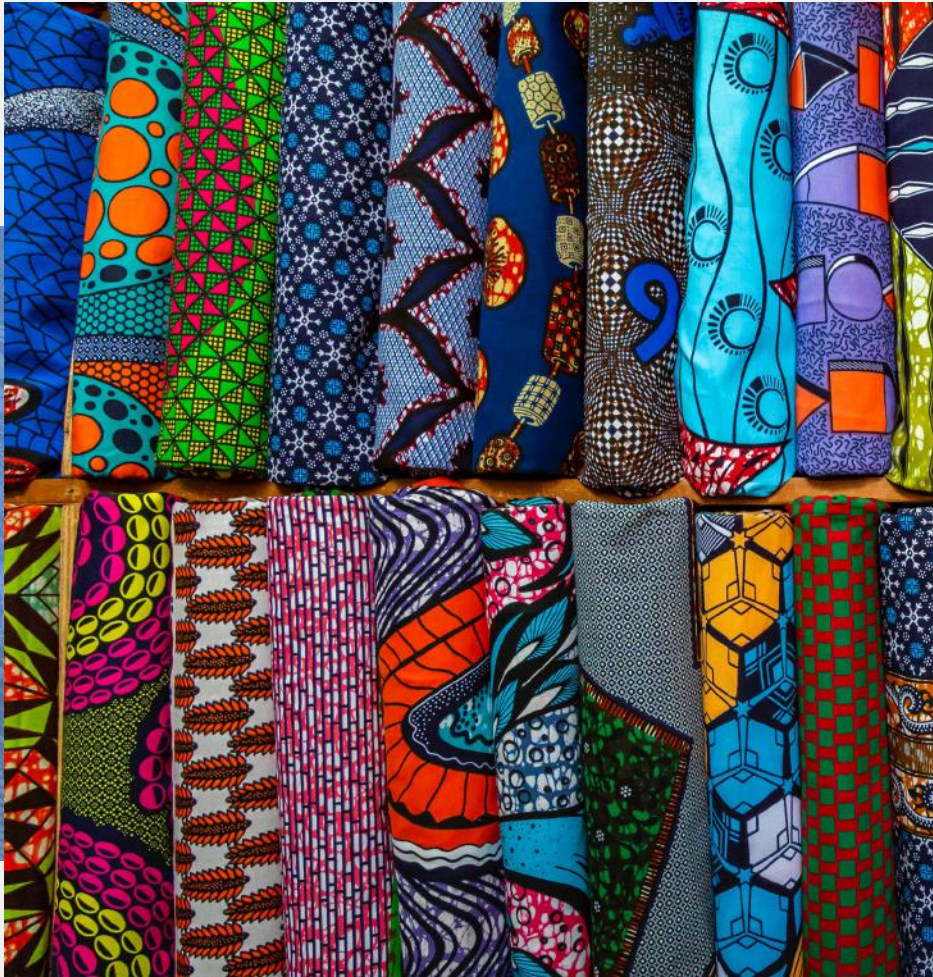


IDENTITIES

I N  T R A N S I T I O N



From Africa to North America & Northern Europe | Becoming Students



Cover | Image credit: Eva Blue on Unsplash.
Next Page | Image credit: Abby Okyere.



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≡≡≡ PREFACE

You travel to search, and you come back home to find yourself there.

(Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in Wilkinson 2005)

...And sometimes while we focus on the destination and not the journey, the journey is in itself 'home'

(Identities in Transition Team members)

Opposite | Image credit:
Jasmine Foong.

The *Identities in Transition* photovoice book is one of the many outcomes of the Identities in Transition research project that took place between 2020-2022 and was sponsored by the Mastercard Foundation. This photovoice book captures the experiences of twelve African students who made the journey from their respective home countries in Africa to universities in the UK and North America. These students- Hammed, Ifeanyi, Favour, Josephine, Mary, Abena, Andrew, Marian, Abby, Anne, Judith, and Atang were at

different career and academic stages of their lives, when they decided to pursue postgraduate and undergraduate degrees outside of their home countries. Recognizing how their experiences of transition played a key role in developing their new identities as African international students studying in the UK and North America, they decided to work alongside the research teams at the University of Edinburgh (UoE), Scotland and the University of British Columbia (UBC), Canada to explore their journey of becoming students.



These students were all part of the highly selective Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. The Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program envisions a transformative network of young people and institutions driving inclusive and equitable socio-economic change in Africa. Since launching in 2012, the Program has supported over 45,000 young people within and outside Africa to pursue secondary or tertiary education, thus enabling many African students to acquire the knowledge and skills to lead transformational change in their communities back home. Between

2021-2022, these Scholars used images, writing and collective reflection to share the stories of their journeys from Africa to North America and Northern Europe, reflecting on how they adjusted to their new environments over time, the challenges they experienced, and the support systems they drew upon. The hope is that through the lens of these images, the readers of this book can learn through the students' own experiences and explorations of how they position themselves in their new academic and social-cultural realities.

Opposite | Image credit:
Muhammed Barakat.
*Mixed feelings of an
unknown home.*

Mixed feelings of an unknown home

the best decision of my life
what if it was the worst?
and I've seen good ones as much as the low moments

and yet this one stood out -
I called it leaping before looking and for a moment, it didn't matter-

if I landed on the cushion or the rubbles
this here was the day when everything changed

the moment that made all the difference
it was a leap of faith
and I was grateful to God for any
so I will prance on without a care
and live this time the words of my favorite whisperer...

"One day at a time"...



≡ INTRODUCTION

You leave home (Africa) for school abroad, ecstatic about the opportunities that lie ahead, but beyond all the ‘butterflies’ is the big question of What should I expect? Will I be able to cope in this new and foreign environment? What will this transition mean for me?

(Mastercard Foundation Scholar from Ghana studying at the University of British Columbia)

Opposite | Image credit:
Andrea Chacon.

Transition, change, and movement, are themselves fluid concepts. These concepts might mean different things to different people, as they can signify shifts and issues that encompass minority statuses, economic backgrounds, nationalities, or ethnic identities, as well as a move from one academic, geographical, or sociocultural setting to another (Briggs et al., 2012; Ploner, 2018). From the perspective of education, the impact of transition can be even greater as it can shape a student’s physical, mental and academic well-being. Whenever people embark on any kind of journey of change, it transforms other aspects of their lives, which may or may not be noticeable to them. People around them may also

observe these changes and some may say “they are different now” or “there’s something new about them”. Scholars like Ploner, Palmer and colleagues, refer to transition as a passage phase or a “liminal in-between state”, a time of separation and reattachment (Ploner, 2018, p. 166; Palmer et al., 2009). Transition can involve separation from the familiar things one knows, and the creation of new meaningful connections with new environments. Transition can involve change and uncertainty, thus evoking many strong and often mixed feelings that can drive someone towards reassessing their perspectives and acknowledging their values.



Opposite & below | Image
credit: Neha Suvindran.

Transition can involve separation from the familiar things one knows, and the creation of new meaningful connections with new environments





Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh.

Given the important changes and feelings that transition may evoke, some argue that it is important to examine how the internationalization of higher education affects students' lives, learning, career pathways, identity and overall well-being (Ploner, 2018, p. 165). Even if a move was carefully planned, when a student departs from what they have grown to know as their culture, their community or their way of life, to settle in a new environment, unexpected changes and valuable learning experiences may occur.

One of the key questions behind this research is: How do African international students transition into a new academic environment and how does this impact their identities? Although African international students make up a growing proportion of international student populations, there seems to be limited knowledge of students' their unique transitional experiences and challenges. Although there is a great deal of research on international students' experiences in general, international students can have very

different experiences depending on their country of origin and their culture. For example, a student from Ghana may have gone through an academic experience grounded in their culture, and this may be different from that of a student from China or India or America. Hence, we cannot consider international students as a singular entity and categorize all of their experiences in a homogenous way. This photovoice book is an attempt to fill this knowledge gap through the documentation of the lived experiences of twelve African international students who moved to study in Canada and Scotland.

The intellectual and cultural capital African international students bring to higher education institutions is invaluable, as they help create a multicultural and positive learning environment. However, it is also important to understand how they adjust into their new academic environments. When it comes to the decision to study in another country and the journey to live elsewhere, there are both welcomed and challenging experiences..





Opposite | Image credit, above: © The University of Edinburgh. Image credit, below: © UBC Brand & Marketing.

Our photovoice book stories the journeys of African international students studying at the University of Edinburgh (UoE) and the University of British Columbia (UBC), and highlights the cultural and identity negotiations experienced through their process of transition. The book highlights the sources of strength, inspiration, and resilience they used to navigate the impact of this change process on their identities. In this photovoice book we share some of the learnings that we have acquired as a team of students and researchers exploring experiences and understandings of transitioning into “new” cultural, social, and intellectual spaces.

As you go through this book, we invite you to think about your perceptions of home, community and belonging, as you engage with our photos, reflections and stories.





≡ CONTEXT

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh.

The *Identities in Transition* project began in 2020 during the start of the global pandemic and it was completed in 2023. This study is based on a collaboration between two universities - the University of Edinburgh (UoE) in the UK and the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Canada. Both institutions take pride in welcoming international students. At UBC 29% of its student population are international students with about 4% from African countries (UBC, 2022).

