why I must stand against it with others like me and victory is ours In Jesus Name. (Emphasis added)

This comment, which was supported by dozens of likes from other posters, offers a sophisticated analysis of the interconnections of politics at the local, national and international levels, economic interests, and even prophetic faith. The post also conveys a sense that students, in their
capacity as campus leaders, imagined themselves to be societal leaders and advocates for the broader population—a self and collective positioning, which deeply inflected the forms of students’ political engagements and decision-making. Other members of the group expounded further on how privilege inflects political analysis and positioning: one student wrote, “Some people lack insight, understanding and wisdom. Maybe it’s because they are still being fed and catered for by their parents. They will understand more when they start earning money and having responsibilities,” while another posted, more dismissively, “All those babies that graduated or are still in school should shut up. Make your fathers put money for other children’s school fee.”

Reimagining Belonging

The previous discussion among students about the sincerity of leaders and the tension between activism and politics relates to the more fundamental question of how students understand the relationship between themselves and society. This relationship has been theorized in both academic and folk discourse as the relationship between “town and gown.” Throughout this dissertation, I have thought about this historically (Chapter One) and in the context of contemporary Ibadan campuses as “the university and the city.” Students explicitly analyzed the linkages between the UI campus and Ibadan and students and society during deliberations on which issues students should focus their activism: issues that are specific to the concerns of students, or those that have broader societal relevance. Prior to the fuel subsidy removal, campus leaders were planning to protest the strike of the faculty union, ASUU, and to request that the federal government meet lecturers’ demands in order to avoid school closures. However, with the start of Occupy Nigeria, student union leaders re-directed their organizing efforts toward the fuel subsidy removal. This decision stimulated a series of telling exchanges concerning the move, which some students criticized. One student, in particular, registered his disapproval in a post, which received nearly seventy comments from other students. In the message, the student condemned the decision of T Cool, the SU president, to support the Occupy protests on UI students’ behalf:

The recent protest led by the UI SU president […] to the Oyo state government house under the banner of reinstating the subsidy is condemnable and uncalled for. […] If the protest were to be about sending a message to use part of the fund to subsidize education further and for the government to share in our sacrifice by reducing their salaries and grants, it will at the least had made some sense. But coming out in the name of UI student to put forward a position which is not shared by the entire UI student is way beyond the hook and should be condemned by well meaning UI and Nigerian students at large.

Most students disagreed with this logic at least partially. Though most were in support of the Occupy protests, some did take seriously the idea that “ASUU demands [be placed] on the table also.” Still, most students participating in the conversation viewed the idea of not participating in the Occupy protests as choosing to “hide under your bed,” or worse, refusing to free themselves from bondage, as one student posted, “If people were like you during slavery, we will still be on sugar cane farm.” Moreover, students urged the commenter and “his kind” to consider that, while the ASUU strike was a sectional issue that affected university students, the removal of the fuel
subsidy represented a related but wider problem “that affects everybody including our parents and lecturers. If you’re not okay with it shut up and let others do it,” as one post urged.

The point I am making here is that this exchange should be understood as a recurring deliberation among students concerning whether or not their responsibilities as leaders are limited to campus and their immediate interests, or issues that more broadly affect society. Students seemed to favor a view of students as social stewards. As one student noted in a Facebook post to the group, campus issues and the fuel subsidy removal were not mutually exclusive concerns. But, given the far-reaching impact of the subsidy for most Nigerians, students had a responsibility to focus on this broader issue, rather than their narrow interests:

The protest is not for we students, we’re representing all well thinking Nigerians: the market women who are now stuck in their trade; the majority of Nigerians who have fallen further into poverty; the struggling students who would be forced to drop out because of lack of funds; and so on. [...] We are students, learned people. We should gather and organize this protest because if the unlearned are pushed to the wall and become the ones to do it, the violence would be unbearable. [...] We need these protests. We aren’t ok with subsidiary removal. He is sacrificing the masses and I mean the real masses for the offenses of the “cabal.” Jonathan has failed us. (Emphasis added)

One obvious tangible outcome of these conversations was the broadening of student leadership beyond the walls of the campus to Ibadan city, as student politicians addressed crowds of young and old, and co-organized mobilization efforts with the local network of political activists, which were actions documented with mobile phones and shared with the student Facebook community. Student protesters understood the widening of the scope of student political activities as a civic duty. As one student, who uploaded a live-action shot of the protest, captioned the image, "I just have to be on the street, [because] I have no dual citizenship." This comment signals a frequent frustration I encountered among students concerning their lack of geographic and socioeconomic mobility with the absence of citizenship elsewhere (namely, European and North American countries). The comment also suggests that the burden of governmental negligence and diminishing socioeconomic opportunities in Nigeria are among the reasons that students feel compelled to take to the street in order to improve the conditions of citizenship in Nigeria. Thus, participation in the Occupy protests is understood as a process of actualizing more meaningful ways of experiencing belonging in Nigeria, which position students as the key catalysts for processes of transformation as the “learned” strata of youth.

Though the desire for social transformation was clear among students active in the Facebook conversations, the nature of desired transformations was less certain, as the removal of the fuel subsidy and the government response raised serious questions for students about the form and very existence of Nigeria’s “democracy.” As one student noted in a Facebook post:

We say we run a democracy in this country yet the masses can’t be allowed to run a yieldful [sic] protest. Imagine the police brutalizing fellow citizens as if in military regime. This Nigerian Pharaoh has refused to listen to his followers. See how he’s oppressing the poor masses while he and his fellow politicians are enjoying. And we call this a government by and for the people?

