

The transnational lives and third space subjectivities of British Nigerian girls

Article (Accepted Version)

Kea, Pamela Jennifer (2020) The transnational lives and third space subjectivities of British Nigerian girls. *Global Networks*, 20 (1). pp. 170-189. ISSN 1470-2266

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Kea, Pamela (forthcoming 2019) 'The transnational lives and third space subjectivities of British Nigerian girls'. *Global Networks*.

Introduction

The growing and diverse body of literature on the transnational lives of children and youth partly reflects their increasing mobility. It covers a range of topics from transnational care chains and parenting; care and intimacy; independent child and youth migration; and children and youth who are sent back to their 'home' country for socialisation, education and care (see for example King and Kilinc 2014; Carling, Menjivar, and Schmalzbauer 2012; Parrenas 2005a, 2005b; and Orellana et al. 2001). Research on education, transnationalism and diaspora highlights the role education plays in creating new opportunities to (re) produce social status, cultural capital and, in some instances, become 'new citizens' (e.g. Olwig and Valentin 2015; Berg 2014; Waters 2006; and King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003). Historically, this literature has focused largely on children and youth who move from poorer countries to wealthier ones. However, there is a growing body of literature on children and youth from the West African diaspora in Europe who are being sent to West Africa for education (see for example Bledsoe and Sow 2011; Kea and Maier 2017; and Van Geel and Mazzacuto 2017).ⁱ

Despite the focus placed on children's and youth's experiences in migration research, particularly in the transnational family literature, Boehm et al. (2010) maintain that '...children and youth have been under theorized as "key players" in globalization and transnational processes.' This article contributes to the empirical and theoretical literature that positions children and youth as "key players" in transnational processes by focusing on their experiences of mobility, transnationalism and the new subjectivities their transnational practices give rise to. As British-Nigerian youth move back and forth between Britain and Nigeria they develop transnational lives. I focus on transnational mobility as creating 'a new space of identification' (Dolby and Rizvi 2008: 1), a third space. How do their transnational practices allow them to (re) define their subjectivities as well as lay claim to particular local and national spaces?

Drawing on ethnographic case studies, with young British Nigerian women who have gone to boarding school in Nigeria and returned to attend University in the

U.K., it is argued they occupy a 'politically ambiguous nexus of privilege...resistance' (Groenvald 2010: 259), compliance and productivity, as they negotiate transnational subjectivities, changing aspirations and gendered and generational expectations.ⁱⁱ Migration and mobility are deeply gendered (Pessar and Mahler 2003). Framing gender relations as relations of power and inequality, I argue that – paradoxically - this process of ongoing mobility can reinforce wider familial and gendered expectations in relation to marriage and reproduction. This sense of liberation can be constrained by parental expectations. Such expectations stem from a 'homeland orientation' mindset - a key feature of a diaspora (Cohen 2008: 12) - of their parents and wider kin. Further, it is argued that parental and wider kinship expectations that these young women marry Nigerians and members of the Nigerian diaspora serve to reproduce the racial distinctions and nationalist rhetoric of colonial modernity that their third space subjectivities contest.

I use the concept of third space as a heuristic device for understanding British Nigerian youth's transnational subjectivities. It is argued that for some this third space is a fruitful and productive space in which youth can counter racialised assumptions, craft alternative subjectivities, as well as narratives about African culture and political economy. Applying insights from decolonial theory, I seek to build on the transgressive nature of third space. Further, this article highlights the contribution decolonial theory can make to understanding their emerging subjectivities and their experiences of transnationalism.

After providing an overview of the relevant theoretical and conceptual literature, and my methodology, I present a brief discussion of the historical presence of Nigerians in Britain, and their choice to send their children to boarding school in Nigeria. I situate mobility and the emergence of particular types of privileged transnational subjects in the context of neo-liberal globalization and the growing prevalence of for-profit schools in Nigeria. Finally, I examine the ways in which my interviewees' transnational lives allow them to: craft alternative narratives about African culture and political economy; re-think their sense of local / national belonging; and develop third space subjectivities. Further, as they assume different subject positions, they work to meet gendered and generational expectations in relation to marriage and reproduction.

Transnationalism, Hybridity and Third Space

The literature on transnationalism, hybridity and third space has, in part, critiqued accounts of stable, uniform and rigidly defined concepts of ethnicity, race, nation and place (see for example Appadurai 2001; Basch et al, 1994; Bhaba 1994; Brah 1996; Gilroy 1993; Ong 1999; Ong and Nonini 1997; Sheller and Urry 2006). Rather, it has placed emphasis on dislocation, fragmentation, disjuncture and incoherence, as well as home and belonging, in the context of the migrant and diasporan experience (Sheller and Urry 2006: 211).