On the other hand, about 49% of UoE's student population are international, with about 2% from Africa (UoE, 2022). Each institution is a partner with the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program. Together the two institutions have welcomed and hosted hundreds of international African students through the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program.



THE UNIVERSITY of EDINBURGH



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA





≡ PEOPLE

This photovoice book was created through the joint collaborative efforts of scholars and academic researchers of the two institutions. Specifically, the UoE team comprised one undergraduate student, Abena from Ghana and five postgraduate students: Hammed, Ifeanyi and Favour from Nigeria and Josephine and Mary, from Malawi and Kenya respectively. Their team was led and facilitated by two academic researchers, Christina and Barbara. Similarly, the team from UBC consisted of two academic researchers, Cynthia and Kimani who led a team of six postgraduate Mastercard Foundation Scholars. The students - Andrew, Marian, Abby, Anne, Judith and Atang - shared a diverse background of origins, including Botswana, Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria.

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh.



≡ OUR METHODS

Opposite | Image credit:
Identities in Transition
Team.

The *Identities in Transition* project included different phases with each phase informing the next. The project began by interviewing experienced UBC and UoE mentors of African students at each institution. Understandings from these interviews helped frame the next phase of the project. This second phase drew upon photovoice methods and involved Mastercard Foundation Scholars participating as co-researchers to collect, discuss and analyze their experiences of transition to UBC or UoE through photographs.

Photovoice is a method that began with American researchers Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997). The method primarily relies on the use and analysis of images to tell a story, and invites photovoice participants to document and reflect on their experiences through their collected photographs. The process promotes critical dialogue as a means of inspiring hope and also change.

In the *Identities in Transition* project photovoice methods involved participants as co-researchers working together with researchers - a form of researching with rather than researching on - to deepen understandings of African students' experiences transitioning to North American and North European institutions UBC or UoE. Pandemic restrictions required meetings and discussions to be held online.

For the UBC team, this occurred between October 2021-December 2021, and for the UoE team between May 2021-September 2021. Each meeting explored, in depth, one of the three main photos collected in relation to the themes of Home, Community, Movement & Transition.



Home | Imagine you are telling your story of being an international student from Africa using photographs. Taking images of things that are relevant to your student life and home, how would you tell someone about the things, objects and spaces that make you feel at home?

Community | Take pictures related to “community”. When taking your photos keep the following idea in mind: Think about the main strengths of your community and challenges in your community.

Movement & Transition | Taking images of things that are relevant to your “movement” between cultures and between spaces, what kind of things from your own cultural background have you brought into this space?

Opposite | Image credit: Shutterstock. Francistown Botswana.

In both institutions, a significant amount of time went into selecting and reflecting on the chosen images. More than simply being visually appealing, the selected photos spoke to the participants' hearts, as they embodied different attachments and emotional meanings in connection to the places the participants had moved to - the new universities and cities - the places participants had left behind by moving out of their home countries, and the relationships that were parts of these connections. One of the unique

aspects of our research, was that the participants in our project were also co-researchers. This form of participatory research - where participants are invited to engage as co-researchers - was new for many involved in the project. Co-researchers selected photos, engaged in critical discussion on the meanings the images held, analyzed the text of these discussions for storied threads and overlapping themes, and interpreted experiences further through academic writing and presenting.



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Vancouver BC Canada



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



The photovoice process at UBC

Opposite & Previous |
Image credit : © UBC Brand
& Marketing.

Co-researchers in the UBC team shared pictures guided by the prompts in their photo-discussion groups. These were either old pictures that resonated with their reflection on the prompts, or new photos that were generated in response to them. In these photo-discussion groups, the co-researchers shared their photos and the personal meanings the pictures held for them and these photos shared were used to trigger collective discussion, a technique also known as photo-elicitation (Guell & Ogilvie, 2015). Other co-researchers and facilitators present in the groups provided interpretations and comments, and in some cases, this led to the

emergence of topics that resonated with many co-researchers. This collective interpretation of pictures and the collective exploration of topics that emerged as key aspects of transition facilitated a sense of shared experience amongst co-researchers. With the completion of the photo-discussion groups, the co-researchers selected the pictures that were most important to them from their group of pictures on each theme, and wrote reflective pieces on the meaning of the photos, to go alongside them.



THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Scotland



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH



The photovoice process at The University of Edinburgh

Opposite & previous
| Image credit: © The University of Edinburgh.
Below | Image credit: Identities in Transition Team.

In many ways, the UoE and UBC teams followed a similar approach to photovoice, as they both adopted a reflective angle towards capturing and sharing pictures. Through photographs, reflective writing and the photovoice discussion groups, UoE co-researchers explored shared needs, life experiences, and senses of self. This created a space

for critical and open conversations as co-researchers explored their thoughts, feelings and experiences deeply. This further led co-researchers to connect with each other, as they shared their stories and created a safe space of belonging where they were not scared to talk about issues and challenges faced during their transition to study at UoE.





Coming together in Edinburgh

Opposite | Image credit:
Image credit: Identities in
Transition Team.

Each research group developed their initial photovoice book based on the data collected from their individually held online focus group sessions. In May 2022, the two teams started online collaborations, as they discussed their photovoice processes and also shared their preliminary photobooks. Although the online meetings were successful, we experienced time zone challenges, given that Vancouver and Edinburgh are 8 hours apart. To begin the collaborative process of putting the pieces of the puzzle together, Christina, one of the UoE research facilitators, traveled to UBC. One month later, five members of the UBC team traveled to UoE in July 2022 to be greeted by seven members of the UoE team.

During this productive visit the two teams worked together to synthesize their work. In our collaborative meetings, an important objective was to compare the photos that have been collected by both teams side by side and think about the process that was involved in collecting them. Through this process, we started to identify some small differences in our approaches to collecting and analyzing photos. For instance, the UoE team only used new photos that were collected in response to the prompts, whereas the UBC team also used older pictures that resonated with the themes that were explored.

ACADEMICS

→ Speak to a previous student etc
→ Speak to your lecturers during their office hours
⇒ Take advantage of the Institute of Academic Development to develop their writings

Accelerator's, critical, effective:
* Demands of deadline
* Critical writing, Analytical writing
CARE
Concept: Different educational systems (think you are normally writing for the right audience) - free to vary content

Language
- exploring some online platforms for specific pieces
eg. You Tube etc.

Language
① thinking (how trying to understand the audience spaces or in

Language 2
- Be central for the

① Open
② mid
③ 800

LANG

Edinburgh workshops | Coming together UBC + UoE

Other interesting differences between the two institutions were also seen in the photos themselves, as the UoE photos were mainly abstract images while the majority of UBC photos showed people. After a series of discussions between co-researchers and facilitators, comparing the key themes from both institutions and co-exploring the reflections and photos, we found that despite being told in slightly different ways, the stories behind these different images were quite similar. After the UBC team left Edinburgh, co-researchers from both institutions collaborated through a series of bi-weekly online

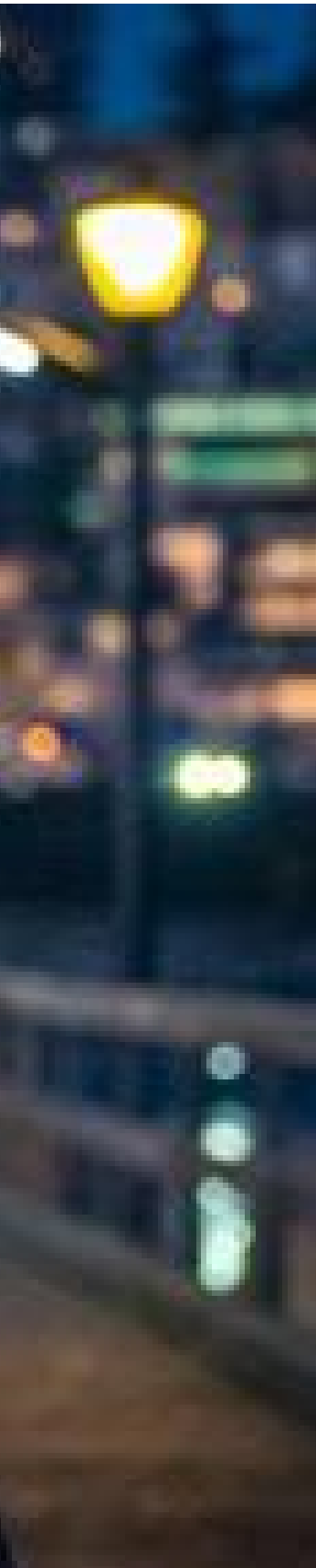
meetings to produce the photovoice book based on selected photos and reflections from team members of both institutions.

Although the locations of our universities were different, there was unity in our ideas, reflections, thoughts and themes. This further meant that wherever we came from in Africa, our experiences are indeed similar, no matter how different our new communities, our mental description of home, our transition, or the challenges we faced.

Opposite & across |
Image credit: Identities in
Transition Team.







"I see you", But am I seen?

Abby Okyere

Opposite | Image credit:
Neha Suvindran. Following
| Image credit: © The
University of Edinburgh.

A land of promise, a chance to start anew,
Leaving behind all that's familiar, it's true.
To a foreign land with hope in my heart,
But soon I realize, this journey is hard.

I see you, but am I seen?
Lost in a crowd, my dreams and hopes keen.
I'm searching for a place to belong,
But it seems I'm just a face in a throng.

My skin is dark, my hair kinky and wild,
A stark contrast to the sea of pale smiles.
I speak with an accent, my words not the same,
Misunderstood and judged, not sure if I am to blame.

I miss the warmth of my mother's embrace,
The rhythm of drums and the songs of my place.
But I'm here for a reason, a better life sought,
A chance to provide for my family, that's what I've brought.

I see you, but am I seen?
My struggles and fears, my pain and my dreams.
I may be an outsider, but I won't be held down,
For I am a fighter, my spirit won't drown.

I'll find my place, I'll make a mark,
For all those like me, who came in the dark.
For though I may face many challenges ahead,
I know that success is where my heart is lead.

So I see you, and now you can see,
That I am more than what meets the eye, you'll agree.
A strong, proud African, on a journey abroad,
With hope, love, and determination to be applaud.



HOME, COMMUNITY, TRAN

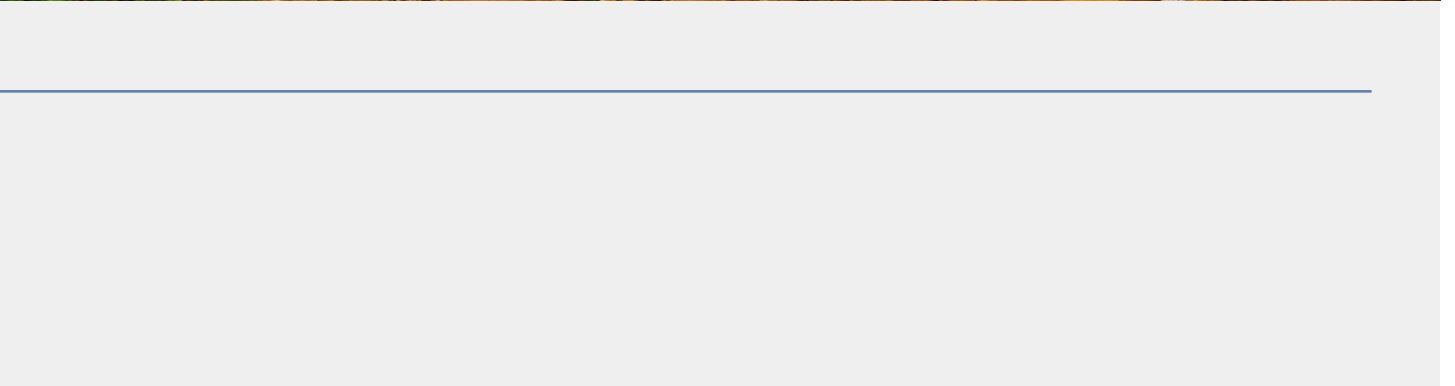


POSITION

INTRODUCING THE JOURNEY



HOME







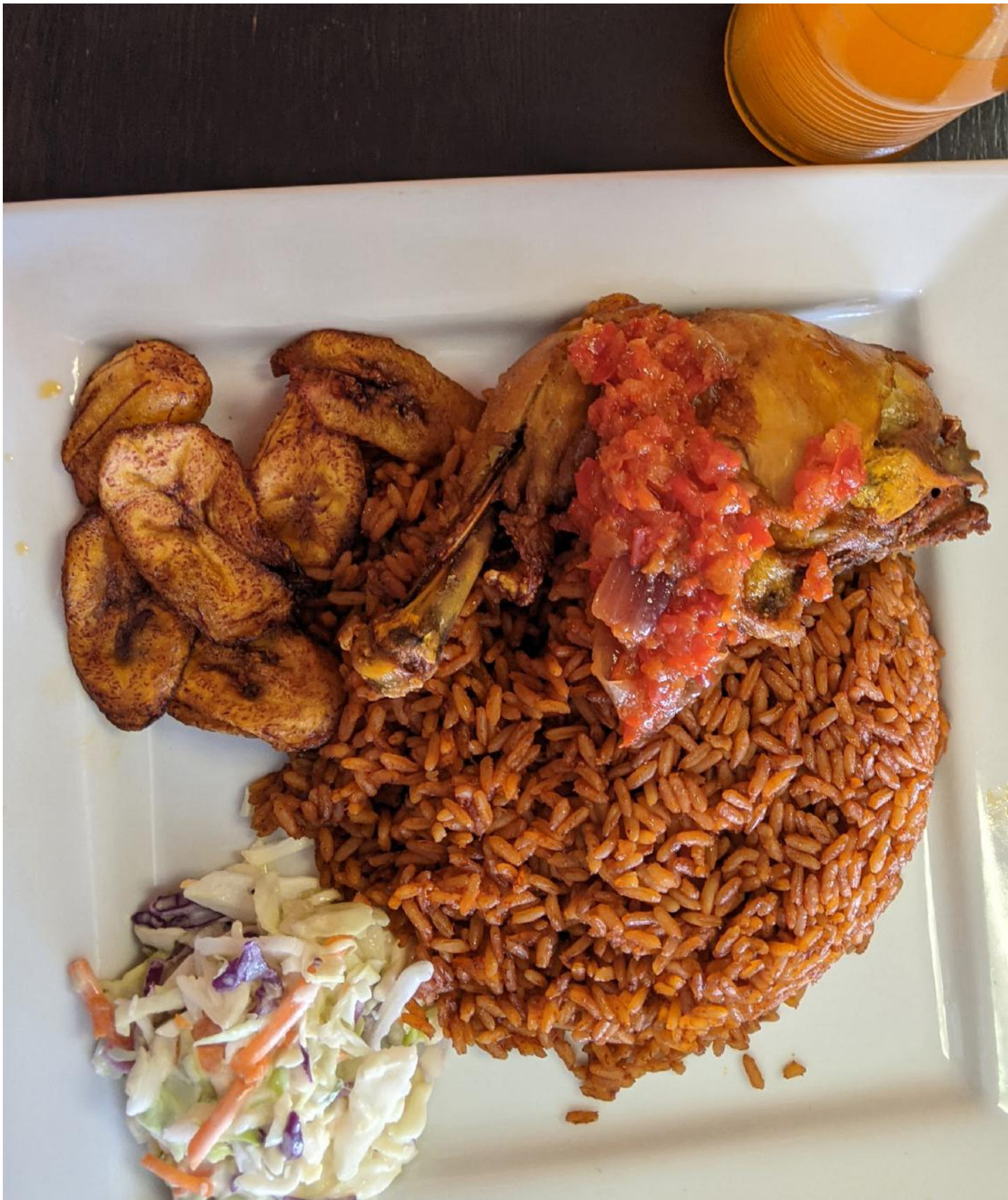
HOME

Opposite | Image credit: Rimma Bondarenko, iStock.
Previous page | Image credit: Ovinuchi Ejjohvo on Unsplash.

In an effort to capture public and private spaces of belonging, as well as objects and sites that highlight the concept of home, we examined it through the lens of our own personal histories and feelings in relation to place, other people, and the socio-cultural environment. Everyday interactions with the physical environment, such as the weather, nature, architecture, and student housing, were identified as important in shaping our individual attitudes toward the new environment and eliciting memories that formed place-based experiences that were unique to each individual. The photovoice images and reflective texts capture the experiences of these connections, which helped us reconstruct our cultural identities in our new environments, to foster a stronger sense of home and belonging. For example, exploring the connections between personal objects and homemaking practices contributed to feelings of homeliness and domesticity. We considered how these practices and possessions not only provide a

sense of comfort, safety, and continuity but also enabled us to face some of the challenges posed by the global pandemic. Retaining traditional ways of food preparation as well as cultural and personal objects of special value allowed us to create ties with our new settings and houses, while bridging the gap with the host country and culture.

We described practices of relationality as one of the most important components of home, as new ties with individuals in the host culture (e.g., Mastercard Foundation Scholars, classmates, peers) became spaces where we felt at home by experiencing a range of good emotions. The people in our new spaces that we, as African students, bonded with over the course of our studies, became our “new family” as we joined together in numerous celebrations from public holidays, to personal milestones. To top it all off, the “African” culture of sharing a meal with friends, family, and even strangers, enabled us to develop strong bonds with those around us.





JUDITH

REMINISCING THE SAVOR OF HOME

Opposite | Image credit:
Judith. *Reminiscing the savor
of home.*

It's almost impossible to talk about Africa without talking about our food. I spoke with some Africans around here and I asked them: "What would you really like to have close to you to feel at home?" For most of us, it's all about the food. One Saturday, I started looking around for places I could get African food in Vancouver, and I traveled almost 2 hours all the way to Surrey to find an African eatery.



JOSEPHINE

BRAAI: THE TASTE OF HOME



Opposite & above | Image credit: Josephine. *Braai: the taste of home.*

Barbeque

The barbeque or what we would call braai reminds me of home because I grew up associating the barbeque stand as a magic “cooker” that would only be used during big family gatherings or celebrations.