The message indicates disappointment, common among Nigerians, about the current form of Nigeria’s democracy. After decades of fighting for a return to representative governance, for
many, the democratically elected Goodluck Jonathan government—at least in its response to the popular protests—was reminiscent of former military leaders, who similarly took a strong-arm approach to protests and other forms of critique. Given the apparent continuities between the military and purportedly post-military eras (i.e., unresponsive leadership and continued hardship for Nigerians), students began to question the desirability of democracy itself. In the early days of the Occupy Nigeria protests, a student posting on the Facebook group cautioned against a sustained protest movement: “We need to think twice, long protesting could lead to hijacking of this our democracy by the military. What do we want, military ruling or our just growing democracy?” Though the post intended to remind students of the historical pattern in Nigeria of violent protests, usually around elections, providing an opening for military coups, others later contemplated whether the return to military rule would not, in fact, be preferable to the current political system. Facebook posts on this issue considered whether Nigeria needed a “good military government” and if a “good” military government was even compatible with the “modern era.” Several students came out explicitly in support of military rulership. One posted that, “[Former Libyan dictator] Gaddafi is far better than Goodluck” and, yet another, stated:

Looking at how expensive our democracy is, I think a sensible military government will be ok. Why do we need democracy? Government of the people by the people for the people my foot. [...] Nigeria’s democracy is a type where a corrupt minority rule over angry majority. [...] Lest I forget, in democracy, the citizens have the right to vote their leaders? I laugh in tongues! [...] What’s the difference between rigging and coup? I see, coup is always bloody? So goes for elections in [Nigeria] now. [...] Bring the boys in khaki jooooo [please] and let them lock these thieves doing polithief?

These comments mulling the relative advantages of military versus civilian leadership, and dictatorship versus democracy capture the fundamental tension embedded within the concept of the post-military, which guides this dissertation and political life in Nigeria since the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999. Despite the imagined promises of democracy, in Nigeria, the era of civilian leadership has been plagued by “minority rule,” electoral “rigging” and “polithief,” or malfeasance on the part of elected leaders, which have stalled the types of political transformation students and most Nigerians envision. For students, participation in Occupy Nigeria—in urban demonstrations and in online deliberations—afforded opportunities to translate campus political leadership to new domains, not just in service of their political training as future leaders, but also in the interest of meaningful change in the here and now. At the same time, the national Occupy protests raised new questions and ambivalence about appropriate modes of political action (activism versus politics) and the desired forms of Nigeria’s political system (military versus civilian; democracy or an alternative).

Nearly two weeks after the labor strike was called off and Occupy Nigeria effectively ended, students were still fiercely debating the individual and collective lessons of the fleeting Occupy Nigeria movement. One student wrote on the Facebook group that the nation needed a “critical mass of new Nigerians...those who selflessly and genuinely occupied streets and parks to get up and occupy [elected] positions.” The comment anticipates the potential of the campus

109 Since 1966, Nigeria has experienced seven military coups, not including at least one coup that was planned but not executed in 1985.
to cultivate a new kind of leader for the future and magnified students’ sense of their own collective power in light of the possibilities Occupy Nigeria seemed to open up. One student posted the following provocation:

The moment for the Nigerian Harmattan is now, following the Arab Spring. It is really the youth of this country who will have to liberate themselves and not wait for old folks [...] to plan it for them or call them out. Our grandfathers in their 20s fought an imperial colonial power and won independence. And some of us...were [beat] by soldiers on the streets of Lagos in the fight against military rule. Its time for those in their 20s and 30s to get the Nigerian Harmattan going. Citizens actually do have power.

Though there was great disappointment among students after the national labor unions suspended the general strike, especially since they did so without achieving the full reinstatement of the fuel subsidy, the post indicates that students were already imagining the prospects for continuing Occupy Nigeria—here reconceived as the Nigerian Harmattan—in the future and within the campus environment. Having witnessed the effects of popular protests, some students noted that they were “tired of meetings” and hoped that student union leaders retained “energy to champion the occupying of our universities.” Foreshadowing the demonstrations that would become “Occupy University of Ibadan,” UI President T Cool confirmed the prospects of campus occupation with the terse Facebook message, “Occupy Universities coming soon, if the people in power fail to take action on this current [academic staff union] strike.”

**Occupy the University**

After weeks of intermittent power supply and the rationing of electricity to residence halls, shortly before midnight on April 23, 2012, UI students had finally had enough. Electricity was limited to a mere three hours per day in the dorms: one hour between 6 AM and 7 AM and two hours between 10 PM and midnight. But, the announced two hours of electricity for that particular night were punctuated with darkness every five minutes—annoying fluctuations, which interrupted plans students had to iron clothes, or study without candlelight ahead of final exams. A crowd of approximately fifty male students from Nnamdi Azikiwe residence hall took off running and shouting in the direction of the Department of Maintenance, where the university generator is controlled, and eventually reached the main campus gate. Over the next two days, hundreds more students would join them. In the campus-wide protests branded “Occupy University of Ibadan,” students forcibly closed the gates to the campus and physically occupied Awolowo Road, the major roadway beside the main gate, bringing to a halt both academic and commercial activities in the area. Occupy University of Ibadan or Occupy UI was a deliberate extension of Occupy Nigeria and a fulfillment of the promise by students, who participated in the national protests, that they would bring the occupations from the city to the campus. Where Occupy Nigeria offered students the opportunity to experiment with “activism” as a mode of political practice, Occupy UI afforded experimentation with both “politics” and “activism.”