Transnationalism was initially used to describe a ‘new immigrant experience’ in which immigrants maintained ties and connections between their home and host societies (Basch et al. 1992; Glick Schiller et al. 1999; Portes et al. 1999; Vertovec 2009). The concept of transnational practices captures the ongoing nature of ‘cross border relationships and patterns of exchange’ (Vertovec 2001) across space and time. The spatialities of transnational practices highlight the spatial aspects of these global connections and networks and the way in which they ‘...are constituted through (and in fact constitute) particular sites and places’ (Featherstone et al. 2007: 383). Featherstone et al. (2007) suggest that initial work on transnational practices privileged the ‘immateriality’ of migrants’ mobility, foregoing a focus on their embeddedness in place (cf. Blunt 2007). This was particularly the case with work on elite migrants and migrants who were part of a ‘transnational capitalist class’ (see for example Ong 1999; and Sklair 2001). British Nigerian youth’s lives and transnational practices are rooted in particular places, to be sure. Movement between places - London, Nigeria, home, boarding school and University - as well as affirming (dis) connections can produce new and alternative spaces. These new spatial forms and practices are constituted through the friendship and / or kin networks that transnational practices and mobility affirm and give rise to (Mbah 2015: 20). Here one can refer to the ‘liberating potential of transnationalism’ (Brettell 2006: 329). Carling and Bivand (2014: 5) maintain that we need to develop our understanding of the ‘content and meaning’ of transnational practice. For instance, transnationalism and sustained mobility can produce post-national inclinations and the desire to live elsewhere, as well as affirm a sense of local and dual/ post- national belonging (Soysal 1994), invariably linking two or more places (Ralph and Staeheli 2011). How can we relate this to the emergence of third space subjectivities?

There is a growing body of scholarship on the third space subjectivities of diasporans and those engaged in transnational practices (see for example Alakija 2016; King and Christou 2011; Bhabha 1994) where third space involves negotiation between two or more places (see King and Kilinc 2014 on fourth space).ⁱⁱⁱ Alakija's (2016) work on first and second generation Nigerians in Britain examines their use of diasporic media as a space for identity expression and their positioning within a third space that brings together the 'homeland' and the country of settlement. Rather than focusing on the 'liminal' nature of identities and the way in which 'they fall between two national spaces' (Alakija 2016: 55), I focus on their transnational practices in the present and in their imagined futures. I do so in such a way as to frame third space as expansive and replete with alternatives. Following Soja (1996: 5): 'I try to open up our spatial imaginaries to ways of thinking and acting politically that respond to all binarisms, to any attempt to confine thought and political action to only two alternatives, by interjecting an-Other set of choices'. It is at this moment of 'in-between spaces' that we can move beyond 'narratives of originary and initial subjectivities' to a focus on emerging subjectivities (Soja 1996: 143). A focus on hybridity and third space helps us to question boundaries. Indeed, this is one of the significant purposes of hybridity. In addition, Alakija (2016: 5) argues that '...the contingent and indeterminate nature of hybrid identities (that is, the fact that diasporic identities disassemble and reconstitute across spaces) leaves room for essentialism to creep in through the back door'. I maintain that a focus on subjectivities as processual and in a state of becoming helps to counter any tendency towards essentialism. Further, by privileging positionality (King and Kilinc 2014: 131) and subject positions, I highlight the way in which people occupy multiple subject positions that can be situated within particular discourses (Holloway 1992: 247).

Decolonial Theory

Similarly, decolonial theory encourages us to critique essentialism and question boundaries. More significantly, it calls for a paradigmatic shift in the way we think about identities, the construction of knowledge and languages. It seeks to move beyond the racialized and hierarchical nature of identities that are born out of imperialism, colonialism and various other periods within modernity (Ndhlovu 2016:36). Privileging 'deep time' and the *longue duree* moves us beyond colonial

history and nationalism, to a focus on pre-colonial trade and mobility (Pieterse 2001: 232-233). Such a focus is central to a decolonial critique, which encourages us to think beyond national boundaries, modes of 'subjectivation' and colonial matrices of power (Quinjano 2000).

'Current global diaspora cultural identities and the ideas about who they are as a people are influenced in many ways by colonial imaginaries of race and racial categories...The notion of colonality of being, therefore, seeks to provide counter-narratives on identities and identity formation processes by drawing our attention to what Maldonado-Torres calls the phenomenology of subjectivity' (Ndhlovu 2016: 37).

My intention is to 'provide counter-narratives on identities and identity formation processes' by focusing on British Nigerian youths' experiences of their transnational practices and sense of belonging. In so doing, I seek to reimagine diaspora cultural identities and capture the 'complex character of transnational European' subjectivities (Arndt 2009: 104) that seek to question 'colonial imaginaries of race.' Such an approach is crucial to an understanding of British Nigerian youth's third space subjectivities.