Pictured here is a barbeque stand from which smoke emanated. I haven’t seen much smoke in the UK although this is very common back home. We use charcoal for cooking mainly in the villages and also in the cities during our very frequent electricity blackouts. I never would have thought that the smell of smoke would bring me so much joy and memories as it triggered such happy thoughts of the numerous times my family and I or friends would light a fire.

Food

I didn’t realise how unique food back home tasted until I moved to Edinburgh. One of the biggest shocks that I struggled to adjust to was how different the food was: from the taste to the cooking method, and the choice of spices and ingredients. I found myself constantly seeking ways to make food so it tastes just like “home food”. On the day I ate this simple plate of fish and rice, I felt closest to home. I grilled the fish with herbs and spices, and made tomato-based gravy with fried vegetables and yellow rice. Eating this food brought a sense of fulfillment and happiness as opposed to all the other meals I had taken prior. This meal made it to my family chat group and I bonded with my family over how good it tasted to be eating a meal that tasted like “home food”.





HAMMED

THE CHAIR

When I saw this chair, it reminded me of having one-to-one meaningful conversations with people - people I knew and people I did not know back at home. Sitting on the chair in Edinburgh, I watched strangers pass by, but I could not talk to them. I could not say hi, and I could not even move close to them. Studying in a pandemic where you do not get to attend physical class sessions always reminded me of home. It always reminded me of those amazing times when I attended class sessions and had one-on-one deep conversations with people where I get to feel and connect to other people who share their stories, knowledge, and experiences and I learn from them.

Opposite | Image credit:
Hammed. *The chair.*

However, this chair reminded me of being a stranger with no one to talk to or no one to share with. The chair reminded me of those days when I boarded a commercial vehicle in Nigeria and how suddenly, conversation erupted without even having to start it. But here in Edinburgh I thought about how to approach a stranger. The chair reminds me of my cousins, how they are always there to talk to but suddenly no one is there. I am just here all by myself.

The chair is a solace, a reminder of home.





HAMMED

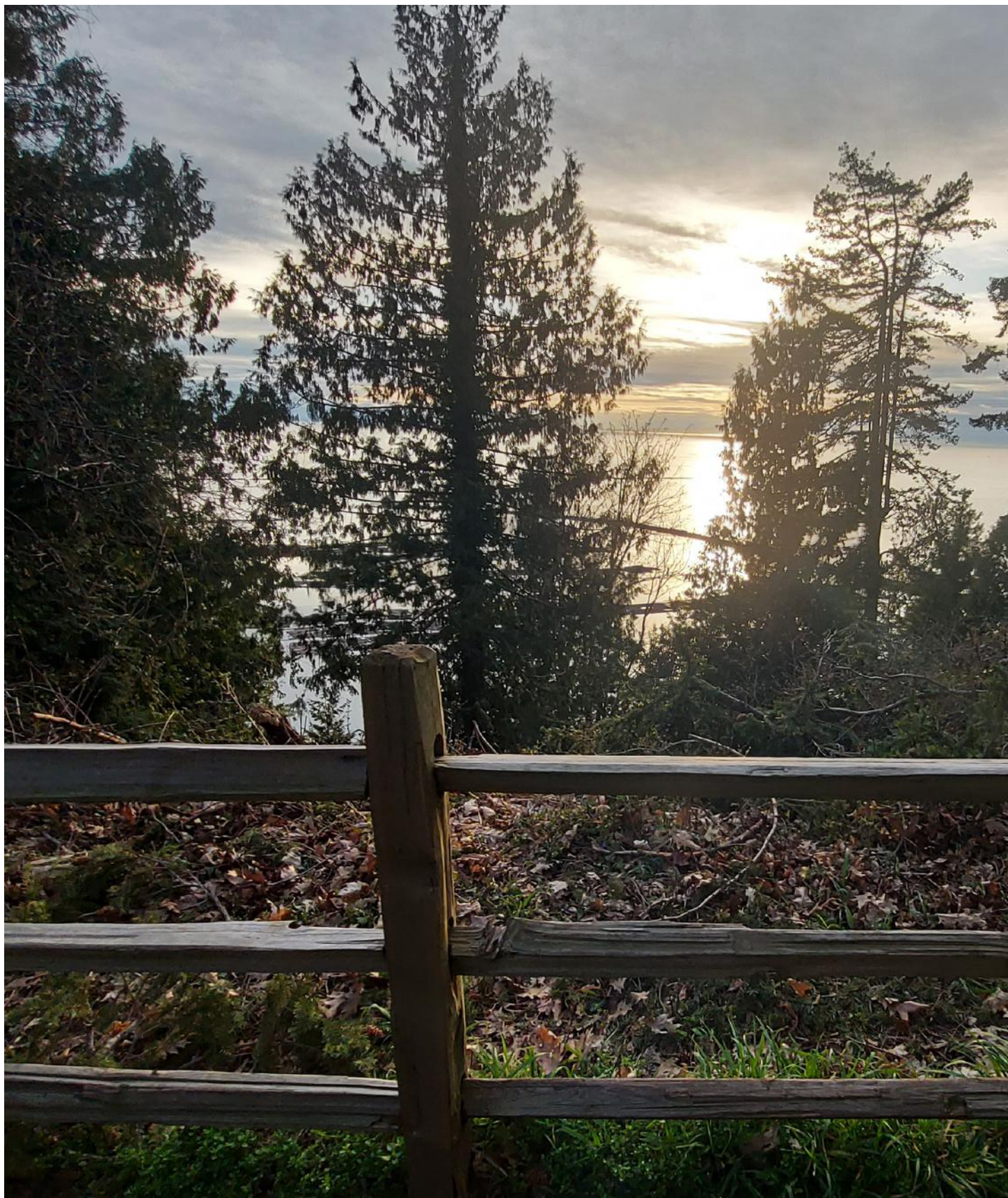
THE SUN

I have never seen the sun shine this bright in Edinburgh. The sun reminded me of home. I felt how much I missed the weather and how much I missed walking on the street and chatting with friends and family. I recall how warm my body felt and how constantly I did not have to cover my body in warm and protective clothes. The freedom that the sun gave me has been taken away in this new space.

I now struggle to deal with and adjust to the weather pattern - feeling sleepy when it is 3:00 pm in the afternoon because it's dark already or at times staying awake when it's 11:00 pm because the sun is yet to set.

So whenever I see the sun shine this bright it reminds me of the beautiful weather that home afforded me and the simple clothes that I wore to feel comfortable and showcase my culture.

Opposite | Image credit:
Hammed. *The sun.*





ATANG

A PIECE OF HOME

Opposite | Image credit:
Atang. A piece of Home.

This is my spot in UBC. I call it my spot, but everybody can go there. So this is where I go to watch the sunset, and the sunset is just something that I like to view at home. Anywhere I go, this is just something that I watch to just take me back home and remind me of my family.

Most of my life has been nomadic. Sunsets have always felt like a piece of home that I could always carry everywhere. In a way, I am always connected no matter where I go.



IFEANYI

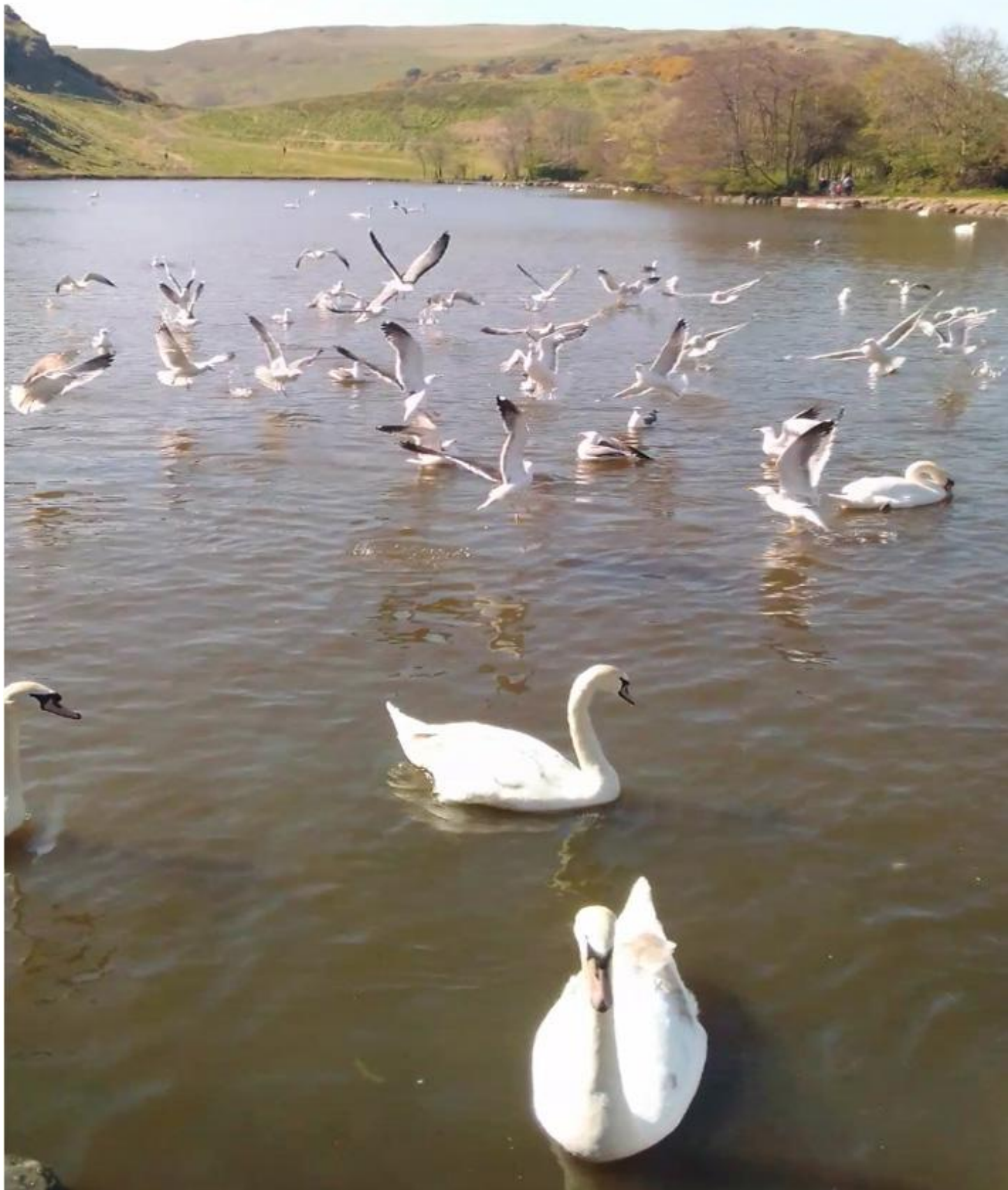
PEACEFUL FOUNTAIN

Opposite | Image credit:
Ifeanyi. *Peaceful Fountain*.

This picture is of a flowing fountain in a remote part of Scotland. The picture reminded me of home. I grew up on a farm where these forms of fountain are readily available. We usually drink from it because it is clean and uncontaminated, and it comes directly from the rock. It also has a religious connotation, as some of these water bodies are held sacred with several superstitious beliefs, as people think that they are connected with their origin and their ancestors.

Even though the people of Scotland don't drink from these sources of water, this fountain reminded me of the beauty of the world, and how people all over the globe can connect to water as a precious commodity.

Humanity depends on water for survival in Nigeria and the situation is not different in Scotland as well. This picture reminded me of home and my early childhood.



IFEANYI

SWANS: THE CARE & CHERISH OF NATURE

Opposite | Image credit:
Ifeanyi. *Swans: the care &
cherish of nature.*

This picture shows some swans inside a loch in Edinburgh. It reminded me of home, but it also has a little puzzle in it. Back home, most of our ducks are black and are privately owned and raised. It is so interesting how the swans here are kept as a tourist attraction and are fed by tourists and passers-by. They wade in clean water, and they look admirable compared to those back home. I find this so inspiring - how people cherish and care for things that are part of their environment, how committed they have

become to go and see these swans with a slice of bread and other food for their growth. I remembered a friend who said we should go for a visit, and he reminded me we must not go empty-handed, but with some slices of bread. It made me realise that things around us are better and more admirable because people have decided to take responsibility for them. It also reminds me of the beauty in nature as well and how the world can be better if we unite to support the weak in our environment.



FAVOUR

A JOURNEY TOWARDS SELF DISCOVERY

Opposite | Image credit:
Favour. *A Journey towards
self discovery.*

Stepping into this room, gave me a feeling of isolation, especially as I had just moved to a completely different country to further my education. Seeing the narrowness of the room was initially daunting and the smallness of the room made me shriek with displeasure once I stepped into it.

Once again, I was reminded that I was far away from home. However, this is a short story of how a space I felt would never suit me, transitioned into a hub for self-discovery, personal development and learning.

Sitting here every day as I stared out the window made me find myself. It gave me the reasons and quietness to explore new habits, including converting my room to a personal concert hall. I accepted this new change and learnt how to maximise my space and make it work for me to induce productivity. In the end, I can say I found a home in this room.



JUDITH

HOME CANNOT BE REPLACED

Opposite | Image credit:
Judith. *Home cannot be
replaced.*

Pushing my mind to feel at home, whilst being a thousand miles away from home, has made me realize that my family, friends and the people I think about when I miss home- they make up my "home".

The memories shared, carved in my heart, and the creative memories we are forging over the distance gives me joy.

My home cannot be replaced, so I take it with me, in my heart, always and everywhere.

A close-up photograph of the interior of a garment. The fabric features a dense, repeating floral pattern in black, yellow, and white. In the center, a rectangular, light-colored label is attached with a decorative, dotted stitching border. The label contains the text "IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL" in a serif font, arranged in four lines.

IT IS
WELL
WITH
MY SOUL

MARY

HOME IN A THOUGHT

Opposite | Image credit:
Mary. Home in a thought.

This is a picture of one of my t-shirts, with the inscription, 'It is well with my soul'. This was a gift from my sister when she came to visit me on Christmas in 2020. Home to me, can be represented by some people that 'feel like home'. In the presence of those people, I feel comforted, embraced, and understood and I don't need to explain myself. For me, that's my sister. We are close friends. The essence is not the T-shirt per se, but it's a representation

of someone who just understands me without even me having to say a word. When she handed me the T-shirt, there was no explanation as to why it was such a befitting gift. She had also gotten herself one to match, a further demonstration of our bond. Every time I wear this T-shirt, I just think of her. And that makes me feel happy.





MARY

CREATING FAMILIARITY

Opposite | Image credit:
Mary. Creating Familiarity.

This is a picture of flowers that I was using to decorate my room in Edinburgh. Flowers remind me of home because my mum loves flowers. Growing up, my mum planted rose flowers and other kinds of flowers all around our home compound. Flowers are very significant to me, and I find them comforting, heart-warming and cosy. I always decorate my room, house, and spaces with flowers, as they bring a sense of familiarity and a feeling of home.





ABBY

WHERE HOME LIVES!

Home is where the heart is
Home is my happy place
It doesn't have to have it all-
The fact that I have my family close-
That I don't just see or hear their
laughter vibrate through the doors
But that I can feel it...
That makes all the difference
Home is where the heart is,
But now I carry home in my heart
And most often than not, I relive it
through phone calls and video chats
... while making the effort to forge a new
home here-
through friends, similar experiences and
familiar activities.

Opposite | Image credit:
Abby Okyere. *Where
home lives!*





ABENA

THE HEARTS THAT OPEN TO YOU

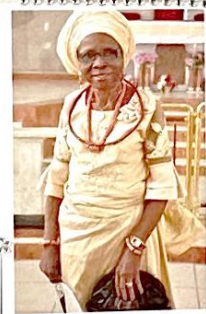
To me “home” is made by people. I have stayed in several houses but only a few were homes. It does not matter where I am if I have people around me that are warm and welcoming, I always feel at home.

Coming to Edinburgh was difficult and I had some trouble adjusting to everything and the people I met. The change was overwhelming and disorienting even if it was not my first time away from my home country.

Now, I can pick up my phone and talk to some of my friends when I am having a difficult day and the sense of peace and tranquillity I achieve after I talk to them makes me feel at home.

To me, “home” is not a building but the people who open their hearts to you.

Opposite | Image credit:
Abena. *The hearts that open
to you.*



MARIAN

MEMORIES ETCHED ON A WALL

Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught on film is captured forever... It remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything.

(Aaron Siskind in Sussman, 1979)

Opposite | Image credit:
Marian. *Memories etched
on a wall.*

This was my first time moving so far away from home. With thousands of miles separating me from my beloved mum, grandmother, aunties, cousins and friends, at some point I felt disconnected. However, this collage reminds me of my support system-

my family, friends, and the memories that are timeless in my heart. Not just memories of the past, but the memories that are created in the present, as I engage in social activities and meet new people in my new "home".





MARIAN

SEE THE FASHION AND GET A GLIMPSE OF A BEAUTIFUL CULTURE

Opposite | Image credit:
Jasmine Foong. *See the
fashion and get a glimpse
of a beautiful culture.*

Fashion is a way of self-expression and I love fashion!!

So what better way to showcase the elegance of my culture and nationality, than to adorn beautiful bright Nigerian prints and jewellery. When I am adorned with my Nigerian fashion pieces, it showcases my identity and It's a beautiful reminder of my home.