Having returned to Nigeria after the end of Occupy Nigeria, I was also positioned to directly

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110 In West Africa, the Harmattan period from December to February, when dusty winds from the Saharan region travel south, is analogous to the spring season elsewhere.
observe and participate in Occupy UI’s physical occupation of campus and urban spaces, in addition to activities on the UI student union Facebook group.

The morning after the crowd of young men ran off to the Maintenance Department, I received an urgent text summoning me to take part in the campus gate protest. Makeshift roadblocks of tree limbs, rocks, and even a building signpost had been strategically placed around the road network to interrupt vehicular access. As I made my way by foot to the gate, I ran into Roadmap. He confirmed that there was a protest at the gate, but that he did not support the action because demonstrations had proven to be ineffective. We walked to the nearby Central Administration building, where he and other campus politicians were meeting with administrators. Over the next two days, elected leaders would participate in similar closed-door meetings with university authorities concerning a solution to the infrastructural crisis. In stark contrast to these negotiations, and overlapping them temporally, hundreds of students sustained the demonstration at the main campus gate and surrounding area of the city. In this section, I discuss three spatiotemporal sites of the occupation of the University of Ibadan: the activist protest at the gate; the negotiations between student politicians and administrators; and the moment when both activism and politics converged (see Figure 21 below for a visualization of the various sites of Occupy UI). Here, I am interested in making sense of the imaginative and material afterlife of Occupy Nigeria, particularly as it relates to the political possibilities students associated with activist and politician modes of political action.

The Campus Gate

By the time I reached the main gate, the protest, ongoing for at least some hours, was still active. Like the roadblocks erected around campus, student activities at the campus gate sought to halt academic activity and any form of movement. The atmosphere, as is often the case with urban and campus protests, shifted unpredictably between focused indignation and carnivalesque fun, the pendulum swing between these two extremes at times threatening conflict that would seem at odds with the assumed intentions of the demonstrations. On both sides of the entrance, students struggled with about a dozen campus security agents to lock the gate with a long stick and cloth. By the main road, some yards away from where a large crowd was gathered and blocking traffic, a police officer from the Sango Station nearby shouted at students to return inside the campus. The presence of the Nigerian Police Force was unusual for campus demonstrations, but expected since students blocked the roads leading to Samonda, Bodija, and Ojo, effectively thrusting the campus protest into the jurisdiction of the city’s authority. A group of a dozen or so students floated between the two groups on the main road and at the campus entrance singing protest songs and noisemaking to keep the tempo of the agitation high.

As students broke out intermittently into song and even dance, everywhere you turned students were engaging in conversations about why they were there, what the source of the problem was, and what could be done. I walked around the protest ground, listening to many of these conversations. “2 weeks to exam. No light. Then tsunami,” I heard one student lament. Tsunami, or flunking out of school, is a common fear among students, made worse by the lack of electricity to study. I asked a group I found myself in the midst of what their demands were, what would make them call off the demonstrations. “Eighteen hours of electricity or we will continue.” Some refused to disperse until the Vice Chancellor addressed them. This particular demand would prove untenable, as we later learned that the VC was away in Japan on official business. Dami, a former elected member in the Student Legislature, sat down next to me on the
Figure 21: Occupy University of Ibadan sites
curb where I was observing the scene, and informed me that the power situation was a conspiracy by the Vice Chancellor’s opposition, an effort to “spoil” his administration. Two male students who knew Dami joined us then. One joked that I looked “too neat for protest” while the other pointed out that my bag was “too big for protest.” I was reminded, then, that the protest was largely a male affair, with few female students scattered around. These observations about my attire, which were made in jest, are nevertheless consistent with gendered patterns of participation in the prior “Occupy Ibadan” movement and public demonstrations more generally. Such protest activities also stand in contrast to elected campus leadership positions, where women are typically elected as “political wives” into the positions of Vice President and Assistant General Secretary—subordinate positions that have become akin to an unspoken gendered affirmative action policy.

The Student Union Building

When the crowd finally dispersed in late afternoon to return to their respective dorms, I joined a stakeholders meeting in the Senate Chambers of the Student Union Building. The newly elected Student Union President, Edosa, stood behind the desk at the front of the room where he addressed a group of roughly fifty student leaders. The President shared the outcome of the meeting earlier at the Central Administration building, where a small group of leaders, including Roadmap, met with the Deputy Vice Chancellor. He said the university blamed a fault within the power grid on the fluctuations, and promised that, when all was fixed, there would be twelve to eighteen hours of light daily. The students present expressed doubts about whether authorities could be trusted to deliver on this promise, since this explanation appeared to be the “same old story.” Then, a group of university administrators, the Division Officer of the national power company, the Deputy Police Officer of the neighboring police branch and campus security personnel joined the gathering to address the student leaders, presumably to quell the brewing unrest at the gate by appealing to student representatives. The serious engagement of authority figures with students serves as a reminder that campus protests in Nigeria have been harbingers of major national political unrest, so state and university authorities take them very seriously. The authorities all stood before the group of students and took turns addressing them, some noting that they had “children among” them to break the ice. Doling out facts and figures that students noted in writing, the power company delegate explained the technicalities of electricity generation in Nigeria and why the distribution network could not adequately supply UI needs. The men addressing the students were much older and presumably more powerful than the students, but the tone was conciliatory. With the threat of unrest looming, they seemed to fear the group gathered there, and appealed to them to douse campus tensions.