A decolonial approach demands recognition of the way in which 'western narratives of progress' are rooted in colonial histories, the construction of the other, and the negation of pre-colonial histories for certain regions of the world (Nash 2002:222; Chakrabarty 2000; cf. Arndt 2009). Further, such an approach calls for the need to move away from reductive accounts of separate histories. By negating connected historical narratives and essentialising geographies rooted in north/ south and east / west divides, we exclude the racially diverse nature of transnational European subjectivities that are the product of these connections (cf. Bhabra 2015:103). A focus on youth's transnational practices foregrounds these connections, as well as recognises them as agents of change (Coe 2013: 1-2). Privileging the ontology of return (King 2011: 453), it is maintained that one needs to '...bring into productive tension gestures of thinking from nowhere and particular ways of being in the world' (Chakrabarty 2008: xviii).

Methodology

I situate the article in the mobilities framework because of its focus on the movement and development of ideas, concepts and ways of thinking, and not just on the movement of people (King and Cristou 2011: 453). Further, Van Geel and Mazzacuto (2017: 2) introduce the concept of ‘youth mobility trajectories’ to highlight the variation in ‘space and time’ of youth’s mobility practices as well as the effect of migration on the lives of Ghanaian youth as they grow up between The Netherlands and Ghana. Although mindful of the importance of wider mobility trajectories, this article focuses specifically on young women’s experiences of mobility for educational purposes and the effects of ongoing transnational practices on their subjectivities. One can characterise the British Nigerians who were the focus of this research as privileged and educated. I focus on young women because, unlike their male counterparts, they face pressure to marry and have children by a certain age. Significantly, gender differences in experiences of return were more apparent in relation to future expectations (i.e. marriage and having children) than in relation to initial motivations for sending youth to Nigeria for education.

Research for this article was carried out in 2012 over a period of four months in London and one month in Nigeria. A research assistant and I conducted one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions. Detailed semi-structured interviews lasting an hour and a half, were carried out with eight British Nigerians in their early twenties (seven women and one man) who were born and raised in London, had been sent back to Nigeria for secondary education and were back in the UK attending University and further education. (They were sent for a period of anywhere from two to six years and would travel back and forth between Nigeria and the UK). We carried out four lengthy focus group discussions of two hours each, with four of these interviewees. In addition, we carried out shorter interviews with fifteen youth who were still attending school in Nigeria. (Their parents were mainly in the U.K. and a few in the U.S.); and eight Nigerian socialized parents and first generation migrants to Britain. They were either British citizens or had legal residence in Britain. Finally, we carried out half hour interviews with nine close relatives of the youth (grandparents, uncles, aunts, and siblings) and several teachers. This article focuses on five of the detailed interviews, and the focus group discussions with four of the seven young women who had returned from Nigeria, in order to provide depth and a stronger sense of their experiences. Further, unlike those who were still at school in Nigeria, they had some distance on the experience and were better able to reflect on its effects.

In analyzing the interview results, drawing on content analysis, I looked for common themes as well as a variety of experiences whilst being mindful of the ‘feminist epistemological claim that things have their significance against a background of socially instituted practices’ (Kea 2013: 98 with reference to Tanesini 1999: 15). Informal discussions with British Nigerian youth and adults in the U.K. about mobility, education and return helped to provide a broader understanding of the nature and variability of these socially instituted practices. We gained access to interviewees through existing contacts from previous research, youth groups, schools and churches. The interviews are not a representative sample but reflect the ethnographic insights of those who chose to participate in the research.

Nigerians in the U.K. and Transnationalism

The second largest group from Africa and the tenth largest out of all immigrant nationalities (Matheson 2010: 17), Nigerians have migrated to the U.K. in large numbers since the 1950s. Most came for education and planned to return to an Independent Nigeria to contribute to nation-building (Harris 2006: 23). The UK has historically been the first choice of destination for Nigerian educational migration (Mbah 2017). Those who came throughout the 1960s for education and work left their children in Nigeria, sent them home from the U.K., or fostered them to white British families (Goody and Groothius 2007). A second wave of Nigerians migrated to the U.K. in the 1980s as a result of the economic crisis. Historically, the majority live in Greater London, and according to Harris (2006: 27), are of Yoruba descent.

British Nigerians have become more transnationally mobile, moving between London, Nigeria and elsewhere (Nworah 2005). Such mobility contests dominant narratives that frame African migrants’ transnational acts as practices of the excluded (Reynolds and Zottini 2015). Indeed, migration from Nigeria to Britain, as is the case with return migration, has historically served as a marker of social distinction. Sending children to boarding school in Nigeria is costly. Many are sent: to improve their academic performance; address their unruly and problematic behaviour at school; as a response to the institutional racism and prescriptive child rearing practices to which children and their parents are subjected; and to affirm links with Nigerian family and culture (Kea and Maier 2017). In relation to institutional racism, some British Nigerian parents chose to send their children to Nigeria for education

because of their children's experiences with the British educational system. Low expectations, racism and poor educational standards have produced differences in educational outcomes (Stevens 2007: 171). Many parents felt that an elite boarding school education in either the U.K., for those who can afford it, or in Nigeria would help to counter the effects of institutional racism (cf. Bledsoe and Sow 2007:8). Consequently, they turn to a burgeoning Nigerian private school sector.