ANNE

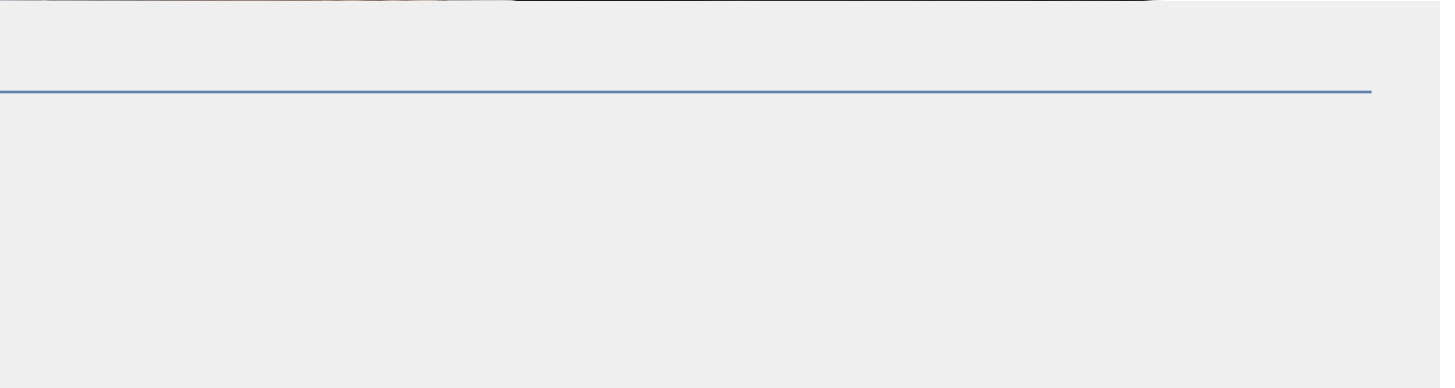
MAKING THE UNFAMILIAR FAMILIAR

Opposite | Image
credit: Anne. *Making the
unfamiliar familiar.*

I have always had a workspace to myself at home since I started high school. Everyone at home knew my spot in the house and when they were looking for me, you can be sure that they would find me there. The funny part is that they may have thought that I was working on an assignment or reading all the time, but that was also my special space to watch movies or do other fun things and relax. So here you go, my workspace in my room in Vancouver. As simple as it is, I do all things here, including having my breakfast, lunch and dinner and it always reminds me of HOME.



COMMUNITY





≡ COMMUNITY

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh. Previous
| Image credit: © The
University of Edinburgh.

As we investigated the various meanings of community, connections were made between the ideas, behaviors, attitudes, and values—as well as emotions—that underlay a particular way of doing things among particular groups. We examined how religion, spirituality, and the church served as an example of a community group that played a part in how diverse countries, races, and genders could coexist in a common space. We discussed how these religious locations, although unique to each of us, may help us feel more at home because they were characterised by several common practices. We discussed the difficulty in building communities in Vancouver and Edinburgh as a result of the distinct philosophies of life in these host cultures. We, as a photovoice team, reflected on the photos we collected to elaborate on the sense of closeness and belonging that occurs when one shares the same ideals but also the language with a group of people. We, as Mastercard Foundation Scholars at UBC and UoE, noted the Scholars community as vital in our experiences as African International students, as this comprised people with similar life goals

and ambitions. In our discussions of the photos collected, it became clear that being deeply rooted in the Mastercard Foundation community helped us integrate into our academic institutions as well as the cities of Edinburgh and Vancouver, which were both foreign and new experiences.

Students had a great opportunity to meet one another and form connections with people from various cultures by exploring the outdoors and participating in a variety of new activities thanks to Vancouver and Edinburgh's stunning setting and popularity as a destination for recreational and leisure activities. In our attempt to create and/or be part of existing communities during the COVID-19 pandemic we faced numerous challenges. The existence of the pandemic made us re-evaluate our solitudes, chance encounters, and the challenges and strategies for developing deep friendships in a time of social and physical distancing. Since there were few possibilities for community building during COVID-19 we had to make do with what we could find.



ENGINEERS &
GEOSCIENTISTS
BRITISH COLUMBIA

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF
SCIENCE GAMES





ANNE

BREAKING BORDERS

Opposite | Image credit:
Anne. *Breaking Borders*.

COVID brought challenges that shaped us into quickly accepting our barriers including not being able to move around easily and most especially not being able to move across borders. At first transitioning through challenges of not travelling did not come at ease. I had previously adapted to sitting on screens for a long time. But I was not ready for how extensive the barriers of not being mobile would become including facing the screen for a long time to attend class and not being able to participate in any activity physically and time difference taking online classes in Canada from Nigeria at home. To engage in extracurricular activities such as volunteering was hard and accepting the new normal adjusted to forming COVID bubbles of our own and sharing ideas shaped the new developments such as Online Science Games we have today.





ABBY

DIFFERENT AND YET THE SAME!

Community for me is those who share my ideals and values. It need not be people from a specific background and I like that my close community appreciates that. I have shared my culture and learnt about the culture and backgrounds of my friends.

This circle of friends have kept me accountable both in school and outside of school and for me that is the essence of a community or family. This picture particularly stands out for me because

it was when my friends celebrated my birthday with me, just 3 months into Canada.

It has everything that warms my heart (smiles, food, kids) and I know beyond the graduate program, these people have become a part of me forever!

We may come from different countries or even speak different languages, but this hasn't been a barrier with these friends.



Opposite | Image credit:
Eva Ke. *Different and yet
the same!*





ANNE

AT LAST, ONLY THIS IS THE FIRST!

Opposite | Image credit:
Anne. *At last, only this is
the first!*

My first encounter with amazing people
I met here shortly after my arrival

My time spent with them was wonderful

We have crossed seas, oceans
and mountains

We reach out to each other in love
and understanding

We are unique and brilliant

A garden sign with a colorful geometric pattern of triangles in various colors (red, blue, green, yellow, purple, orange, and white). The sign is surrounded by various plants, including purple and green foliage. The text "You belong." is written in a yellow, outlined font. The sign is supported by a metal stand.

You
belong.

Belong

ANDY

COMMUNITY, FREEDOM AND BELONGING

Opposite | Image credit:
Tim Mossholder on
Unsplash.

The African proverb, “It takes a village to raise a child” resonates with what community in Ghana typifies. Our sense of community spans to the home given settlements are nucleated in most cities. Home therefore feels like a community and community becomes “a place” we can call home. In such an environment, communal living is the trademark where there are lots to share - food, ideas, memories, emotions, etc. during social gatherings like picnics anniversaries, political campaigns.

Community fosters a sense of belonging and social cohesion wherein one has the latitude to be their true selves and to express their identities, emotions, and opinions without constraints.





ATANG

SHARING INTEREST WITH A NEW COMMUNITY

I have been lucky to find a community in my Masters of Business Administration cohort. These are the people I explore my hobbies with and share the most meaningful moments of my life. We spent the summer hiking through British Columbia and discovering beautiful mystical places. It was no doubt the highlight of my life.

Opposite | Image credit:
Atang. *Sharing interest
with a new community.*





JUDITH

TAKING THE CHANCE

Within my academic and broad social community, I acknowledge the uniqueness of my identity which is not just the color of my skin but also a product of 23 years growing and learning from a different culture and environment.

I enjoy the thrill and adventurous feeling of traveling across Vancouver and connecting to my new community.

Opposite | Image credit:
Judith. *Taking the chance.*



St. John's
St. John's
St. John's
St. John's

The grass
withers, the
flower fades,
but the word
of our God
shall stand
for ever.

JOSEPHINE

NEVER ALONE!

Opposite | Image credit:
Josephine. *Never Alone!*

I am a Christian and a strong believer hence seeing a church reminds me that I am not alone. I find peace and comfort in the church; I find a deep sense of belonging from a long or short mass service. Prayers, the music, the

ambience, the structure, the delivery of mass, all remind me that the church is one of the best places I could find not just myself, but other people who share a deep passion for Christ.





MARIAN

A PLACE TO BELONG!

Opposite | Image credit:
Sussan Agber. *A place
to belong!*

A place where my soul connects to
the divine.

A place where I seek comfort and
answers when my heart is troubled.

A place where I meet and interact with
like-minded people.

A community where someone is always
ready to listen.

A community where the language and
doctrine are universal.

A community to which I will
always belong.

It doesn't matter if I am in Nigeria or
anywhere in the world, the community
will always remain the same.





M A R I A N

A NEW HISTORY TAKING IT ALL IN

To be part of my new community, I had to be knowledgeable about its history and its culture. I traveled and visited new places, engaged in recreational activities and met new people. This gave me a deeper appreciation and connection for my new environment.

Opposite | Image credit:

Neha Suvindran. *A new history taking it all in.*



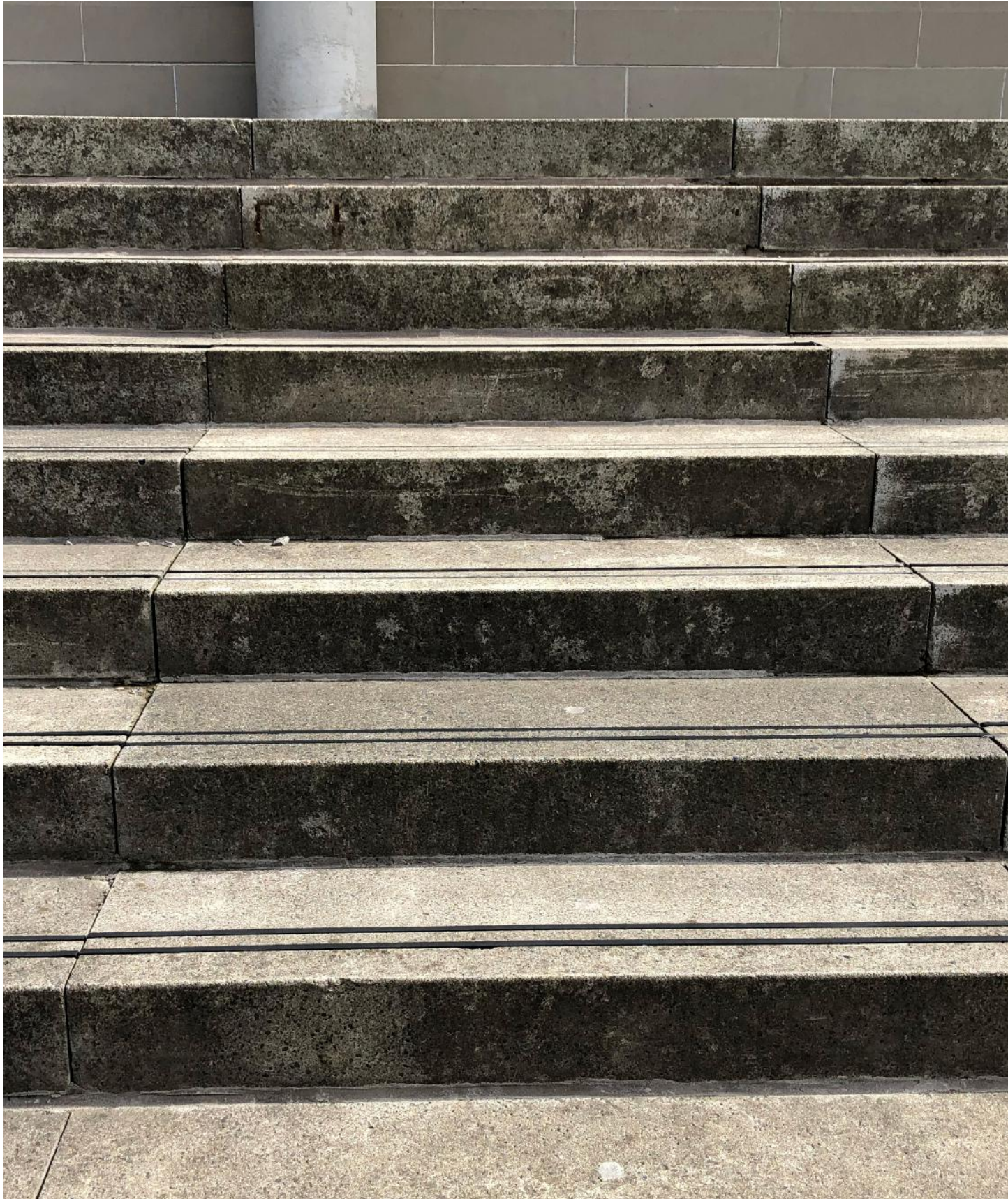
H A M M E D

WILD AND OUT

Opposite | Image credit:
Hammed. *Wild and out.*

This picture shows how happy I am when I am with people who speak the same language as me. I light up and “wild and out”. This is me feeling myself and jumping over the moon. It should not come as a surprise; I was attending a retreat with fellow Africans - with people from my country. I could naturally share, talk to them, play games and I could be wild without being misconstrued. That’s

what community is all about, being your natural self. Going on this trip with my friends, I felt a sense of belonging, a feeling of love. Even if the food we ate was sometimes foreign, sitting together, chatting over the meal in our natural space reminded me of community. It is being able to share in a circle, without a fence or any barrier.



H A M M E D

EMPTY SPACES

Opposite | Image credit:
Hammed. *Empty spaces.*

When I see these empty spaces, I think about how much I have missed my community of friends and practice. People who share the same work that I do, whom I often meet at events in my home country, where we share challenges, progress and things that inspire us to keep our head held high.

I have always loved meeting people in-person, in class and sharing with them. I missed attending physical events, where most times I am invited to speak or even be part of a conversation. I barely found

such conversations here in Edinburgh, maybe due to the pandemic. Most times I found myself being an alien, not understanding what it means to be part of something greater or cause. I have to often reach out first.

It is not the same where I come from, communities are built naturally, they are formed based on natural connections. What connects us together? I really don't know. I also found out the issues in Edinburgh are different from my country.



MARY

THE PICNIC

Opposite | Image credit,
Mary. *The picnic.*

This is a picture of a picnic that we had with my classmates. Sharing meals and conversations is one way to connect with people - deriving a sense of community. Despite not attending physical classes during my study year, I was able to connect with my classmates over picnics and hangouts which were always a good time. We connected by

sharing our career experiences, our designs, and personal projects. Our diverse backgrounds, abilities and unique experiences brought us closer and united us in our curiosity about each other. This created a very strong sense of community and belonging.

LOCHSIDE
HOUSE



MARY

LOCH SIDE

Opposite | Image credit,
Mary. *Loch Side*.

This is a plaque at the Lochside house in Loch Lomond. A group of scholars and I visited the place in the summer of 2021 for a short stay. This trip stood out to me as we shared deep and intense conversations and appreciated one another with personal messages on the final day of the trip. The conversations held during this trip cut through the surface-level “small talk” to deep conversations about life. The experience connected us to one another and created a sense of community.



SOUP ON \$15*
MANUAL CAMERA

IFEANYI

PARADISE

Opposite | Image credit:
Ifeanyi. *Paradise*.

Paradise is not where you are but who you are with.

This is a beautiful memory of time spent at the Loch side here in Edinburgh. The time there was spent with few of my fellow Mastercard Foundation Scholars and some African students from the department of Africa International Development. We went for a three-night trip on the seaside. It was a memory I will never forget. Eating food made by Africans and remembering families back

at home; how a neighbour would have an event or party and how we rally round to prepare food that several people could eat. Thereafter, we would have someone calling us to come and eat. It reminded me of a community I love. While sharing a meal, we reflected on life, career, Africa, religion and what the future holds for us coming from Africa. It also reminded me how possible it is to build friendships, family, and community with people you never knew, but similar circumstances brought you together.



IFEANYI

DEPARTURE

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh. **Below** | Image
credit: Ifeanyi. *Departure.*



Life is a journey; hence every transportation is an iceberg of what the whole of life represents. It has a start, and it has an ending. But several times we travel with a stranger, full of expectations for the future, and eager to leave the past behind. But little do we know that the future will also be overtaken by history. But in all of life's journeys, what makes a difference is the company that goes with you. This picture shows the big bus that took us to the Burn - a house built in the 14th century - and returned to take us

back to where we started (Edinburgh). Here are the Mastercard Foundation Scholars with whom we spent three nights together during an intense writing retreat. This tells me how we know no friend in this world except strangers, whom we meet in the course of our journey. When you have commonalities, similar challenges, similar routes, strangers can become friends. These friends then morph into your community where you can turn for support and you remember when you arrive at your destination.



MOVEMENT & TRANSITION





≡ MOVEMENT & TRANSITION

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh. **Previous** |
Image credit: Shutterstock.

Inquiring into the concepts of movement and transition between cultures and between spaces, we, as a photovoice team, described the transition process as not being linear, but rather one which entails learning and unlearning skills, languages, behaviors, values and goals, in order to navigate the new host culture. For us, the transition became a process that evoked a critical kind of reflexivity as we started thinking about ourselves in relation to our social contexts (Archer, 2007). Through the close examination of our new cultural contexts and the awareness that these are encompassed by differing expectations and rules, we became increasingly aware of our position within different cultural systems, leading to an improvement in our intercultural communication skills.

We took time to reflect on the photos and the emotions emanating to examine our transition and our capacity to manage these different cultural settings.

Our photo-based reflective discussions brought to fore our vulnerabilities which we shared in a state of transparency, rather than as a mark of weakness or passivity. As we shared intimate stories and emotions with one another in this state of transparency, we had to deal with the uncertainty and confusion that came with it. By moving between different cultural spaces and systems, we identified how one can become aware of their diverse intercultural elements, including material structures and objects with the capacity to improve the standard of living. Despite the negative emotions that can be associated with the realization of the existence of fundamental differences between systems of social provision and welfare between cultures and countries, we explored how these differences can also act as incentives by inspiring us to become agents of change in our communities.



MARY

SOUVENIRS & COLLECTIBLES

Opposite | Image credit:
Mary. *Souvenirs &
collectables.*

This is a picture of my arm with a beaded Kenyan wristband, placed on my Kenyan 'Maasai Shuka', a shawl. I've made the habit of traveling with these two items that are very representative of my Kenyan roots and culture. Transitions can be exciting, overwhelming and anxiety inducing. To deal with the anxiety, I strive to look for a sense of familiarity that can easily be brought by these simple items that induce a sense of being grounded and of emotional comfort that I need as I adapt to the new space and experiences.

These are souvenirs and collectibles that I have picked and been gifted that remind me of places I have visited or

people I have encountered. In the theme of transition and movement, I love to keep the memories alive of places I have visited, and experiences created through such collectibles which can be exciting and comforting amid the discomfort of transitions. As I adapt to my new environments, I also acquire collectibles that will remind me of that present moment, as I turn to them in the future. These simple items are representative of my journey of adapting, accepting, and settling into my new environment.



RAMAFRIQUE

Be your own African

ABBY

AFRICAN FIRST

Opposite & across | Image credit, Abby. *African first.*



I understand that I may be the only or first Ghanaian someone might ever meet in their lives, and for me it reminds me that I represent my country in a foreign land. I use that as an opportunity to tell authentic stories of my culture through my clothing and accessories. It's not just a fashion, its an identity and it's what makes me unique





M A R I A N

MY BEAUTIFUL HAIR
IS UNIQUE AND IT IS
IDENTITY

I am African; my beautiful
hair is unique and
it makes me stand out.

Opposite | Image credit,
Marian. *My beautiful hair is
unique and it is identity.*

It's a struggle to nurture and keep African
hair in the North American climate.

Protective styles are my go-to, whether
directly installed or wigged.

It saves me time, it saves me money, and
it makes me stand out!

I always get lots of compliments
whenever I have my hair braided!!

It's not just the protective nature of these
styles but it's also the meaning behind
these styles.

This is a piece of my culture and heritage
that I can carry with me anywhere in the
world, it's a part of my identity.



HAMMED

AMADLA (in isiXhosa means 'Power')

Opposite | Image credit, Hammed. *Amadla* (in isiXhosa means 'Power').

One of the things I brought to the University of Edinburgh is my activist spirit. This does not necessarily have to be 'big activism' but the spirit to fight against injustice. This could be just openly discussing with others so that you can take action collectively, or simply writing an email to decision-makers. The sign of my hand upwards means solidarity. I am with you. I stand with you and we will fight this together. Ever since I came to the UK, I have been involved in one movement or the other. However, I found it difficult to connect with the issues here at first

and it took me time to recognise the local challenges and problems, as they are so different from those faced by people in Nigeria. Step by step, I found spaces that connect with what I stand for in Edinburgh. I was able to speak for refugees to access Legal Aid in Europe and the reason why I was able to do this was because of my experience, story and previous volunteering. I also did an online talk on EndSARs movement, showing that location cannot stop you from movement building, as you can fight against injustice through online platforms.



ANDY

TRANSITION VIEWED THROUGH THE LENS OF SOLIDARITY

Opposite | Image credit:
Shane Rounce on Unsplash.

Immigrants encounter lots of challenges which include socio-cultural barriers and employment opportunities. Transitioning to these new spaces makes me realise that there are many other immigrants from different parts of the world who face similar challenges. I believe one way to thrive amidst these difficulties is to solidarize with these people who share similar ideals and forge ways to make our voices heard.

As part of Immigrant Heritage Month in June, I joined other immigrants to mark the Month, build networks and have a renewed sense of pride while clinging to the hopes that immigrants' challenges would become history some day.



PHOTO BY
MAGAZINE AMERICA

IFEANYI

HOP ON THE TRAIN

Opposite | Image credit:
Ifeanyi. *Hop on the train,*

Entering a train in Scotland made me realize how things have changed in my life. After a very long time, I had the opportunity to use a different transportation that once also existed in my home country. It made me treasure the need to build something that lasts. Being a part of the Mastercard Foundation Scholars Program community that has transformative leadership as a major ethos made me start thinking of the idea of building

something to last. The train stations in Scotland have lasted for centuries and this made me realise the need for restoration and maintenance to have a long-lasting and efficient transport system that can be enjoyed by several coming generations. This was a form of culture shock for me, as the contrasting availability of resources between my country and the UK made me more aware of the differences between places.



ABBY

WELCOME ABOARD!

Opposite | Image credit:
Marian. *Welcome Aboard!*

It was one of those days....
the kind you don't expect any
extraordinary thing to happen...
Then we saw the moving van, picking up
dust and racing towards our direction as
if it was racing against time.

Coming to an abrupt stop, the driver
whispered to us, "hop in!"

We hadn't packed, a part of us still
unready for the new life and just like
that....

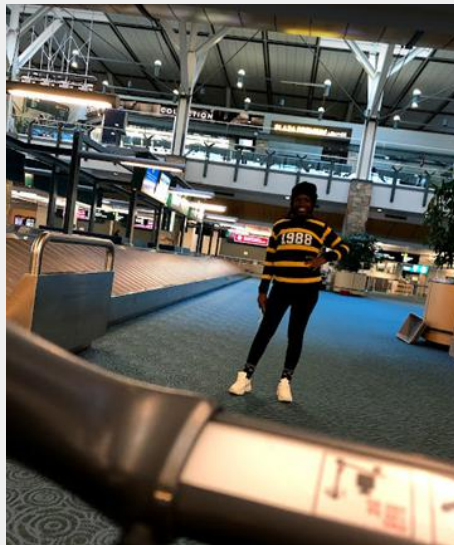
"We moved!"



ANNE

ARRIVAL

Opposite | Image credit:
Judith. Across | Image
credit: Anne. *Arrival*.



My moments of transition have revolved around time differences in Nigeria, the food, the culture, and technology advancements. This is the first picture I took at the airport. I set a timer and I took myself a picture at Vancouver International Airport to mark the beginning of my transition!

It was a wonderful change of atmosphere and the first thing I noticed was that everywhere was calm and cool. The process was systematic and similar to experiences I have had back home.





A B E N A

ADAPTION & SELF-DISCOVERY

I have had the opportunity to travel around in the past five years and I have learnt a lot doing whether I move there for a week or a year or more. I thought moving will be easier the more I do it, and it is easier in some ways, but it is still challenging. Any time I have to leave my place of comfort to a different place and adapt to that is scary.

Personally, moving has been a process of self-discovery, like a character being put into different situations and learning more about their strengths, weaknesses, things they love and motivation as a response to the change in environment.

Every place I have moved has taught me something about myself because of being in that place, the people I have met, the new resources available to me and the culture of that place.

Opposite | Image credit:
Abena. *Adaption &
self-discovery.*





HAMMED

THE HILL

OPPOSITE | Image credit:
Hammed. *The hill.*

This is a photo of Arthurs Seat in Edinburgh, and you will see it is rough. It shows that when you are moving into a new place, the process will never be smooth. It will be rough. When you are climbing the hill it is not straight, but full of milestones until you reach something. It takes a lot of learning and unlearning to get to that point where you understand a place and integrate in it. You have to try different ways and different means. There is never a straight line, a straight way to get to the summit.

To learn new things, sometimes I feel it is about us being open, reaching out to people first and building connections. One of the things I brought with me in Edinburgh was the sense and culture of community. I am with you. Your problems are my problems too. Your challenges are my challenges. However, it was difficult to be that person here when people stick to themselves alone and it took a lot of courage to reach out to someone first.



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IFEANYI

THE CLOCK

Opposite | Image credit:
Ifeanyi. *The clock.*

Time is time everywhere, and it is logically universal. Night falls with time, and day arises with time. However, coming to Scotland, things changed, as I noticed that night can come in the daytime and during the summer daytime lasts until late in the evening. This made me realize that time could also be relative depending on where you are. Time also has implications on what I perceive it to be in terms of security. The night is associated with danger or insecurity in Nigeria. However, in Scotland, I can walk to the grocery stores at 10 pm in the summer and it's still bright everywhere, making me feel safe and secure. Hence, time can be relative depending on what meanings we associate with it.

Time is also a determinant of transition: irrespective of how beautiful an experience, place, career, journey, life event is, it usually has a beginning and an end. People's opinions and perspectives about issues, are all shaped by learning and relearning which is hinged on time. So, I can say that time is transitioning, because it determines if we are going to change or not. Even when we have decided not to transition as individuals, time will continue to create events around us and bringing about change. It also determines growth, emotionally, physically, mentally, and materially, because our needs change with time and this forces us to make transitions, no matter how small.





GRADUATION

Opposite | Image credit:
© The University of
Edinburgh.





Opposite | Image credit: Ronald Agyekum. Above, top | Image credit: Ronald Agyekum. Below, left | Anne. Bottom right | UBC Mastercard Foundation.



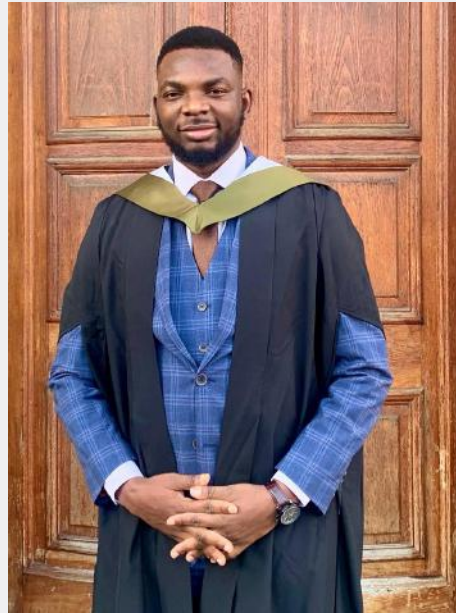
Above | Marian. Below |
Andrew. Opposite, above |
Image credit: Anne. Abby,
Dr. Cynthia Nicol and
Andrew. Opposite, bottom
| Anne..















LIBRARY





Pages 142-149 | Image
credit: © The University of
Edinburgh.



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≡ IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



David F. Robitaille Professorship
in Mathematics and Science Education
Faculty of Education | The University of British Columbia





≡ CONCLUSION

We hope future and current African international students, their mentors, faculty, and staff find the stories told through photos and reflective text a resource and place to learn through the experiences of others.

The Identities in Transition Project Team

Opposite | Image credit:
Favour.





