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International education and the pursuit of 'Western' capitals: middle-class Nigerian fathers' strategies of class reproduction

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ABSTRACT

Studies have shown the ways in which non-Western middle- and upper-class families are seeking to educate their children in the West. The rationale for this kind of social reproduction strategy is the acquisition of 'valuable' cultural and symbolic capitals which can be advantageous in the graduate job market of both their home country and internationally. Presenting a case study of four middle-class Nigerian fathers, the paper reveals the rationale behind these fathers' decision to opt out of the Nigerian HE sectors. The paper focuses on three Western capitals – specifically institutional (a Canadian degree), embodied (high proficiency in English language) and symbolic (Canadian citizenship) – capitals which will position these parents' children advantageously in the future. The paper concludes by presenting an argument that in seeking these Western capitals for their children, these parents become implicated in the Western hegemonic discourse of 'West is best'.

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> *Social positions […] are also strategic emplacements, fortresses to be defended and captured in a field of struggles* (Bourdieu 1984, 244).

As implied in the opening quote, class advantage cannot be taken for granted but rather needs to be continually maintained through the strategic accruement and deployments of relevant capitals. Those wishing to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions must employ effective social class reproduction strategies particularly in the current global context of credential inflation (Brown 2003; Wright and Lee 2019). Bourdieu (1984) describes social reproduction strategies as 'the set of outwardly […] practices whereby individuals or families tend, unconsciously and consciously, to maintain or increase their assets and consequently to maintain or improve their position in the class structure' (125). This paper presents the social reproduction strategies adopted by four Nigerian middle-class fathers who worked in multinational companies and who were seeking Western capitals – a Canadian degree, Canadian citizenship and a high proficiency in English language – for their children in an attempt to maintain their middle-class status and advantage. Research on middle-class parental reproduction strategies tended to focus on the role of mothers and consequently portray mothers as more adept at such class work (Lareau 2003).

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However, by focusing on middle-class fathers' intensive involvement in their children's education this paper reveals how middle-class fathers are not only willing but highly competent actors in the class game.

Several studies in the West (Ball 2003; Reay, Crozier, and James 2011), Asia (Waters 2006, 2007) and Africa (West 2002) have shown that the middle-classes rely on the qualifications bestowed by the educational institutions – particularly HE institutions (Brown 2000) – for the maintenance of their class identity and advantage. In previous scholarship, I have explained how the Nigerian elite parents are maintaining their social position through the consumption of international private schooling (Ayling 2015, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). I focus on how the changes in both the social and educational landscapes have not only led to a heightened awareness of social position in contemporary Nigeria but also intensified the search for guarantees through strategic consumption of the international schooling market (Ayling 2017). Further, I framed the elite parents' decision to educate their children in British private boarding schools abroad as a social reproduction strategy, which not only enabled them to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions but allowed them to distinguish them and their children, as the *authentic* elites, from the new challengers.

This paper builds upon – but crucially advances – our understanding of the role of international education in the maintenance of class advantage in contemporary Nigeria by drawing on interviews with four middle-class fathers who were part of the original study. One of the few things the Nigerian middle-class parents had in common with their elite counterparts was an understanding of the role that Western education – or more precisely 'Western' capitals – plays in the struggle for class advantage in contemporary Nigeria. However, as I have discussed elsewhere (Ayling 2017, 2019b), due to differential access to economic capital, the elite parents and the middle-class parents in my study do not engage in the international education market in the same way. For example, possessing huge economic capital allowed the elite parents to access the desirable elite schools in the UK while their middle-class counterparts more limited finances meant they were relegated to the Canadian market. I use the word 'relegated' because data from the middle-class parents' interview transcripts revealed that the United Kingdom was their preference. This paper aims to provide insight into the type of cultural and symbolic capitals the middle-class fathers covet and how they believed these capitals might be beneficial to their children in the future.