The movement of youth from Britain to Nigeria makes visible cherished social values, aspirations and relations. Boticello's (2009) research amongst the Yoruba in London highlights the value attributed to wealth, health and children. Youth and their parents, as privileged migrants, negotiate existing opportunities and constraints in the pursuit of these goods. In this sense, their transnational acts are central to educational planning, family capital accumulation strategies, the reproduction of the family and social mobility within a context of neo-liberal globalisation (Olwig and Valentin 2015). Further, the decision to send children to school in Nigeria must be understood in relation to social and financial constraints in the UK, brought about partly as a result of neo-liberal globalisation. The latter is characterized by cuts to the welfare state, new forms of governance and decreasing investment in education and the reproduction of the labour force (Sassen 2014:9). At the same time, in the last few decades, we see the emergence of a new geography of centrality in which global cities house corporations and financial institutions that run economies of extraction and primitive accumulation (Ibid.). Further, as Africa hosts three of the five fastest growing economies in the world (Ghana, Ethiopia and the Ivory Coast), the continent is emerging as a potential global power house (Adegoke 2018). Nigeria has the biggest economy in Africa and is the tenth largest oil producer (Alakija 2016: 4). For many British Nigerian diasporans, this sense that parts of the African continent, as well as some cities and regions in Nigeria, are thriving financially undoubtedly makes it a more attractive place to which to send their children. Here, educational choice and aspiration are key to sustaining and (re)producing transnationalism amongst migrants and their descendants (Olwig and Valentin 2015: 249; Baas 2006, 2009).

Private Education in Nigeria

Formal western education, based on missionary education, was introduced during the colonial period in Nigeria. For profit schools emerged in Nigeria following

Independence in 1960 (Rose and Adelabu 2007: 71). There was also an expansion of state education (secular, Christian and Muslim) from this period until the mid 1980s (Peil 1982: 159). However, the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies in 1986 brought about a rapid decrease in educational investment and standards resulting in the expansion of the private school sector (Nwagwu 1997). Indeed, increasing numbers of Nigerians choose to send their children to private schools (Ogunsanya and Thomas 2004: 80; Harma 2013). Although privately financed, and largely independent from the government, private schools must be registered with the government (Harma 2013: 548). They vary in cost and quality, as poorer parents sacrifice in order to pay school fees (Ogunsanya and Thomas 2004). Lagos state, where ‘...12,098 private schools cater to 57% of the state’s enrolled children...’ has the highest percentage of private school children.^{iv} The more expensive elite boarding schools recruit the children of expatriate Nigerians through online marketing and open days in Nigeria, the U.K. and the U.S.^v Here, following accounts from several British Nigerian parents, youth are resources in which parents invest in order to fulfill familial aspirations, with the expectation that their children care for them in their old age.

Crafting alternative narratives

Much of the literature highlights the way in which the Nigerian diaspora in the U.K. invoke a sense of ‘home’ through festive occasions, material culture – food, music, dress and media (see for example Alikaja 2016; Boticello 2009) - all of which must be situated within a wider range of transnational practices. As well as having liberatory potential, transnational practices and mobility (Espiritu 2003) can provide the opportunity to challenge hegemonic representations of African society and craft alternative and critical narratives, as the following case illustrates.

Alice, a 21 year old who was born in Hackney, East London went to primary school in the U.K. At the age of eleven, she was sent to boarding school in Nigeria for five years for secondary schooling. The youngest of three children, she spent more time in Nigeria than either her brother or sister. Her siblings poor performance in their GCSE exams encouraged her parents to send them to school in Nigeria. Alice was sent earlier than her siblings in an attempt to avoid repetition of the poor academic

performance of her siblings. Alice reflects on the misconceptions that members of the Nigerian diaspora had and continue to have about life in Nigeria.

‘...a lot of them have a misconception with regard to Nigeria. So, whenever I speak to people that have not been to Nigeria, maybe once when they were young, they have this misconception... there are certain things that they just don’t understand about Nigeria. And it’s like they have been taught by this society not to like Nigeria or like going back. This usually changes once they spend time there.’

Despite having visited the country many times before being sent to school there, Alice initially did not want to go to school in Nigeria. Partly influenced by British society’s assumptions and dominant narratives about Nigerian society, she saw ‘return’ as a form of punishment. Yet, her feelings were ambiguous as she also experienced discrimination at Primary school in the UK and wanted to study elsewhere.