Student politicians understood the leverage this threat of violence offered them and pressed the power company delegate and authorities with questions, which were evaded with promises far into the future. The conversation eventually lagged, as students challenged the sincerity of the reports from the officials. One respected student politician stood on a chair and confronted the power company delegate with his own calculations for power generation, which showed that the math didn’t add up in the official’s earlier presentation. The student wanted to know who was at fault in the situation. He then noted, with a hint of warning in his tone, that “we assume your sincerity now, but we will check the facts, which means that your integrity will be lost forever if we find out you’re lying.” In both cases—the protest at the gate and the closed meeting with authorities—we see at work both the activist stance of students ready to take to the
streets to protest not only on their own behalf, but on behalf of all citizens affected by the poor power infrastructure. And yet, too, using rational analytical steps (i.e. your math doesn’t add up), we also see how students attempt to expose the corruption and lies that are the standard mode of operation of “adult” politicians, while still trying to negotiate with these interlocutors.

**The Congress**

The next day, activism and politics converged in the form of the Congress, a public gathering convened by the Student Union to deliberate on a way forward among the entire student body. Amidst the shouting, it was difficult to hear what individuals were saying. The purpose of the Congress was to make decisions and pass a resolution on the issue, but the set up was not conducive to this task. UI student politicians used the standard trappings of public gatherings: elevated positions above the gathered crowds, and magnified voices through loudspeaker. The Secretary of the SU attempted to conduct an on-the-fly opinion poll of the crowd of hundreds of students to find a common path, between the student leaders and the protesters at the gate. Below, his words could hardly be heard. Still, the Secretary asked a series of questions, to which the students gathered below were meant to respond “yes” or “no” answers. “Should students go home?” NO, the closest part of the crowd shouted. “Should we suspend classes?” YES, they responded. It became impossible to move forward with this kind of ad hoc deliberative process, which excluded the majority of the assembly. Eventually, large sections of the assembled students began to abandon the meeting in frustration, and returned to the campus gate against the wishes of student politicians, who were trying to deploy negotiation and diplomacy rather than disruption to bring an end to the impasse. However, without the cooperation of the hundreds of student protesters at the gate, who were operating independently of the campus politicians at that point, the deliberations between politicians and protesters would prove futile, as would attempted negotiations between student leaders and the administration.

At the campus gate, the occupation continued to escalate. The previous day, Occupy UI protests were featured in the national and international media. Having lost the faith of their constituents, all the student politicians could do was to attempt to douse the flames at the protest ground. Perhaps sensing the inability of the campus politicians to control their constituents, the university administration took a hardline approach, and decided to close down the university and evacuate students from residence halls. Students refused to leave, but the administration sent in security agents to forcibly evacuate dorms. With the threat of disciplinary action, nowhere to go, and an indefinite school closure, this put an end to what students hoped would be the genesis, or perhaps the re-elaboration, of a mass political movement, anchored by student leaders, which they had attempted with occupations of the nation, the city, and then the university campus. In the end, neither activism nor politics appeared to succeed in their desired aims.

**Experimentation and Ambivalence**

Throughout this dissertation, I have used the concepts of “ambivalence” and “experimentation” to describe the practices that make up Ibadan students’ political training. In this chapter, I discussed two types of ambivalence. The first is a tactical ambivalence among students concerning the type of political approach that best suits the challenges of contemporary Nigeria. Students articulated this as the choice between “activism” against authorities as in the
case of Occupy Nigeria and Occupy UI demonstrations, and “politics” in the form of elected leadership, which campus politicians wager will offer opportunities to more directly shape decision-making in present and future positions of responsibility. The second is a more existential ambivalence concerning the desired form of Nigeria’s political system, whether the current form of constitutional democracy or an alternative. In this space of political liminality, between the military past and the possibility of a post-military and/or democratic future, student politics is necessarily a practice of experimentation with different ways of doing politics, some of which or none of which may pan out in the future. The two occupations discussed in this chapter signal that, even though students attempt to do politics beyond conventional party politics, alternative approaches were generally not successful in achieving their stated aims. For instance, in this chapter, we saw how students’ attempts to leverage elected leadership positions to negotiate with authorities stalled when administrators threatened leaders with discipline and school closures, as was the case with Occupy University of Ibadan and is often the case with campus protests. However, despite what might seem to be the failures of both Occupy Nigeria and Occupy University of Ibadan in achieving their goals, UI students believed their participation in both occupations offered valuable experience and a sense of their potential as a generation to be the catalysts of Nigeria’s transformation. Occupations of the city and the university also offered hope that a different kind of politics is indeed possible in Nigeria, as well as a working through of how this could be made so under the challenging political terrain of contemporary Nigeria.
CONCLUSION:
Students and the Future of Post-Military Nigeria