The paper starts with a brief description of Bourdieu's capitals; theorising 'place' not only as a type of capital, which can be used to mitigate against risk in education but also (certain) 'places' as sites where valuable capitals can be acquired. The paper then provides a brief review of the current literature which addresses the role of Western education credentials and the English language in the maintenance of middle-class status in non-Western countries. The research design and methodology are then described before presenting an analysis of the data drawing on the interviews with four middle-class fathers. My analysis engages with and is framed by Bourdieusian theorizing of capital – and cultural capital in particular – as integral to successful social reproduction. The paper discusses how the consumption of international education– as a reproduction strategy – enabled these fathers to not only circumvent the risk which they associate with Nigerian degrees but crucially enabled their children to acquire valuable Western capitals. The paper contends that these Western capitals are types of institutional (a Canadian degree), embodied (high proficiency in English

language) and symbolic (Canadian citizenship) capitals, which will position these fathers' children advantageously for their future. The paper concludes by drawing our attention to the broader implication of these fathers' social reproduction strategy. That is, how it helps to maintain slogans such as 'West is best' perpetuated by hegemonic discourses, which positions the West at the apex of the metaphoric global ladder.

Theorising capital: 'place' as a form of capital

Bourdieu (1986) theorised that there are four types of capital namely, economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital where cultural capital has the most valuable '*symbolic* efficacy' (Bourdieu 1986, 247 – my emphasis). According to Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital exists in three forms namely, embodied (e.g. accent and deportment) objectified (books and artwork) and institutionalised (academic certificates and diplomas) forms. Kim (2011) describes cultural capital as 'valued and exclusive cultural resources that enable one to signal, attain, or maintain a certain type of social status or position' (119). Flemmen et al. (2017) contend that while the institutional cultural capital 'becomes a capital largely through its value in labour markets,' embodied cultural capital 'becomes an asset through the positive or negative evaluation it is subject to […]' (1279). Importantly, and in relation to this paper, Bourdieu contends that 'transmission of cultural capital is no doubt the best hidden form of hereditary transmission of capital, and it therefore receives proportionately greater weight in the system of *reproduction strategies*' (ibid. 247 my emphasis). Symbolic capital, on the other hand, is what gives the other capitals – especially cultural capital – their legitimacy (Bourdieu 1998).

Research has found that certain geographical locations can be so valuable in the struggle for class advantage that they become forms of capital in themselves; what Borjesson, Broady, and Lidegram (2007) aptly describe as 'place-specific symbolic capital' (2). Byrne (1999) argues that 'spatial location determines access to crucial social goods and, in particular, these different kinds of education may have enormous significance for future life trajectory' (110). However, access to geographical locations where certain capital can be acquired is not open to all. These are exclusive places and, as Reay (2004) reminds us, '[s]ocial exclusivity is the counterpoise to social exclusion, and we need to pay attention to both to understand how educational choice operates' (539). In other words, risk *in* education is spatialised (Butler and Robson 2001); therefore, whether one is able to acquire valuable capitals necessary to succeed in education and the graduate job market is determined to an extent by *where* they are being educated.

The research in this paper speaks to studies that have found that spatial mobility (within and between nation-states) is one of the means by which the privileged classes minimize educational risk and accumulate both institutionalized and embodied forms of cultural capital (Borjesson and Broady 2005; Vincent et al. 2013; Maxwell and Yemini 2019). The massification and marketisation of education has made education a risky investment, which requires careful and strategic planning and utilisation of resources. Consequently, middle-class parents' decisions on where to educate their children are not merely innocuous practices but instead are a type of class strategy employed to ensure successful reproduction and class advantage (Breidenstein et al. 2018; Marwell et al. 2019; Waddling, Bertilsson, and Palme 2019).

Western education and the maintenance of middle-class advantage in non-Western countries

> *When class fractions who previously made little use of the school system enter the race for academic qualifications, the effect is to force the groups whose reproduction was mainly or exclusively achieved through education to step up their investments so as to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications and, consequently, their position in the class structure* (Bourdieu 1984, 135).