When I was growing up, when I was in Primary School, there was a lot of racism towards being African in general...not necessarily from white people but also from Caribbeans. There was a lot of err...obviously misconceptions about being African, that everybody stays in huts and those wild animals everywhere...that kind of thing, that was being seen as being African. They teased us with this. As if that’s how our parents lived. They just came over here on a boat or something. That kind of thing happened a lot when we were children...There are a lot of misconceptions with regard to Nigeria.

Such representations are rooted in ‘colonial imaginaries of race’ (Ndhlovu 2016:37); Africans were, and, to a degree, continue to be racialized as backward, poor and powerless. Historically in Britain, African migrants, racialised as ‘black migrants’ by the majority culture, were frequently conflated with Jamaicans (Alakija 2016: 56). Alice felt better able to openly challenge racist assumptions about Nigerians, once she had spent time at school there. Her experiences, including the levels of wealth she encountered there, contradicted many of the deeply entrenched stereotypes held in Britain about Africans. In addition, Alice’s parents’ status, as well as that of many other members of the Nigerian diaspora, as educated and privileged helped her to contest and resist such representations. Her father works as an academic at The University of London. Her mother started a school in Nigeria a few years ago and travels back and forth between London and Lagos. Their decision to send her to an elite boarding school in Nigeria, positions them as mobile professionals who make

choices about where to live and educate their children in a neo-liberal global economy.

Alice maintains that the increasing numbers of Nigerians and their descendants in Britain have helped to bring about a culture shift in attitudes towards Nigeria.

I have younger cousins and friends and their experience is very different from ours. They are very proud of their African roots. So when they go to school, they have their Nigerian key rings, they celebrate Nigerian Independence day with a lot of enthusiasm. So they know a lot more about Nigeria...there is less of this looking down on Africans because there is a lot more of us than before.

Although a relatively small and privileged group, such changes still speak to the increasing wealth, power and mobility of British Nigerians. Further, such changes serve to contest literature on the geo-politics of mobility that exclusively portrays African migrants and diasporans as marginalized and disempowered. Nonetheless, I recognise that most Nigerian migrants, many of whom are highly skilled and well resourced (Black and King 2004; Faist 2000), are part of a global precariat, and may work in exploitative sectors and working conditions in the UK. Further, they experience different levels of mobility, reflecting varied access to economic, social and cultural resources (Al-Ali, Black and Koser 2001), as well as the enhanced power of some, and diminishing power of others. Such mobility is, in turn, regulated by 'migration regimes and border politics' (Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004).

As places of privilege and opulence, elite boarding schools foster new networks and relations. In this sense, the choice of return provincializes Europe (Chakrabarty 2000) and is, therefore, central to crafting alternative narratives. Such transnational acts draw attention to the places of wealth and privilege that characterise many cities and regions in Sub-Saharan Africa and contest assumptions that when children 'go back' to Africa they are simply returning to poorer parts of the world (cf. Bledsoe and Sowe 2011: 747). Such assumptions fail to recognise increasing levels of wealth in the centre, particular regions of countries in the South, and focus exclusively on the periphery, or poorer regions. Recast as privileged migrants, mobile professionals and flexible citizens (Ong 1999), their transnational lives break down binaries between developed and developing, the local and the global, as well as counter the Eurocentric, racialised and classist assumptions that inform the literature (cf. Werbner 1999: 17). These assumptions are underpinned by an 'epistemological

ethnocentrism' (Mudimbe 1988: 15). Further, they challenge hegemonic representations of African diasporic subjects and dominant crises narratives about African society and political economy, rooted in colonial history. In this sense, their transnational practices can counter racialising discourses and the effects of racialization. However, transnationalism within this context is not simply a project of resistance but too one of productive engagement and repositioning where third space subjectivities can emerge.

Belonging and third space subjectivities

Brah (1996: 192) defines home and belonging as both a 'mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' as well as 'the lived experience of a locality.' Although the latter captures the sense of belonging expressed by many of the younger generation of interviewees who had returned to Nigeria for education, their ongoing mobility and transnational practices add another dimension to their understanding of home and belonging. In this sense, transnational practices and mobility can generate a more complex sense of belonging that affirms post-national inclinations (Ralph and Staeheli 2011), as well as a sense of regional belonging, rooted in the 'lived experience of a locality.' Sally, a second year student at the University of Sussex, who went to boarding school in Nigeria for her secondary education, is a friend of Alice's. They met in Nigeria and continue to be good friends. They are also in touch with Tamsin, a good friend who they met at boarding school in Nigeria, and who was studying at The University of Durham. Sally and Alice reflect on belonging, transnationalism and the period of transition into boarding school life in a focus group discussion.

Sally: I clicked with an American girl because she would understand me more. She wasn't from Nigeria. But after some time, you became Nigerian.

Alice: Yeah, even though we travelled back and forth, all of us became Nigerian.

Sally: People won't even notice. We are like 'oh yea, we are from London!' But at this boarding school, we are all Nigerian.'