In 2013, Sudanese telecommunications mogul and philanthropist Mo Ibrahim penned an editorial warning of the political consequences of Africa’s generational “disconnect.” In the Introduction to this dissertation, I described this as the discrepancy between a “young continent” where 60 percent of the population is under the age of 24, and “old leadership,” whose average age is around 70. Ibrahim also writes of ageing leaders, with little seeming interest in “passing on the reins of leadership,” instead choosing to ignore the concerns of young people and bar them from meaningful participation in political processes. These were among the reasons that Ibrahim created the eponymous “Prize for Achievement in African Leadership” in 2007 to offer an incentive to incumbent leaders to leave political office once they complete their terms. The annual prize carries with it a cash award of $5 million—with an additional $200,000 awarded annually for life—for any democratically elected African head of state, who voluntarily leaves office at the end of his or her constitutional tenure. In its eight years of existence, the prize was not awarded four times, due to a lack of deserving recipients. This underscores the rarity, still, of peaceful regime change in Africa: violent uprisings in which young people play key roles are often the only way to displace entrenched and ageing political leaders. Recent cases of such violent uprisings led by younger generations include Tunisia (2011), Egypt (2011), Burkina Faso (2014), Democratic Republic of Congo (2015), and Burundi (2015).

The focus of this dissertation has been precisely on the generational gap that has pushed young people in Nigeria to navigate social and political marginalization by seeking campus leadership positions from which they could engage with politicians at the regional and national level, as well as with national student organizations, in order to advance agendas for change. In Nigeria—the continent’s most populous nation—achieving stability, or not, in intergenerational transitions in political leadership will have far-reaching consequences for the region. In the preceding chapters, I chose to examine higher educational institutions as critical sites in which young people are enabled to practice leadership and other forms of engagement within the campus and national political arenas, rather than focusing on their exclusion from broader political processes. In particular, I explored the idea embraced by students that the campus is a “political training ground.” For much of the history of Nigeria, and indeed most African nations, the campus has been an important conduit for national leadership, as well as struggles against unpopular regimes. Since the advent of the Post-Military Era with the transition to constitutional democracy in 1999, the campus in Nigeria has seen a revitalization of this role, after many years of institutional policies strategically de-funding and de-radicalizing them. I have argued that this development suggests three critical transformations: (1) a shift in the imagination and practice of politics; (2) a future-oriented view of politics as a “profession” in which one can be trained over

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time; (3) and, finally a re-articulation of the purpose of schooling, which positions the campus as a critical node within urban landscapes and national politics.

In the remaining pages, I consider the implications of each of these arguments as they relate to the ways in which Nigerian students imagine their individual futures and the political future of Post-Military Nigeria. I also reexamine the key conceptual framework of this dissertation, the notion of the political training ground, and its promise of a desired future in which Nigerian youth meaningfully participate in political processes. I do so in the awareness that a kind of paradox within campus politics emerges in my analysis, which calls into question the possibility of students’ aspirations to transform political leadership after decades of military rule, given the sometimes close relations between student and national politicians. I also discuss developments that have transpired in the three years since I concluded my doctoral fieldwork, particularly the 2015 election of a former military head of state, General Muhammadu Buhari, which on the face of it would seem to invalidate any notion of a definite transition to “post” military rule in the country.

The Horizon of Student Politics

Following the controversial aftermath of the “Occupy University of Ibadan” student protest of April 2012 with which I concluded the previous chapter, UI students were forcibly expelled from the campus for over a month. The closure of the school, after nearly three days of demonstrations at the campus gate, had a demoralizing effect for students, who were still recovering from the failure to achieve the aims of the January 2012 Occupy Nigeria protests. From their homes, students reflected on their latest occupation on the Student Union Facebook Group page. One student posted the following message:

God bless those who invented OCCUPY. Look at how easy it was to pass our message across the WORLD without a single form of violence. […] At least after Occupying UI, I can now Occupy my HOUSE. Maybe if OCCUPY ASO ROCK [the presidential villa] is needed, I [will join]. So OCCUPY this life ‘til you die, so that you can OCCUPY your COFFIN without REGRETS.

Posted by Gbenga on April 28, 2012

Though UI students were disappointed with the decision of authorities to suppress the protest, this statement is representative of one of the ways they gave meaning to the experience of occupying their university after staging public protests in the city, and signals a critical lens with which to evaluate the implications of the analysis presented in this dissertation.

According to the post, even without dramatic and measurable results, “occupation” taught this student important political lessons. For instance, the student is able to imagine a Nigeria devoid of the hostilities and, often, bloodshed that attend formal political processes such as electoral proceedings. He learned that direct student political action is capable of putting Nigeria on a global stage and attracting a different kind of media attention than the nation is typically granted, given the major conflicts of the past two decades, the Niger Delta insurgency (1998-present) and domestic “terrorism” actions by Boko Haram (2002-present), both of which have cast Nigeria as perpetually embroiled in violent crises. Most relevant to the discussion here, the experience also gave the student a new sense of self-worth and a sense that he could, in the future, claim a different place in Nigeria: in domestic spaces, in spaces of gerontocratic
authority, and in life. The post is also tinged with humor, and ultimately moves from politics to the personal, experiential level of “occupying” one’s life, and eventually one’s coffin. It is a somewhat ambiguous humor, however, as the statement leaves one in the uncertainty as to whether its author is giving up on representative electoral politics altogether, and reducing the lessons learned from the Occupy movements to direct action and the personal realm.