Research continues to demonstrate that 'diploma inflation' (Bourdieu 1984, 143) is indeed a global phenomenon that structures both the international education market as well as transnational class strategies that surround it. Waters' scholarship (Waters 2005, 2006, 2007; see also Waters and Brooks 2010) documents how middle-class families in Hong Kong rely on educational qualifications gained from Canada for maintaining their class position in Hong Kong where it contributes to a transnational identity. Waters (2006) explains how by sending their children to Canada, the middle-class families in Hong Kong were not only able to avoid the risk of academic failure (due to the tough entrance exam in Hong Kong) but also 'able to access the most desirable forms of education' (Waters 2006, 188–189). Waters (2005) also observed how schooling in the West enable non-westerners to acquire profitable embodied capitals explaining how 'an overseas educational experience is believed to indicate (in its bearer) fluency in the English language as well as less obvious qualities, such as confidence, sociability, cosmopolitanism and possession of valuable social capital' (363).

More recent studies in Asia (Kim 2011, 2016; Sin 2013) and central Asia (Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012) echo Waters' findings. In Kim's (2016) research on occupational trajectories of Korean international graduate students, he argues that there is a 'preference for US doctoral degree holders in Korean universities' (35) noting that 80% of academics in the top three universities in Korea had obtained a doctorate degree in the United States. Despite gender discrimination against women in the labour market, Kim explains how Korean women who have acquired their HE degree from the United States were considered favourably by employers as they are seen to 'have proven their ability' (38). Within Kim's study, the desire for a candidate with a US degree might be due to how 'US degree membership exerts a halo effect on Korean customers, who tend to give more trust and credit to US-educated staff' (2016, 38). In thinking through the relationship between capital, acquisition and place, Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson (2012) argue that a foreign degree is typically worth more to non-Western students in their local labour market than in the West where non-Western graduates 'would have to compete with local [Western] graduates' (2285). What this finding from Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson (2012) research indicates is the extent to which Western degrees, as a cultural capital, are beneficial to non-westerners.

Perhaps due to the rise in credentialism and the ubiquitous nature of hegemonic discourses that typically frame the West as technologically, scientifically and intellectually more advanced than non-Western countries and Africa in particular (Fanon, 1967/2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013; Dalleo 2016), studies have shown an increase both in the number of international schools using international/Western curriculum in non-Western societies (Tarc, Tarc, and Wu 2019; Adams and Agbenyega 2019; Bunnell, Courtois, and Donnelly 2020) and Western universities with off-shore campuses in non-Western countries (Smith 2009; Dobos 2011; Miller-Idriss and Hanauer 2011; Shams and Huisman 2012; Nigel 2018).

The availability of off-shore campuses has arguably made it easier for non-Western students to acquire a desired 'Western degree'. However, Sin's (2013) research on the Malaysian student experiences when studying for a UK degree in Malaysia indicates that the geographical locations from which one acquires their Western credentials matters and that considerably more value is attached to educational credentials (and the recipients) gained from Western overseas (on-shore) than those obtained from off-shore campuses. As Sin writes:

> Participants who would complete their education in Malaysia anticipated a lack of appreciation of their mode of study in the labour market, as opposed to their onshore counterparts [Malaysian students studying in the UK] who were believed to enjoy higher status recognition (856).

Sin explains that even though her participants perceived a UK degree obtained in Malaysia to be superior to one gained from Malaysian public universities, studying in the UK would have allowed them 'to immerse in much desired foreign dispositions and experiences that conferred higher prestige and respectability' (2013, 856). What the findings from these studies have shown is how non-westerners do attach high value to the 'Western' dispositions and education credentials. Consequently, as well as having place-specific *symbolic* capital, the West, the Global North more specifically, is also considered by non-westerners as having place-specific *cultural* capital.

Recent research indicates that a growing number of international students studying in Western countries such as the UK, US and Canada are from Africa, and more specifically, Nigeria (Akpotu and Akpochafo 2009; Kim 2011; IIE, 2015). For example, the International Institute of Education (IIE, 2019) reported that Nigeria is the leading source of students from the African continent, and the 11th leading place of origin for students globally, coming to the United States. What these studies clearly show is that affluent Nigerian parents are key stakeholders in the international education market. However, despite what Beech (2015, 333) has described as 'an explosion in the study of international student mobility', very few studies draw on empirical data to expand understanding of parental rationales for their consumption of international schooling. Crucially, there is scant empirical research on African parents' perspectives both on the international education market and international student mobility. This paper therefore represents a significant shift from the current focus on students' consumption to parental views on the perceived benefits of international education through a focus on Western capitals. Evidence from my own research shows that parents from affluent backgrounds play a crucial role in the decision for their children to study overseas and often make these decisions long before the child even becomes aware of these schooling options (Ayling 2017). The arguments presented in this paper primarily focus on consumption patterns as motivated by positional advantage and social status. Specifically, the paper, through the critical analysis of interview transcripts reveals how the middle-class fathers in my study were drawing on their experiences of working in multinational companies to decide the type of capital that they believed would give their children advantage in the graduate job market.

Research design

The research reported in this paper is part of a larger study that investigated the consumption of international schooling by affluent Nigerian parents (Ayling 2015, 2016, 2017, 2019a, 2019b). The research was carried out in Lagos (South), Abuja (North) and Port-Harcourt

(East) in Nigeria, as well as in London, England. Research participants were recruited through snow-balling and opportunistic sampling frameworks. Data was collected through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaires were used to collect demographic information such as parental age, ethnicity, religion, educational qualifications, job title, number of children etc, while the semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data.

Twenty-six affluent Nigerian parents – all of whom were living in Nigeria at the time of fieldwork – were recruited for the original study. This number consisted of 11 fathers and 15 mothers. Four of the 26 parents had sent their children to Canada, one to Ghana and the remaining 21 parents had sent their children to the UK. It is the interview transcripts of the four middle-class fathers who had sent their children to Canada – Mr. Akin, Mr. Kome, Mr. Dele and Mr. Giwa that inform the analysis presented in this paper.

I am aware that the use of the label 'middle-class' in describing affluent Africans is highly contentious and contested (see Kroeker, Scharrer, and O'Kane 2018 for in-depth discussion). I am equally aware of the debate around imposing labels on research participants (Kezar 2003), with some academic scholars viewing this as unethical (Maylor 2009; Archer 2011). Nevertheless, my decision to use the term 'middle-class' to describe these fathers was influenced entirely by the fact that three of the fathers consistently used it when describing themselves and their lifestyle. All the fathers had at least a degree qualification and held middle management positions in international corporations at the time of the fieldwork (Maxwell and Yemini 2019), suggesting they spent considerable time in their professional lives among upper-class Nigerians and westerners. More importantly, three of the fathers – Mr. Akin, Mr. Dele and Mr. Giwa –the same fathers that had consistently used the term 'middle-class' had lived overseas (e.g. UK, Netherlands) on secondment which indicates they could be considered Global Middle-Class (Maxwell et al. 2019). Pseudonyms are used throughout the paper to protect the participants' identity.

Strategies for reproducing and maintaining middle-class advantage

'Any advantage I can give these guys […] I will let them have it' (Mr. Akin)

In order to maintain their class position, the dominant class must transfer their social status and advantages to their children. However, studies have shown that intergeneration transition of class position between middle-class parents and their children is increasingly becoming difficult (Brown 2003; Tomlinson 2008; Bathmaker, Ingram, and Waller 2013). This is partially due to the 'the schooling boom' (Bourdieu 1984, 132) which has resulted in credential inflation, and which has, in turn, intensified competition both within the field of education and the graduate job market. To provide insight into the rationales of these fathers' social reproduction strategy through the consumption of international schooling I first present the reason why these fathers opted out of Nigeria HE sectors in the first place. This is then followed by a critical analysis of the three Western capitals – a Canadian degree, high proficiency in English language and Canadian citizenship – which these fathers were seeking for their children.

Nigerian universities as 'a no-go area'

The data from parents' interview transcripts revealed that the elites never considered Nigerian education sectors (primary through to tertiary) as viable possibilities for their children. However, as indicated in the extracts below *all* the of the middle-class parents had considered sending their children to public universities in Nigeria prior to the decision to engage with the Canadian market.

> I feel particularly painful about this because I did go to UniLag [University of Lagos] once with my son to look around. I went with pride as in "oh let's just stop and let me show you round" and the boy goes like "whoa you really suffered" (laughs) and that was the end of all my pride. That was where we stopped the trip (Mr Giwa).

> I went to UI (University of Ibadan). That's where I did my degree and my plan was for all my children to follow my footstep when the time comes but after my first son did his JAMB [Joint Admission and Matriculation Board] me and my wife decided to change our mind […] because of all the constant strikes and cult activities and corrupt lecturers (Mr. Dele).

> I was happy for my girls to go to Uniport [University of Port Harcourt] or better still UniBen [University of Benin] but when I think about it again, I feel that it will be a total waste of my hard earned cash (laughs) (Mr Kome).

> This [Canada] was a last-minute thing […]. We saw the way things are going here so we decided to consider abroad (Mr. Akin)

The difference in how elite and middle-class parents engaged with the international education market is significant not only because it indicates the different financial capabilities of both sets of parents – the fathers chose Canada because it was cheaper than the US and UK, which was their preference (see Ayling 2017) – but also their primary motive for educating their children in the West. For example, in my previous publication, I explained how the middle-class parents 'saw and used Canadian boarding schools mainly as a means of getting their children into Canadian universities' (Ayling 2019b, 102). As one father puts it, 'the preparatory school is to get a feel for how life is in Canada before [he] transitions to a university environment' (Mr Giwa). This was in contrast to the elite parents who I contended 'typically conceived UK-based private boarding schools as […] status seminaries' (Ayling 2019b, 102) where their children can "absorb' the British upper-classes' way of life' (Ayling 2019b, 101). Consequently, I discussed how the vast majority of the elite parents had enrolled their children in UK-based private boarding schools aged 13; with one parent sending her son at the age of 9 (Ayling 2017) while the middle-class fathers typically wanted their children to spend 'just one session' (Mr. Akin) in secondary schools in Canada before going into university.

The extracts above indicate that the perceived poor quality of public/government owned universities in Nigeria is a strong motivating factor for why these parents sought an overseas degree for their children. Putting it bluntly, Mr. Giwa described degrees acquired from Nigerian HE institutions as 'useless.' This is despite the fact that all four of the fathers I spoke with had acquired their degree from these universities. Nonetheless, literature on HE institutions in Nigeria have shown that the fathers' sentiments may be justified. For example, in a scathing report on the state of Nigerian universities, Oni (2012) contends that the Nigerian 'society is […] raising a generation of ignorant and illiterate youths' (187). Echoing

this Njoku (2016) argues that those graduating from Nigerian universities are gaining 'certificates without substance' (63).

In regard to their investment in education, the fathers are also making economic and social judgments and therefore seeking places where their investment can yield the most return. Mr. Kome commented that sending his daughters to Nigerian universities would amount 'to total waste of [his] hard earned cash'. Expanding on his point about the economic risk involved in sending one's child to a public university in Nigeria, Mr. Kome commented:

> As I speak with you today the public universities, they are all on forced holidays because lecturers, teachers are on strike. We are not looking at a situation where they could graduate at a particular time frame … The value of education here, in terms of the monetary value, economic value of naira and kobo […] is also equally high and on top of this is the equally high degree of uncertainty of knowing as to when one can get out of school so the problem here is that a degree that would last 3 years here would drag on to between six top seven years.

Given the issues, specifically, the loss of one's investment, outlined in Mr. Kome's remark, the consumption of international schooling becomes the only way by which these fathers can ensure a successful reproduction of their class position. Moreover, as part of the middle-class who are equipped with less economic capital than their elite counterparts, a careful strategic deployment of their economic capital is critical. These fathers demonstrated strategic investment through their decision to enrol their children in preparatory schools where they spend some time; albeit limited, before going onto university in Canada thereby increasing their children's chance of not only gaining admission into a Canadian university but also succeeding in their study. As shall be explained shortly, the decision to educate their children in Canada where they can potentially acquire 'a Canadian passport' (Mr Dele) is also a strategic one.

Interestingly, all of the fathers are also suspicious of the quality of teaching and learning even within highly resourced private university in Nigeria.

> Covenant [university] when they do their graduation, the folks who graduate with 1st class are about 20% of the class or something and that is where my problem is. How can 20%, 50% of the class be making 1st class and a very cynical friend said that okay when you start your university be giving them third class and see who will come. It might be that they get 1st class, the kids are happy, the parents are happy and more customers and so that is my problem (Mr Akin).

Mr Akin's comment not only indicates an awareness of the intense competition within the field of HE education in Nigeria but crucially reveals the psychology of most affluent Nigerians whereby Nigerians and Nigeria – as a country - are conceived as incapable of producing quality products (Okpara and Anyanwu 2011; Shonekan 2013). Consequently, anything that is *made* in Nigeria is viewed with a large dose of scepticism. This deep-rooted belief about Nigeria's inability to produce quality product is evidenced in Mr. Kome's comment - 'the most *any* university in Nigeria can [produce] is an *average student*'. This is despite the fact that Covenant, the university mentioned by Mr Akin, is one of the top private universities in Nigeria (Omuta 2010). Molande (2008) posits that the negative characterisation of Africa in general by Africans is because 'the African unconscious cultural logic accepts that we are yet to be there where Europe and America are now' (179). Extending this point further, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, 38) contends that colonisation has 'produced both historical and intellectual realities mediated by inferior-superior relation' between the

West and Africa. With this in mind, I now focus on the three forms of 'Western' capital the fathers considered beneficial to their children's future as local and global middle-class.

Western capitals

A Canadian degree

Evidence from the data indicates that these fathers believed that Nigerians who have acquired foreign degrees are considered more favourably by multinational companies.

> The way we interact with people who have gone to school outside the country is different from how we interact with people who schooled here (Nigeria) and I see it quite often because in the past I use to be on interview panels and the truth is that those who graduated here are viewed less favourably (Mr Akin).

> If you look at the trend in Nigeria, even most of the multinationals that are coming, they actually prefer now to go abroad to recruit and bring people back, yeah. Even my company that I work for, in the last 5–7 years things seem to be changing and there is a preference for those with foreign certificates (Mr Dele).

The words of Mr Akin and Mr Dele indicate an acute awareness of the highly competitive global arena within which multinational companies operate and the concomitant difficulty in gaining employment in such organisations. Their comment about multinational organisations having 'a preference for those with foreign certificates' echoes with Kim's (2011) findings in Korean context. Interestingly, even though research indicates that a Western degree does not necessarily translate into job securement for non-westerners in the West (Holloway, O'Hara, and Pimlott-Wilson 2012), all of the fathers believed that a Canadian degree would enable their children to 'get a job anywhere in the world' (Mr Kome).

Mr Giwa's remark that a Canadian degree (as a form of institutional cultural capital) would make his children 'globally competitive,' further confirms how they see themselves as part of the global middle-class having worked for a multi-national corporation and having lived and worked in the West. More importantly, it indicates that these parents understand that a 'scholastic investment strategy' (Bourdieu 1984) to use a Bourdieusian phrase, is required if they are to secure the type of future they envisioned for their children.

Embodied and symbolic cultural capital

High English proficiency

> *Education as symbolic capital worked together with other capitals to advantage and disadvantage, and to position social agents in multiple fields* (Grenfell 2008, 76).

The fathers, as part of their experience of working for multinational companies, also seemed aware that in the context of credential inflation, an educational qualification alone is not enough to acquire positional advantage both within local and international graduate job markets (Tomlinson 2008). Rather, as Grenfell implied in the quote above, other types of capital such as embodied cultural and symbolic capital are needed to augment academic credentials (Clarke 2018). Without exception, each of the four fathers commented on the acquisition of proficiency in English language as integral to their decision to send their children to Canada, with one father describing this cultural capital as a 'very important

asset' (Mr. Dele). However, it is important to stress that this is not simply because the fluency in English language is a type of embodied cultural capital that allows 'the most fundament social differences [between individuals from different social classes] to be expressed' (Bourdieu 1984, 226), but because the fathers work in positions within multinational companies where they see the importance of English language proficiency every day.

As previously mentioned, cultural capital, in its fundamental state 'presupposes embodiment' (Bourdieu 1986, 245) and according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, 162) 'class bias is strongest in a test situation like job interview'. By educating their children in places where they could not only acquire high proficiency in the English language but also – as Mr. Dele explained 'learn the correct way to think and act professionally' or 'have access to the best people in the field' (Mr. Kome) – the fathers were ensuring that their children enter professional situations 'already accustomed to operating as an entitled subject with communication skills acceptable to middle class gatekeepers' (Sayer 2005, 127).

Job interviews are classic situations where embodied cultural capital (acquired through the accumulation and strategic deployment of various forms of capital) is rewarded, and variations of disadvantaging dispositions and deportments are highlighted and penalised (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). Consequently, the high value which multinational companies attach to high proficiency in English language clearly positions non-westerners who have acquired this embodied cultural capital in a privileged position (de Mejia, 2002; Hunter and Hachimi 2012). In short, high proficiency in English language is non-westerners' *passport* to the 'Whitewhorld' (Rollock et al. 2011, 1085; see also Adams and Agbenyega 2019) – a world, which as I shall explain shortly, these parents desired for their children to not only be a part of but to excel in.

Attaining a Canadian passport

> *I believe the Canadians, if you go to school there in four years, by the time you leave you can almost get a job permit even before you leave school, two years after you leave school you can actually apply for permanent residency. So for me that was one of the deciding factors* (Mr. Akin)

In addition to acquiring a Canadian degree and high proficiency in English language, the fathers I spoke with were also of the view that their children would be able to acquire a Canadian citizenship at the end of their HE studies (Ayling 2017). This finding resonates with Findlay et al. (2012, 127) who also noted that the acquisition of 'long-term residence and citizenship' was a strong influencing factor when students are applying to international universities. The fathers viewed their children acquiring a Canadian citizenship as valuable as it meant that their children would be treated as 'expatriate' by international companies in Nigeria and thus be paid more than their Nigerian counterparts.

> You get quite a lot of instances where people who are Nigerians but have Canadian, US or UK passport and because they've gone to school in the UK they come back here as expatriate and make quite a lot of money than Nigerians do (Mr Akin).

The implication of Mr. Akin's comment is that a Canadian degree along *with* a Canadian citizenship vastly increases their children's chance of not only being employed by a multinational corporation, but crucially their earning power. The latter point is quite significant

for two reasons. Firstly, it illustrates how the three types of capital discussed in this paper work together to give these fathers' children *double* advantage, thereby increasing their chances of a transnational, global middle-class lifestyle (Maxwell and Yemini 2019). Indeed, remaining in Canada was viewed by some of the fathers as 'a very good option' according to Mr. Dele who explained his 'children don't have to come and suffer in Nigeria *where nothing works*'. Second, it explains how symbolic capital (e.g. Canadian citizenship) brings 'positive recognition, esteem, [and] social honour' to social actors with the 'right' volume and composition of the three different types of capital' (Emirbayer and Desmond 2015, 86). To put differently, a Canadian passport, as a form of symbolic capital, legitimises the education credentials that their children had acquired from the preparatory school and university in Canada thereby increasing the value of the institutional cultural capital (Bourdieu 1998). Furthermore, in considering what Borjesson, Broady, and Lidegram (2007) describe as 'place-specific symbolic capital' (2), while they were unable to afford the costly privileged schools of the United Kingdom, which was their preference, these middle-class fathers were still able to consume international schooling that will position their children advantageously.

Conclusion

They are doing what their class does in order to continue being what their class is…' (Ball 2003, 76).

Studies have shown how non-Western middle-class families – in mimicking their elite counterparts – are increasingly relying on international education and foreign degrees more specifically for the maintenance of their class status and advantage (Kim 2011; Brown, Lauder, and Ashton 2011). This paper has furthered our understanding of this phenomenon by critically examining how a group of middle-class Nigerian fathers were attempting to secure their class position by educating their children in Canada. Presenting a case study of four middle-class fathers, the paper revealed how these fathers had aspired for their children to become global middle-class through gaining employment in multinational corporations in Nigeria or elsewhere. Although Canada was not their first country of choice (Ayling 2017), the paper explained how the three types of profitable Western capitals, which the fathers were seeking for their children would position their children advantageously both within the local and international graduate job markets.

The paper also revealed how working in multinational companies themselves had given the four middle-class fathers useful insights into the highly competitive arena within which multinational companies operate and specifically, how multinational companies that are based in Nigeria have preference for graduates with foreign instead Nigerian degrees. Coupled with their 'insider' knowledge, the paper discussed how these fathers skilfully deploy their economic resources in ways that allowed them to yield maximum return for their financial investment. For example, the fathers knew that a Canadian degree would not only increase their children's chances of gaining employment in a multinational corporation in Nigeria, but more importantly how acquiring a Canadian citizenship would entitle them to 'expatriate' salary, which would be considerably more than what their Nigerian counterparts in the same position would earn. This is a significant finding for two reasons. First, it showed that far from being passive actors in the class game, middle-class fathers

are just as adept as middle-class mothers at playing the 'class game' for positional advantage. As part of the global middle-class these fathers do not only have 'a feel for the [class] game' (Bourdieu 1998, 77) but crucially are also heavily invested (literally and figuratively speaking) in *game*. Second, the finding is illustrative of how the three forms of capitals discussed in this paper are not only inter-related but more importantly, how their potency increases when used together. The latter point has a serious economic implication in the sense that the more valuable capital one is able to acquire for one's child, the more advantage/privileges their children are able to accrue.

Literature on the HE sector in Nigeria has given some support to these fathers' concerns about the supposed poor quality of public/government own universities in Nigeria (Aladegbola and Jaiyeola 2016; Njoku 2016; Ibrahim, Arshad, and Salleh 2017). Consequently, it would be disingenuous to frame these fathers' decision to educate their children in Canada as motivated exclusively by the struggle for positional advantage. Indeed, it is plausible to argue that these fathers were motivated *entirely* by a strong sense of parental responsibility to do the right thing by and for their children (Ayling 2019b). All that being said, a major implication of the active pursuit of Western capitals or 'imperial cultural capital[s]' (Kim 2016, 31) by these fathers is that they become complicit in reinforcing hegemonic discourses that construct the West as 'advanced' 'civilised' and 'developed' while simultaneously constructing Africa as 'amateur', 'undeveloped' and 'corrupt' (Fanon, 1967/2008; Shonekan 2013).

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