Both Sally and Alice highlight the importance of the dynamic, contextual and collective nature of local / national identity and belonging. Although they are originally from London, once placed in an elite Nigerian boarding school, they became Nigerian. These new networks and relations produced a renewed sense of national, as well as regional belonging. Yet, they are not simply Nigerian but a ‘socially distinct group’ (Bourdieu 1996: 2) of Nigerians, whose distinctiveness is (re) produced within the confines of an elite boarding school environment (cf. Mbah 2017: 252). Their sense of being Nigerian is strongest at boarding school, at home with relatives in Nigeria and weaker in other contexts. At the same time, Sally defines herself as a Londoner, affirming her urban and regional roots. Indeed, it is her ongoing mobility between London and Nigeria, that encourages her to affirm her identity as a Londoner. These multiple forms of belonging are central to third space subjectivities. For Alice, this sense of being Nigerian is largely dependent on the intention to live and have a house there. Here a sense of national belonging is affirmed through a material and affective connection to the nation (cf. Ibid. 2017).

I want to live in Nigeria at some point. But I mainly want to have a property in Nigeria before I move there. We have a few family houses in Nigeria. But I want to have my own place, have a place where I can live if I ever want to move back there... I do want to go to Canada, and work there...I love living in London because it is where I was raised. But I feel like I can do the same as my parents...move somewhere else and start my own kind of story there...I feel like I don't ever want to be rooted in one place.

Alice's ‘ambivalent situatedness’ (Arndt 2009: 107-108) is key to the production of third space subjectivities. Ideas of home and belonging are rendered more complex and ambivalent – usually encompassing more than two options - in order to both reflect a lived reality and to counter the discrimination to which British Nigerians have been subjected (cf. Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 521-523). Following Soja (1996: 35) the social production of space, in this case third space, allows for alternative ways of being, affirming the ‘right to be different’. One can frame this difference as a new and / or alternative form of being and an expansion of the range of possibilities that people can inhabit. The latter, as well as the notion of hybrid identities, offers a critique of the dichotomies and logic of the racialising discourses and essentialising geographies of colonial modernity. Similarly, ‘...the fact that the colonies were not a second- ary and marginal event in the history of Europe but, on the contrary, *colonial*

history is the non-acknowledged center in the making of *modern* Europe' (Mignolo 2009: 174) demands recognition of the centrality of African diasporic subjectivities and history to contemporary (transnational) European subjectivities.

Drawing on what Soja (1996:12) terms 'our critical geographical imagination', third space combines real and imagined spaces in the sense that it draws on lived experience as well as those that are part of a 'transnational imaginary' (Wilson and Disanayanke 1996). This transnational imaginary is affirmed when Alice and others stay in touch with friends – and contemplate living - in other parts of the world:

I stay in touch with friends through Facebook, email, whats-app. We still speak but facebook is easier to get updated with each other's lives and maintain the relationship...Some are in Nigeria, some went to America, some Canada, some to South Africa, some came here...I'll see them if I travel to or live in these places.

The desire to travel and live in different places was echoed by many of my respondents. Bola, the eldest daughter of a family of four in which all girls were sent, or will be sent, to Nigeria to boarding school, maintains:

'I would go to Nigeria again, after University. Anywhere...I mean there was a point when I was thinking of going to China for a bit. To work. Yeah. I would go where the money is. And I definitely think that [being in Nigeria] did help.'

For Bola, time spent at school in Nigeria has encouraged and fostered a desire to live elsewhere, possibly returning to Nigeria or going elsewhere. Tolu, Bola's sister and the second eldest daughter, agreed:

'I have just done a certificate to teach English. So, I'd like to go anywhere, really, as soon as I finish my degree. Just teach for a while and travel. I don't really have ties anywhere. I don't really feel I am fully Nigerian, I don't feel I am British. I don't think nationality is really my thing...it's not a big deal to me because I have had it both ways and either place I fit in properly.'

Tolu expresses post-national inclinations (Soysal 1994), maintaining that nationality is 'not her thing.' In conveying her adaptability and ability to live anywhere, she highlights the benefits of dual citizenship. Indeed, her post-national inclinations are expressed in relation to her dual nationality. Other respondents expressed varying degrees of attachment to a national identity where they affirm Nigerian and British

cultural heritage, whilst also negating a sense of national belonging (cf. Mbah 2017). In this sense, they articulate and embody key features of contemporary transnational European subjectivities.