In my June 2012 encounter with Roadmap, the Faculty of Arts President (discussed in the Introduction), I pointed out how he was among the students who were skeptical that protests alone could lead to systemic change, given Occupy Nigeria’s failure to achieve its goal of fully reverting the removal of the subsidy on petroleum products. This was among the reasons why elected campus leaders adopted a different approach and leveraged the disruption of the protests by students, like the one who posted the Facebook message above, in closed-door negotiations with administrators to improve campus conditions on behalf of their constituents. These negotiations, too, were foiled by the school closure, but student politicians like Roadmap anticipated that the experience would still prove useful in the future. In our conversation, Roadmap described the meaning of the campus as a “political training ground” in a manner that is worth revisiting here. He said:

Leaders in twenty years will be the ones leading campus now […] I’m working out the script that I will act out later and playing politics in the real sense. I’m learning all the strategies that I will use later. […] Soon, the current crop of leaders won’t be there. Young thugs won’t be there. New blood will come and being part of the political elite will be a disadvantage.

Though the perspectives of Gbenga, the Facebook poster, and Roadmap differ in critical ways—one is grounded in activism against authority while the other leverages influence derived from elected office to negotiate with authority figures—both share a common future horizon.

The Facebook message suggests that, despite their limitations, the thwarted protests offered students preparation for future forms of “occupation,” which I have suggested throughout this dissertation points to a new kind of political practice, one giving students the audacity to both literally and figuratively “occupy” spaces of authority in ways that had previously seemed impossible. It also leaves open the possibility of a retreat from organized politics altogether. Roadmap, too, envisions campus leadership providing a “script,” or template, for participation in “real” politics in the present, but especially the future, when he says this generation of student politicians will displace the political “elites” and “thugs” currently in power. His statement is more unequivocally optimistic about participation in politics, but as a student leader he has already begun to move in that direction, whereas Gbenga’s success along that road may be more uncertain, and the risk of failure therefore greater. Both statements, nevertheless, capture what is the most politically and conceptually consequential dimension of student political activities, as students understand them, and the notion of the political training ground: their futurity.

At the same time, the path to leadership of some campus politicians may instead point in worrying ways to an excessively familiar past in Nigerian politics. In Chapter Three, I examined the election of the first president of the resuscitated University of Ibadan student union, T Cool. Far from being a charismatic and motivated prospective leader with a clear political vision, at the outset he seemed a rather weak candidate, soft-spoken and not particularly articulate, one who in some ways could be see as having been propped up and primed by elders and stakeholders who
can better maneuver a candidate of their own making than someone with an agenda of his own. The campus, which from one point of view appears to be the kind of training ground where future leaders can gain confidence as they learn through experience and apprenticeship, can also be the site where entrenched leaders come to groom docile politicians or followers for the national arena.

**Futurity and Precariousness**

The concept of futurity indicates the orientation of action and the imagination toward the yet-to-come. Recently, the term has been used to analyze the intensification of collective anxieties concerning what appears to be a bleak future of continued economic and social upheavals. Athelstan and Deller associate this preoccupation with the future with the “landscape of crisis” and the “broken” present brought on by the global financial crisis of 2007-08 when national governments bailed out large financial institutions in what is regarded as the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression (2012, 11). In a similar fashion in the Introduction, I discussed the re-appearance of precariousness as a conceptual framework indexing the normalization of insecurity in recent years, and how vulnerability to the global economy, particularly among the current generation of youth, incited the most significant popular mobilizations since 1968, a kindred “moment of change” and global struggle (Kornetis 2014). Precariousness in relation to narrowing opportunities for social mobility among graduates has been a prominent narrative within European anti-austerity protests, the Arab Spring, Occupy mobilizations, and the Nigerian demonstrations I discussed in the last chapter. In introducing the activities of post-military Nigerian students within this broader context, my intention was to signal the catalyzing potential of the unfavorable, changing economic conditions of students for political action in Nigeria, as well as its resonances with the experiences of youth elsewhere.

However, in a less conspicuous manner, the experience of precariousness also re-orient the manner in which we understand the future and ourselves in relation to it. The future looms heavily in discourses concerning youth, political movements, and their intersections in the contemporary moment. This is to be expected: both youth and forms of activism are logically coupled with considerations for the future. Youth is a liminal social category that anticipates the eventual transition of adulthood in a normal life cycle; it is predicated on change. Political activism, too, seeks to change political, economic, and social conditions, to forge a future that is different from the present. However, for Millennials, who are the most remarked-upon sufferers of the economic downturn in recent times, the future is less commonly discussed with this kind of expectancy. In fact, it is commonly held that this “unluckiest” generation is “without a future” altogether. The question of how young people will prepare for a future that does not exist has generated significant scholarly and even more popular attention. Youth activists explicitly embrace the withdrawal of future prospects as an organizing rubric, as in the case of Spanish

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113 There does not seem to be a clear consensus on a precise definition of the term besides its having to do with the future as a kind of modality of thought and action, as opposed to merely being a relative temporal marker and projection from the present (see Muñoz (2009) and Grosz (1998), for example).

protesters, who mobilized under the mantle “Youth Without Futures” (Juventud Sin Futuro) during the anti-austerity movement launched in May 2011. In this sense, futurity—like precariousness—aligns the activities of Nigerian students with larger patterns, particularly struggles advanced by youth around the world for the possibility of a future that appears elusive.