One must situate transnational and third space subjectivities within the new geography of centrality that cuts across North / South and East / West distinctions. Although the latter is central to neo-liberal globalisation, paradoxically, it creates new geopolitical realities and power geometries that offer alternatives to those of colonial geography and the coloniality of power. In this sense, the new geography of centrality opens up space for difference, alternative forms of knowledge production, and other ways of being and imagining. The interviewees frequently position themselves as independent well-educated young women with career goals, aspirations, desires and dreams that are truly global in their scope and nature. Indeed, ‘capitalism – in the sense of production systems, capital accumulation, financial markets, the extraction of surplus value, and economic booms and crises- has become even more deeply embroiled in the ways different cultural logics give meanings to our dreams, actions, goals, and sense of how we conduct ourselves in the world’ (Ong 1999:16). Such conduct can produce what Soja (1996: 35) terms a ‘thirdspace of political choice’: privileged transnational subjects can choose to either affirm or negate nationality and a sense of national belonging in the pursuit of their aspirations. Yet, post-national inclinations do not represent the decreasing power of the nation state as an institution that confers and withdraws rights but rather a changed relationship that transnational subjects have to the nation state (Faist 2010: 1672), in which they effectively reposition themselves. Further, as Ong (1999: 20) argues such transnational subjects are still constrained by state directives, market fluctuations and kinship obligations. With respect to the latter, we see a tension between individual aspirations and the collective kinship expectations of marriage and reproduction.

Compliance and gendered expectations

The sense of liberation and freedom to travel and live anywhere, as articulated by the interviewees, was tempered by - frequently stringent - parental demands to marry and have children.

That's another thing about people who get married in Nigeria...because...after you graduate, there is nothing else to do but get married. So all this travelling and stuff is kind of out of the question. Because they come and see you in a particular way, if you like travelling...A lot really see you as promiscuous. Because you are not settling down (Alice).

Here, getting married and having children are juxtaposed to on going mobility and travel. Indeed, the threat by family and wider society, particularly in Nigeria, of being labelled promiscuous serves as a deterrent to their continued transnational mobility. In many patriarchal contexts women's mobility is frequently controlled (Massey 1994: 148). Further, as Sally maintains, it is crucial that women marry in their youth, ideally in their twenties, to ensure they have many years of child bearing ahead of them:

My sister is 25 and when we went to Nigeria a lot of aunties and uncles were asking 'so are you planning on getting married soon'. People say 'ah, but you are getting old'. And you're only 25! There is a very different attitude to that kind of thing in Nigeria. That for a woman that is the main aim of life basically. If you are gonna be educated, fine... you not having a husband and child, that's just not acceptable in Nigeria.

All the interviewees conveyed their experiences of familial pressure to marry and fulfil the demands of domestication. Marriage and reproduction are key to gendered expectations of womanhood. Indeed, because marriage is seen as the second most significant life stage after birth and the 'main aim of life' - those who do not fulfil these expectations are stigmatised. Alice explains:

There is just that certain way of doing things in Nigeria, getting married. If you kind of deviate from that there is a lot of social pressure. A lot of people are going to be talking and gossiping. It's things that could really affect you hard...And I guess that, yeah, just doing things the way your parents would want you to be. The way society wants you to go about it... Growing up in Nigeria has taught me a lot about what is acceptable and what is not acceptable, what will make you a kind of outcast...You are bringing your own problems on yourself by doing certain things. Or by going into certain relationships.

The interviewees expressed the importance of fulfilling parental and wider kinship expectations because of social pressure and the fact that their parents have invested in their education. Bourdieu (1990:167) refers to 'an economy of material and symbolic exchanges between the generations'. Parents provide the resources to ensure that

their children are educated, fulfil particular aspirations and are socialised accordingly. Their daughters, in turn, get married and reproduce, partly to avoid bringing shame on their parents, and most significantly to perpetuate the family line. Significantly, great importance is still attached to this exchange in a transnational context. Indeed, it becomes more important when Nigerians live abroad and want to affirm their roots, as Sally explains:

There is a thing about being a woman and adopting your husband's ...everything. That is very important to them, having still that Nigerian-ness about you and not kind of trading in your identity for somebody else's who is not Nigerian, who is not, like, black... There is a lot of fear that there is gonna be a lot of Nigerians who don't marry Nigerians... and they are just not gonna be a real Nigerian race any more, not a real Nigerian culture.

Sally articulates the sense of collective anxiety expressed by her parents and other Nigerian relatives about the need to perpetuate 'Nigerian culture'. (Paradoxically, by expressing this collective anxiety their parents and extended family re-inscribe a racial distinctiveness and essentialism that their children's transnational European subjectivities contest). Women are not just reproducing the family and an ancestral lineage but the nation as they reproduce citizens, an ethnic group and a race (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989). Women's bodies are central to imagining the nation, its racialised dimensions and the 'embodied politics of identity and difference' (Blunt 2007: 686). In this sense, despite the interviewee's diasporic status, they symbolise the fertility and health of the Nigerian nation (cf. Blunt 2000). In instances where parents have left Nigeria and are no longer based there, and where home and a sense of rootedness is part of a lost past, this symbolic association can be all the more important (Bricknell 230: 2012). For many members of the Nigerian diaspora in the U.K. home and belonging is partly a 'mythic place of desire in the diasporic imagination' (Brah 1996; Alakija 2016); children become the means through which this myth can be nurtured and (re) produced. Consequently, young women's bodies may be subjected to familial and community control. Yet, within a domestic context such control is rarely hegemonic and involves flexibility, negotiation and, in some cases, passive resistance. For instance, although most of the interviewees maintained that they would eventually get married, Sally and Tamsin insisted that, despite their parents' disapproval, they would co-habit with future partners before marrying.