In The Time of Youth: Work, Social Change, and Politics in Africa, Honwana (2012) argues that the inability of young people to imagine the future is a by-product of “waithood,” the normatively liminal status between childhood and adulthood, which is no longer a “passing” transitional stage but rather an “undeviating” permanent condition for youth in Africa and increasingly around the world. Precariousness, Honwana writes, foreshortens the time horizon of young people, “imprisoning” their ability to develop long-term self-projections beyond the immediate needs of the here-and-now (29). In a way, this dissertation has examined political training in this light, as a range of practices encompassing elected leadership, activism and political networks that are essentially survival strategies for students of largely under-resourced higher educational institutions. Disruptive protests were the most effective mechanism for students to pressure authorities to improve basic infrastructural conditions and to forestall the implementation of policies such as the introduction of unprecedented fees, which would place higher education further out of the economic reach of young people. As the willingness of UI students to risk discipline and bodily harm in both Occupy mobilizations suggests, the possibility that urban and campus protests could drastically improve the degraded conditions of everyday life made participation worth the associated risks. Among aspiring politicians, including those professing altruistic intentions for public “service,” even the most routine affordances of elected leadership positions—for example, access to the student union bus or the provision of catered food at official meetings—lessened the financial burdens many negotiated while schooling. Even the more ambiguous issue of voluntary participation in clientelistic relations of sponsorship with godfathers like Radical Brother can be interpreted in this vein, since the cultivation of such relationships enabled students of limited means to participate in organized politics—a field in which monetary resources are required for participation.

Though these aspects of campus politics were propelled by the exigencies of the present, the point I emphasize here is that they are equally bound to the future, as the very premise of the campus as an arena for training itself assumes the significance of politics beyond its immediate implications. The concept of the political training ground is especially compelling for this reason. By all indicators, the future remains discouraging for young Nigerians, educated or otherwise.115 At the level of secondary education, roughly fifty percent of secondary school-aged young people have access to education. At the tertiary level, this figure drops to ten percent. Even among graduates, the unemployment rate is a staggering fifty-four percent for youth. These are among the reasons that scholars (of youth in Africa) have suggested a retreat of hope among young people. However, despite Honwana’s analysis of the prolongation of youth as producing an inability to imagine the future beyond the present, political training offers a practice for imagining the future in new ways, which suggests the persistence of hope rather than its absence. The existence of hope for the future among my Nigerian interlocutors is worthy of note, and suggests that discourses of social inertia ascribed to youth may not entirely capture the ways in

which young Africans approach and understand the challenges, as well as openings, associated with coming of age in the contemporary moment.

The futurity of students’ political thinking links to what has been the second major argument of this dissertation, which is that the routinized practices of “professionalization” associated with political training offer the possibility of realizable trajectories in leadership in a social context in which such pathways are scarce, and access to them often obscure. The comments of Gbenga the Facebook poster and Roadmap signal this point: despite the failure of Occupy Nigeria and Occupy University of Ibadan to achieve their stated aims, they were essential to evolving students’ thinking and practice of politics for forms of political leadership and engagement anticipated for the future. The trajectory of “producing politicians” discussed in Chapter Three also demonstrated that students involved in campus politics understood their participation to be a long-term process of training in the practices of politics, as well as an apprenticeship, of sorts, into enduring relationships with more experienced politicians, such as stakeholders and godfathers. Much of these activities revolved around electoral proceedings, which were the key avenue for campus politicians to practice for the future. Students developed public personae and forms of self-representation through political media and address, which are important to securing elected office on campus and in expected futures as career politicians in the national arena, where competency in such performative modes is valued. Elections also provided the occasion for establishing useful relationships with political elders, who offered access to needed financial sponsorship and mentorship in the course of official tenure and beyond. It is also worth noting that, even among the electorate not involved in organized politics as candidates or stakeholders, regular participation in the rituals of electoral politics that are substantively transparent created a sense that “free and fair” political proceedings are indeed possible, in a context in which elections are usually marred by misconduct and conflict. As such, within this framework of incremental political “production,” the specific outcome of elections and mobilizations may be important in the moment, but in some ways is secondary to the opportunity it offered students to gain experience for their desired futures. Thus, the seeming failures and contradictions of present modes of engagement still allow for the possibility that different, better outcomes can be achieved and, more importantly, that the lessons derived from such experiences work to refine students’ thinking and practice of politics for the future.

**Post-Military Paradoxes**

To the extent that campus politics anticipates a future (or futures), the substance of the future is less certain. The practices described throughout the course of this work present a convoluted and, in some ways, discouraging picture of the ends and implications of student involvement in campus politics as an entry point into politics at the national level. If the “professional” politician is a new aspiration among students in the Post-Military Era, this figure looks strikingly similar to the current crop of political leaders. The ascription of prestige based on wealth and conspicuous consumption of goods like imported cars and bottles of champagne among Lead City University “party chiefs” described in Chapter Two resembles the forms of excess common among Nigerian political and economic elites.\(^{116}\) The involvement of students in

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\(^{116}\) According to local press coverage, at the April 2014 wedding of the daughter of former President Goodluck Jonathan, the bride and groom received over 80 luxury cars from invited guests, who in turn were gifted customized
electoral violence at The Polytechnic Ibadan, also discussed in Chapter Two, suggests that youth continue to use non-peaceful means to achieve their goals, often at the behest of political godfathers. It also points to patterns of behavior that are consistent with, rather than disruptive of, the forms of violence associated with national party politics in Nigeria. At the University of Ibadan, which I have indicated is the site where the idea of the professional politician was most developed, campus politics similarly appeared to mimic, as opposed to offer an alternative to, broader political processes. As I discussed in Chapter Three in the context of elections, UI students adopted the techniques of national actors, producing political media that resembled the aesthetics of professional political campaigns at great expense to students. These costs often necessitated what was perhaps the most troubling aspect of student politics and the one that most closely resembled national politics: relationships of apprenticeship with political godfathers in Oyo State, which sometimes involved mentorship but were almost always predicated on financial sponsorship and “gifts” like televisions, satellite dishes, and other goods that are classic examples of clientelism.

These practices beg the question: if student politicians are indeed engaged in practices of apprenticeship for the future, to which form(s) of leadership and politics are students being apprenticed? Is campus politics preparing students for the kind of paradigm shift that Roadmap anticipates, or are they merely preparing students for incorporation into “business as usual” within national politics? The position that I have taken in this dissertation is that student politicians are preparing for both possibilities: that the current way of doing politics may persist, but also that their desire for a new kind of politics is possible in Nigeria. As I stated previously, preparation for both a kind of realpolitik and more utopian projects, with which students experimented in the course of student elections, mass protests and, increasingly, in online forums, is a form of pragmatism many students believe to be necessary for negotiating political life in contemporary Nigeria. For now, it cannot yet be determined whether campus politicians are “just like” corrupt politicians because only the future will tell in which ways individual intentionalities will articulate with what is possible in particular places and times. Also, the outcomes will depend on the ability of future leaders to mobilize like-minded constituencies that might oppose the entrenched clientelistic alliances of Nigeria’s “politics as usual.” Moreover, the question represents students as a monolithic constituency, rather than individuals with various, perhaps even competing, motivations for aspiring to political leadership, which could evolve over the trajectory of political training, for better or for worse. This preoccupation also obscures a more fundamental point, that critiquing national leaders and authority figures while at the same time forming relationships with those engaged in the very practices that such critiques target is a perfectly reasonable strategy for learning and effectively playing “the game” of politics in Nigeria. After decades of being activists against the (military) government, and being punished for this oppositional position through expulsions, detention, injury and death, students are attuned to the advantages of being within the corridors of power.¹¹⁷ Many of the campus

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¹¹⁷ Punishment of student leaders has continued in the Post-Military Era. In a recent incident from August 2014, two student union leaders at Obafemi Awolowo University in southwestern Nigeria were suspended for four semesters.

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politicians that were my interlocutors insisted that elected office is still the most impactful way to affect change in the civilian era since power remains concentrated in executive leadership and given the absence of meaningful checks from the other branches of the government and civil society. Students also did not seem to find it especially useful to frame leadership purely in ideal terms (i.e., altruism versus pragmatism), as these do not provide a realistic rubric for political transformation.

Thus, what appear to be the more inconsistent and troubling aspects of student politics (i.e., financial relationships with national political actors; “abusive” forms of political discourse in the student union Facebook group; and the tension between activism against the government and the desire for future incorporation into government leadership) are perhaps the inescapable paradoxes of the post-military political space. In spring 2015, as I completed this dissertation, General Muhammadu Buhari was inaugurated as a civilian, democratically-elected president—more than three decades after seizing power as military head of state in 1983-1985, and after unsuccessfully running in every civilian election since 1999. In 2011, Buhari publicly vowed not to contest political office in the future, amid popular suspicions that he was an ageing politician desperate for power, and a Muslim fundamentalist in a time of militant Islamic insurgency. One election cycle later, the Nigerian daily newspaper, The Vanguard, referred to the “cultic” devotion to “the People’s Dictator” as Buharimania, or the “preference for a retired military dictator with a reputation for rigidity, integrity and honesty [Buhari] over a well-educated, humble and methodical democrat [former President Goodluck Jonathan].”

How do we make sense of the narrative that it is now only a “disciplined,” “incorruptible” retired military general who can “clean up” Nigeria and set Nigeria’s fledgling democracy on the proper course? More than any other recent political development, the re-ascendance of Buhari in the era of civilian leadership complicates the very notion of post-military Nigeria. However, it also brings into stark relief the complicated terrain that students are learning how to navigate through campus politics—and, ultimately, why the campus must be understood as a critical space for Nigeria’s political transformation.
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Appendices

Appendix 1: List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<td>ADR</td>
<td>Alternative Dispute Resolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFAS</td>
<td>Association of Faculty of Arts Students (University of Ibadan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACN</td>
<td>Nigerian political party, Action Congress Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASUU</td>
<td>Academic Staff Union of Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBM</td>
<td>BlackBerry Messenger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Campaign for Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDHR</td>
<td>Committee for the Defence of Human Rights</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLO</td>
<td>Civil Liberties Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FB</td>
<td>Facebook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FESTAC</td>
<td>World Black and African Festival of Arts and Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FMG</td>
<td>Federal Military Government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOSSU</td>
<td>Federation of Oyo State Students Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead City</td>
<td>Lead City University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>Naira</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NABAFS</td>
<td>National Association of Banking and Finance Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NANS</td>
<td>National Association of Nigerian Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAPAS</td>
<td>National Association of Public Accountancy Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLC</td>
<td>National Labour Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NUNS</td>
<td>National Union of Nigerian Students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPEC</td>
<td>Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PDP</td>
<td>Nigerian political party, People’s Democracy Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poly</td>
<td>The Polytechnic Ibadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Structural Adjustment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SRC</td>
<td>Student Representative Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>student union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TUC</td>
<td>Trade Union Congress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UI</td>
<td>University of Ibadan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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</table>