Similarly, Alice felt that parental pressure to marry would not compromise her independence and the choices that she would make in her life.

... If I was like 30, 31 and I was not getting married, there'll be serious intervention. There is no way that my parents are gonna let that slide!... I feel like going to Uni. is like an extra asset for females. Because eventually in the life plan that most of our parents have for us, we are going to get married...It doesn't bother me because me getting married to a man and just living off his paycheque is never gonna happen....The thing is that now we are at a stage where we are kind of more enlightened. I feel like I have more of a say in what I am gonna do.

Alice's level of education, new networks and transnational life style have expanded her choices and aspirations, allowing her to occupy a range of subject positions. On the one hand, she is a dutiful daughter, who acknowledges the importance of marrying, and fully intends to do so. On the other hand, she maintains that she is free from financial dependence and particular marital constraints. Further still, her education will allow her to make choices about her future career and home. Indeed, '...priorities can change over time' (Erdal and Oeppen 2013: 875). Her claim to being 'more enlightened' conveys her sense of autonomy and liberation, partly cultivated through her transnational practices and the production of her third space subjectivity.

Conclusion

As British Nigerian youth travel back and forth between Britain and Nigeria they engage in transnational practices, which give rise to the emergence of third space subjectivities. Building on existing literature on transnational practices, and third space amongst diasporans (Alakija 2016; Bhabha 1994) - where third space involves the negotiation between home and country of settlement - I have sought to move beyond these binaries and to highlight the transgressive potential of third space. In so doing, I have applied insights from decolonial theory. The coloniality of power helps to 'shed some useful insights for questioning and challenging the epistemological foundations of how diaspora cultural identities have been and continue to be imagined' (Ndhlovu 2016: 37). As well as being mindful of the new geography of centrality and power geometries that cut across North / South and East / West

distinctions, such questioning and challenging must involve a critique of such binaries.

The interviewees' transnational practices create a new and potentially transgressive space of identification in which they can counter racialized assumptions and craft alternative subjectivities and narratives about African society and political economy. Their local and dual / post national (Soysal 1994) sensibilities, levels of privilege, and ability to make choices about education and work in a neo-liberal global political economy help them to subvert the coloniality of being and 'colonial imaginaries of race'. As they position themselves variously as Londoners, Nigerians, dual and post-nationals, they move away from an analysis that frames their identities in relation 'two national spaces' (Ralph and Staeheli 2011: 521; cf. Alakija 2016). Further, as they express key features of transnational European subjectivities, they open up space for '...the creation of new modes of being and becoming' (Ndhlovu 2016: 37 with reference to Fanon 1986:1). In this sense, they harness the productive power and liberating potential of transnationalism (Espiritu 2003). Yet, as young British Nigerian women, they are subjected to parental and wider kinship obligations to marry, ideally a Nigerian or a member of the Nigerian diaspora, and reproduce. While their transnational practices and third space subjectivities provide insight into the varied nature of contemporary transnational European subjectivities, parental and wider kinship expectations serve to reproduce the racial distinctions and nationalist rhetoric of colonial modernity.

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Acknowledgments: Many thanks are due to the Global Networks editors and reviewers for their incisive comments.

Note

ⁱ Diaspora ‘generally refers to more historically embedded migrations, dispersing from an original source territory, to a usually wide range of locations...’ (King and Christou 2011:456). Further, diasporas frequently ‘mobilize a collective sense of identity’ with those with whom they share national and / or ethnic identity (Cohen 2008: 7).

ⁱⁱ This research forms part of a larger Rockefeller funded research project entitled “Reconfiguring Transnational Care and Education: West African Migrants in the UK” (grant no. 2008 SRC 114) on Gambian and Nigerian families who send their children to The Gambia and Nigeria.

ⁱⁱⁱ Soja’s (1996) concept of third space was initially informed by Lefebvre’s notion of ‘(social) space as a (social) product’ (26) in which physical, mental and social space is linked. In addition, Soja builds on Bhabha’s (1994) concepts of third space and hybridity (in which individuals negotiate between two or more cultural groups) and Foucault’s notion of heterotopia, ‘a transgressive practice of space, often in imagination’ (Maier 2013: 82).

^{iv} Costs for elite private boarding schools vary from \$4,000 to \$20,000 for fees alone (Expatriate Arrivals Website).

^v Although there is a growing body of literature on the international education market, specifically higher education in western countries (see for example Waters 2006:180; King and Ruiz-Gelices 2003; Olwig and Valentin 2015), there is virtually no literature on private schools and higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa.