# International Education and Social Distinction: The consumption of British private schools by elite Nigerian parents

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# Abstract

This thesis analyses the factors that shape Nigerian elite parents’ decisions to consume private boarding schools in Britain. It draws on literature from the sociologies of education and consumption and applies Bourdieu’s concepts of the habitus, field, and capital together with Fanon’s colonisation theory. The research was carried out in Nigeria (Lagos, Abuja and Port-Harcourt) and in Britain. The project used qualitative methods, principally semi-structured interviews. Through a non-probability snow-balling sampling framework, a total of 39 participants were recruited. 26 were parents, all of whom reside in Nigeria, and 13 were ‘gatekeepers’; consisting of education agents and consultants, head-teachers of British private secondary and primary schools in Nigeria and Britain, including senior staff at Deputy High Commission in Lagos.

The data reveals that the parents in this study are seeking a type of ‘quality education’ that is only accessible to the privileged few and one that they believe will mark their children out as ‘cultured’, ‘modern’, ‘moral’ and ‘distinguished’ individuals by instilling in them western dispositions, deportments and lifestyle. These parents define ‘quality’ in education in terms of ‘exclusivity’, ‘authenticity’ and ‘whiteness’. The gatekeepers who help to shape parents’ perceptions of, and access to, private boarding schools in Britain use similar definitions themselves. In an increasingly competitive international education market, the data shows that these gatekeepers use these terms to construct and ‘sell’ British private boarding schools as ‘world-class’ and elite education establishments and maintain their brand image at the same time.

# PART 1

# Introduction

*‘Where one goes to school can be very important in determining his or her life-styles and life chances […] Where a person goes to school may have little to do with his or her technical abilities, but it may have a lot to do with social abilities’* (Cookson and Persell, 1985:16).

This thesis explores how, through the consumption of British private schooling, Nigerian elites are able to display and reproduce their social status, (re)create conspicuous class boundaries between themselves and others, and ‘transform’ their children into socially distinctive (and privileged) young adults who are able to enjoy elite status both at home and abroad. In addition, the thesis seeks to understand the role played by those who work for, or in, British private schools, such as head-teachers and teachers, education agents, consultants and officials of the British Deputy High Commission (BDHC) in Lagos, in the formation and maintenance of British private (boarding) schools’ image as the “best in the world”. The thesis is not seeking to examine the impact of class practices on academic achievements neither will it investigate the day-to-day practices, and experiences of these parents’ children in UK-based British private boarding schools. Rather, it examines the educational decisions and practices of Nigerian elites, focusing on the factors shaping their preferences for particular schools in particular countries. The thesis is also not about the international education market *per se*. That is, an empirical analysis of the composition and characteristics of the international education market or indeed that of British private schools will be not provided though it will serve as an important frame of reference for the main theoretical underpinning. It is the views and actions of the representatives of British private schools (as noted above), as they shape and impact on parents’ perceptions of, and access to, British private schools, that are the main focus of analysis.

## Purpose of the study

Building on the work of leading sociologists (Lury, 1996; Allatt, 1996; Bowe et al., 1994; Ball, 1998), education is conceived in this thesis as a commodity and site of consumption. Allatt (1996:164) argues that to view education in this way ‘thrusts its socially embedded nature to the fore’. Additionally, since only a small number of families in Nigeria send their primary and/or secondary school aged children to UK-based private boarding schools (Brooks, 2011; Scottish Council of Independent Schools, 2013), these schools are conceptualised here as 'positional goods’. Bowe et al., (1994:44) citing Hirsch (1976), describes a ‘positional good’ as ‘a product, which because of its scarcity, helps to mark people’s relatively higher social position’.

In view of the above, this study straddles two distinct yet interrelated fields: the sociologies of consumption and education. In turn the thesis build on, and seeks to extend three significant bodies of work; consumption (and marketing), class practices in education, and the field of international education markets in general, and elite private schools in particular, all of which are reviewed in full in chapter 2. First the thesis extends the very substantial work on consumption as a mechanism for acquiring and expressing status and social distinction. The thesis will attempt to show that the consumption of UK-based private boarding schools is as much about the parents as it is about their children. It will show that this kind of conspicuous consumption of education is a mechanism for acquiring and expressing social status and class-related credentials around ‘good’ and ‘responsible’ parenting as well as providing social and material advantages for the children concerned. The consumption of elite private boarding schools is more about interclass struggles for legitimacy and distinction than it is about giving ones’ child ‘quality’ education. In revealing these motivating factors, the thesis seeks to examine the instrumental use of elite private schooling, an area that is largely neglected in education studies in Nigeria and in the sociology of consumption in general.

Secondly, drawing extensively on research on western middle-class practices in education, the thesis adds to the substantial work on strategic approaches used by the privileged classes in order to reproduce and maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions. The thesis shows how by perceiving ‘quality’ education as ‘authentic’, ‘original’ and ‘exclusive’, and indicating British whiteness as the key signifier of ‘quality’ in education, the parents in my study are systematically relegating to ‘second rank’ the type of education that the majority of Nigerian families have access to (Bourdieu, 1984:247) while instigating social closure at the same time. In doing so, the thesis accepts Bourdieu’s (1984:244) postulation that ‘social positions which present themselves to the observer as purely theoretical question of the limits between the groups who occupy them, are *strategic emplacements*, *fortresses to be defended and captured in a field of struggles*’ (my emphasis).

Thirdly, the thesis builds on research on elite boarding schools by analysing how UK-based British private boarding is used by Nigerian elite parents as a site for acquiring transnational and intellectual identities for their children. The thesis extends this field by analysing parents’ views of these schools, rather than those of pupils – the more common focus of existing studies of such schools (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a; Oliver and O’Reilly 2010; Kenway, et al., 2013; Forbes and Lingard; 2013; Gaztambide-Fernandez, et al., 2013; Kenway and Koh, 2013). The thesis posits that in order for parents to achieve their aspiration of transforming their children into socially distinctive young adults, ‘a thinking through of those educational forms, or conditions of acquisition’ as well as a ‘delicate inculcation’ of the *right* dispositions, deportments and accent in their children are essential (Ball, 2003:71).

This thesis also extends emerging research analysing the international secondary education market. Drawing on Bourdieu, it reveals how the (colonial) habitus shapes both the consumers’ (parents) and producers/sellers’ (gatekeepers) perceptions of British private boarding schools. It also seeks to reveal the sort of risks Nigerian parents associate with the international education market and the type of risk management strategies they employ to avoid or minimise their children’s exposure to these risks. In seeking to reveal how those working in, or for, British private schools ‘sell’ British private schools as ‘world-class’ and elite education establishments, the thesis argues that the use of a soft-sell technique allows them to do this effectively without devaluing their brand image.

Since the thesis explores the educational ‘choices’ made by a group of Nigerian elite parents who have opted to send one or more of their children to private boarding schools in Britain, it also aims to address the on-going relative neglect of the relationship between western based private boarding schools and elite identity formation and social distinction in non-western societies like Nigeria within the sociology of education. Similarly, by taking into account the parent participants’ history, notably their families’ experience of colonisation, the thesis problematizes current understandings of Bourdieu’s concept of habitus while also seeking to extend it through an exploration of the analytical value of what it terms a ‘colonial’ habitus.

Two key theoretical frameworks; Bourdieu’s theory of social practice and its related concepts of habitus, capital and field and Fanon’s theory of the impact of colonisation on the psyche of both colonised and colonisers, are used in this study to varying degrees. Employing a Bourdieusian framework, the thesis seeks to reveal how the ‘habitus’ of the parent participants’ has shaped one of their particular ‘social practices’, namely their engagement with the ‘field’ of the international education market. The thesis also argues that these parents’ habitus has not only provided them with ‘a feel for the game’ in the field of education (Maton, 2008:58), it has also given them inside or tacit knowledge of the types of strategic approaches to use in order to continue to monopolise, via their children, their own socially and economically advantageous positions.

Through a Fanonsian analysis of the data gathered, the thesis seeks to reveal how and why decades after gaining independence from Britain, Nigerian elites continue to perceive white British people as ‘experts’ in education as well as representing the epitome of high *taste*, *class* and *quality*. The parents in this study not only expressed a clear desire for their children to attend a predominantly white school, they were also very keen for their children to acquire a white British upper class ‘habitus’. On the surface, this desire seems to confirm Fanon’s classic claim that colonisation has not only impacted on the colonised ability to be reflective, it has also generated a complex of inferiority within the colonised. In effect, and to present this in Fanonsian terms, the parents’ habitus could be argued to have remained broadly *colonial.*

However, this thesis seeks to present a different view. It argues that these parents perceive white British upper classes’ habitus as an instrumental means by which their children can acquire a transnational identity. The transnational identity is, in turn, bound up with a kind of cosmopolitanism that can deliver further clear material advantage to this group. It can enhance their status at home in Nigeria as well as allowing them to strengthen their international connections. But importantly, and contrary to Fanon’s view, these parents are aware that ‘total otherness’; that is, seeking to become completely ‘white’, is ‘without value’ (Featherstone, 1991 cited in Skeggs, 2004a:149) and therefore they have endeavoured to maintain in their children key aspects of their ‘Africanness’ and/or ‘Nigerianness’ in order that their newly acquired elite status can ‘be socially recognised and legitimated’ in Nigeria and by Nigerians (Featherstone, 1991 cited in Skeggs, 2004a:149). In other words, learning how to ‘use’ elements of elite white British culture is another tactical device used by these parents to ward-off competition, within Nigeria, from class ‘intruders’ from below.

Whiteness, as multimodal, is a major recurring theme in this thesis. It permeates the parents’ narratives of quality education (chapter 3), risk (chapter 4) and the creation of “respectable ladies and gentlemen” (chapter 5). British whiteness is seen by these parents as the trademark of ‘quality’ in education and is also used by those working in and for British private schools as an informal but powerful mechanism for quality control (chapter 6). One of the significant findings of the thesis is the high currency value of whiteness but, more importantly, also how its ‘superiority’ is still accepted and perpetuated by elite blacks. This finding is uncomfortable but it makes a significant contribution to studies of race and racism which tend to view racism as something which is ‘done’ to blacks rather than something that blacks can impose on themselves, albeit in the name of instrumental gain (Wise, 2009; Jensen, 2005). The thesis also makes significant contributions to the sociology of education, particularly Nigerian sociology of education, the sociology of consumption, and the emerging field of the international secondary education market.

While this thesis focuses on the educational practices of a privileged minority, it fully acknowledges that the vast majority of Nigerians have access to much poorer quality education (Olori, 2005; Theobald et al., Tooley and Dixon, 2005; Tooley, 2009; Igbuzor, 2006; Adriaan, 2008; DFID, 2011; Institute of Education, 2011; National Planning Commission, 2010; Santcross, et al., 2010; House of Commons International Development Committee, 2009). Nigeria is a country (House of Commons International Development Committee, 2009; Santcross et al., 2010; Institute of Education, 2011) and Africa a continent (Lewin, 2007) where there are still many who do not or cannot access education. Given this, it is no wonder that the majority of sociological studies that have investigated the educational practices of the middle and elites classes have mostly focused on the West (Boyd, 1973; Scott, 1991; Cookson and Persell, 1985; DiMaggio, 1982; Bourdieu, 1984, 1993; Allatt, 1993; Lareau, 2000; 2003; Ball, 2003; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Reay, 2004a, 2008; Weenik, 2008; Reay et al, 2007; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a, 2009b; Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2013; Oliver and O’reilly 2010; Bodovski, 2010; Banks, 2011; Ilari, 2013; Kenway, et al., 2013; Kenway and Koh, 2013a, 2013b; Reay, 2013; Forbes and Lingard; 2013; Weis and Cipollone, 2013).

However, I will argue that ‘studying up’, to borrow Gaztambide-Fernandez’s (2009a:1) terminology, is important for three important reasons. Firstly, I shall argue that Nigeria’s current inability to provide quality education to most of its populace coupled with its pursuit of neo-liberal ideologies makes it a suitable and favourable site for the study of middle and upper class educational practices. With over 60% of its schools privately owned by organisations and individual investors (Theobald et al, 2007), the educational sector in Nigeria is an epitome of capitalist ethos and structures and, by implication, governed by neo-liberal ideologies and principles (Brock-Utne, 2008; James et al, 2010).

It has been argued that class practices are at their peak and most brutal when market dynamics are introduced into education (Ball, 2008). In that situation, competition becomes rife not only between the producers of education but also among its consumers. As Beck (2007:38) aptly notes;

‘the marketisation of education in recent decades has provided new arenas in which middle-class parents are engaging in intensified class struggles to secure positional advantage for their offspring in a world of heightened occupational uncertainty and risk’.

Moreover, the landscape of Nigerian education has changed considerably since these parents had their own schooling. There has been a significant growth in the number of people now using the education system in contemporary Nigeria compared to the early 1960s and 1970s when the majority of these parents were educated (Unagha, 2008; Aigbokhan et al, 2007). Sociological studies in the West have observed that the historical increase in the number of people accessing education has led to a twentieth century ‘schooling boom’ which, in turn, intensified class struggle in the field of education. In Bourdieu and Boltanski’s (1981:220) words, it became ‘the most important loci of class struggle’. Education has become ‘an arena for zero-sum competition filled with self-interested actors seeking opportunities’ (Larabea, 1997:32 in Demaine, 2001:188).

At moments of intense class struggle economic capital must be converted into cultural capital (Swartz, 1997) since the possession of economic capital only, regardless of its volume, does not qualify one for elite status (Bourdieu, 1984; Swartz, 1997; Boyd, 1973). Lawler (2005:440) also argues that ‘when legal barriers between classes get broken down, as in democracy, social hierarchy must be maintained in other ways’. Individuals or groups must select carefully from the ‘field of stylistic possibles’ (Bourdieu, 1984:226), often consisting of luxury and rare goods and which according to Bourdieu (1984:226) are more ‘predisposed […]to express social differences’. Besides enabling the dominant class to express their social status, the consumption of these types of luxury goods also enable them to instigate social closure and maintain class boundaries at the same time. The study of Nigerian elite parents allows us to examine whether the consumption of overseas private schools is their way of seeking scarcer and more expensive education as a means of retaining their social and economic advantages while expressing their social status at the same time. Put differently, the thesis is seeking to understand whether the consumption of overseas private schools is a type of class strategy used by these parents to ‘change and reproduce the borderlines of class’ in contemporary Nigeria (Ball, 2003:8).

Secondly, investigating the consumption of overseas schools sheds light on how the educational choices of the Nigerian privileged few not only ‘reflect but augment and amplify social class differentiation’ which, in turn, perpetuates inequality (Hatcher, 1998:20). In other words, ‘studying up’ is central to our understanding of inequality as generated and perpetuated by the differential access to high ‘quality’ education or ‘world-class’ education, in the case of the Nigerian privileged few. Savage, (2000:159) accurately argues that:

‘if there is still a role of class analysis it is to continue to emphasize the brute realities of social inequalities and the extent to which these are constantly effaced by a middle class, individualized culture that fails to register the social implications of its routine actions’.

Thirdly, studying the reasons why Nigerian elite parents consume UK-based British private schools helps to reveal how, decades after independence, British whiteness still plays a central role in the acquisition and maintenance of elite status in postcolonial Nigeria. The lack of research in this area means that, at best, the decision by Nigerian elites to send their children to private boarding school in the West is perceived simply as a search for ‘quality’ education, and at worst this practice is completely ignored, together with the inequality and western hegemonic discourse that it might perpetuate. In a society where the English language and the way it is spoken, is ‘a magic key to social prestige and power’ (De Mejia, 2002:152), and ‘good quality’ and authenticity is epitomised as whiteness (Byrne, 2006; Reay, 2008; Shonekan, 2013), it can be argued that those in possession of such valuable capital will have positions of advantage; social and economic, in that society (Bourdieu, 1984). In turn, the hegemony of such individuals or groups is normalised and their social and economic advantage legitimised.

## Research Aims and Objectives

This thesis is premised on a key Bourdieusian supposition, which is that ‘the relevance of education as means of social reproduction may be evaluated differently at different points in time and thus the relevant sources for achieving reproduction may be different’ (Bourdieu in Ball, 2003:24). Therefore, the central research aims of this thesis are as follows:

* To investigate the way(s) in which the education landscape in Nigeria has changed and the (re)sources that elite parents use to avoid the perceived adverse effects of this change.
* To identify the type of risk these parents associate with the international education market and the type of risk management strategies they employ to protect their children from the effects of this risk.
* To analyse the ‘strategies of social distinction’ these parents employ in their attempt to transform their children into (trans)national elites.
* To investigate the ways by which the representatives of British private schools, notably head-teachers and educational agents, construct and ‘sell’ British private (boarding) schools’ as ‘world-class’ and elite education establishments.
* And overall, to understand how the ‘class’ and ‘colonial’ habituses shape these parents’ social practices, and in particular how they shape their engagement with the field of British international secondary education.

The thesis uses broadly qualitative methods to investigate these aims and mainly employs semi-structured interviews with parents, head-teachers and educational agents. The research was mostly conducted in urban Nigeria (in Lagos, Abuja and Port-Harcourt) between 2009 and 2011 although some interviews were conducted in Britain. In total, 39 participants were recruited, consisting of 26 parents and 13 gatekeepers.

# Defining terms and setting out the research context

## Consumption

Baudrillard (1998) describes consumption as a tool employed to create class distinction and legitimation. Concurring, Douglas and Isherwood (1979:74) suggest that goods are ways of making visible and stable the basic ‘categories by which we classify people in society’. In relation to education, existing suggests that the consumption of private schooling is mostly linked to the fulfilling of social rather than utility functions. For instance, studies of private schools in the UK show that parents’ decisions to consume private schools relate ‘specifically to the perceived or aspirant social status and to the individual consumer’s preservation of self-image and status’ (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003:196). Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:197) note that one of the main attractions of elite private schools are their high fees because, as they argue, some individuals buy ‘a product or service simply because it is more expensive than the alternatives, and not because of any necessary objective measure of quality’. They argue that the motivation behind this way of thinking, otherwise known as the ‘Veblen effect’, is the idea that by consuming this *luxurious* education, these parents occupy the enviable and prestigious position of ‘class’ and high taste in the society (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003).

Bourdieu (1984) argues that the employment of goods and services for the purpose of maintaining self-image and status becomes crucial as one ascends the social ladder. At the top of the social ladder, Bourdieu asserts that consumption decisions become about the ‘stylisation of life’. The stylisation of life is the ‘primacy of forms over function, of manner over matter’ (Bourdieu, 1984:5). He (Bourdieu, cited in Swartz, 2002:175) asserts that this is crucial in the struggle for legitimate taste and status, as a lifestyle of ease; an ‘elective distance from the necessities is the antithesis of the ‘culture of necessity’ which functions as a negative reference to the dominant aesthetic. Concurring, Sedden (2000:134 my emphasis) writes:

‘The cultural activities of the middle class, that is to say, the objects of its ‘free’ consumption as well as the style of consumption peculiar to it, are the means by which it *distinguishes* itself, cultivates and interprets its distance from other group while at the same time framing a system of internal reference, a symbolic and communicative order of self-recognition’.

In the context of education, this would suggest that while economic constraints force the working classes to concern themselves with the more pragmatic, functional (that is, reading and writing skills) aspects of education, the upper and upper-middle classes, due in large part to having large volumes economic capital, are free from such practicalities.

## Defining Elites

The Nigerian parents who sent their children to UK-based British private boarding schools have been described here as ‘elites’ for two reasons. The first was because, without prompting and as will be shown later, these parents described themselves as elites. Self-assigned identity is favoured over the imposition of categories or labels on research participants (Kezar, 2003) as the latter could be considered unethical (Maylor, 2009; Maylor and Williams, 2011; also see Archer, 2011).

While I am aware that there exist other definitions and arguments on the formation of elite groups (Keller, 1963/1991), the second reason for using the term ‘elite’ is because these parents fit Boyd’s (1973:16) characteristics of ‘elites in modern democratic society’. In his classic study of British elites and their education, Boyd (1973) offered nine key features and values that define this group.

1. High occupational position
2. Minority status
3. High status
4. A distinctive style of life
5. Group consciousness but openness
6. Exclusiveness but openness
7. Functional capability and responsibility
8. Moral responsibility
9. Power of varying degree

As shall be shown in chapter 2, the majority of these parents hold high positions in their various fields. All the fathers have high-paying jobs and all the mothers either run their own businesses and/or are married to senior business executives. Citing Richards (1962) Boyd (1973:17) argues that ‘occupation is a source of income, and income is a determinant of life style [and thus] ‘the observable criteria by which people rate one another’. Boyd (1973:17) goes further to argue that ‘elites are increasingly classified on the basis of positional criteria; the power elite […] refers exclusively to institutional position’.

Minority status is another central characteristic of eliteness (Harvey, 2010, Boyd, 1973; Keller, 1991; Ellersgaard, et al, 2012). The minority status of these parents’ is confirmed both by their consumption practices, manifested here in their consumption of UK-based private schooling. Parents are in possession of and/or consume goods and services that are desired by many but only accessible to a few (Boyd, 1973). Boyd (1973:21) citing Mayer (1955) argues that ‘claims for prestige [or elite status] are therefore based not only on the amount of money an individual possesses but also on the way he [sic] uses it’.

At the time the qualitative data was collected, the estimated number of Nigerian children in private boarding schools in the UK was only 802 (Brooks, 2011). Brooks (2011) argues that the actual figure is likely to be higher because children with dual Nigerian / British nationality were not included. Also other wealthy Nigerian families send their children to overseas for schooling, notably in Canada, America and other African countries. Unfortunately, there is no reliable data on the precise number involved. Despite the lack of accurate data the key point is that only a small minority of Nigerian parents send their children to private schools overseas.

These parents are also marked out as a minority by the volume of their economic capital. Although none of the parents in the study were asked to state their precise income, the fact that most of them had two or three children at any given time in UK private boarding schools, where fees average between £15,000 (Palfreyman, 2003) to £30,000 per annum for boarding ([www.aprivateeducation.co.uk](http://www.aprivateeducation.co.uk)), confirms their status as economic elites. That status is further highlighted by the fact that, despite the country’s oil wealth, an estimated hundred million Nigerians - a third of its population - live on less than one dollar a day thus ‘representing a quarter of Africa’s extreme poor’ (DFID, 2011; [www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17015873](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17015873)).

Bourdieu (1984) asserts that social class is not defined by economic capital alone (although he acknowledges the role of economic capital in the acquisition of elite status), However, I shall contend that having large volumes of economic capital has not only given these parents ‘minority status’, it has enabled them to acquire ‘high status’ and ‘exclusivity’ as well as live a ‘distinctive style of life’ while giving them ‘functional ability’ and ‘power to a varying degree’. Put differently, these parents’ capacity to ‘get the most of what there is to get’ has made them vastly economically superior to the majority of Nigerians and thus ‘no longer their social equals’ (Boyd, 1973:19).

Power and moral responsibility are more difficult characteristics to ascertain. The difficulty of using power as a criterion for defining elites is aptly expressed by Dahl (1958 in Boyd, 1973:30) who argued that ‘power can [only] be empirically tested […] under certain conditions. Besides ‘there is a hierarchy among elites; some are more elite than others (Keller, 1963/1991:20), thus making it difficult to identify the individuals in any elite ‘group who are the true power-wielders’ (Boyd, 1973:31). Still, I argue that these parents do have *power* since according to Mills (1956 in Boyd, 1973:31 my emphasis) ‘elite groups possess power because they ‘are able to realise their *will*, even if others resist it’. In relation to moral responsibility, I take these parents’ aspiration for their children to come back and restore and/or build Nigeria as an expression of moral responsibility towards the future development of their country.

## International Education Market

Extensive review of literature on the international education market has revealed that there are no concrete definitions of this field. However, I use the term ‘international education market’ here to describe a particular field of education where schools with international affiliations and/or international reputations operate. The schools operating in this market have three main characteristics; i) They are private (boarding) schools; ii) they are usually based in the West. When they are based in non-western countries for example, Nigeria, these schools maintain strong links with the West through curriculum, pedagogical approach and the employment of foreign nationals; iii) in Nigeria, and elsewhere, they are mainly attended by children from affluent backgrounds. In this study, the term is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘overseas education’.

## Elite Schools

The nature of elite schools varies. For example, not all UK-based British private boarding schools are considered as elite educational institutions (Boyd, 1973; Walford, 2009). However, the schools referred to in this study, that is, British-based private boarding schools (BBS-UK) and British private schools in Nigeria (BPS-N), to which these parents sent their children to have been described as such for three significant reasons. Firstly, in the Nigerian context, these schools are considered elite schools because they are able to inculcate the types of dispositions, behaviour and accent that will set their pupils apart from their Nigerian counterparts. Secondly, only very wealthy Nigerian families can afford to send their children to these schools. Third, and more importantly, these schools match Gaztambide-Fernandez’s (2009a, 2009b) five constitutive characteristics of what makes a school ‘elite’.

Five constitutive characteristics of elite schools (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009b:1093 my emphasis)

1. Typological elite, by virtue of their identification as ‘*independent* schools’
2. Scholastically elite, by virtue of the extensive and *sophisticated curriculum* they offer and their particular *pedagogical* approaches.
3. *Historically* elite, by virtue of the role that elite social networks played in their historical development.
4. Geographically elite, by virtue of their physical character and *location*
5. Demographically elite, by virtue of the *population* that attends elite boarding schools.

As implied in the name, BBS-UK are private (boarding) schools in the UK that use the British curriculum and are underpinned by British educational ethos and values such as child-centred approach. BSP-N on the other hand are high status private schools in Nigeria which are essentially replicas of BBS-UK in the sense that they emulate the ethos, practices, curriculum content, and pedagogical approach; and in the majority of cases have white British head teachers.

## Race

Race is used throughout this thesis as all the parents described themselves as black, and westerners as whites. Moreover, ‘ethnicity’ which appears to be the more favoured term in sociological studies in the West (see Aspinall, 2013) means something different to these parents. While ethnicity is usually employed in the West to refer to people of different skin colour, this term is used by Nigerians to describe someone from a different tribe / religion or from a different part of their home country. Also, since race is central to Fanon’s thesis and because Fanon himself tended to use terms such as ‘black’ and ‘whites’ when referring to the colonised and coloniser respectively, race is considered a more appropriate and relevant term to use in the current study.

## Thesis Organisation

The remainder of Part 1 is organised in two further chapters. Chapter 1 provides an extensive analysis of the sociological approaches to consumption, with specific focus on Bourdieu’s work. The chapter also discusses Fanon’s analysis of colonisation before going on to provide a critical review of literature relating to: the formation of elite identity in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria, class strategic approaches and the ‘selling’ of high status schools. Chapter 2 provides a critical analysis of the methodological tools and epistemological positions adopted in the study. The research design, ethical issues and analytical techniques used are also discussed.

Part 2 of the thesis focuses on the analysis of the research findings, which are presented in four chapters. While all four chapters deal with different themes, these themes are interrelated. As well as providing structure and coherence to the arguments presented in the thesis, discussing these equally important themes separately also makes it possible to unpack key ideas (and related concepts) and thus analyse them in great depth while simultaneously demonstrating their complexity.

Chapter 3 unpacks participants’ perceptions of ‘quality’ in education in order to reveal how ‘quality’ education is used as a strategic approach in class struggle over legitimacy. Starting with an exploration of parents’ own educational experiences, this chapter examines how mass education in Nigeria has both intensified class struggle in the education arena on the one hand and the search for quality education on the other. Examined against the backdrop of class struggle over socially and economically advantageous positions, which has been precipitated by the democratisation and marketization of education in contemporary societies, the chapter argues that the consumption of ‘quality’ education has become more about the expression of social class and status and less about the acquisition of academic competency

Chapter 4 examines the main risks that parents associate with the international education market before going on to critically examine the different types of risk management strategies they use to avoid these. Chapter 5 explores the consumption of British private schooling as both a mechanism of social closure as well as for the creation of (trans)national elite identity. The chapter also examines the fluidity of racial identity and the ways in which these parents use whiteness/blackness as well as Britishness/Africanness as tools to secure advantages for their children. Here, whiteness is theorised as a commodity that these parents *choose* to use in their struggle for socially and economically advantageous positions via their children. Consequently, the chapter proposes a re-working of Fanon’s identity theory in order to accommodate and acknowledge the fact that Nigerian elites, like their western counterparts, are capable of using a variety of tools and strategies to construct what they perceive as profitable identities. Chapter 6 examines the construction and ‘selling’ of UK-based British private boarding schools as “the best in the world”. The chapter also explores the subtle ways in which these schools work to maintain their global brand. Part 2 concludes with a summary of the thesis’ main findings and their implications and summarises its contributions to the sociology of education in general and the emerging sociology of international education in particular. The thesis’ limitations are also discussed in the concluding chapter alongside a suggestion of the new fields of study opened by it.

# Chapter 1

# Theoretical Frameworks and Literature Review

This chapter is divided into three main parts. The first part provides a critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks adopted in the current study. The chapter provides a brief critical analysis of the sociological perspectives on consumption before going on to critically examine Bourdieu’s pivotal approach to consumption as well as a critical description of his three key conceptual tools; habitus, field and capital. It is proposed that in its current form, Bourdieu’s concept of habitus; one of the main analytical tools used in this study, is inadequate as an explanatory tool in the context of this study and therefore needs reformulating. A case is made for the need to extend Bourdieu’s habitus through the incorporation of Fanon’s theory of the effects of colonisation. Due to the similarities between the theoretical positions, the chapter argues that it is possible to maintain one of the underlying principles of Bourdieu’s habitus; that is, ‘unconsciousness’ and still account for unique historical events like colonisation, which Fanon argues have impacted on the psyche of both the coloniser (whites/westerners) and the colonised (blacks/non-westerners).

The second part of the chapter provides a review of literature on education and social class (re)production, the democratisation of education and the different class strategies used for social reproduction and maintenance. The section ‘Elite identity formation in colonial Nigeria’ discusses the role of western education in the acquisition of elite status in colonial Nigeria. The roles of high status (private) schools and western accent in the formation and maintenance of elite status is also explored in this section. ‘Democratisation of education (and Status)’, explores the impact of the democratisation of education and status on social reproduction and class boundary marking in contemporary societies. ‘Class Strategies’ engages in a critical description of different kinds of strategies such as ‘concerted cultivation’ and international education employed by western middle and upper classes in their attempt to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions. The section ‘Selling high status Schools’ investigates the ways high status schools market themselves. The chapter concludes by highlighting the gaps in the current literature, particularly on the international education discourse as it relates to Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The specific contributions that the current study will be making to the sociology of education; the field of international secondary education market in particular, and consumption are also highlighted.

## 1.1 Theoretical Framing: Socio-cultural Perspectives on Consumption

A review of the broad social science literature on consumption reveals that there are many different approaches to this topic (Wilk, 2005; Bowe, et al. 1994; Mackay, 1997; Edgell, et al, 1996; Baudrillard; 1998; Wilk, 2005; Warde, 2005; Joy and Li, 2012). Mainly, however, these approaches are usually categorised into two theoretical types: that of economists, who tend to emphasise individual choice theory and that of sociologists who tend to draw on different kinds of social theory (Wilk, 2002).

In brief, economist’s perspective on consumption, ‘seek[s] the basis for consumption within the individual, through the mechanism of the satisfaction of needs’ (Wilk, 2005:6). Wilk (2002:6) expands this argument further and asserts that ‘consumption [from the economist perspective] is [seen as] the product of individual choice, driven by an internal hierarchy of needs’. Thus, it is the individual, rather than the social and cultural contexts in which they are situated that is the main focus of analysis. Consequently, the economist’s approach only provides **‘**individualistic explanations of how and why people select what to consume among the immense range of products and services available’ (Warde, 1994:304). Put differently, from the economists’ standpoint, consumption decisions seem to be influenced by *needs* and satisfaction maximisation (Baudrillard, 1998; Wilk, 2005; Paterson, 2006).

The economist’s approach to consumption is also closely linked with the notion that goods and services are consumed primarily for their use-value and for their utility function rather than for social prestige that their consumption may bring. Consequently, ‘rationality’, ‘needs satisfaction’ and ‘utility maximization’ are key ideas in this approach, with individuals’ consumption decisions thought to emanate from the cognitive and conscious rather than from the unconscious (Wilk, 2005; Warde, 1994). Crucial in the economist paradigm is the assumption that advertising and the media are simply sources of information rather than a mechanism used to lure consumers by ‘associating brands and styles with particular social groups’ (Wilk, 2002:6).

The economist’s paradigm is perceived by many academics as too narrow and one-sided, thus analytically restrictive (Warde, 1994; Baudrillard, 1998; Paterson, 2006). Placing too much importance on the use-value of consumption has also meant the economist approach is deemed incapable of recognising and addressing the social and cultural functions of consumption neither is it able to recognise the complexity of the process of consumption decisions (Paterson, 2006).

Speaking from a sociological standpoint, Warde (1994:896 my emphasis) argues that;

‘consumption cannot be divorced from those social forces which propel the individuals towards or away from particular goods and shape the manner of their consumption. Consumer behaviour’ is ‘link[ed] back’ into *status*, exchange social transition, *social class, hierarchy* etc.’

By contrast, sociological approaches to consumption (Warde, 1994; Miles, 1998, Lury, 1996, Baudrillard, 1983, Wilk, 2005; Warde, 2005; Paterson, 2006; Mackay, 1997; Joy and Li, 2012) seek to explore the ways by which goods and services are used to ‘create either social bonds or to signal social distinctions’ (Bowe et al. 1994:43).

Here consumption is conceptualised as a mechanism for effecting group differentiation and social closure as well as group integration and/or alignment. Baudrillard (1998:62) asserts that implicit in the sociological approach is the assumption that goods and services are not consumed simply for their use-value but rather ‘as signs which distinguish you, either by affiliating you to your own group taken as an ideal reference or by marking you off from your group by reference to a group of higher status’. Put another way, from a sociological perspective, ‘the core mechanism governing the process of consumption is the one based around struggles over distinction’ (Longhurst and Savage**,** 1996:274). Adnett and Davies (2002:195) claim that;

‘an individual suffers a negative externality when goods and services they consume are also purchased by members of a group with which they do not wish to be associated and benefits from positive externalities when these goods and services are bought by members of a group to which they wish to belong’**.**

Accordingly, consumption, from this perspective, can be defined as;

‘a set of practices which permit people to express self-identity, to mark attachment to social groups, to accumulate resources, to exhibit social distinction, to ensure participation in social activities, and more things besides’ (Warde, 1994:304).

In a similar vein, Bowe et al. (1996:43) assert that ‘consumption is driven by the search for satisfaction and status, which, in turn, revolve around the maintenance of social difference’. Douglas and Isherwood (1979:75) also contend that the consumption of goods and services are ways of making ‘visible and stable the basic categories by which we classify people in society’. In sum, ‘consumption [from a sociological standpoint] is a social code, and people consume to fit in or to stand out’ (Simmel, 1904 cited in Wilk, 2002:6).

However, as Bowe et al., (1994:43) perceptively point out, ‘consumers are not seen as homogeneous and goods can carry different cultural meanings’. Consequently, the reasons *why* individuals consume particular goods and/or services will not be fully understood unless the analysis also considers and interrogates the social and cultural contexts in which the particular consumers operate (Bourdieu, 1984; Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). Putting it aptly, Warde (1994:308) argues that ‘consumption is contextual’.

There are many examples of sociological studies that illustrate how goods and services are consumed in western societies for their social or cultural value rather than their use value or utility function. In their analysis of the consumption of FairTrade products by the British middle class, Adams and Raisborough (2008:1173) found that rather than ‘merely’ being an attempt to ‘demonstrate progressive politics via the reflexive consumer’s taste and preferences’, the consumption of these products seems to be yet another ‘manifestation of a bourgeois project to distinguish the middle class from its others’ (Lawler, 2005:443).

Studies have also focused on patterns of consumption in non-western countries. For example, Muller and Broderick (2009) and Belk (2000) have found that the consumption of western products is used both to signal ones’ social status as well as ‘to buy upward in the class system’ in non-western countries (Muller and Broderick, 2009:8). In China, Muller and Broderick (2009:9) observe that the decisions of officials to reject the Manchu-style dress in favour of western-style dress was because many believed Manchu-style dress embodied China’s ‘backwardness’ while western-style dress was a conspicuous symbol of modernity. Belk (2000) also notes that in non-western countries, it is the local elites that tended to consume western products because it allows them to demonstrate their social worth.

All these might be taken as examples of what Bourdieu (1984:7) calls ‘cultural consumptions’, which he says, ‘are predisposed, consciously and deliberately or not, to fulfil a social function of legitimating social difference’. In this thesis, I contend that UK-based British private boarding schools are a form of cultural consumption, which from a sociological standpoint, allows the parents in this study to communicate their lifestyle and express their taste and social status (Douglas and Isherwood; 1979; Baudrillard, 1983; Giddens, 1991; Warde, 1996; Miles, 1998; Lury, 1996; Wilk, 2006; Bowe et al, 1994; Bourdieu, 1984; Wolfhard, 2010). Before setting out the research questions in detail, it is necessary to summarise the analytical approach of Bourdieu, as a leading theorist of consumption, education and social distinction.

## 1.1.2 Bourdieu’s analysis of consumption

In ‘Distinction’, Bourdieu (1984 in Lamont and Molnar, 2002:172) ‘showed how the logic of class struggle extends to the realm of taste and lifestyle and that symbolic classification is key to the reproduction of class privileges’. Importantly, Bourdieu (1984 in Lamont and Molnar, 2002:172) notes that the ‘dominant groups generally succeed in legitimizing their own culture and ways as superior to those of lower classes, through oppositions such as distinguished/vulgar, aesthetic/practical, and pure/impure’. Put simply, from Bourdieu’s theoretical perspective, ‘the core mechanism governing the process of consumption is the one based around struggles over distinction’ (Longhurst and Savage, 1996:274). Accordingly, ‘symbols’ and ‘symbolism’ in terms of how they are used in social life is central to Bourdieu’s social theory (Schinkel, 2007). Bourdieu is not of course, the only sociologist to give prominence to the role of symbols in social life. As Schinkel (2007:707) points out, Giddens (1979:98) also places emphasis on the role of symbols in ‘codes’ and ‘systems of signification’ while Parsons (1964:327) spoke of ‘culture’ as ‘patterned ordered systems of symbols that are objects of the orientation to action, internalised components of social systems’.

According to Bourdieu et al, (1991:631 my emphasis),

‘what is commonly called distinction, that is, a certain quality of bearing and manners, mostly considered innate […] is nothing in fact but *difference,* a gap, a distinctive feature, in short, a *relational* property existing only in and through its relation with other properties’.

Bourdieu (1984) goes on to argue that class struggle, defined in terms of the struggle over legitimate taste and social prestige, is one in which we all partake and from which no one can escape. Distinction is an integral part of this struggle. To ‘win’ the struggle, individuals and groups ‘unconsciously’ distinguish themselves from other groups viewed as beneath them while simultaneously aligning themselves with those perceived as equals.

Due to the large volume of economic, social and cultural capitals at their disposal, Bourdieu argues that the dominant groups are able to consume exclusive and rare cultural goods, for example art and education, which enable them to create symbolic (and spatial) distance and thereby to ‘monopolise privileges, and exclude [other social groups]’ (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:172). The consumption of these goods and services is also a means by which individuals can ascend the social ladder (Bourdieu, 1984).

According to Bourdieu (1984), the need to distinguish oneself becomes even more necessary as individuals rise up the social ladder because as individuals do this, their need to express social status becomes more important than ever (and that, arguably, the pressure to maintain and preserve their position is increased too). As a consequence, decisions about what to consume become decisions about the ‘stylisation of life’ which he describes as the ‘primacy of forms over function, of manner over matter’. He (1984:376) goes on to argue;

‘The principle of the most important differences in the order of life style and, even more, of the stylisation of life’ lies in the variations in objective distance and subjective distance from the world, with its material constraints and temporal urgencies.’

Bourdieu’s approach is similar in many ways to the earlier analysis of Veblen. According to Warde (1996:307) both thinkers are ‘the prototypical representatives of [the] sociological approach’ to consumption. However, Bourdieu’s (1984; 1990; 1993) perspective of consumption differs from Veblen’s in two significant ways. Firstly, Bourdieu broadly opposes Veblen’s supposition that in modern society, individuals can, and are capable of, desiring what is in effect outside their habitus (Wilk, 2002; Campbell, 1995). That is, individuals ‘are capable of wanting to be different, in their preferences and purposes, *from what they are*’ (Frankfurt, 1988:12 in Brooks and Wee 2008:509 my emphasis).

On the contrary, Bourdieu argues that, because individuals have internalised the social field in which they are situated (habitus), which in turn shapes their taste, lifestyle and dispositions, they do not desire goods and/or services that have not been traditionally theirs. Thus, for Bourdieu (1984), consumption is a reflection of ‘underlying groups of tastes and style that hold social classes together’ (Wilk, 2002:6). This is because as Featherstone (1992:86) accurately notes, ‘different classes have different ways of life and views of the nature of social relationships which form a matrix within which consumption takes place'.Moreover, as Bowe et al., (1994:46) contend, the cultural aspects of consumption; that is; ‘know-how and taste are bound up with people’s material circumstances’. Subsequently, they go on to argue that the material and the cultural aspects of consumption ‘feed off’ each other, ‘either setting constraints or opening up possibilities (Bowe et al., 1994:46).

The second significant difference; and related to the first point, between Bourdieu and Veblen is that, while Veblen conceives consumers’ choices and preferences as a conscious act (Lareau, 1988; Swartz, 1997), Bourdieu on the other hand, argues that ‘most signals are sent *unconsciously* because they are learned through socialisation, and incorporated as dispositions or ‘habitus’ and are therefore ‘unintended classificatory results of cultural codes’ (Lamont and Lareau, 1988:158). Therefore, an act of consumption ‘correspond[s] to the condition of which it is the product’ (Bourdieu, 1984:175).

Bourdieu’s analysis has been hailed as a major contribution to sociology in general (Bowe et al, 1994; Longhurst and Savage, 1996; Warde, 1996, 2005; Wilk, 2005) as it allowed him to explain how and why ‘people uncritically accept a whole range of postulates, axioms, which go without saying and require no inculcating' (Bowe et al., 1994:45). Concomitantly, advertising too is not perceived here to influence consumers’ choices and preferences but rather ‘to reflect group characteristics and providing images that reinforce identities and provide reference group’ (Wilk, 2002:7). Bourdieu (in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:169) asserts that 'of all forms of "hidden persuasion”, the most implacable is the one exerted, quite simply, by the order of things'.

Of course these approaches to consumption have also come under criticism. The main criticism is that they place too much emphasis on the social and/or expressive aspects of consumption (Jenkins, 1992; Bridge, 2010; Granovetter, 2000; Sayer, 2005; Chang and Goldthorpe, 2007; Lois and Lopez-saez, 2009). Other researchers have suggested that there exist two types of goods: material goods, which are consumed primarily for their utility function and positional goods, which are consumed for their social value (Caruana, 2007). They also suggest that certain types of goods, like education, fall into both camps. For example, Allatt (1996:164) contends that ‘the consumption of schooling straddles two domains’; that is, the public and private domains. She goes on to argue that ‘in traversing these domains, schooling undergoes a transformation, changing its character from commodity to that of gift’ (Allatt, 1996:164).

Expanding her analysis further, Allatt (1996:166) asserts that because private education is usually bought with the intention to give something to ones’ child, ‘schooling is embedded in a system of moral transactions [though], economic and competitive dimensions of commodity still lurk but are transformed into sacrifice, coloured by love, trust, pride and risk’. In a similar vein, Sayer (2005:99) asserts that **‘**no struggle is reducible to striving for power or advantage, because power or advantage can only exist in relation to good, that is, valued things, practices and ways of life’. In this, Allatt and Sayer would seem to support Veblen’s (1953 [1899]:80 in Paterson, 2006) view that: ‘even in articles which appear at first glance to serve for ostentation only, it is always possible to detect the presence of some, at least ostensible, useful purpose’.

Furthermore, excessive emphasis on the ‘performative’ ‘significance of consumers’ actions’ (Longhurst and Savage, 1996:293) has meant other key variables like ethnicity, race, gender and religion*,* which are equally important determinants of cultural tastes, consumption, and lifestyles; and only imperceptibly related to class, have been neglected. Alexis (1970) in his study of the automobile market in America found that when black consumers were compared to white groups of similar income, they were more likely to purchase expensive cars. However, this, as Alexis went on to argue, was influenced by black consumers’ desire to demonstrate their ethnic equality and not necessarily by their desire to display their social class.

Still, Bourdieu (1984:226) argues that, irrespective of the type of goods being consumed, the very act of consumption activates class distinction and differences ‘through the instruments of economic and cultural appropriation which it requires’. Put differently, because consumption is a ‘class institution’, since it highlights social differences as well as homogenise consumers (Baudrillard, 1998:59), the process of *consuming* will always instigate class struggle over status and distinction, regardless of whether one consumes material or positional goods and/or services.

## 1.2 Bourdieu’s Key Concepts: ‘Habitus’, ‘Capital’ and ‘Field’.

*‘Habitus is the link not only between past, present and future, but also between the social and the individual, the objective and subjective, and structure and agency’* (Maton, 2008:53)

The habitus is a conceptual tool that emerged out of Bourdieu’s attempt ‘to transcend the structure-agency dichotomy’ by reconciling objectivist and the subjectivist approaches (Maton, 2008:54). The idea of the habitus is Bourdieu’s way of explaining ‘how the ‘outer’, social, and ‘inner’, self, help to shape each other’ (Maton, 2008:50). It allows Bourdieu to draw attention ‘to the way that the ‘self’ and the ‘social’ are mutually constitutive (Longhurst and Savage 1996:293). Accordingly, the habitus has been described ‘as a bridging device between structure and agency’ (Longhurst and Savage, 1996:275) because it ‘brings together both objective social structure and subjective personal experiences’ (Maton, 2008:53). Consequently, the habitus is described by Bourdieu (1984:101) as the ‘practice–unifying and practice-generating principle’. Crucially, the habitus is acquired through early socialisation experiences in a given social space (Bourdieu, 1984).

Since the habitus is the ‘the dialectic of the internalisation of externality and the externalisation of internality’(Bourdieu, 1977:72),Bourdieu (in Bourdieu, and Wacquant, 1992:18)defines the habitus as ‘the structuring mechanism that operates from within agents, though it is neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinative of conduct’. Expanding this argument further, Bourdieu asserts that the habitus is;

‘the strategy generating principle enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations […] a system of lasting and transposable dispositions which integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:18).

The above descriptions indicate three key features of the habitus. Firstly, because the habitus is ‘the product of the internalisation of the structure of social space’ (Bourdieu, 1984:101);

1. ‘all agents in a given social formation share a set of basic perceptual schemes which receive the beginnings of objectification in the pairs of antagonistic adjectives commonly used to classify and qualify persons or objects in the most varied areas of practice’ (Bourdieu, 1984:468);
2. ‘it functions as a sort of social orientation, ‘a sense of one’s place’, guiding the occupants of a given place in social space towards the social positions adjusted to their properties, and towards the *practices* or *goods* which befit the occupants of that position’ (Bourdieu, 1984:466 my emphasis);
3. ‘the cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world’ are a reflection of the internalised sets of dispositions, preferences, expectations and perceptions (Bourdieu, 1984:468).

Secondly, as a ‘*principle generating mechanism*’, the habitus ‘embed[s] [in individuals] what some would mistakenly call values in the most automatic gestures or the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body’, for example, ‘ways of walking, talking, speaking, and engaging in the most fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world’ (Bourdieu, 1984:466). Put simply, the habitus ‘defines who we are’ (Brooks and Wee, 2008:508).

Thirdly, and more importantly, Bourdieu asserts that;

‘the schemes of the habitus, the *primary forms of classificatio*n, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of *consciousness* and language, beyond the reach of *introspective scrutiny or control by the will’* (Bourdieu, 1984:466 my emphasis).

Due to the habitus, we instinctively know ‘what is and is not “for us”’ (Bourdieu 1990:64). Consequently, the decision-making process ‘does not even require active consent, merely the non-occurrence of a refusal’ (Connell 1989:297 in Ball, 2003). In other words, decisions and ’choices’ are reached *unthinkingly,* for want of a better word. This is because with the habitus;

‘the most probable practices are therefore excluded, as unthinkable, by a kind of immediate submission to order that inclines agents to make a virtue of necessity, to refuse what is anyway denied and to will the inevitable’ (Bourdieu, 1990:54).

Bourdieu’s conceptual tools – as thinking tools - are intended to be used relationally. The ‘field’ is another key concept of Bourdieu’s. Indeed, Maton (2008:61) argues that;

‘to talk of habitus without field and to claim to analyse “habitus” without analysing “field” is thus to fetishize habitus, abstracting it from the very contexts which give it meaning and in which it works’.

The concept of ‘field’ is a spatial metaphor used by Bourdieu to ‘draw attention to the latent patterns of interest and struggle that shape the existence of […] empirical realities’ (Swartz, 1997:119). Thus, Bourdieu’s fields are both hierarchical and competitive. However, each field has its own distinctive ‘logic of practice’ (Maton, 2008:70). In the broadest sense, fields are sites ‘where agents and institutions constantly struggle according to the regularities and the rules constitutive of this space of play’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:102). They are also arenas of struggle ‘for control over valued resources’; that is, capital, as well as ‘over the very definitions of what are to be considered most valued resources in fields’ (Swartz, 1997:122-123). According to Bourdieu, the struggle that occurs in the field is mostly ‘between the established agents and the new arrivals in fields’ (Swartz, 1997:124). To win the struggle, the ‘established agents tend to pursue conservative strategies while challengers opt for subversive strategies’ (Swartz, 1997:124).

Field and habitus interact in specific ways. Even though the ‘habitus is creative [and] inventive’ (Bourdieu, and Wacquant, 1992:19) in that it regulates the actions of the agents; enabling them to know how ‘to act in certain ways and not others (Maton, 2008:52), it is guided and delimited by the field from which it originates. Bourdieu’s (1984:170) description of the habitus as a ‘structuring structure’ as well as a ‘structured structure’ illustrates the interconnectedness of the habitus and the field. Both phrases suggest that while the habitus (subjective) is *shaped* by the field, and therefore a product of the field, the field (objective) for example, the social class/space, is also shaped and maintained by the habitus. That is to say, the habitus perpetuates and reproduces the field and vice versa.

Furthermore, Bourdieu posits that the ‘concepts of habitus and field are relational […]’and ‘that they function fully *only* in relation to one another’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:19 my emphasis). The inter-dependence and co-construction of the field and habitus is aptly captured in the quote below;

‘on one side, it [habitus] is a relation of conditioning: the field structures the habitus. On the other side, it is a relation of knowledge or *cognitive* *construction*. Habitus contributes to constituting the field as a meaningful world (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127).

Crucially, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:127) posit that when habitus is in tune with the field, ‘it finds itself ‘as fish in water’; it does not feel the weight of the water and takes the world about itself for granted’.

Finally, Bourdieu offers a distinct analysis of different types of capital. Capital, in more general terms, can be described ‘as the ‘energy’ that drives the development of a field through time’ (Moore 2008:105). Moore expands this argument by explaining that ‘capital in action is the enactment of the principle of the field. It is the realization in specific forms of power in general.” (Moore, 2008:105). Importantly, ‘*a capital does not exist and function except in relation to a field*’ (Bourdieu and Waquant, 2007:101 in Erel, 2010:647 emphasis in original). Capital exists in two forms; that is, the objectified and embodied. According to Bourdieu there are four types of capitals. These are;

‘*economic* (money and assets); *cultural* (e.g. forms of knowledge; taste, aesthetic and cultural preferences; language, narrative and voice); *social* (e.g. affiliations and networks; family, religious and cultural heritage) and *symbolic* (things which stand for all of the other forms of capital and can be ‘exchanged’ in other fields, e.g. credentials).” (Thomson, 2008:69 my emphasis)

Certain capitals, such as economic, can be transformed into other more valuable ones like symbolic and cultural capitals and vice versa (Bourdieu, 1984).

Bourdieu’s model of social action has come under severe criticisms from the likes of Calhoun (1993:72) who argues that at best, it is ‘a theory of reproduction’, and, at its weakest ‘a theory of transformation’. Similarly, Jenkins (1992), Heelas (1996), Bonham (1999), Adams (2006), Goldthorpe (2007), and Brooks and Wee (2008) have all remarked that Bourdieu’s theory is excessively deterministic in nature, thus allowing little or no room for human agency. Rather, they argue that ‘people have to turn to their resources to decide what they value, to organise their priorities and make sense of their lives’ (Heelas, 1996:5). This is because ‘the self today is for everyone a reflexive project’ (Giddens, 1992:30).As Lareau (2000:178) astutely observed;

‘possession of high status cultural resources does not *automatically* lead to a social investment. Rather, these cultural resources must be effectively activated by individuals in and through *their own actions and decisions’* (My emphasis).

While habitus influences these actions and decisions, so would the individual’s ability to reflect on the benefits and consequences of these action and decisions. Putting it succinctly, Bridge (2001:209) contends; ‘agents must anticipate the choices of others in order to make their own choices knowing that other agents are doing the same’. Echoing a similar point, Jenkins (1992:97) argues that ‘actors must know more about their situation, and that knowledge must be more valid, than Bourdieu proposes’. Indeed history is littered with examples of individuals or groups desiring that which was once classed as ‘not for them’. The western working class use of the educational system is one such example (Reay, 2001; Kaufman, 2005; Goldthorpe, 2007; Lehmann, 2009). Bridge (2001:211) makes a good point when he argues:

‘The principles of choice provided by the habitus might produce too many potential ‘leads’. If so, which one is chosen? In these situations actors must look to other features of the social, spatial or temporal situation that will give them a focus for subsequent actions. Equally they might look at how unlike others are acting in order to act differently’.

In the above instance it is reflexivity that helps to clear the ambiguity that may result from habitus (Bridge, 2001; Beagan et al., 2010). In relation to choice, proponents of rational action theory (RAT), Goldthorpe (2007) for example, who tend to favour economists’ analysis of consumption also oppose Bourdieu’s theory and propose instead that our choices ‘are arrived at via the rational calculation of risks, benefits and the possibilities of success and failure within a framework of ends or goals and an awareness of competition’ (as summarised by Ball, 2003:16).

However, since ‘[it] is in virtue of being socialised into common background of pre-reflective assumptions and orientations that agents have goals at all’ (Bonham 1999:30), the notion that decisions and goals are reached via ‘rational calculation’, is an ‘*illusion’* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:125 my emphasis). Bourdieu explains this well, arguing that:

‘rationality is bounded not only because the available information is curtailed, and because the human mind is generically limited and does not have the means of fully figuring out all situations, especially in the urgency of action, but also because the human mind is *socially bounded, socially structured*. The individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped - save to the extent that he becomes aware of it – “within the limits of his brain” […] *within the limits of the system of categories he owes his upbringing and training’* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126 my emphasis)

In other words, there is nothing ‘original’ or ‘rational’ about our actions and decisions since what is contained in the brain, that is, our repertoire of thoughts and reasoning (which inform our decisions and actions), are already pre-determined and delimited by the field and by association, our habitus.

This thesis has been shaped by an engagement with, but strong critique of, Rational Action Theory (RAT). This approach, which foregrounds the notion of ‘rational’ agents, is considered inadequate as a theoretical framework for this study for three specific reasons. Firstly, it is too similar to economic theories of consumption, which have already been shown to be limited as an analytical tool (see discussion on page 27-30). Indeed RAT is underpinned by economic principles such as utility maximisation and cost-benefit assessment (Boudon, 1974; Goldthorpe, 1996; Whitford, 2002). Consequently, like many economic theories, ‘methodological individualism’ (Elster, 1989:13); the idea that all ‘social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed’ (Scott, 2000:2), is a core feature of RAT’s theoretical framework[[1]](#footnote-1). According to Elster (1989:13)

‘the elementary unit of social life is the individual human action. To explain social institutions and social change is to show how they arise as the result of the action and interaction of individuals’.

From RAT’s perspective, the individual is a ‘[rational] *calculator* rather than a rule follower’ (Gray, 1987 cited in Whitford, 2002:328 my emphasis). Consequently, rational action theorists vehemently oppose Bourdieu’s assertion that due to the habitus, individuals instinctively know, in any given situation;

‘things to do or not to do, to say or not to say, in relation to a *forthcoming* (original emphasis) reality which […] puts itself forward with an urgency and a claim to existence excluding all *deliberation*’ (Bourdieu, 1977:76 my emphasis).

As a result of the methodological individualism adopted by RAT theorists, more emphasis is placed on individual’s action to the exclusion of social structures such as class, gender, tradition, colonisation, all of which are considered important variables in the current study (Boudon, 1974; Elster, 1989; Coleman, 1990; Hechter, 1987; Goldthorpe, 1996, 2007; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). For rational action theorists, social structures are simply patterns that result from individuals’ actions rather than pre-existing entities that shape and are shaped by individuals’ actions and social relations (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1990).

Bourdieu (1977:90) however, asserts that ‘the relationship between the objectified schemes [the individuals] and the schemes incorporated or being incorporated [structure/customs] presupposes a structural analysis’ of social practices, which in this case is the consumption of schooling. According to Bourdieu (1977:90), such analysis ‘is the only means of fully grasping the structuring structures’ for example, of class and gender norms and traditional values, which shape and influence individuals’ actions and choices and ‘which […] are revealed only in the objects they structure’, that is, the agents. He goes on to explain that ‘the mind born of the world of objects does not rise as a subjectivity confronting an objectivity’ (Bourdieu, 1977:91). In other words, individuals’ construction of the world is ‘not the sovereign operation of consciousnesses as RAT claim (Bourdieu, 1977:91). Rather Bourdieu posits that:

‘the objective universe is made up of objects which are the product of objectifying operations structured according to the very structures which the mind applies to it. The mind is a metaphor of the world of objects which is itself but an endless circle of mutually reflecting metaphors (Bourdieu, 1977:91).

Other academic scholars for example Munch (1992) and Sciulli (1992) have viewed RAT’s failure to take into account the role of social structure and norms, and more importantly, as it is ‘embodied’ by social agents in their analysis of social practices as a major weakness of this conceptual framework. In fact, the exclusion of these ‘value systems’ or ‘systems of values’ makes RAT a positivistic rather than a sociological theory (see for example Parson, 1936/1991; Parson, 1937). Whitford (2002:331) argues that ‘rational choice theory’s neglect of the [social structures] leaves it as economics, bereft of its sociological complement, and thus incomplete and unworthy of paradigmatic privilege’ which RAT theorists tend to claim. Indeed, some rational action theorists like Elster (1989a, 1989b) and Hechter (1994) have also come to accept the argument that norms – embodied social practices that are acquired and perpetuated by individuals within a given structure or social field; to use a Bourdieusian phrase, are not outcome-oriented as most RAT theorists argue but are ‘internalised and so acquire a compulsive character that cannot be explained in purely rational terms’ (Scott, 2000:9). Indeed, Scott (2000:9) asserts that ‘as far as the explanation of norms [and social structures] are concerned, rational choice theory has nothing to offer’.

Secondly, and related to the first point, ‘while rational considerations may explain why particular individuals introduce and enforce social norms’ for example, why parents invest more in their sons in societies that valued men over women, ‘they cannot explain how these norms come to be internalised’ (Scott, 2000:9). Bourdieu’s concept of the habitus on the other hand, specifically deals with the idea of internationalisation of social structure and norms (Bourdieu, 1977; 1984; 1990). As will be shown later in the chapter, the internalisation of norms and ideologies are very important in my analysis of why Nigerian elite parents prefer and consume UK-based British private boarding schools. The internalisation thesis as formulated by Bourdieu and Fanon (explained shortly) also allows us to understand how and why British whiteness still holds significant value for Nigerian elites decades after colonisation.

Thirdly, unlike Bourdieu (1984), rational action theorists do not perceive education as a ‘consumption good’. Rather, they tend to view education as an ‘investment good’, as a transaction in which individuals engage on the basis of a purely utilitarian analysis of costs and benefits instead of as a means of articulating their class status (Goldthorpe, 1996; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). Therefore it is not surprising that rational action theorists; for example Boudon (1974)[[2]](#footnote-2), Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) and Morgan (1998) – based on the hypothesis of ‘primary and secondary’ effects on students’ engagement in and with education - have tended to concern themselves with differences in levels of educational participation rather than the link between the consumption of schooling and the acquisition and/or maintenance of social status (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003). As already explained, education is conceptualised in this study both as a commodity and a site for consumption. The conception of education as a consumption good is crucial in the thesis as it allows us to understand why and how Nigerian elite parents are able to simultaneously express their social status and reaffirm class boundaries by consuming high status private schools.

## 1.2.1 Extending Bourdieu’s habitus with Fanon’s Colonisation theory

This thesis examines the contemporary consumption of international private education. However, it focuses on this as undertaken by families outside the West – families drawn from Nigeria’s social and economic elites. This raises the question of the applicability of theoretical concepts that have been conceived and formulated in the West and which, therefore, might only reflect the concerns and cultural biases of a western worldview (Fanon, 1967/2008). Nigerian society, it might be argued, has a distinct cultural milieu and its own unique social and political history. Indeed, Bourdieu (1993) encourages social scientists to challenge sociological concepts and not to apply them arbitrarily. Rather, he urges us to consider their applicability in light of where and when they were produced and thus their usefulness in each research context (Bourdieu 1993). In other words, sociological concepts that have originated from the West should be thoroughly scrutinised before they are applied to non-western societies.

How far can Bourdieusian concepts be used to analyse the consumption preferences of the Nigerian elite? As already argued, the field, that is, the social space occupied by individuals, is an integral aspect of the habitus because it is from the social space that the habitus is generated in the first place (Bourdieu, 1984). However, extensive review of the use and description of the habitus reveals an implicit assumption (which has not been helped by the uncritical manner in which even well-known Bourdieusian scholars have tended to use the concept of habitus), about the origin of the ‘*intrinsic properties’*; taken here to mean the values and practices, of a given field (Bourdieu, 1984:170). The general assumption is that the ‘intrinsic properties’ of a field have originated from, and are therefore specific to, the society in which the field or fields are situated. That is to say, the values, properties, and practices of a field have their roots in, and thus have emerged from, a given spatially-bounded society. Therefore, to speak of the British upper, middle or working classes’ habitus, for example, is to speak at the same time of habituses that have been shaped by values, lifestyles and practices that have both originated from, and are specific to, Britain. However, as I shall argue shortly, ‘social space is not and could never be magically contained within the borders of the nation-state’ (Johnson, 2013:178).

The view taken in this thesis is that colonisation and other western hegemonic discourses have not only undermined local values and practices in former colonies (Fanon, 1967/2008; Johnson, 2013; Shonekan, 2013), they have also changed and shaped the *intrinsic properties* of these social spaces and by extension, class habitus within these societies. In his extensive study on colonial Zimbabwe, West (2002) outlined the rise and formation of the African middle class. He argues that the former British colonists provided the structure for the emergence of an African bourgeois class. Besides western education, which was the main ingredient in the acquisition of middle class status in colonial Africa, West argues that due to ‘their vociferous claims to western civilisation and Christianity’, the African bourgeois class adopted western lifestyles that ‘separate[d] them from the ‘natives’ (West, 2002:1). Further, these lifestyles included the adoption of a western ‘ideology of domesticity’, Christian values and practices, which were very different from traditional customs and practices. The African bourgeois class also forsook traditional marriage for ‘white weddings’ and preferred living in western-style living quarters which were perceived as more ‘respectable’ (West, 2002:107).

Bassey (1999:51) also makes a similar claim, arguing that ‘African educated elites […] in Nigeria adopted European styles of dressing and ‘maintain[ed] nuclear families’, rather than the ‘traditional’ practice of polygamy. Furthermore, Belk (2000:13-14), in his research on the consumption patterns of the new elite in Zimbabwe, observes that this group has as its reference the former colonists and the West in general because it lacks ‘a pre-existing indigenous elite to emulate’. This echoes Ekeh’s (1975:93) early study of African class relations and his view that the African bourgeois class ‘does not have an upper class, an aristocracy, over and above it’.

The analysis above hints at the African elite and bourgeois class inherited practices, values and lifestyle that do not have their roots in Africa. Besides showing that social spaces cannot be protected from external cultural influences, these studies have also indicated that, not only have some of the *intrinsic properties of* African bourgeois and elite class habituses originated from the West, they have also shown that these habituses are still shaped and influenced by western values, practices and lifestyle. Put differently, the habitus of African elite and bourgeois classes are a reflection of western middle class practices and values. These are very significant points for this thesis because they show race and (post)colonial experience to be vitally important factors in the analysis of the consumption decision and choices of African social elites.

Bourdieu (1984:467 my emphasis) contends that ‘knowledge of the social world has to take into account a practical knowledge of this world which *pre-exist*s it and which it must not fail to include in its object’. I will argue that colonisation is a significant historical event and that, by extension, race is a significant form of social difference that both *pre-exist* the ‘social world’ of my participants and hence must be taken into account in the analysis of the data**.** Although Bourdieu did acknowledge that colonisation impacted on the colonised, he mainly focused on the ‘discrepancy between habitus [of the colonised] and the field’, which in the case of the Algerians is the new ‘capitalist cosmos’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:130).

That said, Bourdieu (cited in Maton, 2008:53 my emphasis) does acknowledge that ‘the structures of the habitus are […] *not ‘set’ but evolve* – they are durable and transposable but not *immutable*’. Based on this premise and the observations made above, I will argue for an extension of the habitus to include, and take account of, the colonial situation. I have drawn on the highly influential work of Frantz Fanon and, in particular, his claim that colonisation has greatly undermined black people’s perceptions of themselves and their ability to be reflective, to support my proposition (Bhahba, 1994).

The intention here is to retain what is considered to be the fundamental principle of Bourdieu’s habitus; that is, the *unconscious* aspect, and apply it to the Nigerian context. I intend to foreground class and race through the concept of ‘colonial habitus’ within my analysis in an attempt to investigate the ways in which ideas of cultural superiority and inferiority, which Fanon argues are ‘ingrained’ in blacks’ and whites’ psyche respectively, shape social practices of consumption. I have drawn on the work of Fanon in order to develop the concept of ‘colonial habitus’. It should be noted thatFanon used the term ‘blacks’ to refer to non-western or the *colonised* in general and ‘white’ as a generic term for European civilisations and its representatives or the *coloniser*.

# 1.3 Frantz Fanon’s theory of colonisation

In his classic book ‘Black skin, White masks’ Fanon (1967/2008) famously argued that colonisation shattered the psyche of the colonised through the systematic process of assimilation and acculturation, perpetuated via the institutions of language, religion and education. The colonised, on their part, eventually came to internalise the hegemonic discourse of white superiority and thus to see themselves as inferior (Fanon, 1967/2008). While the colonists have values, intellect and morals, the colonised lack, or are made to feel they lack, such qualities. The colonised were also deemed uncultured and uncivilised (Fanon, 1967/2008). The internalisation of what are usually negative and derogatory attributes, images, symbolisms and languages used to describe the colonised, according to Fanon, has created a fatalistic and inferiority complex within them (Fanon, 1967/2008).

Furthermore, Fanon contends that by destroying the corporeal schema; which he argues is ‘a definitive structuring of self and the world’; and an essential element to any sense of self, colonisation ‘creates a real dialectic between the body and the world’ (Fanon, 1967/2008:111) for the colonised, and consequently a ‘normal’ or normative subjective self could not be formed. In the place of the normal subjective self, Fanon argues arises the ‘historico-racial schema’ (Fanon, 1967/2008:112) which has meant the colonised can only have ‘a relationship to self, to give a performance of self which is scripted by the coloniser’, thus ‘producing in him the internally divided condition of ‘absolute depersonalisation’ (Fanon, 1967/2008:xxxii).

In line with Fanon, contemporary writers like Molande (2008:179), posits that ‘the African unconscious cultural logic accepts that ‘we are yet to be there where Europe and America are now’. Echoing a similar point, George (2003:80) argues that, ‘the word Africa is a signifier and referent at the same time’. That is, the word ‘Africa’ connotes poverty and inferior, barbarity while simultaneously conjuring up images of slavery, corruption and amateurishness. In sum, Africa is objectified as underdeveloped and inferior to the West.

Fanon’s broad notion of the internalisation of inferiority is corroborated by Wang and Chen (2004) who argue that in many developing countries, consumers’ willingness to purchase their own domestic products has been weakened by the view that these products are ‘inferior’ to western ones. Similar attitudes have been found amongst Nigerians by Okechukwu and Oyenmah (1999), and Okpara and Anyanwu (2011) who found that Nigerians consume foreign products not because they are necessarily of a higher quality than local products but mainly because of the ‘foreignness’ of the product. Classen and Howes (1996:188) concur and argue that the high value attached to western products by non-western societies has made the idea of ‘Westerness’ and ‘Americanness’ a highly valuable feature in any product.

A more recent study by Shonekan (2013) which explores the impact of American Hip Hop culture on Nigerian youths analyses the ways in which Nigerian artists and musicians adopt western sounding names, accent and tattoos in their bid to gain international recognition. Similar to most African scholars, Shonekan (2013:186) also attributes the perceived supremacy of the West and whiteness to ‘Colonialism and Imperialism’, which she argues has produced ‘clear power structures, a global hierarchical order that separates the winners from the losers’.

Academic scholars like Hannerz (1992) however, have argued that rather than perceiving consumption of western goods in developing countries as slavish manipulation of the indigenes, the consumption of western commodities should be viewed as a conscious attempt by people in developing countries to create and ‘forge their own unique cultural identity’ (Classen and Howes, 1996:179). Making a similar point, Giddens (1996:367-8) argues that while;

‘globalisation invades local contexts, it does not destroy them; on the contrary, new forms of local cultural identity and self-expression are causally bound up with globalising process.

Nonetheless, the ability of Africans to embody western and African identities at the same time has been a contentious subject among Africa scholars (Ekeh, 1975; Mungazi, 1996; Woolman, 2001; Fanon, 2008). Du Bois and Fanon for example, argue that while Africans, due to colonisation and Black diaspora, have come to have dual identities; indigenous and colonists’, these never fuse together and become one. Rather they both assert that these “two souls”, as Du Bois puts it, exist separately within the person of African heritage and causes ‘internal turmoil’ (Du Bois, 2007).

Unlike Du Bois who argues that eventually these two identities can co-exist amicably, Fanon, on the other hand does not. This may be due to Fanon’s understanding of identity coming from one source, that is, shared experiences and ‘cultural codes which provides us, as ‘one people’, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of references and meaning’ (Hall, 1994:393). However, this definition of identity has been described as too rigid and ‘one-dimensional in ways that reinforce and sustain white supremacy’ (hooks, 1994: 425).

## 1.3.1 Comparing Bourdieu and Fanon

Apart from the obvious link of both theorists to France; one French (Bourdieu), the other (Fanon) colonised by the French, the similarities between their work are not at first apparent. Yet both theorists are similar in significant ways. To begin with, and as Bourdieu himself acknowledged, there is a similarity between his own theory of practice and broad psychoanalytic concepts (Bourdieu, 1993:46), which are very influential within Fanon’s frame of analysis. Further, both Bourdieu and Fanon are concerned with the subject of social action. For example, like Bourdieu, Fanon asserts that human actions and desires are shaped by internal mechanisms; in Fanon’s case, mechanisms linked to their psyche. Though emphasising the internal, both see individuals’ or groups’ actions and practices not as ‘hereditary’ or innate but as acquired through socialisation. Both recognise the role of ‘history’ in shaping individual’s choices and preferences.

By asserting that habitus is ‘the product of social conditioning and, thus history’ (Bourdieu, 1990:116), Bourdieu like Fanon recognises the ways in which particular histories shape and create the perception of self. Indeed, Bourdieu (1993:46, original emphasis) claims that ‘the social *is* history, through and through’. He went on to contend that ‘history is inscribed in things – in institutions […] and also in bodies’ (Bourdieu, 1993:46). In other words, ‘history’ is central to the creation of individuals’ and collective identities. More importantly, Bourdieu (1993) and Fanon (1967/2008) believe that social action or practices emanate from the sub-consciousness.

Despite his main anthropological study being of the Kabyle tribes of Algeria, Bourdieu made no mention of the way in which ‘habitus is differentiated by race’ (Reay, 2004b:436). This is a significant difference not least because many sociological studies have shown race to be a significant factor that impacts on individuals’ preferences, decisions and lifestyle choices (Johnson, 2013; Shonekan, 2013). Also unlike Fanon, Bourdieu focused on personal and family histories while Fanon focused on ‘racial’ history. To separate personal/social class history from colonial/race history, I will argue, is to lose sight of the complex and co-dependence/construction and relationship between class and colonial habitus, particularly, as ‘expressed in objectified form in styles of life and lifestyle choice’ and also objective life chances (Moore, 2008:110)**.** This thesis examines the concepts of ‘colonial habitus’ alongside the more familiar Bourdieusian concept of class-bound habitus.

A fundamental difference between Bourdieu and Fanon is that unlike Bourdieu, Fanon privileged the psychic dimension over the social and economic in his analysis of the social actions (Bhabha, 1994). Consequently, unlike Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984; Lovell, 2000; Sayer, 2004), discourses (used here to mean ideas, symbolism, images, language and abstractions used by the colonists to construct the colonised) and their power to penetrate the individual psyche, are central to Fanon’s theory of social action. Parker (1994:245 in Willig, 2008:172) defines discourse as ‘sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions’ while Alvesson (2002:117) postulates that ‘discourses position the person in the world in a particular way and at a given time, prior to the individual having any sense of choice’. Fanon (1967/2008:xvi) argues that in all of these (discourses) ‘there is a constellation of postulations, a series of propositions that slowly and subtly […] work their way into one’s mind and shape one’s view of the world’.According to Fanon, the internalisation of western hegemonic discourse such as white superiority; perpetuated first, through colonisation, western education and religion and later via the media and technological advancement, has generated in blacks an inferiority complex which means that they can only view themselves through western lenses (Appiah, 1986; Stoller, 1995; West, 2002; Simpson, 2003; Molande, 2008; Shonekan, 2013).

By ‘privileging the psychic dimension’, Fanon ‘not only challenged what we understand by *political* demand but transform[ed] the very means by which we recognise and identify its *human agency*’ (Bhabha, 2008:xxv in Fanon 1967/2008 original emphasis).Bhabha (2008:xxvi in Fanon 1967/2008) corroborates this argument, stating that by viewing choice and desire from the psychoanalytic paradigm, Fanon ‘radically questions the formation of both individual and social authority as they come to be developed in the discourse of Social Sovereignty’. Speaking specifically about colonisation, Fanon believed that human agency was fundamentally undermined in the colonial situation where everyday life exhibits a ‘constellation of delirium’ that mediates the normal social relations of its subjects: ‘The negro enslaved by his inferiority, the white man enslaved by his superiority alike behave in accordance with a neurotic orientation’ (Bhabha, 2008:xxvii in Fanon 1967/2008).

By including Fanon in its theoretical ‘tool box’, this study employs an ‘ontological dualism’ (Hays, 1994:65) which prevents one from being drawn to what Ball (2003:2) refers to as ‘seductive simplicities’ or in Stronach and MacLure (1997 cited in Ball 2003:2) words ‘comforts of certainty’. Bourdieu (1990:28) citing Nietzsche (1969:119) stresses the significance of ‘ontological pluralism’ approach further, arguing that;

‘there is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective “knowing”; and the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more* eyes, different eyes, we use to observe one thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be.’

It important to point out that very few studies (see Puwar, 2004 for such example) in the UK and America, which have explored Africans’ or ethnic minority groups’ consumption practices in general or their class practices in relation to schooling in particular, have used Bourdieu and Fanon in this way. As already argued, concepts and ideas that have emerged from the West might have different concerns and worldviews in non-western societies (Fanon, 1967/2008). Therefore, my effort to ‘Africanise’ Bourdieu’s habitus has the potential to make a significant contribution to research on consumption and the sociology of (international) education.

## 1.4 The acquisition of elite status in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria.

‘So high was the prestige of learning becoming that […] it was *infra dig* for a man who knew how to *read* and *write* to carry any loads of any kind, including Bibles and hymn books which had to be carried by the Christians’ (Bassey, 1999:46 my emphasis).

Studies of African and other former colonies have identified western education as one of the main instruments for the acquisition of elite status in these societies (Ekeh 1975; Swatridge, 1985; Sicherman, 1995; Bassey, 1999; West, 2002; Simpson, 2003). Speaking specifically about colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria, Bassey (1999), in the quote above suggests that western education confers on its possessor, to varying degrees, power, prestige and economic security. Interestingly, the quote also suggests that basic education; that is, the ability to *read* and *write* was the requisite for the status of elite in these periods. Indeed, Bassey (1999:46 – my emphasis) goes as far as claiming that the ‘white man’s *clerk’* was an embodiment of class, prestige and honour; suggesting further the transformative power of education in colonial and early post-colonial period. Additionally, Bassey (1999:45) posits that education became one of the very few institutions that ‘allocates and regulates privileges’ in colonial and postcolonial Nigeria. Western education also became the singular ‘determinant of the economic, political and cultural elite status in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria’ (Bassey 1999:62).

Historical studies of other former British colonies have also found that similarly, Western education was the main site for social reproduction and ascension (Simpson, 2003; Roy, 2009; Bassey 1999; West, 2002; Mahmudat, 2010). Significantly, like the professional middle classes in Zimbabwe (West, 2002) and India (Roy, 2009:97) where ‘neither land nor wealth was their insignia’, studies have also shown that Western education bonded and homogenised Nigerian elites while simultaneously marking ‘them off’ from other groups (Bassey, 1999; West, 2002; Mahmudat, 2010).

Western education also meant acquiring western languages.

Academic scholars in the West have also contended that to speak the English language without any trace of accent ‘is one of the most important indicators of class status’ in contemporary societies (Berghoff, 1990:152). This thesis will add to the existing literature on the perceived value of the English language by non-westerners by exploring how the parents in this study perceive the English language, particularly in the formation of national and transitional elite identity in contemporary Nigeria.

## 1.4.1 Exclusivity and elite formation: the role of elite private schools

*‘The middle and upper classes […] when they send their children to public school they are not simply paying for a good education, they are starting their children on the road to power and influence. The principal commodity which those who send their children to public schools are buying is not education but privilege’* (Glennerster and Pryke, 1973 cited in Urry and Wakeford, 1973).

While being educated in colonial and early post-colonial Africa might guarantee ones’ social mobility, attending certain schools over others guaranteed membership of the political elites (Smythe and Smythe, 1960). In his book ‘Western education and political domination in Africa’, Bassey (1999) notes that due to their exclusivity, certain schools such as King’s College, Lagos, Methodist High School, Uzuakoli and St Andrew’s College, Oyo, became the breeding ground for political elites in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria. Bassey for example, claims that at the time of his writing, ten members of the House of Assembly including a premier, a minister of education and four members of the Federal House of Assembly in the Eastern House of Assembly, were educated at the Methodist High school, Uzuakoli (Bassey, 1999:65).

Studies on elite formation in the West have also found that certain types of schools are more likely to be able to generate future elite status within their pupils (Bourdieu, 1996, 1984; Caputo, 2007; Boyd, 1973; Ball, 2003; Oliver and O’Reilly, 2010; Berghoff, 1990; Borjesson, et al 2007; Teese 1981; Lamb, 1989; Zimdars et al., 2009; Johnson, 2013; Kenway and Koh, 2013a, 2013b). In his book ‘The State Nobility’, Bourdieu (1996:73) discusses the central role of elite schools (by which he means leading French universities) both in the formation and maintenance of elite identity and status; describing them as enabling ‘ritual exclusion’ and thereby producing ‘distinction’. Similarly, historical examination of status formation and elite maintenance in Britain and United States reveals that elite schools play a crucial role in status acquisition and maintenance (Musgrave, 1970; Cookson and Persell, 1985; Cole, 1967).

John Scott (1991:115) offers a rare historical account of elite formation, maintenance and legitimation in Britain and suggests that entry into the elite class in the early 1990s, ‘depend[ed], to a substantial extent, on the social assets inherent in attendance at the ‘right’ school or college’. Baltzell (1958:293 in Kendall, 2002) also makes a similar point when he argues that elite private schools ‘serve the latent function of acculturating the members of the younger generation, especially those not […] born, into an upper-class style’. Citing Bernstein (1975:18), Demaine (2001:200) asserts that while ‘the British middle class can only ensure its privileged position in education, through the public school system it can select which social type’.He concludes that ‘the British public school system is a system for generating not a finite range of sentences, but social *types’* (Bernstein, 1975:18 in Demaine, 2001:200 emphasis in original).

Teese (1981:104) citing Clegg (1996) argues that tuition fees in elite private schools are not ‘just about paying fees […] but about investing in ways that sustain the ‘frameworks of power’. Concurring, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009a:11) posits that elite schools are also used by elites to authenticate ‘the transfer of social and economic capital from one generation to another’.Elite schools also function as social cocoons and thus a mechanism of setting ‘limits on social mixing’ (Vincent and Ball, 2007:1074). In a similar vein, Musgrove (1970:124) contends that elite private schools, due to their exclusiveness are able to protect:

‘the child from social promiscuity and contamination as effectively as the most jealous parental surveillance, and more effectively than the *nouveau riche* could manage’.

Susan Ostrander (1984) in her study of American upper class women found that the decision to send children to elite private schools is primarily based on a the upper classes attempt to keep children from mingling with those from lower social-economic background. As one of her respondents puts it: “You don’t go to private school just for education. You go there to be separated from ordinary people” (Ostrander, 1984:84-85). West and Noden (2003:177) research on private and state schools in Britain also found similar responses from their respondents with one explaining the reason why she chose to send her children to private schools is because she wants them to mingle with their kind, ‘not riff raff’. Brantlinger et al., (1996:584) argue that the pathologizations of the working classes via the employment of derogatory terms and euphemism, for example ‘riff raff’, are ‘expurgation strategies’ which is another means of social exclusion. Consequently, class as well as being a site for the judgement of taste, is also the site for making moral judgements (Skeggs, 2004a).

Bourdieu (1984:143) contends that ‘academic qualifications never achieve total exclusive acceptance’ into the echelon of any society. Instead, studies have shown that membership of an elite group is dependent on, and regulated by, the acquisition of aesthetic taste and distinguish and distinguishable deportments and dispositions (Boyd, 1973; Cookson and Persell, 1985; DiMaggio, 1982; Scott, 1991; Smyth, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a; Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). In their study which examined parental choice in private and state schools in Britain, Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:188) observed that while the majority of the factors that influence parental school choice ‘are similar in the state and independent school markets’, they found that one significant factor that seems to influence parental choice in the independent school market is;

‘the desire to place a child in a well-disciplined school environment that will foster the development of what are perceived as high standards of *behaviour and appropriate attitudes and values*’ and the ‘*possession* of key personal social attributes’ (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:191-192 my emphasis).

Likewise, in Gaztambide-Fernandez’s, (2009a:11) ethnographic study which examines, among other things, elite formation processes, he notes that ‘status groups are formed around status signals and behaviours that symbolically limit who can access membership in such groups’. Extending the argument further, Gaztambide-Fernandez (2009a:11) asserts that;

‘having access to economic resources alone does not give a person elite status; rather, the ability to demonstrate particular behaviours, dispositions, knowledge, and aesthetic choices is essential in order to assert particular kind of status-group membership’.

These dispositions and deportments are also a form of symbolic boundaries and capital employed by the upper classes to ‘to enforce, maintain, normalize, or rationalize’ their social advantageous position (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:186).

Several studies have concluded that elite private schools are the ‘hot house’ for the inculcation of ‘attributes of excellence’ (Boyd, 1973; Bourdieu, 1984, 1996; Cookson and Persell, 1985). Thus, they have been quite aptly described as “*status seminaries*” (Cookson and Persell, 1985:22) and the manufacturer of ‘synthetic gentility’ (Wingfield-Stratford, 1956 in Wilkinson, 1970:127). As well as being an ‘effective instrument for bestowing gentility on the sons of the rough and warty industrial pioneers’ (Berghoff, 1990:150), elite schools are used by existing elites, that is, ‘old money’ for sustaining their lifestyle ‘by transmitting forms of inner cultivation and conventional deportment required by status group membership’ (Gerth and Mills, 1964 in Boyd, 1973:22).

As the saying goes, ‘Manners maketh the man’ and over the years ‘manner’ has come to signify many aesthetic devices that are used to create and distinguish the elite group (Wilkinson, 1970). These aristocratic aesthetics are manifested in comportment of dress, ‘refined’ accent, etiquette, habit etc (Musgrave, 1970; Scott, 1991; Entwistle, 1978; Berghoff, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996, 1984; Kendall, 2002). Emphasis on the learning of *appropriate* masculinity and femininity and manner and style of speech, and walking in elite schools are all attempts to create the differentiated style of the elite (Vincent and Ball; 2007; Williams et al., 2008; Bourdieu; 1977). Smart et al., (2008:42) in their research which looked at the strategies employed by British middle-class graduates found a link between ‘personality package’ that elite private schools endorse on their students and the employability of its alumni in the job market.

The etiquettes learnt in elite private schools help ‘accustom the individual to colourful privileges of status’ (Wilkinson, 1970:131) and also help to distinguish *genuine* elites from imposters (Boyd, 1973). Bourdieu (1984) argues that membership of any social field is always based on prolonged socialisation; via family and school and not through imitation. Bourdieu (2004:18 in Vincent and Ball, 2007:1074) extends this argument, explaining that *genuine* socialisation is ‘a labour of inculcation and assimilation’. The imprinting and encoding onto the body of these lifestyles become ‘an underlying ethical total personality’ of the elite group (Weber, 1966:155in Beck, 2007:44). The result is, of course, that upper and middle class status has come to be more a matter of social etiquettes and less about the possession of large amount of economic capital.

All of these raise interesting questions. For example, is the consumption of UK-based British private schools an attempt by Nigerian elite parents to reproduce themselves? What makes a place and/or school an effective site for acquiring elite identity? What are the processes involved in transforming these children into (trans)national elites?

## 1.5 Democratisation of education

Studies have shown that there has been a huge increase in the number of people now using the education system in Nigeria. For example, various educational statistics in Nigeria show that the total number of pupils in primary schools increased from 626,000 in 1960 to 2,912,619 in 1974 (Aigbokhan et al, 2007). A more up-to-date research shows that there are 50,700 primary schools presently in Nigeria, with an enrolment figure of around 22.3 million (Theobald et al, 2007). In 2007, Theobald et al (2007) put the number of government owned secondary school at around 10,349 with enrolment of 6.4 million.

To date, there has been little attention given to the impact of the democratisation of education on the Nigerian educated elite’s ability to reproduce itself. As a result, the tactics used by this group, who depend on education for their reproduction, have not yet been studied. Elsewhere, research has shown that the democratisation of education has meant that traditional educational credentials are no longer sufficient to ward off competition or secure ones’ position in the social field (Borjesson et al., 2007; Beagan et al, 2010). Given this, investigating the consumption of overseas’ schools by the Nigerian privileged classes will provide a valuable insight into how this group are able to retain and maximise ‘advantage under shifting global conditions’ (Weis and Cipollone, 2013:704).

Studies in the West have shown that ‘the democratisation of schooling’ (Bourdieu, 1984:143); otherwise known as ‘the schooling boom’ over the last century (Bourdieu, 1984:132) has seen a huge increase in the number of people now accessing education (Bourdieu, 1984; Ball, 2003; Weis and Cipollone, 2013). As a result, the children of the working classes now ‘compete dangerously with the children of the bourgeoisie on the [educational] terrain’ that was once the exclusive domain of the upper and middle classes (Bourdieu, 1984:93). Weis and Cipollone (2013:704) argue that democratisation of education has also meant ‘class position must now be ‘won’ at both the individual and collective rather than constituting the ‘manner to which one is born’. Echoing a similar sentiment, Savage (2000:69) posits that ‘people now have to achieve their class positions’ because ‘reproduction is never guaranteed and mobility, up or down, is always possible’.

While the fear of ‘downclassing’ is now a real concern for the middle classes (Ball, 2003; Lawler, 2005; Weis and Cipollone, 2013), Bourdieu (1984) conjectured that this is particularly intolerable for the privileged classes. Though unlike the middle classes who are largely reliant on the qualifications bestowed by the educational institutions for the retention and maintenance of their position in the social field (Demaine, 2001; Smyth, 2009), the upper class have little need for educational credentials (Smyth, 2009). Cookson and Persell (1985:16 my emphasis) go as far as claiming that, for the elites, learning certain social roles and behaviours is a central- ‘and perhaps *the only* – purpose of [formal] education’. Still, the upper classes are not immune from the risk that democratisation presents especially as the traditional structures for example, caste, race and blood linage that they once relied on are now weakened to the extent that they are no longer, by themselves, capable of performing the role of class reproduction (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1990; Bauman, 2000; Castells, 1997; Adams, 2006; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). Hence, even for the upper classes, nothing can be taken for granted as simply ‘the way things are done’ (Gergen, 1991:48).

The weakening of traditional mode of class identity coupled with modern phenomenon such as globalisation, democratisation and technological advancement has made intra-class difference difficult on the one hand while on the other hand, it has intensified the need for distinction within and between social classes (Adam, 2006). DiMaggio (1982:190) puts it succinctly:

‘As the potential membership of a status group becomes less known to any single member, the importance of the shared status culture – those cultural cues that define a person as a member to other members – becomes greater’.

It is at this point of intense competition that the ‘practical principles of division’ and ‘the distances that need to kept’ (Bourdieu 1984:472) are emphasised in order to maintain privileged positions. To achieve this ‘distance’, the middle and upper classes have had to mobilise their cultural, economic, political and social capitals (Bourdieu, 1984; Brown 2000). They have had to ‘to step up their investments’ (Bourdieu 1984:33) otherwise ‘face the very real prospect of generational decline’ (Parkin 1979:63). Consequently, a strategic investment in education is undertaken ‘so as to maintain the relative scarcity of their qualifications and subsequently their position in the class structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984:133). Since education disguises, legitimises and normalises elitism, which otherwise has negative connotations, it becomes the most suitable and logical site for maintaining and/or acquiring the status of elite in contemporary societies (Demaine, 2001).

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# Class Strategic Approaches

## 1.6 High cultural activities

One of the key concerns in the sociology of education is the intergenerational transmission of social class status and advantages from parents to their children. Bourdieu’s reproduction theory has been useful both in terms of our understanding of the type of strategies employed by different class factions and the role of consumption and education in class (re)production and maintenance, and to a lesser extent, social ascension. Bourdieu (1984) argues that the transmission of cultural capital (which Bourdieu defines as ‘instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed’ [Bourdieu, 1977 cited in DiMaggio, 1982:190) is one way by which the dominant classes acquire and transmit advantages to their children. Thus, besides reproducing their children within the dominant classes, Bourdieu argues that the intergenerational transmission of cultural capital allows middle and upper-class parents to secure, via their children, socially and economically advantageous positions (DiMaggio, 1982).

For example, Vincent and Ball (2007:1066) argue that Bourdieu perceived (1984:19) classical music as a high cultural activity which plays a significant role in distinguishing the ‘bourgeois world’ from that of the ‘populace’, or as he also suggests, ‘inheritors’ from ‘newcomers’. More importantly, the ‘conditions of reception’ involving either ‘belated knowledge through records’ or ‘early knowledge through playing the piano’ was crucial both for the acquisition of legitimacy and maintaining distinction within and between class factions. In other words, ‘early, *domestic*, practical acquaintance’ (Bourdieu, 1986 in Vincent and Ball, 2007:1067) with these high status cultural activities ‘is a particular mode of acquisition of cultural capital’ (Vincent and Ball, 2007:1066). Early socialisation enables upper and middle class children to acquire certain dispositions, cultural skills, social connections, educational practices, and other cultural resources that translate into different benefits/capitals as they move out into the world (Vincent and Ball, 2007).

Sociological scholars in the West have used Bourdieu’s theoretical framework to explain the different reproduction strategies used by the middle classes, via their children, to secure their socially and economically advantageous positions (Lareau, 2002; 2003; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Reay et al., 2007; Bodovski, 2010; Banks, 2012; Ilari, 2013; Reay, 2013; Sin, 2013; Bathmaker et al., 2013; Weis and Cipollone, 2013; Vincent et al., 2013). In their attempt to provide social advantage for their children, studies in the West have found that black and white middle class parents are engaging in ‘concerted cultivation’; a term coined by Lareau (2002; 2003), to describe the American middle class childrearing practices. Concerted cultivation involves the exposure and enrolment of children in cultural activates which middle class parents perceive will endow their children with skills and dispositions that will set them apart from working class children while giving them social advantage at the same time (Zelizer, 2005; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Gillies, 2007; Lareau, 2002; 2003; Dumais, 2008; Roksa and Potter, 2011; McCoy et al., 2011; Irwin and Elley, 2011; Vincent et al., 2012). Vincent and Ball (2007:1067) put it aptly; ‘enrichment activities’ play a key role in the *making up* of the [British] middle-class child’.

In her ethnographic study into the class-related differences in the ‘cultural logics of childrearing’, Lareau (2002:772) identifies the processes through which black and white American middle class parents maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions via the education system. While the middle classes adopt a ‘concerted cultivation’ childrearing practice, Lareau (2002:748) argues that the working class parents used ‘natural growth’ parenting style. She explains that the concerted cultivation approach which involves the deliberate stimulation of ‘their children’s development’ in a bid to enhance ‘their cognitive and social skills’, translate to education and social advantage later in life (Lareau, 2003:5). Lareau (2003:5) goes on to argue that the employment of the concerted cultivation approach is middle class parents’ way of ensuring that ‘their children are not excluded from opportunity that might eventually contribute to their advancement’.

Kremer-Sadlik et al., (2010:48), in their comparative study which investigates parents’ attitudes to children’s extra-curricular activities in United States and Italy also found that both sets of parents in Los Angeles and Rome see ‘extracurricular activities as a means for acquiring important skills and traits that will ensure their children’s future professional and personal success’. In the UK, the research of Vincent and Ball (2007:1062) on middle class parents’ use of ‘enrichment activities’ also reached a similar conclusion as Lareau. They argue that British middle class families enrol their pre-school children in numerous enrichment activities in an attempt to develop their ‘physical, social and intellectual skills which would leave them in a state of learning readiness for future success at school’. Vincent and Ball (2007:1072) posit that extra-curricular activities also provide opportunities for middle class girls to learn about femininity;

‘for girls, in particular, through ballet and other dance classes particular forms of ‘style’, ‘grace’ and ‘habit’ are invested in the child, embodied in the child, making the child’s body readable in a particular way and subject to visible classification’.

Recent research in the UK has also found that besides being a strategy used by British black middle-class parents to ‘raise and develop their children as both middle class and black’, participation in extra-curricular activities allows them ‘to arm their children against racism, to help them resist the often subtle, but insidious positioning of black children as inferior in a White-dominated society’ (Vincent et al., 2013:431 & 436).

By contrast, studies have also shown that the consumption of multiple cultural activities is a mechanism by which the middle and upper classes express their social status. In their ethnographic study which investigates the phenomenon of ‘busyness’ in America middle class families, Darrah et al., (2007) concluded that the consumption of extra-curricular activities is yet another way by which American middle class parents communicate their social status. Shore (2003 cited in Kremer-Sadlik et al., 2010) problematized extra-curricular activities as consumer goods and therefore like Darrah, argues that these activities are used by middle class families as a way of maintaining as well as increasing their social status. Shore (2003:8 cited in Kremer-Sadlik et al., 2010:36) goes on to assert that ‘what was once a stress on work as a moral virtue has expanded into a kind of obsession with all activities as status markers, with being ‘active’ as a kind of ritual class act’.

It is notable, however, that all of these studies have focused on western middle class parenting practices. Very few studies have investigated how African parents seek cultural accomplishments for their children and what part this might play in the maintenance of privilege. Also, if African parents practice ‘concerted parenting’, is this as Lareau (2003:5) argues, to ensure that ‘their children are not excluded from opportunity that might eventually contribute to their advancement’ or as Darrah et al., (2007) or as Shore (2003) suggests, a mechanism used to communicate their social status, or both?

## 1.6.1 International education

*‘Place can also be so important that it constitutes capital in itself - a place-specific symbolic capital’* (Borjesson et al., 2007:2)

The democratisation of education and the devaluation of status (Demaine, 2001) has meant without the strategic selection of place of education and type of education (Waters, 2006, 2007, Ball, 2003, Weis and Cipollone, 2013), the middle and the upper classes risk falling ‘into the homogenous, the undifferentiated’ category (Bourdieu, 1986:469 in Ball, 2003:63). Consequently, there is more emphasis on “educational route” rather than “educational amount” in contemporary society (Hopper, 1971 cited in Cookson and Persell, 1985:16). That is, the *place* ‘one goes to school’ (Cookson and Persell, 1985:16) now takes precedence over how educated one is (West and Noden, 2003; Waters and Brooks, 2010).

Studies have found that high status is usually attached to the recipient of western education (Waters, 2006) and educational qualifications obtained overseas in non-western countries (Ong, 1999; Rizvi, 2000). For example, Waters (2006) notes that Hong Kong middle class families were able to maintain their social and economic position as a result of being educated in Canada and afterwards gaining prestigious jobs at home. According to Waters (2006) foreign education was pertinent both in the construction and formation of what she terms as Transnational Capitalist Class in Hong Kong. The role of international education in the formation of ‘local’ elite is further stressed by Findlay et al., (1996:291) who speculate that international education‘could be claimed to be a key mechanism by which the intellectually most vital elements of a country's elite form (diverse but local) social networks’**.**

However, like any mass-produced good, the expansion of the international education market (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Waters, 2006; Borjesson et al., 2007) has necessitated the need for differentiation since not all education acquired from overseas has the same cultural and symbolic capital (Borjesson, et al, 2007). Sin’s (2013:856) analysis of Malaysian students studying ‘in offshore UK universities, that is, with satellite campuses outside the UK’ reveals that;

‘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’.

The discrepancy in the value in nation-specific educational qualifications is also highlighted by Weiss’ (2005) comparative study that looks at the professional progression of highly skilled migrant workers from third world countries working in Germany and German professionals working in third world countries. The study found that while German professionals do not depend on the local culture of the countries they work in, they were still relatively successful in terms of their career progression. On the other hand, the migrants from third world countries, despite having outstanding transnational validated credentials, were not as successful as the Germans in their career progression. The differential outcome of the migrant workers is due to the universalization of western credential, which then translates it to profitable cultural capital (Weiss, 2005).

It is widely acknowledged in most international education studies that language, culture and country are some of the factors which influence choice in the international education market (Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Borjesson and Broady, 2005). However since most of these studies tend to employ large-scale quantitative surveys, ‘choice’ is usually conceptualised as a straightforward rational process. To put it simply, choices are constructed in these studies as ‘concrete, measurable things instead of the social constructs that they are’ (Holme, 2002:181). While such large-scale surveys are very effective in providing general patterns and trends and also good for doing large comparative studies (see; Borjesson and Broady, 2005 for example), ‘the personal responses of individuals at the micro-level are usually ignored in these studies’ (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2001:44). Moreover, factors such as country, language and culture that inform choice in the international education market are not unambiguous precisely because their meanings are context specific (Gewirtz, et al., 1994). Therefore, one of the questions that the thesis will attempt to answer is how elite Nigerian parents’ ‘colonial habitus’ has shaped their engagement with the international education market.

The focus on the consumer in these studies has meant that academic scholars have mainly explored the perceived benefits of consuming international schooling. While this is useful, it tends to construct the international education market as risk-free. Thus, another objective of the thesis is to establish what my participants’ perceive as the risks involved in the international education market and the kinds of risk management strategies they employ.

## 1.7 Packaging and selling high status schools.

Another omission that has been noted in the literature on international education market is a lack of focus on the *product* and the *producers*. Very few studies have looked at the marketing of elite schools to the international market. Studies in the West that have looked at how private schools market themselves to prospective parents found that these schools tend to play on the ambition and emotions of their clients. According to Cucchiara (2008:171) private schools advertisement ‘involved implicit and explicit appeals to status – essentially, attempts to show that ‘the right sort of people’ sent their children’ to that particular school. A similarobservationwasmadebyMusgrave (1970:136) who argues that that elite schools ‘played on the ambitions of the social climber’ ‘by perpetuating an attractive gentry style and manners and [more significantly] by associating such style with moral status’.

Evidence from Virginia Caputo’s (2007:183) study on middle class parents’ school choice in Australia shows that like the promotional materials, mothers tend to employ words like ‘best’, ‘exceptional’, ‘quality’ and ‘stellar’ and phrases such as ‘the best money can buy’ when describing ‘the educational opportunities afforded through private schooling’. From the producers’ perspective, these abstractions are important aspects of advertisement. As Chatterjee (2007) postulates, it is through these abstractions, coupled with images, that consumer can obtain a symbolic idea of what the school offers both in terms of expressive and instrumental order. She goes on to argue that because ‘intangible and tangible’ things gain supremacy through ‘a selection of images’, eventually the images themselves become the ‘epitome of reality’, and the ‘real world’ becomes a mere incarnation of these images (Chatterjee, 2007:296).

The few studies that have explored the admission processes in elite boarding schools have also found that the admission procedures in these schools are designed to give the impression of prestige and quality and also to weed out undesirable candidates (Cookson and Persell 1985;Weenik, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernande, 2009a). Ball et al., (1995:73) posit that ‘the fact that certain schools are more difficult to gain admission to is significant in itself; this serves as some sort of surrogate guarantee of quality’. Likewise, Cookson and Persell (1985:49) suggest that admission into elite private schools ‘[has] less to do with ability or willingness than background and style’. Selection and admission on the basis of socio-economic background is crucial if these schools are to maintain their reputation as elite establishment (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a, 200b). According to Cookson and Persell (1985:57) this is because ‘if the “wrong” students are admitted, then the historical mission of the schools to mould patrician and parvenu into an elite cadre will be jeopardised’. The key point here is that the admission process is another tactic used by elite schools to portray themselves as well-heeled education establishments.

There is also relatively little research on the role of the gatekeepers; the head-teachers, agents and embassy officials in the admission process, and how they market, influence and shape non-western parents’ perceptions of schools in the international secondary school market. Interrogating how British private schools construct and maintain their image via these gatekeepers will provide some insights into how and why ‘the present cultural capital tends to flow from western countries to the East’ and Africa (Zhang, 2009:107). To this end, this thesis will explore the type of soft-sell marketing strategy used by these gatekeepers in their attempt to construct and *sell* UK-based British private schools as the “best in the world”.

# 1.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to provide a critical analysis of the theoretical frameworks in which the thesis is situated. I have shown how and why Bourdieu’s work will be central and how it can be usefully extended through the integration of insights from Fanon. The concept of ‘colonial habitus’ will allow me to investigate how race and class intersect to shape my participants’ perceptions of quality and risk in the international education market. The chapter has also identified significant gaps in research on elite consumption and education practices which has tended to exclude the African experience, and in research on the international education market which has not examined the broader contexts in which parental choices are made.

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# Chapter 2

# Methodology

*‘[Theory] influences the way the researcher approaches the study and pervades almost all aspects of the study. It is a ‘lens’ .framing and shaping what the researcher looks at and includes, how the researcher thinks about the study and its conduct, and, in the end, how the researcher conducts the study’* (Mertz and Anfara, 2006:189).

There are three main sections in this chapter. The chapter begins with a brief overview of constructionism and Interpretativism and explains their relevance to, and suitability for, the current study. The second part of the chapter outlines the research design, introduces the research population, samples and data collection techniques used. The third and final part of the chapter examines the issues of reflexivity, positionality, ethics, and outlines the data analysis technique used.

## 2.1 Constructionism and Interpretivism

Situated within the Idealist ontology**,** constructionism in the main ‘generally take[s] an anti-essentialism and anti-realism’ stance and places ‘emphasis on historical and cultural specificity of knowledge’ (Engler, 2004:294). An Idealist ontological position claims that ‘reality is what human beings make or construct [and that]; it is the activities of creative subjects that constitute the world of objects’ (Blaikie, 2007:16). Schwandt (1994:127) argues that the constructionist perspective ‘refers to the inter-subjectively shared knowledge, meaning-giving that is *social* rather than *individual’* (my emphasis). Berger and Pullberg (1965:201 cited in Engler, 2004:292) contend that the social world ‘is given neither in itself nor once and for all’. Instead, they argue that ‘it must be constructed and re-constructed over and over again’. In sum, the constructionist theoretical perspective is premised on the idea that reality is a social construct.

Although, unlike objectivism and subjectivism, both of which occupy the opposite ends of the epistemological axis, and thus make either/or arguments, the constructionist perspective is situated between these two extremes and thus overcomes such binaries by recognising the inter-dependency and inter-relatedness of ‘objectivity’ and ‘subjectivity’ in the construction of reality (Hart, and McKinnon, 2010). That is to say, reality and/or knowledge are created via the interaction between the ‘subject’ and the ‘object’. Bourdieu (1985:200) also acknowledges the inter-relatedness of objectivism and subjectivism in the construction of knowledge when he argues:

‘The most resolutely objectivist theory has to integrate the agents’ representation of the social world; more precisely, it must take account of the contribution that agents make towards constructing the view of the social world, and through this, towards constructing this world, by means of the work of representation (in all senses of the word) that they constantly perform in order to impose their view of the world or the view of their own position in this world - their social identity’.

He goes further to argue that agents’:

‘perception of the social world is the product of a double social structuration’, and while ‘on the ‘objective’ side, it is socially structured because the properties attached to agents or institutions do not offer themselves independently to perception, but in combinations that are very unequally probable, on the ‘subjective’ side, it is structured because the schemes of perception and appreciation available for use at the moment in question’ (Bourdieu, 1985**:**200-1).

Constructionism also involves an emphasis on the social context within which ideas and objects are developed, acquired and conceptualised (Creswell 1994; Kvale, 1996;Crotty, 1998; Engler, 2004; Blaikie, 2007; Hart, and McKinnon, 2010). Put simply, from this perspective reality and knowledge are ‘context-bound’ (Engler, 2004:294). Crotty (1998:57) argues that knowledge ‘is constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context’. Bourdieu extends this point further when he contends that the;

‘social world is, to a large extent, what the agents [social actors] make of it, at each moment; but they have no chance of un-making it except on the basis of realistic knowledge of what it is and what they can do with it from the position they occupy within it (Bourdieu, 1985:208).

In other words, the social context not only shapes individuals’ perception of reality, it also restricts their ability to change their reality.

Two major factors influenced my decision to adopt a constructionist approach. First, the fact that I am seeking to establish my participants’ perceptions and understanding of an everyday phenomenon: namely the consumption of schooling, makes the constructionist perspective a more suitable research approach. This is because perceptions and understanding can be highly subjective; for example, the views of consumers and producers of education will be very different. I am also interested in identifying the subtle differences and nuances across my participants’ narratives and this can only be achieved by collecting rich descriptive data.

A second reason for this epistemological choice is because I am also seeking to understand how the *contexts*; that is, the socio-economical and historical context within which my participants (especially the parent participants) are situated and within which their narratives have been conceived and produced shape their perceptions, attitudes and choices in the international education market. I am seeking to generate data and by extension, ‘knowledge’ that is context-specific. Put differently, I am concerned with gaining a better understanding of ‘human knowledge’ and its ‘meaning in the complex social, physical, and situational real world’ (Luck et al., 2006:105 cited in Liamputtong, 2009). Giddens (1993:165) argues that since social actors ‘draw upon resources, and depend upon conditions, of which they are unaware or which they perceive only dimly’, it is crucial for social scientists to complement the idea of the production of social life with that of the social production of structures. I aim to provide in-depth insight and interpretation of the ‘lived realities’ of the parent participants with regards to their consumption of schooling.

Bourdieu (1993) argues that because social scientists tend to investigate everyday mundane activities they risk being accused of stating the ‘obvious’. In his book ‘Sociology in Question’, Bourdieu (1993:32) writes:

‘It often happens that ordinary language designates very important social facts; but masks them at the same time, by the effect of familiarity, which leads one to image that one already knows, that one has understood everything, and which stops research in its tracks. Part of the work of social science consists in dis-covering what is both unveiled and veiled by ordinary language. This means running the risk of being accused of stating the self-evident, or, worse, of laboriously translating into heavily conceptual language, the basic verities of common sense or the more subtle and more agreeable intuitions of moralists and novelists. When, that is, people do not accuse the sociologist of saying things that are simultaneously banal and untrue, which goes to show the extra-ordinary resistances that sociological analysis arouses’.

While attending a research methods course as part of the preparatory training for my study, I was asked by the Professor of Economics who was running the course what the thesis question was. On hearing it, he asked me if it was not “just obvious” that these Nigerian parents are “simply seeking better quality education” for their children? I later came to realise that the Professor’s response, like those of many of my friends and family, may be due to the presumed ‘obviousness’ of the situation. The obviousness which stems from how ‘Africa’ and the ‘West’ are perceived. While Africa is still considered under-developed or *developing*, the West is seen as *developed* and politically, socially and technologically more advanced. Framed within such overly simplistic binaries, it is “no wonder” that ‘better quality’ education is the *obvious* answer to the question of why these Nigerian parents seek international education for their children. In other words, the ‘obviousness’ of the situation; Africans buying ‘quality’ products from the West, conceals the phenomenon that may be buried within this practice. The ‘obviousness’ of the problem thus suggests that this is not a social ‘phenomenon’ and by extension does not warrant investigation.

Like Bourdieu (1993), Smith et al (2009:35) assert that ‘there is a phenomenon ready to shine forth’ from everyday practices or events. Therefore as a social scientist, one of my roles is to unveil and ‘facilitate the coming forth’ of the phenomenon concealed within this kind of education migration (Smith et al, 2009:35). Another is to ‘make sense of [the phenomenon] once it has happened’ (Smith et al., 2009:35). That is, ‘to make sense of (or interpret) the meanings [my participants] have about the world’ (Creswell, 2003:9). Smith et al. (2009:35) argue that ‘making sense of what is being said or written involves close interpretative engagement on the part of the [the researcher/analyst]’.

I have opted to use an interpretivist approach to the gathering and analysis of my data. Interpretivism, which has ‘its origins in hermeneutics and phenomenology’ (Blaikie, 2007:124), is a key approach within constructivist sociology. Weber (1964:88) postulates that ‘sociology is a science which attempts the interpretive understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its course and effects’. According to Sahay (1971:68) Weber believed that the understanding of social ‘is not the subtle intuitive sympathy which philosophers favour – but intellectual, analytical and predictive explanation of action’. Building on Weber’s models of meaningful social action, Schutz (1967/1972:10) writes:

‘[The] social world which [social actors/research participants] immediately experienced as meaningful is also meaningful from the standpoint of the social scientist. But the context of meaning in which [the social scientist] interprets this world is that of systematising scrutiny rather than that of living experience. His data, however, are the already constituted meanings of active participants in the social world. It is to these already meaningful data that his scientific concepts must ultimately refer: to the meaningful acts of individual men and women, to their everyday experiences of one another, to their understanding of one another’s meanings, and to their initiation of new meaningful behaviour of their own. He will be concerned, furthermore, with the concepts people have of the meaning of their own and other’s behaviour and the concepts they have of the meaning of artefacts of all kind’

Besides highlighting the central role of interpretation in the production of understanding and the meanings which social actors attribute to their actions and behaviours, also indicated in Schutz’s words is the idea that the generation of deep and intellectual analysis of every day phenomena is dependent on the interpretative skill of the analyst / researcher. I will return to this point later when I discuss the analytical processes that were followed in this study.

One of the major critiques of studies which adopt an interpretivist approach is that they lack validity, replicability and reliability; as conceived within the positivistic tradition. However there has been a growing debate regarding the suitability of what are essentially positivistic concepts in qualitative enquiry. Carpenter and Suto (2008:148) argue that ‘the concepts of validity and reliability are seen as incompatible with the ontological, epistemological, and methodological foundations of qualitative research’. Johnson and Waterfield (2004:123) concur stating that qualitative data cannot be ‘tested for validity’ using rules and standards based on ‘assumptions of objective reality and positivist neutrality’. This, they argue is because qualitative research is usually ‘descriptive and unique to specific historical, social and cultural contexts. Hence it cannot be rigidly replicated in order to justify reliability’ (Johnson and Waterfield, 2004:122-3). Similarly, since qualitative data involves interpretation, replicability may not be deemed important or indeed encouraged in qualitative research.

This is not to suggest that qualitative studies do not undergo robust and rigorous process in order to maintain quality of the research process and data analysis, but rather to indicate that other more compatible means, that is, interpretivist ‘criteriology’ as Seale (1999) puts it, are used instead. For example, in the current study, Lincoln and Guba’s four evaluative criteria; confirmability, credibility and authenticity, transferability or applicability and dependability, are used to ensure rigour and the ‘trustworthiness’ of the data collection and analysis processes as well as Davis and Dodd’s (2002:288) guide for conducting quality qualitative research (‘attentiveness, empathy, carefulness, sensitivity, respect, honesty, reflection, conscientiousness, engagement, awareness and openness, context’) will also be used. However, it is worth mentioning at this juncture that these are simply guides and thus are not rigidly adhered to in the same manner that the concepts of validity and reliability are in positivist science (Carpenter and Suto, 2008; Lincoln and Guba, 1989; Davis and Dodd, 2002).

## 2.2 Research design

The main research population in the study are elite Nigerian parents whose primary place of residence is Nigeria and who have primary and/or secondary aged children in private (boarding) schools in the UK, Canada and Ghana (see figure 1 & 2). The secondary sample is made of the gatekeepers who have direct and/or indirect dealings with these parents and who, in their different capacities, are experts on UK-based private boarding schools. There is a consensus among many social scientists that this type of multi-perspective enhances the validity and credibility of the research findings (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2005; Smith et al. 2009; Liamputtong, 2009).



**Parents’ personal data (figure 1)**



**Funding information (figure 2)**

A non-probability purposive sampling frame was used in the current study because purposive sampling is theoretically more suited to qualitative study such as this one (Smith et al. 2009). Besides, I was seeking to recruit participants with first-hand knowledge and experience of the phenomenon under investigation. The invisibility of the primary group; due partly to their smallness and partly to the fact that most of the parents that send their children to UK-based British private schools are either political or business elites therefore making them inaccessible, make snow-balling and opportunistic sampling frames the most suitable for this study (Liamputtong, 2009). Indeed, due to the difficulty in gaining access to the primary sample group, fieldwork stretched between August 2009 and June 2011.

It is also possible that living, lecturing, and studying in the UK made it easier for me, both in terms of access to key gatekeepers and cost of travelling, to recruit elite Nigerian parents who educated their children in the UK. This plus the fact that my only Nigeria based ‘contact’ also educated her daughter in the UK meant I was able to build strong ties with British private schools, both in Nigeria and the UK, which in turned facilitated the recruitment of participants. On the other hand, not having any strong contacts with private schools affiliated to other countries made it very difficult to recruit Nigerian parents who, for example, might send their children to the US.

In order to maximise the number of parent participants recruited from the various channels used, different strategies were employed. One was to send out recruiting letters directly or via gatekeepers to potential participants. The recruiting letter contained information about the study, the role of the participants, my role and responsibility as the researcher and contact details for myself and my supervisor as well as my university. According to Goldstein (2002) this kind of detail is particularly important in research involving elites. The information about the university institution was crucial because it gave participants the reassurance they might need with regards my credibility. Studies have shown that belonging to a reputable institution can be an effective tool to gaining access to elite members (Rivera et al., 2002; Herod, 1999). Harvey (2010) asserts that having an affiliation with both Cambridge and Harvard enabled him to gain access to elite members. The high esteem in which most of the parents hold British education institutions might have also facilitated the gaining of access whilst boosting my credibility as a researcher at the same time (Walford, 2011).

With one exception, all the parents were recruited via third parties. The three main avenues used to recruit parents were; friends, relatives and private schools in Nigeria and the UK. Harvey (2010:196) contends that one of the advantages of ‘pursuing multiple avenues for gaining access to [research] participants is that it reduces the potential bias of only speaking to people within a particular social network’. However, Goldstein (2002:671) counsels that researchers using multiple sources must be vigilant so that ‘reliance on connections [do not lead] to an unbalanced set of interviews’ since different gatekeepers are likely to only recruit their kind. Mothers were disproportionately represented in my research; however this, in my view, had little to do with the gatekeepers used but more to do with mothers being the ones that tend to come forward in school choice research (Demaine, 2001; Williams, et al., 2008).

The research was carried out in Nigeria Lagos (South-West) Abuja (North) and Port-Harcourt (East) and in Britain. In total, 39 participants took part in the study. This number is made up of 26 parents and 13 gatekeepers, which consists of education agents and consultants, head-teachers, heads of department and embassy officials. Of the 26 parents interviewed, 11 are fathers and the remaining 15 are mothers. 21 of the parents send their children to UK, 4, all of whom were men holding managerial positions in Shell Petroleum Development Company, Nigeria, send their children to Canada, and one mother sent her daughter to Ghana. The remaining 7 fathers were mostly directors or CEOs of major organisations or owned their own firms. At the time of the fieldwork, 2 of the mothers held political appointments at federal and state levels. One was the commissioner of education in one of the Southern states and the other was the chair of a special advisers’ committee to the president. The other women, apart from one, either run their own businesses or are married to senior business executives. 3 of the parents; a father and 2 mothers, run their own private schools in Nigeria.

Mrs Osun’s (the parent whose daughter is schooling in Ghana) involvement in the current research was not by design but rather accidental. She had been recommended by a family who thought I was looking for parents whose children were schooling outside Nigeria rather than those who were educating their children in the West. I think this misunderstanding might have arisen from the word ‘overseas’ in my recruitment letter. However, having gone to her house, I felt it would be rude not to interview her as she had set aside time for this purpose. Whilst my initial intention was not to include her interview in the study, upon reflection, I felt that her views with regard to the consumption of schools outside Nigeria might shed some light in areas such as class differences in perception and consumption of schooling.

All the parents were selected on the basis that they met the following criteria.

* That they had primary and/or secondary aged children in schools overseas.
* Their children were attending *private* boarding schools in the country of their choice
* Their main place of residence was Nigeria
* That they were of Nigerian descent

This however is not to suggest that the research sample is identical in every aspect as this was not the case. For example, while the parents were all Nigerians, they were not all from the same ethnic group nor shared similar religious beliefs. Other unavoidable variations in the sample; but which add both *texture* and depth to the analysis, included age, profession, socio-economic and educational background, number of children and number of children schooling overseas; as shown in Figure 1**.** Smith et al. (2009:49-50) state that these differences also known as ‘random error’ are useful for examining ‘in detail psychological variability within the group, by analysing the pattern of convergence and divergence which arises’.

Data from Figure 1 shows that the 21 elite parents belong to 9 different ethnic groups; Yoruba (7), Ijaw (2), Itsekiri (2); Igbo (3), Efik (2), Hausa (2),Urobo (1), Delta Igbo (1) and Gombe (1). As already argued, western education did not only weakened the traditional sites of elite (re)production social, such as marriage and caste in colonial Nigeria, it also played a significant role in the formation of contemporary Nigerian elite (Bassey, 1999).

Historical accounts of the introduction of western education in colonial Nigeria have also shown that due to its affiliation to Christianity, formal education was met with a stronger opposition in the North because it was seen as a threat to their religious and cultural beliefs (Smythe and Smythe, 1960, Csapo, 1983). Consequently, the number of children in school in the Northern region was considerably less, particularly girls, when compared with other regions (Csapo, 1983). For example, the Ashby Commission study in 1960 found that in some areas of the North as little as 1 in 50 children attend public school (Csapo, 1983). Similarly, Smythe and Smythe’s (1960:65) study of the ‘New Nigerian elites’ in 1960 showed that the majority of students enrolled in University College Ibadan (UCI); Nigeria’s only university at the time, were from the South; ‘with Yorubas and Ibos accounting for 711 out of a total student population of 944’. At the time of their study, there were only two Hausas (northerners) in attendance.

Whilst it is apparent that religion and culture played a significant role in the composition of elites in the colonial and early post-colonial eras, the use of snow-balling sampling method coupled with the small sample size in the current study does not allow me to draw a similar conclusion. In other words, whilst a large proportion of the elite parents in my study are Yorubas, this does not necessarily mean that the majority of Nigerian elites are Yorubas. Instead, the fact that most of the parent participants were recruited in Lagos, one of the states of the Yoruba indigenes, might explain the high number.

An important point that I wish to make here and one that Smythe and Smythe (1960:96) also emphasised is that Nigerian elites intermingle and ‘treat each other as equals’. Indeed, they argued that some of their participants were keen to stress that ‘tribal identification […] should not be overemphasised’ in the study of Nigerian elite (Smythe and Smythe, 1960:88). Another significant point that was highlighted in Smythe and Smythe’s study and also evidenced in the current study, is the idea that elitism transcends ethnic as well as racial boundaries.

As previously mentioned, there were 13 gatekeepers recruited of whom 5 were head-teachers, 1 head of department, 6 education agents and 1 consular official. The head teachers were all white British males, three based in Nigeria and two in England. The head of department was a white British female. The agents consisted of 3 Nigerians; 2 males based in Lagos and 1 female based in England. The other 3 agents consisted of 2 white British females and one male education agent/consultant all of whom were based in England. The consular official was a white female who was head of the visa section at the British Deputy High Commission in Lagos.

With the exception of the white British male agent/consultant (although he has worked for Nigerian families), 6 of the parents who sent their children to the UK had used the services of the education agents in this study. These parents had all sent their children to British private schools in Nigeria prior to sending them to the UK. At the time of field work, 7 of these parents had their children in private schools of which the three Nigeria-based white British males were head-teachers while 5 parents had their children in UK-based private schools whose head-teachers were interviewed for this study. It is also important to mention that all the schools were either of Christian affiliation or non-specific.

## 2.2.1 Data collection methods: Interview and Questionnaire

*‘Interviewing is the most common and most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings. [And it is a] paramount part of sociology, because interviewing is interaction and sociology is the study of interaction’* (Fonata and Frey, 1994:361).

Two data collection techniques; namely, semi-structured interview and questionnaire, were used in this research. Interviewing which is defined ‘as a conversation with a purpose’ by Berg, (2009:101) is the most appropriate data collection technique in qualitative studies because it ‘facilitates the elicitation of stories, thoughts and feelings about the target phenomenon’ (Smith et al., 2009:56). The fact that this thesis intends to investigate parents’ perceptions makes the interview the ideal data collection technique. As Patton (1990 cited in Greenfield, 2002:209) aptly points out, ‘we interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe’. More importantly for me, the interview is considered a ‘more efficient means of obtaining qualitative data from elites than other methods such questionnaires and focus groups which can be time consuming’ (Harvey, 2010:194).

The semi-structured interview was the primary data collection technique used in this study. The reason for this choice of interview type is because it is considered the most flexible and accommodating of all the three interview types. It is a balance between the two extremes i.e. unstructured and structured interview (Brenner, 2006). Unlike the unstructured interview where no ‘set’ questions are used and participants are allowed to talk without any ‘interruption’ or prompting because it is perceived ‘that respondents are readily organised and do not require direction or encouragement’ (Gillham, 2005:49). The semi-structured interview on the other hand permits the use of interview schedules, which in turn ‘increases the comprehensiveness of the data and makes data collection systematic for each respondent’ (Greenfield, 2002:21).

In total, 38 interviews were conducted. However, since the research samples consisted of two distinct groups, two different interview schedules were designed. The one for parents addressed their own educational background and schooling experiences as well as their children’s educational history; the type of school they went to in Nigeria; how long the children had schooled in Nigeria; their decision to send their children overseas; factors which had influenced both their choice of country and school; and their fears and concerns with regards to educating their children outside Nigeria. The interview schedule for the gatekeepers covered themes such as the general (and specific) ethos of British private schools; curriculum type; their perceptions of British private schools; their views on why Nigerian parents choose to send their children to UK-based British private boarding schools; the distinctiveness of British private schools; the admission (and visa) processes; and the kind of services they offer to Nigerian parents.

Harvey (2010) posits that the way in which questions are worded and, to a lesser degree, the order in which they are asked also has huge impact on the quality of data. To this end, piloting plays an important role in research (Yin 2009). However, piloting in elite studies is not straightforward. Apart from the issue of lack of guidance with this group with regards to piloting (Harvey, 2010, 1984), the fact that the sample sizes are usually small in elite studies means one cannot afford to do a test run on the available participants; especially as the likelihood of being granted access twice by the participants can be quite slim. I concur with Harvey’s (2010:202) argument that getting the questions right reduces the chances of ‘non-response’, thus saving time and money. In my case the cost, both in terms of time and money, would have been significant, as I travelled to Nigeria to interview some of the participants. However, the most costly price of a badly worded question is poor data which in turn affects the research findings (Harvey, 2010).

Whilst it is important to carry out an initial piloting, it is my view that evaluation and reflection which is basically what piloting is, is a continuous process. So while I endeavoured to make sure that the questions were relevant and appropriately worded before commencing fieldwork. I did not necessarily stop ‘tweaking’ the questions neither did I stop reflecting and evaluating my ‘performance’ with regards to how the interviews went. Consequently important lessons were learnt from each interview, for example; how to ask the questions, use prompts and ‘silences’ and interpret facial expressions. This did not make me an expert at interviewing. What it did do though was arm me with the necessary ‘tools’ needed to conduct a stronger and more developed interview each time.

The interviews, with a single exception, were held with one parent only; this was not by choice. In fact the opposite would have been preferred because the single couple I did interview allowed me to get both parents’ perspectives. The interviews also varied in length but lasted an hour on average. Although a few of the interviews were done in England, the majority were done in Nigeria.

The participants decided the place and the time of interview and hence the interviews were conducted at their convenience. Even though Dexter (2006) argues that the office is the most conducive environment to interview elites, this was not the case in my experience. Most of the participants were women thus the home was the most obvious and most frequently chosen venue for the interview. Four of the mothers and the couple were interviewed in their second homes in London. In the instances when interviews were conducted in a participant’s office, there were numerous distractions, in the form of telephone calls and/or queries and interruptions from employees. Other venues where the interviews took place included hotel lobbies and restaurants. The two UK-based head-teachers were interviewed via the phone.

Since the Interpretivist approach relies on detailed personal accounts of research participants, most of the interviews were tape-recorded. As well as ensuring that participants’ responses are captured in their own words, a tape recorder also allowed me to interact and to be fully engaged with the interviewees. Furthermore, using a tape recorder ensured that participants’ ‘words and their tone, pauses and the like are recorded in a permanent form’ thus allowing me to ‘return to [them] again and again for re-listening’ (Kvale, 2007:94). As Smith et al. (2009:55) go on to argue ‘recording interviews is crucial for the detailed analysis that is required in qualitative research. On the two occasions that the participants did not want to be recorded, I reverted to note-taking. However this process was distracting and it also interrupted the ‘free flow of the conversation’ (Kvale, 2007:94). Crucially, when interviews are not recorded there is the likelihood that ‘phrases and language used can be easily lost’ (Smith et al. 2009:55), all of which are integral to the analysis of the data.

As mentioned earlier, questionnaires were also used to collate data; however, they were only given to the parent participants. Employing a quantitative data collection method in a study that is essentially qualitative is common practice among social scientists, most notably Bourdieu. What is required of researchers adopting this kind of triangulation is the ability to combine both methods ‘in a way that respects their compatibilities and incompatibilities (Sayer, 1989:268). In other words, they should be used to complement each other and strengthen the research findings. Bourdieu tends to favour this kind of cross-pollination of methods and used it successfully to establish the link between objectivity/structure and subjectivity/agent (see ‘Distinction’ for example). My intention was similar to Bourdieu’s as I had sought to explore the link between social context such as socio-economic background, gender and religion, and the choices these parents make with regards to the place and type of school they chose for their offspring.

The questionnaire was divided into four parts. Part A was designed to generate personal information about the parents; for example age, educational history, profession and marital status. Parts B and C were designed to elicit data on the number of children schooling abroad and the annual school fees while Part D sought to establish the most frequently used source, that is, where parents found out about the schools and also factors; for example, school’s reputation, that influenced their school choice. On reflection, Part D could have been extended to cover questions on country of choice. Although the question was addressed in the interview, using statistical data to underpin the qualitative data on this topic would have enhanced the credibility of the findings of research further (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2005). Liamputtong (2009:54) contends that;

**‘**socio-demographic data such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, education and employment […] will be useful for the interpretation of the research findings and help the researchers to avoid stereotyping their participants’.

## 2.3 Interviewing local elites: Lessons from the Field

Due to the fact that most of the parents in the research are elites, I had to devise different strategies in order to gain their respect, which in turn led to more ‘successful’ interviews. The strategy I found most useful and effective is what I have termed here as ‘self-editing’. This strategy arose from, and was necessitated by, the unpleasant situation (narrated below), I found myself in during one of the first interviews I did.

From the time I arrived at the participant’s residence; a second home in England which is located in one of the affluent parts of London; I was reminded of our difference in social class. The protocol that I had to go through; signing in with the doorman and having to wait for about 30 minutes before I was collected by a Filipino woman (the house keeper as I later found out), and a further 15 minutes wait before the participant came to join me, accentuated this difference further. If I was left with any doubt about the difference in our social status, the participant’s attitude during the interview quickly helped dispel this. Apart from offering one sentence answers to most of the questions with my request for elaboration met with her own question which was “what do you want me to say?” She sat on the arm of the chair opposite me throughout the entire interview.

While there could be any number of reasons for the participant’s behaviour, one of which could have been that she was having a bad day, I am of the view that her attitude was more to do with the difference in social class. This view is validated by Ganga and Scott (2006:3) who assert that ‘whilst researchers [with insider status] are closer to those migrants they are studying, both themselves and their participants are much more aware of each others’ social position as a result’.

While I could not change the fact that I was the supplicant in this arrangement, I knew that I would need to ‘act’ being in the same ‘league’ or something close, with the elite parents in order to bridge the class/status gap between myself and them. In other words, ‘self-editing’ was needed if I wanted to avoid a repeat performance of what was a very difficult and uncomfortable interview.

As part of my self-editing I decided to avoid dressing too casually, I also found that wearing a very expensive looking watch meant I could almost pass as ‘one of them’. This watch became one of my most effective weapons in addressing the issue of power imbalance as it gained me ‘respectability’, particularly with the mothers. Looking the part also ensured a swift response from gatemen and personal assistants in Nigeria. My watch, and on a few occasions, my clothes became discussion points prior to the interview starting. It is my view that these went some way in creating a conducive and cordial atmosphere.

‘Self-editing’ in elite research is not new and indeed many scholars have come up with different strategies to address the imbalance of power in elite research (McDowell, 1998; Mullings, 1999; Ostrander, 1993; Herod, 1999; Aldred, 2008). In a bid to optimise the response from research participants Morris (2009:213) writes that Herod presented himself as ‘Dr’ in Eastern Europe ‘where the relationship between academia and the labour movement is closer, but never in the US as he was fearful that this might sound too ‘ivory tower’ to be attractive to would-be respondents’. Similarly, McDowell (1998) in her interviews with elites in the City of London also found herself shifting her position according to the gender and/or age of the interviewees. She described herself as ‘playing dumb’ with patriarchal figures, ‘brusquely efficient’ with older and extremely fierce women, ‘sisterly’ with women of the same age holding similar positions and ‘superfast and well-informed’ with younger men ‘and definitely not to be patronised’ (McDowell, 1998:2138).

There is a danger though that these strategies can be deemed unethical since they can be perceived by some scholars, rightly or wrongly, as ‘duplicitous’ (Morris, 2009:213). However the reason I self-edited was not to *influence* what the participants *say* to me; although this may be an unintended outcome, but rather that they see me worthy of their time and thus grant me audience. Whether or not this could be deemed unethical in my opinion depends on an individual’s perception of the role and purpose of reflection in qualitative enquires. In so far as reflection / piloting in research, *inter alia*, is done in order to improve the quality of the research process/experiences and data gathered, which is my view, then judging my actions and those of Herod and McDowell as unethical may be too harsh.

The subsequent successes of the interviews could not be solely down to act of self-editing. It certainly did not stop last minute cancellations of which there were a few instances. In fact, some of the successes could be down to where the interviews took place since May (2001:136) argues ‘in the setting of their own home, the interviewer becomes more like a ‘friendly guest’ than an official inquisitor’. I found that the use of open questions was another factor that may have contributed to the success of some of the interviews. Studies have shown that elite respondents prefer these types of questions as opposed to closed ones (Aberbach and Rockman 2002 in Harvey, 2010). As Schoenberger (1991:183 cited in Harvey, 2010) explains;

‘respondents are likely to feel less frustrated if they are able to explain exactly what they mean in their own terms rather than trying to fit themselves into the terms of reference proposed by the researcher’.

What self-editing did was to boost my confidence; which meant I was able to handle the interview situation better. It also noticeably changed the participants’ behaviour towards me. Instead of being in a rush to get rid of me, it was clear the parent participants were more accommodating and forthcoming with answers to my questions. Put more simply, pretending to be ‘one of them’ helped change the dynamics between the elite interviewees and myself.

## 2.4 Positionality and Reflexivity

Being a Nigerian meant I had a very valuable positionality. Significant because it means I share similar cultural, religious and national heritage with the majority of the parent participants. In other words, I have the status of a *cultural* ‘insider’, which many scholars have argued can be advantageous (Naples, 1997; Harvey, 2010; Hopkins, 2007). Besides giving the research participants a sense of belonging (Harvey, 2010) and thus putting them at ease, one of the benefits of being a cultural insider is being able to understand ‘the spoken and unspoken language’ of the interviewees (Ganga and Scott, 2006:5). Crucially, being a cultural insider meant I was aware of the types of questions these parents might find offensive and/or threatening. For example, at the time of my fieldwork, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC); an organisation that was set up by the Nigerian government to identify and investigate politicians, senior civil servants, and in some cases business executives for embezzlement, was very active. The fact that this organisation tends to operate covertly meant many wealthy Nigerians became wary of people asking about their finances. Hence, I deliberately avoided asking these parents about the source of their income.

At the time of fieldwork, the kidnapping of the relatives and children of influential and wealthy individuals was rampant in Nigeria. Indeed, a few of the parents mentioned this problem as one of the reasons why they sent their children to the UK for schooling. Since I was aware of the kidnapping problem, I deliberately avoided asking these parents the names and the location of the schools their children were attending in the UK or Canada. Although a few of them inadvertently gave this information away, others were more careful and consistently said ‘the school’ rather than use the actual names of the schools during the interview.

Still, as already shown, insider status does not necessarily lead ‘to greater proximity in the social interview and ultimately smaller divide between the researcher and the participant’ (Ganga and Scott, 2006:3). Indeed, being a cultural insider could sometimes be a hindrance. For example, in his research on local elite, Sabot (1996) explains how his insider status became a barrier that prevented him from getting pertinent information from the local elites which was given freely to a foreign researcher doing a similar research topic. Describing his experience Sabot writes:

‘The interviewees’ glances and attitudes were different: people had obviously mentally prepared themselves to welcome a foreigner, and so, to show the best side of their personality. They were more friendly, patient, and ready to give documents than they used to be with me. They opened every cupboard to satisfy my American colleague’s wish. Instead of being deliberately ambiguous they now give several examples to express clearly their point of view. No topic was a taboo. There was no longer a question of confidentiality or secrets (Sabot, 1996:331)

Sabot (1996:333) contends that the differences in attitude towards himself (an insider) and the foreign researcher may be due, in part, to the local politician’s desire to show off his/her territory to a foreigner and partly because they feel ‘honoured by the presence of this foreigner’. He concludes that how a researcher/interviewer is perceived, that is, important, subordinate or equal, by the respondents in a research project has more impact on the kind of reception and responses one gets in an interview situation than any conventional ‘positionalities’ that the researcher may or may not hold (Sabot, 1996). This finding supports the case for ‘self-editing’ I made earlier.

Declaring and critically reflecting on ones positionalities is regarded by some scholars as not only ethical (Adkins, 2002 in Gray, 2008), such ‘thorough’ reflection is thought to offer ‘a basis for researchers and readers alike to develop further understanding’ of the phenomenon under investigation (Angen, 2000 cited in Liamputtong 2009:25). Similarly, Liamputtong (2009:25) argues that ‘the resulting discourse between the perspectives and experiences of the researchers will make the research more meaningful’ and also enhance the credibility of the research findings (Mays and Pope 2000).

Nonetheless, the kind of reflexivity that most feminists advocate; which is basically to ‘turn up’ and reflect in great detail the researcher’s different positionalities, for which they may be few, has been criticised by some, including Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992; Salzman, 2002; Sweetman, 2003; Hopkins, 2007; Emirbayer and Desmond, 2012) as ‘a privileged and self-indulgent focus on the self’ (Kobayashi 2003:348). That is, a self-indulgence, which takes the form of the ‘bemoaning [of the sociologist’s] class background and location […] race or his [or her] gender’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:69). According to Kobayashi (2003:348), such in-depth analysis of self ‘has no use if it is not connected to a larger agenda [...] meant to change the world’.

I concur with Kobayashi for the following reasons. Firstly, the ‘reflexive turn’ gives undue prominence to the researcher which, in my view is equally, if not more, damaging to the research project as the lack of ‘thorough’ analysis of researcher’s positionalities. This is because focusing on my positionalities might detract me from more important issues like how privilege and inequality are perpetuated through differential access to place and ‘quality’ education and why decades after colonisation, British whiteness is still perceived and seen by Nigerian elites as a sign of quality in education. Lastly, while I acknowledge the importance of reflexivity, as Kobayashi points out (2003:348) it is ‘an ancillary rather than a central part’ of the research.

Rather I have chosen to use Bourdieu’s ‘epistemic reflexivity’ instead (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:45). Epistemic reflexivity is ‘neither egocentric nor logocentric but quintessentially embedded in, and turned towards, scientific practice’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:46). It is not the ‘self-fascinated observation of the observer’s writings and feelings’ but instead, it is a sociological reflexivity which concerns itself with scientific practice of the social scientist (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:72). That is, it is the ‘epistemological unconscious of [the researcher’s] that must be unearthed’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:41). Thus Bourdieu’s theory of reflexivity demands close examination of our theoretical and ontological positions and the knowledge claims which implicitly underpin them.

Adopting Bourdieu’s ‘epistemic reflexivity’ prompted me to ask myself the following questions. What ideologies am I bringing to bear on this study? What are the origins of these ideologies? And how might the origin of my sociological knowledge influence my understanding of the phenomenon under investigation and more importantly, my interpretation of the data? Asking these questions reminded me of the fact my sociological knowledge is made up of western ideas and concepts. This is a significant issue as Fanon (1967/2008:xv original emphasis) rightly points out ‘the West have *their own drama’*, and as a consequence, concepts and theories that have emerged from the West will ‘reflect the concerns and prejudices of that culture and worldview’.

To reduce any negative impact that the theoretical/analytical tools used in the current study may have on my interpretation and understanding of the parent participants’ narratives (especially as they are the main research sample), I have problematised, as shown in the previous chapter, Bourdieu’s habitus by attempting to make it applicable and suitable to the current research context and population.

## 2.5 Data analysis

The analysis process started with the transcription of all the interviews. Guided by Davis and Dodd’s (2002) and Lincoln and Guba’s (1989) ways of ensuring ’rigour’ and ‘trustworthiness’ of qualitative research, all the data were transcribed verbatim even though some scholars have argued that ‘it is pointless to transcribe information which will not be analysed (O’Connell and Kowal, 1995 in Smith et al. 2009:74). The analysis of the data followed four stages. As explained above, the transcription process is the first stage of the analysis process. This process ensures a close interaction with the words while serving as a reminder of the ‘people’ behind these words. Each of the interview transcripts was read thoroughly on more than one occasion (and revisited throughout the analysis period) during which time themes were identified and categorised into major/primary and minor/secondary themes.

Themes are categorised as primary if they capture the *essence* of the participants’ narratives while secondary themes are those themes that in their collective, help to illuminate and explicate the primary themes. In total, four major themes, namely: ‘quality’ education; risk and risk management strategies; parents’ post-secondary aspirations and ‘selling’ of world-class education, were identified.

It is important to mention that due to restriction on word usage, I was unable to present all the themes identified in my data. However, the 4 major themes presented here were chosen as it was felt that they offered the most comprehensive picture and understanding of the phenomenon. They achieve this by providing answers to important questions like how the education landscape in Nigeria has changed since these parents had their own education and the types of (re)sources they are using to avoid the perceived adverse effects of this change (chapter 3); what type of risk do these parents associate with the international education market and the kind of risk management strategies they employ to protect their children from the effects of this risk(chapter 4); what are these parents’ post-secondary aspirations for their children are and how do UK-based British private schools enabled them to achieve these (chapter 5); and how do the representatives of British private schools, notably head-teachers and educational agents, construct and ‘sell’ UK-based British private schools as “the best in the world.

For the analysis and interpretation of the interview transcripts, I followed Kvale’s (1996:214) interpretation model namely: ‘Contexts of Interpretation and Communities of Validation’. The ‘Contexts of Interpretation and Communities of Validation’ is one of the few systems of data interpretation and analysis that Kvale (1996) advocated.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Contexts of Interpretation - *the source and focus of interpretation* | Communities of Validation – *the source by which interpretation are validated* |
| Self-understanding | The interviewed subject |
| Critical common-sense understanding | The general public. |
| Theoretical understanding | The research community |

**Table 2:** The three stages of data interpretation and analysis

Starting with the participant’s self-understanding, that is, ‘what the subjects themselves understand to be the meanings of their statements’ (Kvale, 1996:214) ensured ‘that the interpretation was inspired by, and arose from, attending to the participant’s words, rather than being imported from outside’ (Smith et al., 2009:90). Consequently, my participants’ words, in the form of excerpts, phrases and single words/terms are woven into my own analysis in the telling of what is essentially, their story. The second stage of interpretation, which is the critical common-sense understanding, moves beyond the participants’ interpretations to focus on the ‘person making it’ (Kvale, 1996:215). Here, gender, socio-economic background as well as the historical context in which the participants are located are used to produce a deeper understanding of the topic. According to Schutz (1967/1972:244) the understanding and meaning which social actors attribute to their actions and behaviours are ‘related to their biographically and situationally determined system of interests and relevances’.

The third and final stage involves the use of a theoretical ‘frame for interpreting the meaning of a statement’ (Kvale, 1996:215). That is, the interrogation of the data with theoretical frameworks. I must add that in my case, empirical data were also used to interrogate the theoretical frameworks used in my study. Therefore, my analysis is partly inductive and partly deductive (May, 2001; Brenner, 2006; Inglis, 2010). Or more precisely, abductive, insofar as the abductive research strategy is understood as an analytical tool whose main aim is to start with the ‘everyday understanding of concepts and meanings’ (self-understanding) and conclude with the interrogation of common-sense understanding with ‘existing social theories or perspectives’ (Blaikie, 2007:90). In doing so, I hope I have demonstrated an understanding of the ‘mutual interdependence’ of theory and empirical data (Bulmer 1986:208 in May, 2001:32).

The analysis of data through a theoretical lens is a contentious area in social science. Advocates of grounded theory approach (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967 in Smith, et al., 2009), which ‘focuses on the process of generating theory rather than a particular theoretical content’, oppose to the idea of using existing theory to interrogate empirical data in research. There is of course another faction of social scientists (which I belong to) that emphasises the importance of ‘social theory […] in the interpretation of empirical data (May 2001:28). Liamputtong (2009:17) argues that ‘research cannot be conducted without the conscious or unconscious use of underlying theory’. While May (2001:29) goes as far as arguing that;

‘the idea of theory, or the ability to explain and understand the findings of research within a conceptual framework that makes ‘sense’ of the data, is the mark of a mature discipline whose aim is the systematic study of particular phenomena’

## 2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are very important for any research project (Brenner, 2006; Aldred, 2008; Smith et al. 2009; Harvey, 2010; Liamputtong 2009). The thesis follows broadly agreed protocols commonly used in qualitative research and summarised by May (2001:60).

1. To ensure that participation is voluntary;
2. To provide a synopsis of the research’s aim and mode of data collection to the participants so that they are aware of what is required of them and also how the information they provide would be used in the study;
3. To inform participants of their right to stop the interview at any time.
4. To inform participants of their right to withdrew from the research even after given an interview as long as the work has not been published;
5. All information to be treated confidentially and secure the identities of all participants.
6. Data to be stored in secured place.
7. Written and oral consents are obtained from all participants.

While all of the above guidelines were adhered to in this study, some were easier to accomplish than others. For example, in the recruiting letter which was sent to all participants they were not only told that their involvement was entirely voluntary but also that there would be no financial reward for taking part in the research. Anonymity was achieved through the use of pseudonyms and data were kept secure on a personal computer which could only be accessed via a pass code.

Unlike the guidelines 1-6, guideline 7 which relates to the seeking of consent was the most difficult to achieve. I found that it was much easier in an elite study to get oral consents even though the universal practice ‘require the researcher to receive a complete written consent form from respondents before they participate in the research’ (Harvey, 2010:196). That said, some scholars have critiqued the ‘ritualism around completing consent forms’ (Hammersley, 2006 in Calvey, 2008:907). As previously stated, the majority of the participants were recruited using a snow-balling/ opportunistic sampling method. What this meant in practice was that I had little or no initial contact with the participants and vice versa. Although all the documents pertaining to the research, that is, the recruiting letter, questionnaire and consent letters were given to the ‘gatekeepers’ to pass on to potential candidates for the research, it was not until I finally met the participants in person that I could collect the signed consent forms.

Apart from the logistics of sending and collecting consent forms, getting a signed consent form was also not an easy task in elite study. For example, some of the participants refused to sign the consent form arguing that the fact that they have agreed to take part in the study was enough proof that they have given their consent. Indeed, some of them felt insulted when I asked them to sign the consent form before commencing the interview. On one occasion I tried to explain to a participant that a written consent was more than a “mindless exercise” (her words) but was one way of ensuring that the researcher keeps to his or her side of the bargain since without a signed consent letter both the researcher and the participants are vulnerable. The participant’s reply to this explanation was that if I was suggesting that I was not trustworthy then I might as well leave. On reflection, I realised that the participant had a very valid point and that the invitation to her house was in itself consent albeit a symbolic one. As another participant puts it “the fact that I had given instruction to my security man to let you into my compound is an indication of my consent”.

Rather than participants simply being ‘difficult’, which was my initial feeling, I am now of the view that the desire to remain anonymous may have been the main reason why some of the participants had refused to sign the consent letter; although, I had continuously reassured them that their real names would not be used in the study. For example, I did not request that they put their names on the questionnaires. Still, I had a sense that the participants felt signing the consent form was seen as giving away their identity. Since it is the participants’ prerogative to maintain anonymity according to how they deem fit (Rivera et al., 2002; Israel and Hay 2006; Spicker, 2011), demanding a signed consent may lead to an equally important ethical issue, that is, undermining participants’ rights. As Brenner (2006:361) succinctly argues, ‘when confidentiality is of great importance [to the participants] the risk to informants should be minimised despite the potential loss of some data’.

## 2.7 Conclusion.

The chapter has identified and critically examined the epistemological and methodological approaches used in this study. It has also described and evaluated the research design as well as discussed issues of positionality, reflexivity and ethics. The chapter has also argued that the researcher’s ability to adapt is crucial for successful research. The following chapters – 3 through to 6 - will present the findings of this study.

# Chapter 3

## Consuming ‘quality’ schooling: A strategic approach

*“If I say quality [education] I will not just talk of what somebody teach [sic]. Not just what you get from the black board. Quality starts from character, dressing everything. I mean being somebody not just grades. Good grade is good but being a good human being is better. If you don’t have good character, if you are late to your office three to four times you’ll get sacked so quality [education] is not about having good grades but also about a good human being”* (Mr Bala).

Despite not being one of the questions that the parent participants were asked, all the parents in my study made references to quality education; a response that always came when they were asked to explain why they had chosen to send their children to schools outside Nigeria. Interestingly, even though the data shows that none of these parents had considered sending their children to state schools, it was noted that all the references to quality or more appropriately, the lack of quality education in Nigeria, were always in relation to the state schools. Nonetheless, a thorough analysis of the data indicates that references to quality education is these parents’ way of communicating that the search for quality education is one of the reasons why they send their primary and/or secondary school aged children to private boarding schools overseas.

Research has shown that even the least equipped private schools in Nigeria can and do provide quality education (Tooley and Dixon, 2007). A study by Brooks (2011) has also found that there are high status private schools in Nigeria. In light of these observations, if quality education is indeed one of the reasons why the parents in the current study are sending their primary and/or secondary school aged children overseas, it then begs the question, is the type of quality education these parents are looking for not available in Nigeria? Also, what are these parents’ perceptions of quality education and more importantly, what factors influence their perceptions of quality education? Also, is the increased number of families now willing and able to participate in the education market a factor which influences these parents’ perceptions of quality education?

An extensive review of the literature on education so far has revealed that very few studies have been done on parents’ perceptions of quality education in Nigeria. Studies in the UK on parental school choice decisions have indicated that factors like location (Vincent and Ball, 2006; Ball et al. 1995; Reay et al. 2007; Waters, 2007), school fees (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003) and the socio-economic background of the children attending particular schools (Reay et al. 2007) are used by middle class parents as indicators of quality in education. Nevertheless, these studies do not describe in much detail what parents’ perceptions of quality education are. In other words, parents’ perceptions of quality education are merely *alluded* *to* rather than explicitly discussed in the aforementioned studies.

The neglect of parents’ perceptions of quality education has meant that the concept of ‘quality’ in education is unproblematised. Consequently, it is still not very clear what precisely parents mean when they talk about ‘quality education’. This neglect has also meant how ‘quality education’ is used by the privileged classes as a form of mechanism for social distinction is rarely explored. Abbott (1994:1) argues that quality is a subjective notion thus its meaning will vary from one individual to another and also from one society to another. Likewise, the subjective meanings of quality are both a reflection of individuals’ and societies value (Abbott, 1994).

The different cultural, social, economic, political as well as historical context in which my participants are situated, combined with the fact that western education was imported into Africa and therefore technically a foreign product (Swatridge, 1985; Bassey, 1999; West, 2002), means that, at best, the findings from the West on parents’ perceptions of quality education would only serve as a starting point on which the current study can build. Besides extending the current body of work on quality education, the findings from my research will also make a significant contribution to the sociology of education in Nigeria, where research on quality education has tended to be quantitative in nature and where the perspectives of stakeholders like elite parents are rarely sought.

Evidence from the participants’ interview transcripts suggests that there are three inter-connected factors which influence parents’ perceptions of quality education, as well as factors which parents perceive as indicators of quality in education. These factors are the parents’ own educational experiences, the democratisation of education, and the period in which parents received their primary and secondary education. Findings from the current study also show that parents’ definitions and descriptions of quality education are directly linked to their perceptions of an educated person and *vice versa*. In other words, quality education is used as ‘a form of identity work’ (Ball, 2003:56) and class ‘boundary work’ (Lacy, 2007:75) as well as a mechanism for social reproduction.

Several sociological studies on social class reproduction strategies; and social mobility, have found that education is one of the sites relied upon by the dominant group to reproduce its social position from one generation to another (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Bourdieu, 1996), and the working classes for moving up the social ladder (Goldthorpe, 2007). By the same token, research has shown that the democratisation of education which has resulted in the increased use of the educational system by individuals and groups who would not normally use it, has not only weakened education as a site for class reproduction, it has also blurred class boundaries (Bourdieu, 1984; Ball, 2003; Vincent and Ball, 2007; Kraaykamp, et al., 2013). More significantly, the democratisation of education has meant education has become ‘the most important loci of class struggle’ in modern societies (Bourdieu and Boltanski, 1981:220-1). Ball (2003:24) contends that the democratisation and marketization (which in turn has led to the surplus amount of private schools in Nigeria) of education has not only intensified class struggle in the education arena, it has changed the ‘relevant resources for achieving social’ distinction.

Findings from the current study indicate that the democratisation of education has not only led to a redefinition of quality education, it has also shifted emphasis from the consumption of education *per se* to the consumption of ‘quality’ education. The current study found that parents’ definitions of, and access to, so-called “quality education” allow ‘the most fundamental social differences to be expressed’ (Bourdieu, 1984:226); differences and distinctions being significant factors in the marking of class boundaries. Subsequently, quality education has become a strategy employed by these parents to maintain ‘the [social] distances that need to be kept’ (Bourdieu, 1984:472) between them and intruders from below in order for them to continue ‘to monopolise socially and economically advantageous positions’ (Weber, 1945: 241-2 in Brown 2000). Therefore, as well as being an exclusionary tactic, the consumption of quality schooling has also become a way of making visible and stable the basic ‘categories by which people are classif[ied]’ in Nigeria (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979:74).

Findings from the current study also suggest that parents’ constructions of quality education have not only lead to the imposition of a definition of quality education ‘that is most congruent with their particular interests’ on the general public (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:14), but that their definitions of quality education have also meant only certain types of private schools, with certain types of curricula and pedagogical approaches, are rated highly in ‘quality’ charts. As a consequence, what constitutes ‘quality education’, the forms it takes and the place it can be acquired as well as those qualified to deliver it, have also come to play an important role in the struggle over positional advantage.

All of these class-based practices have changed the meaning of education and by extension, what it now means to be an educated person in Nigeria. Whilst the emphasis of education might have been on academic competencies in the colonial and early post-colonial era (Bassey, 1999), findings from my study indicate that for these parents, the emphasis is more on social competencies. In other words, the definition of what constitutes quality education in contemporary Nigeria is now based on expressive rather than instrumental order (Bernstein, 1966 cited in Power et al., 1998:159). That is, aesthetics instead of academic competencies. Consequently, an educated person is not just someone who has acquired reading and writing skills but one who has also acquired both the skills and taste for leisure activities as well as appropriate ‘manners’ and ‘morals’.

In relation to parents’ own educational experiences and the era in which they attended primary and secondary schools, their narratives indicate that both factors together with the historical context in which they are situated play a significant role in their perceptions of quality education. These also apply to factors which they perceive as indicators of quality in education. Evidence from the data shows that having attended schools that were run and/or managed by British missionaries, and in some cases, having been taught by British missionaries, the parents in this study have not only come to perceive whiteness as a sign of quality in education, they have also come to perceive white British as the *experts* in education.

This chapter does not seek to explore correlation between class practices/habitus and educational achievements and/or cultural exclusion in micro settings like the school, which is usually the focus of most Bourdieusian studies on education **(**see Lareau {2003} for example). Rather, the primary focus of this chapter is to investigate parents’ perceptions of quality education and how quality education is used by these parents as a mechanism for marking class boundaries, reproducing and/or maintaining socially and economically advantageous positions, as well as constructing positive identities for their children.

Two distinct qualitative data sets are used in this chapter to illustrate, examine and/or explain parents’ perceptions of quality education. One set of data is used mainly to explain parents’ own experiences of, and benefits from, quality education; the other set is used to examine parents’ perceptions of quality education in relation to their children. Although parents’ own early educational experiences and their current perceptions of quality education in relation to their children are discussed separately, since these aspects are interconnected both data sets will be used throughout to interrogate and examine my participants’ perceptions of quality education in general.

The chapter begins with a critical description of parents’ own primary and secondary educational experiences. Besides providing a backdrop for the investigation of parents’ perceptions of quality education, investigating parents’ early educational experiences also reveals their dispositional frames of reference. This in turn a context for the factors which influence their perceptions of quality education as well as the reasons why these parents search for quality education beyond the shores of Nigeria. The effect of the democratisation of education on the reproductive capability of education as a site for social reproduction and quality education in Nigeria is also explored.

The second part of the chapter explores parents’ descriptions and understanding of quality education in relation to their children. The implications of these definitions, both in terms of how they relegate to ‘second rank’ the type education which the majority of Nigerian families have access to (Bourdieu, 1984:247) whilst simultaneously constructing those who have access to ‘quality education’ as modern, educated and moral beings are discussed. Throughout, factors which parents perceive as indicators of quality in education, both in the colonial and early post-colonial periods and in contemporary Nigeria are identified and critically analysed. The shift in parents’ perceptions of quality education is examined and the reasons for this shift, for example, the democratisation of education are discussed in relation to social reproduction, class distinction and boundary marking. A thorough examination of how whiteness is interwoven and associated with quality education in Nigeria is undertaken.

The divergences within the group in relation to parents’ perceptions of quality education are identified and critically analysed. The differences between parents’ perceptions of quality education and the factors which indicate quality in education are used to explain the idea of the habitus as a factor which influence parents’ perceptions of quality education. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the relevance and significance of Fanon’s colonisation theory as an analytical tool while simultaneously identifying the limitation of Bourdieu’s theory at the same time.

## 3.1 Parents’ own experiences of ‘quality’ Education

*‘They are doing what their class does in order to continue being what their class is’* (Ball, 2003:76)

An investigation into parents’ description of their own primary and secondary education experiences reveals that most of these parents had first-hand experience of what they thought of as ‘quality education’ and also benefited from it. The data also show that this may have shaped how they interact with the education market, particularly in critical periods like democratisation. The evidence from the current study also indicates that these parents are aware of, and are engaging in, the struggle over valuable cultural and symbolic capital. It is worth mentioning here that those parents who received their primary and secondary education in Nigeria did so in the early 1960s and 1970s when the majority of the schools were still owned and/or run by British missionaries and colonists. This is a very important point as evidence from the study suggests that the historical context within which the parents were educated plays a significant role in their understanding of quality education, as well as their views on the cause(s) of the low standard of education in contemporary Nigeria.

Data from the questionnaire reveal that of the 26 parents, 23 of them had their primary and secondary education in Nigeria. Of the 23 parents who had their primary and secondary education in Nigeria, only 4 were privately educated themselves. These figures are very significant for two reasons. Firstly, whilst not conclusive, the fact that only 4 of the parents were privately educated gives some support to my participant’s suggestion that, although “the (educational) structures were not much” (Mrs Bridge) in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria, the quality of the government/state schools at the time was “top class” (Mr Bala). Consequently, as Mr Bala explains, “there was no need at that time to go to private schools”.

Secondly, and more significantly, the figures also suggest that overseas education was not “in vogue”; to borrow the words of one of the Nigerian agents, in the colonial and early post-colonial periods. Also indicated in parents’ description of their own early educational experiences is the idea that children were rarely sent overseas for their primary and/or secondary education in early post-colonial period. Instead, as one of the agents commented, when children are sent overseas, it was usually for their university education: “A long time ago most people only think of university. They don’t consider primary and secondary schools” (Nigerian agent 1).

Furthermore, the perceptions of the availability of a “top class” government schools on their doorstep also meant, “there was no need for anyone to go to abroad and school” since according to my participants, education in Nigeria was “comparable to those in the UK” (Mr Bala). Mr Bala went on to explain that those who sought private education outside Nigeria in the colonial and early post-colonial era were “drop-outs” who could not gain entry to schools in Nigeria. Besides highlighting the stigma attached to those who used overseas education in the colonial and early postcolonial era in Nigeria, Mr Bala’s comment, coupled with the frequent use of phrases and words like “very high standard” “thorough” “super” and “top class” when describing their early educational experiences, is an indication that my parent participants believe that they received quality education.

Bassey (1999:45) argues that education was one of the very few institutions that ‘allocate[d] and regulate[d] privileges’ in colonial and early postcolonial Nigeria. Due to the data collection methods used in this study, coupled with the type of questions asked in the interviews and questionnaires, it was difficult to ascertain whether or not these parents acquired their current social positions via education. Nevertheless, there are some indications that this may have been the case, at least for some of these parents as shown in the quotes from Mr Okon, a successful businessman and Mr Odili a senior executive in a global oil company.

“Most of the children that came out from there [secondary school] they are actually doing very well in their different field, very well. Most of them are senior military officers. Most of them have ruled, most of them have governed” (Mr Okon).

“Thank God education then was free, unlike now when we have to fork out huge sums to get the type of quality we had enjoyed for free. My parents would not have been able to send me to school even if it had cost one shilling then. My children’s school fees combine cost me well over a million naira per term and that’s just for the three in Nigeria” (Mr Odili)

Also, comments like: “As those parents who have gone to the university they know what education is. They know good education can make all sorts of difference to a child” (Mr Bala), is further indication that education is not only the source through which some of the parents may have acquired their current social position, it is also the means through which these parents intend to reproduce and maintain their social positions. Also indicated in the parents’ narratives is the idea that education was only accessible to, and used by, very few people in early post-colonial period.

“Because then, I schooled in the north where a lot of them don’t really want to go to school. So what we saw then was that as students, they give you money, they give bursary, to encourage you. They’re (employers) waiting for you to get out; they are already looking for you to come and start working. So the experience is different to what we have now with my own children” (Mrs Ola)

“It was a very select institution. The entire institution from form one to five was about four hundred children, in fact I’m not sure it was even up to that but they don’t take more than a 120 children in a year so that made it very very competitive. That makes it very high in terms of standard those days. Most schools then were actually very high standard compared to now but this was one of the best” (Mr Okon)

“Education was a rare thing in my time. In our days only the lucky few went to school. It was not widespread like it is now” (Mrs Kuti).

The rarity and the exclusiveness of education during the colonial and early post-colonial periods is an important factor in social reproduction and transformation. In other words, Bassey’s comment that the ability to ‘*read* and *write’* was enough to confer one with elite status in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria must be understood in the context of the exclusivity and rarity of education during these periods. Indeed, whilst these parents described the education provided by government schools in colonial and post-colonial eras as high quality, research suggests that the quality of education during these periods was in fact, of an arguably low standard (Uchendu, 1979; Csapo, 1983). Csapo (1983:92) goes as far as to claim that education in the colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria ‘provided dysfunctional and useless knowledge’. Rather, as Csapo (1983:92) perceptively notes, the high value of education in Nigeria in those periods was due to ‘its scare market value’, which ‘opened doors to positions of authority’.

As already shown in chapter 1, contrary to these parents’ experiences, there are now vastly more families using the education system in Nigeria (Theobald et al, 2007; Aigbokhan et al, 2007; Santcross et al, 2010). The increase in the number of families now using the education system is significant because it has not only weakened the capacity of education as a site of class reproduction, it has also made differentiation between social classes more difficult (Bourdieu, 1984). Boyd (1973:20) argues that democratisation of education has not only made ‘[social] closure more difficult’, it has also ‘brought a heightened awareness of social position’. Boyd (1973:20) expands on this, arguing that ‘the very process of mobility tends to blur the lines of social demarcation and thereby increases the attempt to be identified by status symbols’.

Evidence from the data indicates that my participants are aware of the correlation between increased accessibility to, and use of education and the weakening of the reproductive capacity of education as a mechanism for social mobility and reproduction. In their description of their early educational experiences, parents consistently used phrases like “the privileged few”, “lucky few”, “very lucky persons” and “one of the very privileged children” to describe themselves, thus demonstrating their awareness of the relationship between social mobility and the total number of people who are willing and able to gain access to education. Likewise, words like “lucky” and “privileged” suggest that my participants are conscious of the fact that education does not automatically translate into social and economic success. The constant reference to “our time” also suggests that they are also cognizant of the fact that the period; or in this case of their children, the *place* where one acquires education matters if education is to be effective as a social reproduction strategy.

## 3.2 Democratisation of education

“All my education is in Nigeria, everything Niaja [shorthand for Nigeria]. So it’s all in Nigeria and I’m okay. But the challenge of course starts with first of all my kids couldn’t go to the secondary school. We’ve had guys; we’ve had folks who are there, whose fathers also went to the same secondary school. Then that was our dream yeah, we will continue the family tradition because we have people who were like third generation in the same school but then we lost it. When it comes to education, there is no getting away from merit, there will always be different quality of schools but once you want to make it one size fit all, when you wipe out competition, that people had to do an admission exam to get into the school, when the policy becomes one that promotes the idea that everybody can go to the same school, this wipes out quality. Because when we got in, it was very competitive, we had to do three days interview and stuff like that. It was elitist but by its very nature that is the way I believe it should be. It [quality education in the colonial and early post-colonial era] should be something everybody aspires to, there should be levels and if you don’t meet the standard of the top level ones then you go to the second level” (Mr Akin).

The comments above of Mr Akin’s (a senior accountant with an international organisation) encapsulate one of the key arguments made thus far in this chapter. That is, some of these parents have benefited from, and depended on, education for their reproduction. His comment that: “[there were those] whose fathers also went to the same secondary school […] people who were like third generation in the same school”, is a further indication that their reproduction was not only dependant on education, but also that education had guaranteed their reproduction across generations.

Also implied in Mr Akin’s remark is the idea that education was two-tiered in the early post-colonial period. There were “different quality of schools” for different groups; one for the privileged classes and another for the rest of the population. Whilst “it [exclusive schools] was something everybody aspires”, entry was vigorous and tightly controlled; “it was very competitive”, thus allowing only the privileged few access. In other words, certain schools were the exclusive enclaves of the privileged few. As a result of its selectiveness, the quality of education and class boundaries were maintained, and social reproduction was guaranteed.

However, as Mr Akin went on to explain, all that changed when education became accessible to the general population: “Then we lost it[…] when the policy becomes one that promotes the idea that *everybody can go to the same school*”. So, as well as making common what was once an exclusive entity, the democratisation of education also weakened the reproductive capacity of education as a site of social reproduction for this group whilst reducing the quality of education at the same time. As a group whose reproduction is ‘mainly or exclusively acquired through education’ (Bourdieu, 1984:133), these parents now have to increase their investment in education so as to avoid the ‘the very real prospect of generational decline’ (Parkin, 1979:63). In order not to lose ‘class ground’ (Weis and Cipollone, 2013:716), these parents must engage in a ‘specific form of class welfare’ (Weis and Cipollone, 2013 cited in Reay, 2013:666); one that involves the strategic mobilisation and deployment of cultural, social, and economic capital in matters relating to their children’s education (Lareau, 2008; Reay et al., 2011; Weis and Cipollone, 2013).

Since social class reproduction is a familial process, primarily due to the fact that it revolves around the inter-generational transmission of the family’s social standing, these parents must buy what they perceive as high quality education whether at home or abroad, in an attempt to provide their children with the structural resources that may enable this process. Additionally, to do *‘*what their class does in order to continue being what their class is’ (Ball, 2003:76), these parents would need to invest in a type of quality education that will produce a person that is markedly different from the rest of the Nigerian population (Sin, 2013). In other words, a ‘scholastic investment strategy’ (Bourdieu, 1986:244 in Ball, 2003:71); that is, an appropriation of cultural capital, with the sole aim of enhancing their children so as to place them at an advantage over their counterparts and therefore securing and maintaining the status quo, is now of great importance.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Signifiers of Quality Education** | |
| **Past**   * Free * Teachers who can teach – product * Passing exams – academic competence * Competing locally | **Present**   * Expensive * Teachers who can teach *well* – process * Extra-curricular activities – social competencies * Competing internationally and international exposure |

**Figure 4:** Signifiers of quality education: Past (1960s and 70s) and Present.

Evidence in the data show that none of these parents had contemplated sending their children to a state school, and that these schools were not part of the choices they felt were appropriate for them. Statements such as: “that (state schools) wasn’t in the picture at all” (Mrs Adu) is typical of parents’ response when asked if they had considered sending their children to state schools in Nigeria. This is unlike the middle class parents in Waters’ study who had considered sending their children to government schools in Hong Kong prior to leaving for Canada (Waters, 2007). The families in Waters’ research had left for Canada because of the tough entrance exam; the Academic Aptitude Tests (AATs), Hong Kong Certificate of Education Examination (HKCEE) and the Hong Kong Advanced Level Examination (HKALE) (2007:183). In Waters’ words, ‘overseas education offers an *escape* from ‘highly competitive, highly stratified and unforgiving local education system and an easier academic route’ (Waters, 2006:184 original emphasis).

In contrast, the parents in my study are not necessarily escaping from ‘*fear of academic failure*’ but rather from the congestion of *social space*. These are fundamental differences because as shall be shown in chapter 5, when the reasons for consuming overseas education are different, then variations should be expected in their perceived benefits and the type of schools individuals or groups think are best suited to achieve the desired objectives.

## 3.3 Whiteness: the symbol of ‘quality’ in education

Evidence from the data set indicates that the transfer of ownership of the schools from British missionaries and colonists to the Federal and State government is perceived by these parents as another reason for the decline in the quality of education in Nigeria.

“Like the school I attended has gone down the drain and this is a school that in those days when you say you are from that school people would say hey, look at you, you are very lucky. It *was* being *managed* by the Irish sisters” (Mrs Bawa).

“The education was good and for free too. I went to schools *run* by the Catholic Church and they were more or less for nothing” (Mrs Ayo)

“I went to a boarding school in Imo state and em’ at that time schools had been, well, Catholic schools here [had] been taken over by the government but it was new at that time, there were still the *presence of white Catholic Nuns* [...] the nuns, the sisters, the reverend fathers”. The decay of the system has not gotten quite as bad as it is now where the schools are been run by the States, State and Federal government (Mrs Amechi).

As well as showing that these parents were educated in an era when schools were owned and/or managed by British missionaries, the quotes above also imply that the quality of education was better because of this. In contrast, Mr Akin’s comment that, “yeah, the government came along and rubbish the school […] the quality has gone down so much that now nobody wants to go to these schools anymore” implies that the government take-over of these schools is what had led to the decline in the quality of education in Nigeria. My participants’ narratives also indicate that the quality of education in state schools was maintained by “the *presence* of *white* Catholic Nuns”. In other words, the quality of education has declined in Nigeria not necessarily because the government took over ownership of the schools but rather due to the *absence* of white missionaries as educators in the schools. In this respect, white missionaries simultaneously functioned as a sign of quality as well as a mechanism for quality control.

Of course one can infer that since formal education was introduced to Nigeria by the British missionaries and colonists (Bassey, 1999), it is the absence of so-called *experts* rather than the absence of missionaries *per se* which has led to the deterioration of quality education in Nigeria. In this sense therefore, the quality of education in Nigeria has deteriorated because of the lack of the involvement of educational *experts*. This idea of the British being the expert in formal education is one that often came up when parents tried to explain the reasons why they send their children overseas.

“like I said, the curriculum and the quality of education in England is far superior to whatever you can get in Nigeria, after all that was where education originated from who else could possibly do a better job than the British?” (Mrs Gbenga)

“The British brought education to us so where better to go but to the actual source of Western education” (Ms Ambrose)

“I also believe that because […] it is their curriculum, their education, they developed education so it makes them the expert in education” (Mr Akpan)

The belief that the British are experts because “they developed education” or because they “brought education to us [Nigeria]” introduces another dimension to the idea of expertise. That is, western education as these parents see it, originated from Britain thus making the British both *experts* and *inventors*. A major implication of this logic of argument however, is that no other nationalities can be deemed ‘experts’ in education regardless of their qualifications.

Mrs Gbenga’s question that “who else could possibly do a better job than the British?” on the other hand, implies that the British will always be considered as expert irrespective of whether they are more or less qualified than teachers of other nationalities. In light of this, we can infer that Nigerian schools and colleges in the past were able to endow the status of elite on their graduates (Bassey, 1999) due to the direct involvement of the British both in terms of provision and delivery. This notion of British being the experts in education is one that international schools are aware of and try to capitalise upon, as chapter 6 will show.

These parents’ desireto send their children to the UK because education “originated” from there suggests also that they are searching for *authentic* education. Consequently, as well as being a sign of quality in education, British involvement, directly or indirectly, in education signifies a certain kind of authenticity. Spooner (1986:226) argues that authenticity, which he describes as ‘a form of cultural discrimination projected onto objects’, resides not in the ‘object’/product itself but in the relationship between the goods and the consumer. In this logic of argument, British schools and education are considered authentic not necessarily because they are, but because of the *historical* relationship between Britain and Nigeria which in turn, has shaped these parents’ perceptions of Britain and British education.

Wallace (1979 cited in Skeggs, 2004a:105) argues that the ‘definitions of authenticity rely upon being over-layered by the other binaries of value’.For example, the idea that the type of education provided by the British and in Britain are authentic, and thus expensive, automatically positions education provided by Nigerians in Nigeria as imitation and subsequently, cheap (Skeggs, 2004a). The authentic/imitation binaries also result in the construction of British education and teachers as superior whilst simultaneously constructing Nigerian education and teachers as inferior. Additionally, since it is the dominant class that usually determines what is authentic and what is not (Bourdieu, 1984), authenticity becomes a *classed* (Skeggs, 2004a) as well as a *raced* concept.

Data from the interview transcripts and anecdotal evidence from fieldwork shows that parents typically use the term ‘expatriate’ to describe white foreigners in general while the term ‘British’ is used to describe white British. Frequent references to ‘expatriate teachers’ coupled with the incessant comparison between white British teachers or “real British teachers” as Mr Odili described them, and teachers of other nationalities or ethnicities, suggests that the quality of a teacher is directly related to his or her skin colour. Parents’ explanations for their school choice in Nigeria prior to sending them overseas demonstrate this point.

“It was a good school. In fact it is one of the best schools in Lagos. It was run by the British so it was good, they know what they are doing. At least you are reassured they knew what they are doing. The teachers are good too, and a few of them were British too. I mean, white British” (Mrs Gbenga).

“The good thing about it (British school in Nigeria with white British head-teacher) let me tell you is all about management. When you entrust the management of place, it is a general thing, I’m sorry to say, to Nigerians, Nigerians we are poor managers. We are very very, em, we’ve got this attitude of not really caring of the consequences. We don’t realise that very little things actually matter. We don’t realise it. I tell you what, if for example this school [with a white British man as head-teacher] was been managed by Nigerians, I tell you it would have gone down the drain; honestly it would have gone down the drain. The level of commitment would not be there” (Mrs Bawa).

Indeed, one of the reasons why parents choose to send their children to the UK even though there are British schools in Nigeria is because, as Mr Akpan explained: “all the teachers in the schools [in the UK] are white British instead mixed like in Nigeria I believe makes it of higher quality”. Another significant point that is worth noting here is that not all whiteness is perceived by parents as having equal value as Mr Odili’s comment demonstrates (this point will be returned to later in chapter 5).

“What I like about the British school [in Nigeria] is that they have real British teachers as opposed to White South Africans or Indians which is what you will find in some of this so called internationals schools” (Mr Odili)

The idea that “quality is higher” when all the teachers in a school are “white British” while quality will go “down the drain” when a school is run by a Nigerian instead of a white Briton is a clear indication that British whiteness in particular, is simultaneously a signifier of quality in education and a mechanism for *quality control*. British whiteness assures quality as well as ensuring quality. These findings are similar to those found in other studies which also conclude that the notion of ‘whiteness’ both as a measurement and the hallmark of quality usually pervades the discourse of quality in the West (Reay el al., 2007) but this phenomenon is more apparent in Africa and other developing countries (Fanon, 1976; Keating, 1995; Shonekan, 2013). This is partly because, as Molande **(**2008:183) observes, factors likecolonisation has made whiteness ‘an author of Blackness’. As will be shown in chapter 6, the idea of whiteness as a sign of quality is one of the marketing strategies employed in the international secondary education markets.

Despite the fact that not all of the parents were taught by, or in the words of one of the parents “passed through a lot of British teachers [in] secondary school” (Mr Abdu), all of them; irrespective of whether they were privately educated or not, spoke highly and positively of the calibre of teachers they had in their time. Yet, as the comments below indicate, most believe that the government take-over of schools from the British missionaries and colonists has led to a deterioration of the quality of teachers in contemporary Nigeria.

“The teachers then were teachers […] then we had teachers. Now we have graduates in schools that have no idea what they are doing unfortunately” (Mrs Ayo)

“We had very good teachers, committed crop of teachers who really taught … unlike these days it’s not like that.” (Mrs Bridge).

“In our days, we had excellent teachers, high calibre of teachers who were trained by the British themselves. The quality of education then can’t be compared to what they call education nowadays” (Mrs Kuti).

As suggested previously, one explanation for the decline of “well qualified teachers” may be due to the departure of the ‘experts’, i.e. the British missionaries and colonists. However, if the question is, why were the teachers in the past described as “well qualified”, and “high calibre”? Then there are two plausible (though not unrelated to the previous one) explanations. First, these teachers were “excellent” because they were mostly British teachers as Mrs Bawa comment indicates:

“Most of my teachers were British, yes. They were British teachers very few non-British. Like the Indian she was only taking me for CRK (Christian religious knowledge). My English teacher, Mrs Lloyds was British. We had so many of them, so many of them. So many British you know. My maths teacher was an Irish woman. We have some many teachers, some were Spanish, most of them were British”

Secondly, these teachers were trained by, and had continuous contact with, the British as Mr Kome’s comment suggests: “people who had the opportunity to interact with our *colonial masters* and saw the value of education”. Therefore, the quality of a teacher is based on their nationality and/or race or who they were trained by. In light of this observation, one explanation for the decline in quality teachers in contemporary Nigeria may be down to the huge temporal gap which now exists between colonial and contemporary Nigeria. The passage of time following independence has not only reduced the involvement of the ‘inventors’ and ‘experts’ (British colonists and missionaries) in the Nigerian education system, it has also made it more difficult and/or reduced the opportunities for teachers to be directly trained by white British.

The high esteem that these parents attach to white British teachers is further demonstrated in the quotes below.

“We believe the teachers in England are more committed to their work than those in Nigeria. An English teacher is committed, in Nigeria it is vice visa. Teachers are not committed. Honestly they are not” (Mrs Bawa)

“I have very little confidence in most of the Nigerian teachers but unfortunately the school [British school in Nigeria] didn’t have enough expatriate teachers to go round but the headteacher made such that your child is taught by an expatriate at least twice before they leave the school. My daughter was lucky because I think she must have had a *real British* teacher more than twice before she left the school. When my children have Nigerian teachers I usually employ somebody who comes to the house to teach them” (Ms Ambrose).

“I put them in this school because I want them to get the benefits of being taught by a *British* person before they go abroad” (Mr Bala)

“The *white* teachers [white British teachers in UK based private boarding school] are very *well qualified* and *their mentality* is different from those in Nigeria. I mean the Nigerian teachers” (Mrs Adu).

Molande’s (2008:182) postulation that whiteness has ‘the highest possible concentration of values’ is aptly demonstrated by these comments. The high value ascribed to British whiteness is reflected in parents’ preference for, and description of, white British teachers. Children are deemed “lucky” when they are taught by white expatriate teachers, and unfortunate when taught by Nigerian teachers. Similarly, while white British teachers are “committed”, “enthusiastic” and “competent”, Nigerian teachers are seen as the exact opposite. Whilst white British teachers are perceived as having qualities and values, which would enhance their children, their children’s learning is, at best, stagnated when they are taught by Nigerian teachers.

The description of schools and teachers as high/low, good/poor could be seen as another way of sorting schools and families into different social hierarchies. Concomitantly, these parents are able to legitimate their social positions through the consumption of high quality schools. Ball (2003:59) posits that, ‘within the social field of education perceptions, expectation and choice all relate to, and play their part in reproducing social structure’. Also by synonymising British whiteness with quality education, these parents invariably create exclusive schools (and social segmentation) as well as making quality teaching the exclusive remit of a particular race. Besides functioning as a tool for social demarcation through the creation of quality schools, the constructions of whiteness as the epitome of quality in education also help perpetuate the hegemonic discourse of “West is best”.

None of the parents actually verbalise the idea of the inferiority of blackness. This is not surprising though since the habitus, which regulates these parents’ thoughts, preferences and actions functions below the level of consciousness (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993). However, the constant referencing of whiteness and preference for white schools (chapter 5) suggests a feeling of inferiority which Fanon argues is the (by)product of colonisation. The *unconscious* internalisation of the inferiority complex has in turn made ‘blackness […] at best a figure of absence, or worse a total reversion’ of whiteness (Sardar, 2008:xv cited in Fanon, 1967/2008).

The references to, and the synonymous of quality with whiteness in this and subsequent chapters have not only highlighted the relevance and significance of Fanon’s colonisation theory as an analytical tool in the current study, they have also identified race as a major structuring factor which influences these parents understanding of quality education. The significance of race in the analysis of my participants’ perceptions of quality education has also highlighted the limitation of Bourdieu’s theory of social practices, which neglects race as a structuring factor within the habitus. Several academics have also acknowledged the fact that Bourdieu’s theory is limiting in this regard (Reay, 2004; Byrne, 2009; Sayer, 2005; Lovell, 2000; Skeggs, 2004b; McNay, 2004; Emirbayer and Desmond, 2011; Johnson, 2013; Vincent et al., 2013). Lovell (2000:36) puts it succinctly; ‘while class penetrates his [Bourdieu’s] diagrammatic representation of the social field, like the lettering in Brighton rock, gender is largely invisible, as is race’.

## 3.4 Meanings and uses of ‘quality’ education in contemporary Nigeria

*‘[T]he relevance of education as a means of social reproduction may be evaluated differently at different points in time and thus the relevant resources for achieving reproduction may be different’* (Ball, 2003:24)

Research suggests that quality education, particularly within current social policy and political discourses, is usually conceptualised as high academic performance in national and international ‘league tables’ (Gewirtz, 2000; Ball, 2008; Brown, 2003; Unagha, 2008; Clark, 2009). In Nigeria where a considerable number of children do not yet have access to free basic education (Theobald et al, 2007) the Nigerian government; rightly or wrongly, continues to focus on ensuring the provision of ‘basic’ education for its populace (Santcross et al., 2010). Indeed, according to UNESCO (2008 my emphasis), the Nigerian primary and secondary curricular are designed to ensure the acquisition of basic skills and training ‘relevant for *functional living’*. As a consequence, the quality of education is, to a large extent, measured through literacy rates (Tooley and Dixon, 2005; Unagha, 2008) and the standard of basic school buildings (Theobald et al, 2007; Olori, 2005; Odumosu, et al, 2010)

Besides the fact that the current political conceptualisation of quality education in Nigeria parallels parents’ description of quality education in the colonial and early post-colonial eras (see figure 4), there is evidence in the current study which suggests that these parents’ believe that academic competency is actually obtainable in private and government schools that use the Nigerian curriculum.

“I will give example of the British school again, like maths or some other subjects, you will find out that they (British curriculum) are not doing well compare to Nigeria curriculum […] especially in the UK” (Mr Dele)

“Surprisingly I must tell you, we still support my second and third child with books from Nigeria especially mathematics. Mathematics and social studies, we still support them with materials from here (Nigeria) because we’ve come to discover that the British educational system does not actually task the children, it doesn’t give them a very round education as we had wanted. It is not very very tasking […] (Mr Okon)

“But be that as it may [...] we have what we call ‘Jakande’ [generic name for bulk-standard state schools in Lagos State] schools here in Nigeria, schools that are so bad, but still I tell people that I can decide to send a child to that school, and if I want that child to excel, that child will excel, you can still produce a good academic student” (Mrs Tosin)

The belief that state schools in Nigeria are capable of producing “*good academic student*” is the first indication that academic competency *alone* is not perceived as quality education by the parents in this study. Crucially, the fact that these parents are using teaching and learning materials designed for, and used in, schools which run the Nigerian curriculum to support their children whilst they are in private boarding schools overseas (so as to bring them up to an acceptable academic level), is a clear indication that factors other than the search for ‘quality’ education are motivating my parent participants’ desire to consume overseas schools.

Within the data, there is substantial evidence which suggests that the political conceptualisation of quality education is markedly different from these parents’ perceptions of quality education in relation to their children. Indeed, some of the parents like Ms Ambrose, are of the opinion that “academic is a very small part of what [quality] education is about”. Instead, the general consensus among these parents is that quality education is a type of education that focuses not only on academic competence but also on other areas of development such as social and moral development. As Mrs Ayo who owns her own private school in Nigeria explains, “quality [education] means the total education of the child. It *not just an academic* education of the child”.

The data however, show that more emphasis is placed on social and moral, rather than academic, development. Most of my participants were keen to point out that their choice of school in the international education market was not based on the school’s academic performance. Mrs Ayo illustrates this point when she explained that the school she sent her son to in the UK is not “one of those that is achieving all the A stars”, as does Mrs Tosin, who says that “education is not just about academics. I always tell people that I’m not bothering about my kids getting A’s and all that, honestly”.

The data in the current study reveals that extra-curricular activities and the acquisition of social etiquettes and morals are the three most frequently cited reasons for buying into the international private education market.

“A good education is about exposure to different things like sport activities, culture and lots and lots of extra-curricular activities. You don’t go to school just to read and write. If that were the case then I would say most private schools here (Nigeria) can do that. But like I said that is *not* quality education” (Mrs Gbenga)

“By my understanding quality education means the kind of education that would not only enhance their academic circumstances but also something that would give them good character by any standard. That is what I think quality education is” (Mrs Bridge).

Throughout the research, parents’ preference for expressive order over instrumental order (Bernstein, 1966 cited in Power et al., 1998) has become quite apparent. As the comments show, parents are more concerned about comportment such as manner of eating and speaking and the “extra-curricular activities” that their children would be exposed to, and can take part in, rather than acquiring high grades. The consumption of the overseas schools in order that children could learn the “white man’s sports and activities”; to use the words of one of the Nigerian agents, learn western deportment/decorum may seem like an extravagant past-time; particularly if one considers the fact that UK-based private boarding schools typically cost between £15,000 (Palfreyman, 2003) to £30, 000 per annum (<http://www.aprivateeducation.co.uk>).

For these parents, however, this is small price to pay in the struggle over positional advantage. Indeed the cost is used to reinforce the value of this type of education and instigate social closure as shall become evident in the subsequent chapters. As this chapter will demonstrate, preference for expressive orders is one of the strategies employed by these parents for marking class boundaries, acquiring the image of modern and educated person for their children and instigating social closure, all in an attempt to continue to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions.

The significant shift in my parent participants’ descriptions of quality education from academic to social competencies, as shown in figure 4, is their way of warding off competition from the newcomers and maintaining the status quo. Bourdieu (1984:161) puts it aptly, when he posits:

‘to protect themselves against excessive numbers, the holders of rare titles and rare jobs must defend a definition of a job [quality education] which is nothing other than the definition of those who occupy the position’.

The shift in emphasis away from basic to aesthetic education also indicates that my participants are aware that education *per se* ‘cannot be a signal of dominant class culture, because it is a continuous variable that applies to members of all classes (Lamont and Lareau, 1988:156). Alternatively, one could also argue that my participants’ current understanding of quality education is their way of explaining ‘morally adequate versions of their life choices’ (Jordan et al., 1994:4). The decision to consume overseas private schools might be a means by which these parents communicate and acquire the image of responsible and ‘good’ parent identity.

Furthermore, comments such as: “What I had […] was *enough* for then” (Mrs Philips) and the “best that was necessary at that time” (Mrs Okwu) indicate that these parents are aware of the link between the political/historical context and the type of resources *necessary* for class struggle over positional advantage. Also implied in the quotes is the idea that what these parents had, that is, basic education is no longer relevant or adequate as an instrument for class struggle in the 21st century neither is it effective as a class boundary marker (Lamont and Molnar, 2002). In other words, the parents in my study are aware that the resources and strategies needed for class struggle evolve over time.

The differences between these parents’ description of quality education in colonial and early post-colonial eras and in contemporary Nigeria suggest that they are employing what Bourdieu (1984:157) might describe as ‘reconversion strategy’. Bourdieu (1984:157) describes reconversion strategies as ‘nothing other than an aspect of the permanent actions and reactions whereby each group strives to maintain or change its position in the social structure’. More importantly, Bourdieu (1984:157) states that reconversion strategies are required:

‘at a stage in the evolution of class societies in which one can conserve only by changing – to change so as to conserve […] to gain an advantage over the other classes and so, objectively, to reshape the structure of objective relations between the classes’

From Bourdieu’s frame, the shift in emphasis in these parents’ perceptions of quality education could be described as their attempt to reshape and transform the meaning of quality education and, by extension, what it means to be an educated person in contemporary Nigeria. This enables these parents to ‘conserve’; via their children, their socially and economically profitably positions. To put it differently, by re-defining quality education these parents are ‘restructuring the system of reproduction’ (Bourdieu, 1984:131) in order to discredit the type of education the majority of Nigerians have access to so as to increase the relative value of the education received by their own children.

However, rather than a ‘conscious’ effort, my participants’ knowledge in terms of how to maintain their social positions is as a result of their habitus which itself has been greatly influenced and shaped by the education system (Bourdieu, 1993). That is to say, individuals whose habitus have not been shaped by the field of education; either because they never engaged with it or have limited use and interaction with the education system, will not have ‘a feel for the game’ which simply means the know-how required in class struggle (Maton, 2008:58), neither would they see the relevance of such struggle (Bourdieu, 1993).

## 3.4.1 Marking class boundaries

*‘When legal barriers between classes get broken down, as in democracy, social hierarchy must be maintained in other ways’* (Lawler, 2005:440)

As already discussed, education in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria automatically bestowed the status of elite on those who had acquired the ability to read and write (Bassey, 1999; Csapo, 1983). Also, as previously argued, the transformative and reproductive capability of education in these periods was due in large part to the fact that the total number of those who could read and write in colonial and early post-colonial Nigeria was small compared to the number of those who could not. Bassey (1999) also argues that the relatively small number of people using the education system at these times made class boundaries relatively easy to maintain. However, democratisation of education, coupled with globalisation and technological advancement (Adam, 2006), has not only weakened education as a site for social reproduction and/or transformation, it has burred class boundaries at the same time. Academic competence as a mechanism for class demarcation has also become increasingly fragile. Since ‘group membership involves the maintenance of boundaries’ (Levine-Rasky, 2008:465), other firmer, stronger means of marking class boundaries and class distinction need to be sought.

Bourdieu (1984) postulates that as class struggle over positional advantage intensifies, individuals or groups that wish to maintain their social and economic position must look for ways of expressing the most fundamental social differences between themselves and those in other social groups. Seen from this perspective, these so-called “white man’s sports and activities” and the acquisition of western dispositions are the means by which the parents in this study intend to simultaneously maintain and create firmer class boundaries and prevent their children from falling into the category of the ‘homogenous, [and] the undifferentiated’ (Bourdieu, 1984:469). Put differently, the acquisition of western habitus is a mechanism for ‘defending or asserting structures of divisions’ (Ball, 2003:76). Bourdieu (1984:174-175) argues:

‘[T]aste [a taste for leisure activities for example], is the practical operator of the transmutation of things into distinct and distinctive signs […]; it raises the differences inscribed in the physical order of bodies to the symbolic order of significant distinctions. It transforms objectively classified practices, in which a class condition signifies itself, into classifying practices, that is, into a symbolic expression of class position’.

That is to say taste, which in this instance is expressed through the embodiment of western dispositions and cultural activities, is now used as a subtle indication of one’s position in Nigeria (Sayer, 2005).

Furthermore, these extra-curricular activities and social competencies are types of cultural capital (DiMaggio, 1982; Vincent and Ball, 2007;Lareau, 2002; Lareau and Weininger, 2003), which in their embodied state, will help to create visible distinctions between my participants’ children and children from other social classes. Citing Bourdieu, Skeggs (2004a:17) defines ‘cultural capital as high culture’. Consequently, bodies inscribed with valuable cultural capital ‘literally embody entitlement’ (Skeggs, 2004a:17). More importantly, since these extra-curricular activities, for example “play[ing] golf, sailing and kayaking” and “skiing” are activities ‘which characterise the [western] bourgeoisie’ (Bourdieu, 1984:283), they enable non-westerners who have acquired them to ‘become [more] mobile and flexible’ in the global/international social space (Skeggs, 2004a:2). Thus, by acquiring this type of quality education for their children, these parents are effectively broadening their children’s socio-scape while enabling them to acquire ‘cosmopolitan cultural tastes’ (Bryson, 1996:897), which in turn broadens their landscape of possibilities beyond Nigeria.

As well as being this group’s first step on the ‘trajectory of privilege and closure’ (Ball, 2003:90), perhaps more important is the fact that, access to this group in the future will be regulated and determined by the acquisition of western dispositions and acquisition of highbrow cultural activities. In light of this, the consumption of overseas schools is less about seeking better quality education *per se*, but rather, more about creating firmer class boundaries and/or ‘class collectivism’ and achieving social closure (Gaztambide-Fernandez et al., 2013a; Boyd, 1973; Allatt, 1993). Put differently, the consumption of overseas schooling is an example of ‘hidden instrumental strategies and power relations behind apparently innocent and disinterested action’ (Reay et al., 2007:1053).

It is interesting to note how similar these parents’ class reproduction strategies are with those employed by white and black middle class parents in the West (Weis and Cipollone, 2013; Lareau, 2002; Vincent et al, 2013). For example, in her study, which investigates the nuanced differences in childrearing practices between middle and working class families in America, Lareau (2007:537) found that extra-curricular activities are one of the mechanisms by which American middle classes transmit ‘advantage across generation[s]’. Clark (2009) whose study examines girls’ extra-curricular pursuits and school choice also draws similar conclusions. However, there are two significant differences in the work of Lareau’s and the current study. First, unlike the parents in Lareau’s study who do the concerted cultivating themselves, the parents in the current study out-source this responsibility to those they considered as the ‘expert’. Secondly, whilst the knowledge of, and taste for, extra-curricular activities is used by my participants to ward off competition at the macro-level, the parents in Lareau’s study use extra-curricular activities for the same purpose but in a micro-settings like school.

That said, the acquisition of cultural capital would be very useful for my participants’ children in micro-settings, like a job interviews. Indeed, evidence in my data suggests that one of the reasons these parents send their children to schools overseas is because they know that employers usually consider candidates who have schooled overseas more favourably. This knowledge comes from the fact that most of my participants’ are either employers themselves or have been part of interview panels in the past.

“The way we [employers] 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)

Bourdieu and Passeron, (1990:162) state that ‘class bias is strongest in a test situation like job interview’. They go on to explain that such situations not only ‘throw the examiner onto the implicit, diffuse criteria of the traditional art of grading’, it is also;

‘an occasion of passing total judgements, armed with the unconscious criteria of social perceptions of total persons, whose moral and intellectual qualities are grasped through the infinitesimals of styles or manners, accent or elocution, posture or mimicry, even clothing and cosmetics’ (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990:162)

In other words, most test situations like job interviews are essentially places where privilege is rewarded and *socially constructed* inadequacies are highlighted and penalised. By sending their children to schools which imbibe them with the right and appropriate cultural capital, these parents are ensuring that their children enter the job market ‘already accustomed to operating as an entitled subject with communication skills acceptable to middle class gatekeepers’ (Sayer, 2005:127). That is to say, since it is the habitus which eventually attunes their children to interacting with these gatekeepers, the acquisition of western habitus is my parent participants’ way of preparing their children for the job market; at home or abroad.

A significant finding in my study is that unlike the West where the majority of elite and middle class parents rely on the local private sector and/or government schools for their reproduction and maintenance, the Nigerian privileged classes have come to rely on the international education markets for these functions. The two main reasons for the reliance on this education market, as this and other chapters will show, are the ‘synonymonisation’ of quality with whiteness, and the perpetuation of the idea that ‘West is best’ (chapter 6).

## 3.4.2 Making ‘moral’ beings

The parents’ discourse of quality education has also activated what might be understood in Bourdieusian frame (1984:468) as a ‘pair of antagonistic adjectives’, which is another tactical device used for sorting individuals into different social categories as well as limiting membership to a group. Skeggs (2004a:5) argues that class formation is ‘dynamic [and its] produced through conflict and fought out at the level of the symbolic’. Ms Ambrose’s comment that “a lot of Nigerians can read and write but, believe me, they are not *completely* educated”, is a good example of this. While their children are educated and modern, children from families that cannot afford this type of quality education are, at best, semi-illiterates and ‘unmodern’ (Skeggs, 2004a:92).

Here, a clear distinction is made between my parent participants’ children and those from low-income Nigerian families. Citing Bourdieu (1984), Ball (2003:59) describes this kind of ‘classifying practices’ as ‘the self-production of class collectivities’, which can only be accomplished ‘through struggles which simultaneously involve relationships between and within classes and determined the actual demarcation of new frontiers’ (Wacquant, 1991:52). Making a slightly different point, Bourdieu (1984:244) asserts that ‘social positions which present themselves to the observer as purely theoretical question[s] of the limits between the groups who occupy them are *strategic emplacements*, *fortresses* to be defended and captured in a field of struggles’ (my emphasis). In sum, the use of ‘antagonistic adjectives’ (Bourdieu, 1984:468) is a fundamental aspect of class struggle over positional advantage and legitimation.

The description of quality education as a “proper education” that makes a person “complete”; “more rounded” (Mrs Adu), become a “good human being”, “give[s] them good character by any standard” and gives them ‘good manners” also adds a moral dimension to the discourse of quality education. Comments like: “these are things [manners and comportments] that keeps decency” (Mrs Bawa) is also an indication that the acquisition of western habitus is one of the criteria used by my participants to determine a decent and complete human being. Skeggs’ (2004a:17) assertion that ‘different bodies carry unequal values depending on their […] *cultural baggage*’ is apposite here. Making a slightly different point, Thornton (1995:10) contends that ‘[d]istinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority and presume the inferiority of others’.

Mrs Bridge’s detailed description of the differences in attitude and behaviours between children who attend British private schools (in Nigeria and overseas) and those who are educated in schools using the Nigerian syllabus, is indicative of these parents’ views of those who have not received this type of quality education. It is also a clear indication that this type of education and by implication, these qualities can only be acquired in the UK (this point shall be returned to shortly).

“Issues of integrity are familiar and common place in the UK. Very familiar and commonplace in the UK. That’s one, and I do know that if I look at my children who went through these British schools and the ones who didn’t especially the older ones … you see, the seriousness of what, even their words [of those who are schooling in the UK]. See, let me give you an example: if my child tells you, you are meeting at nine o’clock you can be sure you’ll tell your time nine o’clock which, is not very common with the others [those schooling in Nigeria]. She sticks to the rules. Her word is very important. Very honest, which is not common here, believe me, I have children who passed through the same system I passed through, lots of them are not that way, lots of them don’t act or behave that way but the ones I have, of the four that school in the UK three of them are prone to behave this way. They have lots of integrity and honesty and I think that the British culture foster this behaviour, I think so. Maybe because they’ve always been in that school (British school) and I have children who have never gone through those schools [and] I can see the difference in them, a lot of difference. Issues of integrity, lots of things” (Mrs Bridge).

From Mrs Bridge’s comment, it is very clear that attributes such as “honesty” and “integrity” are ascribed to those who have received this quality education. On the contrary, those who have not received this type of education are “not that way”. Here, we see both the constructions and privileging of class identity through the pathologising of the ‘other’. This is another example of the logic of difference or a ‘system of difference[s]’ (Bourdieu, 1984:226), which plays a significant role in the struggle for positional advantage and the marking of class boundaries. Citing Bourdieu (1998), Reay et al. (2007:1049) argue that ‘moral stigma is frequently attached to those who are worst-off in class terms while moral superiority is attached to higher classes, in a process of what he [Bourdieu] terms ‘class racism’.

Also, by brandingtheir children as decent, moral and complete human beings while others are considered semi-illiterate, incomplete human beings who are lacking in morals, these parents have subsequently converted; albeit unconsciously, morality ‘[in]to style’ thus ‘aestheticising virtue’ (Skeggs, 2004a:155). As a consequence, this group’s hegemony is normalised and their social and economic advantage legitimised. Like the white British middle classes in Foskett and Hemsley-Brown’s (2003) study, the consumption of high status private schools, first in Nigeria and later overseas, has become a means through which these elite parents seek to maintain their social positions and legitimise their claims to moral, social and economic superiority.

The discourse of quality education, as noted earlier, is further complicated by the notion that quality education can only be acquired in certain places, the UK to be precise, and delivered by people of a particular race and nationality, using a particular pedagogical approach. The latter point will be discussed later in the chapter.

“With my exposure I know that there are certain things that completes a person. In England they get so much more than they can ever get in Nigeria. They learn how to be a decent human being, honesty and integrity […] if you think you can get these things, these virtues in our schools, forget it. You will not get those things here” (Mrs Kuti).

“They know that what they get here they cannot get anywhere else. Any ordinary school in Nigeria. Here we teach not just subjects but also how to behave; good table manners. You will be surprise how many of these children come to us without any of these skills” (Head-teacher 3 – British school in Nigeria).

The belief that quality education cannot be acquired in Nigeria has three very significant implications. First, ‘quality’ education in Nigeria has been ‘transformed back into an “oligarchic” good’ (Jordan et al., 1994:212) thus becoming, once again, the exclusive property of the privileged few (Bassey, 1999). Secondly, as well as constructing quality education out of the reach of most Nigerians, the idea that attributes like honesty, good manners, integrity, and decency can only be acquired from being educated in places like the UK, has not only made morality, *class* and *place* specific, morality has also become a *classed* and *raced* concept. Thirdly, by suggesting that quality education can only be obtained from a specific place, these parents and British head-teachers; consciously or unconsciously, are creating as well as protecting ‘exclusive schools [and place]’ ‘as class reproduction institutions’ (Pakulski and Waters, 1996:90 in Ball, 2003:76). This thus confirms Weber’s (cited in Bourdieu, 1998:xix), argument that ‘patents of education [has] creat[ed] a privileged ‘caste’’.

## 3.5 Differences in parents’ perceptions of quality education

*‘Within the social field of education perceptions, expectation and choice all relate to and play their part in reproducing social structure’* (Ball, 2003:59)

These parents’ understanding of quality education is by no means homogeneous. On the contrary, there exist some obvious and subtle differences within the group. The most significant and obvious difference, however, is between Mrs Osun; the only parent who chose a private school in Africa, and those who sent their children to Canada and the UK.

Evidence from the quantitative and qualitative data shows that Mrs Osun has the least economic capital in the group. The data also show that she is one of the three parents (all women) with the least educational qualifications. However, the other two women owned their own businesses. One owns and runs a small transport business that employs ten people and is married to a senior executive in an international company. The second woman owns a medium size bridal shop and dress making business and her husband owns a large rubber company in Nigeria.

Mrs Osun had not travelled outside Nigeria prior to sending her daughter to Ghana. In contrast, the other parents travel regularly to Europe and America for family holidays and business. Some of the parents who send their children to the UK also owned second homes overseas while four of these parents (three of these sent their children to Canada) have also lived overseas (in the UK, Netherlands, and Guatemala) as a result of secondment. The quote below typifies the lifestyles of the parents who send their children to the UK (and to a lesser extent, those who send their children to Canada).

“There are some instances where we went to places like Venice, spend time in places like Sicily, spend time in places, parts of Greece […] There were times we had to spend time in Disneyland, in France, such trips were more of holidays where we spend days just travelling. At times, we travel from Paris to Rome and we visited a lot of tourist places like the Coliseum and all the others. Such trips were mainly holidays but there were times we were in England mainly we started out having a holiday but because we have family there we ended up just staying with family and then having family reunion and all those kind of things” (Mrs Bridge).

Before going on to discuss the differences in perceptions of quality between Mrs Osun and the rest of the parents, it is important to state that Mrs Osun is not thought to be representative of all Nigerian parents who send their children to Ghana for their primary and secondary education. Neither is the intention here to suggest that her economic, cultural and social capitals are a reflection of the social field of all families who send their children to Ghana. As discussed in chapter 2, Mrs Osun was included in this study to help illuminate and illustrate the habitus as a structuring factor.

Unlike the other parents in the study, evidence from the data set indicates that Mrs Osun tends to describe quality education in terms of academic rather than social competencies. Indeed, the data suggest that the main reason why she sent her daughter to Ghana is because the schools in Nigeria were not academically challenging enough.

“Each time she goes to the school at the end of the curriculum, maybe the school year she is the person that will be take first, first and that she [her daughter] doesn’t want it like that. She wants a school that she will now compete with others. That made me look for a school that will look at the higher standard she is looking for” (Mrs Osun).

Another equally significant difference between Mrs Osun and the rest of the group is her perceptions of what constitutes quality teaching. Mrs Osun’s explanation that the quality of teaching her daughter receives now is of a better quality - because teachers provide answers for the children “instead [of] pushing the children to do it themselves” - is in direct contrast to the rest of the group who send their children overseas precisely because they *do* prefer their children to be “pushed”, that is, to seek solutions and answers for themselves.

“British curriculum each tends to bring up the kids as to know how to do things professionally for themselves. Even academically, the kind of assignments that they are given is to make the kids to use their initiatives OK. Sometimes they give them assignments that the teacher has not even given them any inclination on how the solutions are formed […]” (Mr Akpan)

This view is re-enforced by a British head teacher:

“I think the Nigerian curriculum is much more prescribed and it is much about learning facts and cramming knowledge in whereas the British curriculum is much more geared towards encouraging children [to] think and to explore, investigate and to take responsibility for their own learning and that’s the main difference I think. The British curriculum is much more hands on and they are expected to take full responsibility for their own learning, particularly as they get older” (British head-teacher 1 in Nigeria).

Parents who sent their children to the UK and Canada are of the view that the types of pedagogical approaches used in those countries are better and more effective than the one used in Nigeria. Nonetheless, Mrs Tosin’s comment that: “in Nigeria I always say we have this em’ way of teaching our children, *whether they went to all this British curriculum schools or whatever*, we have this methodology that doesn’t really bring out the best in children”, implies that this pedagogical approach is only *available* and *practised* in private boarding schools in the West. Thus like morality and good manners, effective pedagogical approach is place specific.

“But we felt that a lot of things they (Nigerian schools) were teaching them, but it was more of what you can put in your head, how many things can you count, how many things you can say at such three years old. It is not just about knowing how to count, it is about knowing the science behind counting” (Mr Dele).

“I mean in those days we say oh they made us “cram” it you know (laughs) what I am trying to say but I found out that the Oyinbo man’s way, you know, the white man’s way of doing it, you go through more it methodologically, you understand”(Mrs Tosin).

“Our country you are being made to read, and reproduce what you are taught. But here [the UK] you are being made to learn to understand, to give what you understand not to reproduce what you have been given” (Mrs Ola)

These comments suggest that there are two types of pedagogical approaches. Mrs Osun’s preferred approach is one that seems to focus on the end product. In contrast, “the white man’s way”, which is the preferred approach of the rest of the group, seems to be about the process, the journey involved in seeking answers and information. Unlike Mrs Osun, these parents believe that the latter makes their children “more inquisitive” (Mr Abdu), and “think better” (Mrs Tosin) as opposed to hindering their learning as Mrs Osun suggested. Mrs Adu explained that, “it’s just a different way of thinking” which according to her “opens up another part of your brain”. Mr Oye on the other hand believes this pedagogical approach enables their children to “think above” their Nigerian counterparts.

The privileging of western pedagogical approaches over what can be described as a traditional mode of teaching (Bassey, 1999) is another way by which this group legitimises it superiority over other social groups. By suggesting that the pedagogical approaches employed in western schools enable their children to “think above others [in Nigeria]”, these parents are claiming, for their children, intellectual superiority over those who are educated in Nigeria or other African countries. Once again, the logic of difference; that is superiority versus inferiority, has been applied here.

Mrs Osun’s response below, when asked to explain her reasons for sending her daughter to Ghana also highlights significant differences between her perceptions of what constitutes quality education and those parents who send their children to the UK and Canada.

“It is better because the class room are not congested, 30 per class, 30 per class. It does not exceed 30. But in Nigeria sometimes 50, 60, 80 persons will be in a particular class. The environment is clean. In the secondary school [in Nigeria] there are no enough chairs for them to sit down. The environment is not even conducive for them. Dirty environment. That place [Ghana] even the compound itself is clean. The classrooms are clean. They have access to the Internet. If you want to be an art student materials are there for you to learn it so that when you are passing out they will give them handiwork; making of soaps, pomade. Those things are there for them to use. Their school they make soap and pomade and they will teach them and at the end of the day come out with a certificate that without going into, she will get handiwork on her own to do” (Mrs Osun)

Small class size, clean environment and Internet access are all signs of quality education for Mrs Osun. On the contrary, the parents who send their children to the UK and Canada rarely mentioned these factors, perhaps because for them, these are elements which fall into the category of schooling and education which Barthes (1973:11 cited in Allatt, 1996:173) describes as ‘what goes without saying’. Put differently, these aspects of education have been regulated to ‘second rank’ by these parents ‘because they have long been theirs and seem to go without saying’ (Bourdieu, 1984:247). Bourdieu (1984:247) argues that the privileged classes;

‘cannot identify their distinction with properties, practices or ‘virtues’ which no longer *have* to be claimed or which, because they have become commonplace and lost their distinctive value, no longer *can* be claimed’ (original emphasis).

When technology was mentioned, it was more about having access to “the latest technology” (Mr Akpan) and also that their children are allocated a computer each instead of “trying to share with about three people” (Mrs Seiye). Similarly, when the environment is mentioned, it was not talked about in terms of its cleanliness. Rather, unlike Mrs Osun, when these parents, particularly those who send their children to the UK, mention the school’s environment, it is in terms of aesthetics, grandeur, seclusion and exclusivity.

“The availability of the latest technology and the grounds are much bigger and also very secluded. The schools are far away from the cities” (Mr Akpan)

“Melberry secluded and far away from bad influences and trailer trash” (Mrs Kuti).

“St George is not in London and that is one of the reasons we chose it. It is far away from London, in one of the most beautiful places in England with beautiful grounds” (Mrs Gbenga).

In addition to these is the fact that while Mrs Osun is pleased that her daughter would acquire practical experience in soap and pomade making; in other words, learn a trade, the other parents are more concerned about their children acquiring western habitus and a taste and skills for certain kinds of exclusive leisure activities.

Evidence from the data indicates that most of the references made to etiquette and comportment were by the parents who sent their children to the UK. However, further interrogation of the data reveals that it was predominantly the mothers who made these references. Indeed, the data shows that it is the instrumental, rather than expressive order that was of more concern for the men in this study. For instance, unlike his wife (the only couple in the study), for whom social competencies like: “etiquette […] how to sit down, how to eat properly, how to use fork and knives” seemed very important, Mr Ola was very keen to stress that “the academic is the main gain for [them]”. Similarly, when Mr Okon (the owner of a high status private schools in Port-Harcourt) was asked to explain what quality education meant to him, he responded thus: “How equipped are you [the schools] to be able to translate [the] curriculum? How are you able to make the children imbibe this curriculum? How trained are your teachers? How qualified are they?”

This finding indicates an interesting gender difference in perceptions of, and attitudes towards, quality education within the parent participants. Although, this is not a reflection of women’s ‘particular’ understanding of quality education in general, neither are these views thought to be representative of elites women’s perceptions of quality education. Nonetheless, these women’s preference for expressive order resonates with Bourdieu’s argument that women are ‘the predominant makers of taste’ (Bourdieu cited in Skeggs, 2004a:142). Hence, while the men seem to be concerned about the academic and the functional aspects of education, the women seem to be more concerned with the ‘cultural education’ of their children (Roos and Rahkonen, 1985:268). Skeggs (2004a:142) asserts that ‘it is the women’s role to covert economic capital into symbolic capital’ and maintain status (Brantlinger et al., 1996). The conversion of economic to symbolic and cultural capitals is quite important particularly in the formation of transnational/Nigerian elite identity as shall be shown in chapter 5.

Bourdieu (1984) postulates that as an internalised social structure, the habitus; itself shaped by the differences in volume and composition of capitals, not only regulates, but also generates distinct lifestyles choice and preferences (Bourdieu, 1984). In other words, it is the difference in habitus; as a result of occupying very different positions in social field, which accounts for differing understanding of quality education and the indicators of quality in education between Mrs Osun and the rest of the group (Sayer, 2005).

The discernible differences between Mrs Osun and the other parents’ concerns in education; her concern with the ‘basic’ or essential aspects of education (function) in contrast with the other parents’ concern with aesthetics and extra-curricular activities (form), instantiate the ‘stylisation of life’ thesis. From Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, Mrs Osun’s habitus; which, among other things, is the product of economic constraint, has predisposed her to ‘a pragmatic, functionalist ‘aesthetic’ (Bourdieu, 1984:376). On the contrary, the consumption of private boarding schools in the West, allow the other parents to communicate their ‘removal from practical necessities’ (Gartman, 2002:261), that is, basic education. It is also their way of communicating a lifestyle of ease; which, according to Bourdieu (1984:6) also implies a lifestyle of luxury and class whereas a ‘taste of necessity’; as characterised by Mrs Osun’s choices, implies quantity and vulgarity.

Evidence from the data suggests that Mrs Osun’s place of choice was influenced by financial constraint.

“A school that will look at the higher standard she is looking for so when I find out that type of school in Nigeria the amount paid is much. They are looking for 200 to 300 thousand naira [between £800 to £1,200 at current exchange rate] in Nigerian money [per annual] so in discussing with somebody, a friend said maybe in Ghana. With this type of school you can get it for a lower price” (Mrs Osun)

On the other hand, financial constraint meant Ms Ambrose, who had two children, could only send one child the UK. However, unlike Mrs Osun who sent her daughter to Ghana because she cannot afford to send her to good quality private schools in Nigeria, Ms Ambrose kept her daughter in Nigeria (in one of the most expensive British private schools in Lagos) precisely because she felt that anywhere but the UK would not be good enough for her daughter.

“If I just wanted to send my children abroad then I can afford to send both of them to Canada but that’s not what I want. I want the best quality of education money can buy and I know that at the moment my daughter is losing out but I would rather get the best than get something cheaper but only of a low standard” (Ms Ambrose).

The comment above shows that unlike Mrs Osun who was willing to settle for a cheaper alternative, Ms Ambrose would only accept “the best quality of education money can buy”. Despite not being able to send both of her children to the UK at the same time, Ms Ambrose’ decision to send her daughter to one of the most expensive British private schools in Nigeria might be her way of expressing an *elective* distance from the world of ‘material constraint and temporal urgencies’ (Bourdieu, 1984:376).

Furthermore, Ms Ambrose’s decision to send her son to the UK instead of Canada where it would have cost a similar amount to educate both children appears irrational and illogical, at least in a purely economic, *calculative* sense. However, Ball (2003) posits that such responses are outside the rational. They are ‘not irrational’ neither are they ‘reducible to a simple calculability’ (Ball, 2003:162). In other words, these responses ‘are gut feelings that are ‘primitive’ form of class awareness’ (Reay 1997:226). As Reay (1997:226) goes on to argue, these are ‘the-taken-for-granted understanding [individuals] bring to their relationships with others’. In a similar vein, Connell (1989:297 in Ball, 2003) argues that as a result of the habitus, decisions and actions ‘does not even require active consent, merely the non-occurrence of a refusal’. This finding also supports Werbner’s (1996:136) argument that:

‘the experience of choice generated by the culture industry in capitalist societies is an illusion, since consumers are ultimately restricted by their habitus- the cultural and economic constraints and dispositions they occupy by birth, education and wealth’

Another significant difference that was noticed between Mrs Osun and the rest of the parents participants is that unlike the rest of the group, Mrs Osun neither made any reference to whiteness nor did she consider the British as the ‘experts’ in education. One explanation for this might be due to Mrs Osun’s limited education and financial resources since Fanon (1967/2008:14) citing Westermann, posits that [blacks’] inferiority complex is particularly intensified among the educated’. More contemporary studies have found that in general, ‘people with more education are more status-oriented […] more immersed in the culture of upscale acquisition’ (O’Dair, 2000:350).

While the habitus is the product of early experiences received from family and school, Bourdieu argues that it is continually ‘re-structured by individuals’ encounters with the outside world’ (Di Maggio, 1979 cited in Reay et al, 2007:434). In other words, ‘the structures of the habitus are thus not *set* but *evolve*’ (Maton, 2008:53 emphasis in original). Within the logic of this argument, one can infer that through their encounter with, and participation in, the ‘WhiteWorld’, to use Rollock et al’s (2011:1085) terminology; which has been made possible through their education, professional networks and financial positions, these parents’ habitus have been re-structured to the extent that one can infer that they have acquired, what I will describe here as an ‘international habitus’.

Subsequently, it is reasonable to infer that; paradoxically, Mrs Osun’s ignorance of the ‘WhiteWorld’ is as a result of her habitus, which is more *national/local* than international because of her limited involvement in, and *encounter* with, the West. What has also come to light is that colonisation *per se* is not the main influencing factor with regard to these parents’ negative perceptions and depiction of the quality of Nigerian teachers and schools. Rather, it is their experiences of, and continuous exposure to, the West and western ideals and ideologies that have shaped and influenced their perceptions of the quality of education provided by Nigerian schools as well as their preferences for white schools. Although Bourdieu (1984) does not acknowledge the role of discourses in shaping and influencing the habitus, I shall argue that there is an interdependence and interconnectedness between discourses and class habitus. That is to say, exposure to the West and its ideologies and hegemonic discourses such as ‘West is best’, which will be discussed in more depth in chapter 5, influence and shapes non-westerners’ tastes and preferences which in turn influence their class practices (habitus) and vice versa.

## 3.6 Conclusion

The chapter has demonstrated that the consumption of ‘quality’ school is a strategic approach; which has been necessitated by the change in educational landscape in Nigeria as manifested by democratisation of education, used by the parents in this study (perhaps with the exception of Mrs Osun) to simultaneously guarantee social reproduction, create firmer class boundaries and engender social distinction and closure at the same time. In relation to their children, the consumption of ‘quality’ schools allows these parents to provide a type of education for their children which will not only mark them off from their Nigerian counterparts through the acquisition of western deportments and taste for western leisure activities, but one that will also enable their children to acquire positive identities such as ‘modern’, ‘cultured’ and ‘moral’ persons. As well as helping to legitimise these parents’ social and economic positions, the consumption of ‘quality’ schools also allows them, via their children, to continue to maintain their socially and economically advantageous positions.

The chapter also shows that class habitus is not the only influencing factor when it comes to these parents’ perceptions of the indicators of quality in education. By adopting a Fanonsian framework, the chapter argues that race is an equally structuring factor. The chapter also argues that these parents’ own educational experiences and their continuous exposure to, and encounter with, the WhiteWorld, itself characterised by western hegemonic discourses, are instrumental in shaping their perceptions of White British as the ultimate sign of quality in education.

# Chapter 4

# Risk and Risk Management Strategies

*‘What is considered as a risk, and how serious that risk is thought to be, will be perceived differently depending upon the organisation or grouping to which a person belongs or with which he identifies, as will the disasters, accidents or other negative occurrences which occur in a culture’* (Douglas, 1992:78)

The primary aims of this chapter are to: first, identify the type of risk these parents associate with the international education market; and second, to investigate the types of risk management strategies the parents in the current study employ to manage and/or avoid the perceived risk. The chapter starts with an investigation of these parents’ views with regards to the risk of educating their children in the West. The second part of the chapter critically analyses the three main forms of risk management strategies; namely, the ‘right country’, the ‘right school’ and ‘right time’, used by my parent participants to avoid and/or minimise the impact of the perceived risks which their children might be exposed to. The chapter also identifies and discusses some of the factors that influence my participants’ choice of country and school of choice in the international education market. How factors such as gender, religion and social class influence these parents’ perception of risk is also analysed in the chapter. In conclusion, the chapter critically examines the extent to which ‘risk management strategy’ is a rational action.

There are two major ideological persuasions when it comes to the discourse of risk. These are socio-cultural perspective in which; although varying to some degree, the likes of Beck (1992), Douglas (1992) and Foucault (1991) fall into and which takes ‘into account the broader social and cultural, and in some cases, historical contexts in which risk as a concept derives its meaning and resonance’ (Lupton 1999:1). On the other hand, there is the techno-scientific perspective ‘which emerged from and is expressed in such disciplines as science, engineering, psychology, economics, medicine and epidemiology’ and where ‘risk is largely treated as a taken-for granted objective phenomenon’ (Lupton, 1999:2). In keeping with the main theoretical framework adopted in this study, the socio-cultural perspective is applied in this chapter. In other words, I accept Lupton’s (1999:2) postulation that;

‘risk cannot simply be accepted as unproblematic fact, a phenomenon that can be isolated from its social, cultural and historical context’ but rather they are to be understood as inevitably the outcome of socio-cultural processes’.

Ball (2006:265) argues that risk ‘has a plurality of meanings’ and functions. Dean’s (1999:131) description of risk as ‘a way of – or rather a set of different ways of ordering reality’ identifies one of the main functions of risk. That is risk; real or invented, is a way of maintaining the status quo. The simple fact being that, whilst it has been argued that ‘risk displays an equalizing effect’ (Becks, 1992:35); that is, it affects all of us, individuals’ and groups’ conceptions of risk as well as their access to the types of resources needed to mitigate and reduce the negative impact of risk varies considerably (Ball, 2006). Consequently, there are different outcomes, which translate to different realities. Furthermore, because risk is spatialised (Butler and Robson, 2002); due to factors such as social class and race, it means that some individuals are more exposed to risk than others as a result of their location in the social and global spheres.

Like every area of modern life, risks permeate the education market place. Some might argue that the fact that there are still children in world (as there are in Nigeria) who do not yet have access to education is one of the biggest risks in modern times (Santcross, et al., 2010). Evidence from research in education has shown that the schooling boom (Bourdieu, 1984) coupled with the recent neo-liberal ideology; with its central themes of agency, responsibility and rationality, have led to an over-production of risk in education (Ball, 2006). So, while the risk of not getting an education was (and unfortunately, still is for some) the main type of risk that individuals had to contend with, neoliberalism has introduced other types risks, such as the risk of not getting the ‘right’ education, at the right ‘place’ with the right ‘people’ (Oria, et al. 2007).

Research on school choice has found that there is ‘too much choice’ in modern societies such as the UK (see Ball, 2006 for example). As a consequence, there is ‘always a possibility of wrong or unsuccessful choice-making in the education market place’ (Ball, 2006:266). Even though the British middle classes, partly as a result of having the right amount of social, culture and economic capitals, are more equipped to manage and/or avoid these risks, Ball (2006:265) argues that ‘there are no guarantees, no certainties of a smooth and uneventful process of social reproduction’. Crook (1999:180) puts it succinctly, when he argues that;

‘for the educated middle classes of the advanced societies, at least, risk communications merge with problems of consumption and lifestyle choice in a general information overload that is more likely to provoke anxiety and insecurity than a sense of safety and control’

Ball (2006:269) makes a very valid point when he contends that ‘risks and perception of risk vary’. In relation to the education market, it is plausible to argue that the types of risks which the parents in the study will contend with, and are concerned about, in the Nigerian private education market will be quite different from those they come across in the international education market. This is because what parents look for, and expects from, the local and international education market is bound to be different. As a consequence, what they perceive as risk in the international education market and the ways by which they manage and /or avoid these risks will be different from their perception of risk as well as the risk management strategies they employ in the local/national education market.

A small number of studies have explored the nature of the international education market (Borjesson and Broady, 2005; Borjesson et al., 2007; Wiers-Jenssen, 2008; Water, 2006), but they have neglected the issue of risk. At best, the idea of risk is mostly inferred and rarely problematised. Instead, these studies have tended to focus mostly on the reasons for engaging in, and the *benefits* of, overseas education. Whilst these are significant areas, not least because they help to shed light on some reasons why parents send their children overseas for their education, the failure to explore risk in the international education market has inadvertently constructed it as a risk-free market. Indeed, it could be argued that the main reason why these studies tended to focus on the *benefits* of international education is precisely because these researchers view the transitional education market as risk-free. However, it is quite misleading to conceptualise the international education market as such. Giddens (1991:102) postulates that ‘modernity […] brings uncertainty to the very mode of existence’ and the education market, whether national or transnational, is not exempted from this uncertainty and thus risk.

Critiques of western education have questioned the suitability of western education for persons of African heritage (Ndura, 2006; Harris, 1992; Mutisya, 1996; Christian, 2002; Sicherman, 1995; Woolman, 2001). Sicherman, (1995) and Ndura (2006) postulate that western education may bring about stress to African individuals due to the constant battle of trying to ‘fit’ into two different cultures. Others, like Mazrui (1978 in Woolman, 2001) and Alexander-Snow (1999) posit that western education will result in alienation and low self-esteem amongst Africans. Consequently, there have been calls for a shift from Eurocentrism to Africentrism with regards to curriculum content in African countries (Woolman, 2001; Mutisya, 1996, Harris, 1992). The parents in my study do not share these views though. On the contrary, they see the acquisition of western education not only beneficial to their children in terms of the acquisition of socially and economically advantageous positions in the future, they also believe that western education; in its purest form (managed and delivered by white British), is integral to the production of a *moral* and *complete* human being (chapter 3).

Evidence in my data however, suggests that the parents in this study perceive the West a risky place to educate children of African heritage as it has the capacity rob their children of their African identity and heritage. As a result, they have devised ways of avoiding these risks by adopting three key risk management strategies. Evidence in the data also shows that there is a potential risk to parents’ investment if they invest in the ‘wrong’ country and in the ‘wrong’ the child. Thus, as well as preventing the ‘loss’ of their child’s African heritage and identity, parents also need to choose the right country and right child if they are to get good value for their financial investment. Consequently, the avoidance of ‘risk’ and getting value for money are two interconnected themes in this chapter.

The concept of ‘strategy’ unavoidably invokes the notion of consciousness/agency. Indeed, critics of Bourdieu’s theory of social practices; which rational action theorists (Goldthorpe, 2007 for example) are a large part, have vehemently argued that to use terms like ‘strategies’ and ‘interest’ (as Bourdieu does on a few occasions) in the analysis of agents’ social practices without acknowledging the role of individuals’ agency would amount to ‘an indefensible epistemological conceit’ (Jenkins, 1992:87). However, in Bourdieu’s theoretical frame, the term strategy does not imply a ‘cynical calculation’ neither does it suggest ‘the conscious pursuit of maximum specific profit’ (Bourdieu, 1993:76). Instead, ‘strategy’ is understood as ‘an unconscious relationship between the *habitus* and field’ (Bourdieu, 1993:76). Bourdieu (1993:76) expands on this by contending that;

‘strategies […] are actions objectively oriented towards goals that may not be the goals subjectively pursued […] The habitus, a system of dispositions acquired by implicit or explicit learning which functions as a system of generative schemes, generates strategies which can be objectively consistent with the objective interests of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end’.

Put simply, the term ‘strategy’ is used by Bourdieu ‘to emphasize the active, *creative* nature of practices” (Maton, 2008:54 emphasis added).

## 4.1 Parents’ perceptions of risk in the International education Market

*‘Culture guides how people live, what they generally believe and value, how they communicate, and what are their habits, customs, and tastes, [it] is a kind of knowledge that we use and act [with]’* (Loustaunan and Sobo, 1997:9)

As mentioned earlier, parents stand to lose not only their financial investment in the international market if careful thought is not given to the country and the child they invest in, there is also the equally, if not more, important factor of their children losing their African heritage and identity. It is therefore not surprising that the rhetoric of *loss* permeates parents’ narratives of the risk in educating their children in the West throughout.

One of the questions which all of the parents were asked was to explain if they had any concern about educating their children outside Nigeria. Apart from Mrs Osun whose daughter was schooling in Ghana, all the parents emphasised the importance of instilling and maintaining in their children the African/Nigerian culture. They were not only keen to stress how African culture is integral to the formation of African identity, they were also keen to emphasis the differences between African and western culture. Unsurprisingly, parents’ fear that their children may lose their African heritage and identity as a result of being educated in the West was palpable throughout.

Mrs Ola’s comment is an apt example of the parents’ view of the importance of culture and cultural identity.

“Culture is about where you come from. It links with where you are from. The culture in Nigeria is different from culture here [UK] and with the skin they have which is the black skin, that culture [African/Nigerian] must *show forth in them*” (Mrs Ola)

Evidence in the data shows that parents are concerned that without appropriate and adequate measures, there is a risk that they might end up getting a “*brand new child*” (Mr Oye) or to use Mrs Ayo’s phrase “*a little black-white [child]”.* That is, a child that has not only acquired characteristics and manners that are *un*-African, but one that has also lost its “African identity” and roots as well. These parents are also worried that the level of freedom which children are allowed in the West will result in their children forgetting their *role* and *place* as a child in the African society, which in turn might result in them having a “total disrespect for constituted authority” (Mrs Tosin).

Throughout, parents describe African societies as “very conservative” while western societies are described as “too free”, “permissive” and “too liberal”, thus suggesting that they perceive African culture and values as the antithesis of western culture. Mr Akpan’s comment illustrates this point aptly.

“The level of exposure of the average British child is not what I would wish for my child […] That kind of *respect* that my children are supposed to give to their seniors, I can’t find that in the average British child, you know. Their freedom ... too much of it, too much of exposure, too much disrespect ... *those are the kind of things I would not like my children to imbibe*”

Interestingly when parents were asked to elaborate on what they mean by “too much freedom”, parents typically responded thus:

“As Africans, we wouldn’t let our children to behave anyhow. We wouldn’t allow them to speak anyhow to their elders or do whatever they like to do. No, my daughter won’t dare *go out whenever she likes*, or *wear revealing clothes* and sleep around and *smoke and drink alcohol*. Her father will kill her and my son also. So that’s the kind of freedom we are worried about” (Mrs Okwu).

“My *daughter cannot wear makeup until she is 18*. Most of her British friends wear makeup but she knows she cannot and even at 18 when she uses it, it has to be in moderation (Mrs Chuka)”

“You know, like they [children] go into town, they do all that things like *drinking alcohol and smoking.* Girls have boyfriends from the very tender age of 8 and 9 and their parents would allow them. By the time they get to 15, 16, they have slept with many boys. Things we don’t think are right for children to be doing you know…” (Mrs Philips).

“Too much freedom” is conceived here as a law*less* situation where children have the “power” and “freedom” to do as they please and where parents do not, and cannot exercise any form of control over what their children can and cannot do. The resulting situation is as these parents perceive it, is that children will acquire vices like smoking and alcohol consumption at a young age. Too much freedom is also thought to not only encourage girls to dress provocatively, these parents are also of the view that it encourages promiscuity in girls. The emphasis on girls rather than boys in the quotes suggests two things. First, it indicates that parents are more concerned about the damage that ‘too much freedom’ would have on their daughters. Second, and interrelated to the first point, is the idea that boys are not subjected to the same moral ethics as girls.

Besides making children feel that they “*can talk to their parents anyhow and do whatever they like”* (Mrs Philips), these parents believe that the permissiveness of western societies has also led children to believe that parents “*cannot deal with them*” (Mrs Bridge) when they do something wrong. The data suggests that the latter point is very important to the parents in my study since they believe that it prevents them from disciplining their children as they see fit. Mrs Bridge’s comment below demonstrates this.

“You can’t correct them [children] and mostly they have even much more say than their parents in matters concerning them. So most times you have children whose parents cannot act very firmly with them and get away with it. You see […] we are a little bit worried that if your children grow up believing, especially in their teens, that you cannot do anything to them or you cannot deal with them, you cannot deal with them, is something that becomes worrisome. So that means that if my teenage child, my child do something wrong, I could flog him, I could. You won’t allow that, you won’t allow it [referring to me] and even if I stay in Britain and I smacked my child I don’t think there is anybody [that] would hear about it. They are too free, just too free” (Mrs Bridge).

The quotes below are some examples of parents’ perceptions of un-African attitudes and characteristics.

“Recently my daughter has to go and visit a friend in England and the lady didn’t want her to do anything. But my daughter cannot sit down because the lady wants to get up my daughter will say what do you want to do? You understand? If she is carrying a plate, my daughter want to collect the plate from her ... and she keeps saying that no Tola do not worry I am going to the kitchen anyways. The girl will say that I cannot be sitting down watching television and you are carrying the plates to the kitchen, you understand and, you know, it is all, but the white girl will rather sit down and watch television and expect you to do these things, you know, even when I go and visit some of my friends and I can say no, though I am your visitor, you have a 13, 14 year old girl in the house, I am not going to the kitchen and make tea, you understand? she has to get up and make my tea” (Mrs Tosin).

“Children that have good background if you send them abroad you will get another brand new child. If you are not careful you would get a ‘whats-up’ child [a phrase used to describe ‘over-westernised’ African child] who will tell me daddy don’t be stupid even though I know it’s an advice here it is an abuse. My child cannot tell me don’t be stupid he is already telling me that I am stupid […] A child that would come and say you people are useless and give you another name instead of saying daddy he will call you *that old man*. So there are lots of advantages and disadvantages” (Mr Oye)

The scenario described in Mrs Tosin’s multi-layered account is very revealing. Firstly, reverence for one’s elder is at the fore here. Mrs Tosin’s remark that she cannot go to the kitchen and make tea for herself when a “13, 14 year old girl in the house” is one such example. There is an assumption here also that an African child is expected to always do the bidding of the adults without questioning, thus implying that there is a distinction between the *role* and *place* of a child and those of an adult in traditional African society. Also inferred in Mrs Tosin’s comment is the idea that children are constructed in traditional African society as respectful, meek and subservient. An African child without these traits will be construed as one that has lost its heritage and thus identity. Mrs Tosin’s conviction that, unlike her daughter, “a *white girl will rather sit down”* and “*expect”* the adult to do the chores in the house, reveals these parents’ believe that respect for, and obedience to, one’s elders are uniquely and exclusively African values and traits.

Similar to Mrs Tosin, there is an implicit assumption in Mr Oye’s account that there is a distinctive difference between African and western cultures and values. Whilst in western societies, it might be acceptable for a child to address his or her parents or elders in casual and carefree way as indicated in phrases such as “whats-up”, “old man” and “don’t be stupid”, Mr Oye, like the rest of the parents, firmly believes that it is unacceptable for a child of African heritage to address his or her elders in this manner irrespective of the circumstances. It is quite clear in both comments that reverence for ones elders is an integral part of the African identity; to lack reverence for one’s parents or elders goes against what it means, in the eyes of my participants, to be an African child.

There is a sense among these parents that the potential loss of their children’s African/Nigerian cultural heritage and identity will reflect negatively on them as parents. Indeed, there is a perception among these parents that Nigerian children who are living in the UK have lost both their African roots and identity “because their parents have never brought them home”. In other words, the children’s loss of their African heritage and/or the acquisition of un-African characteristics are construed as a sign of bad and irresponsible parenting. As a consequence, there is a risk to my parent participants’ image as good and responsible parents if their children were to lose their African/Nigerian cultural heritage.

“Most of the children brought up here [Nigeria] have manners compared with those in the UK. Most of these children [Nigerian children] in the UK have no idea what their identity is or what their heritage is. They have no idea where they come from because their parents have never brought them home. They are lost in UK and have become white men in black man’s skin” (Mrs Gbenga)

“it [the loss of African cultural heritage] affected several foreign students that came to this country [the UK] and their parents were not watchful because they fall into wrong gang, wrong group and all this things” (Mr Ola)

## 4.2 The Three Rs: ‘Right country’, ‘Right school’ and ‘Right time’

*‘Risk is a response to the unknown, the dangerous […] in the case of schooling, these are risks that have to be managed, ‘handled’ by the family*’ (Ball, 2006:272)

As already shown, my participants do not perceive the international education market as risk-free. Rather the evidence suggests that, as well as associating specific types of risks with the international education market, these parents have also expressed great concerns about them and are employing various risk management strategies in an attempt to reduce or avoid the risks in the international education market. One such strategy is the maintaining “close contact with [children]” through communications such as telephone and Skype, as well as frequent visitation from parents and children going home during holidays.

“Like I said children need to be monitored at all times. Though the school does keep an eye on them but I feel that *I need to be in touch with them at all times* so that they don’t *lose their root. I mean their African root*” (Mrs Bawa).

“We *maintain close contact* with them. It’s a worry really that I thought these folks don’t get influenced by the people they see every day” (Mr Akin)

“I sit here and I chat with them every time. Every once in 3 or 4 days […] I sit here and then plan for them what I think they should do for the week” (Mr Kome)

“Since they’ve been gone in September (9 months at the time of interview) I’ve gone over ten times...” (Mrs Chuka)

Another risk management strategy that parents employ is choosing a country where parents have relatives.

“… I’ve been very careful to place them strategically where my people have eyes, where my people can look after them, people who can see what they are doing and tell me, that they don’t do things right, and tell that this is not appropriate and tell them that they would let daddy know. We’ve arranged ourselves in such a manner that on very short notice we can reach out to them and find out exactly what is happening” (Mr Kome).

“My younger sister and brother live in the UK and that keeps him in check. It gives me assurance too that he would not forget his root, where he is from. He will not forget our tradition because he goes to their place on CV days and stay with them. He mustn’t do anything bad or join bad gangs because he knows his Aunty and Uncle will deal with even before I get there. I can ask them to go and check up him any time” (Ms Ambrose)

Through close and constant monitoring of children; whether by frequent phone calls, or regular visits from parents and/or updates from relatives who live in the country where children are schooling, parents believe they are able to ensure that their children remember their roots and do not become too westernised. Having children strategically placed so they can be checked upon at any time not only eases parents’ fear, it also gives the parents “assurance”. In the event that their children show any sign which suggests that they are beginning to be “influenced by the people they see every day” in the West, this can be nipped in the bud (before it becomes harmful) as parents and/or relatives can reach children at “very short notice”. Further analysis of the data shows that these parents mainly employ three key risk management strategies; namely, choosing the ‘right country’, the ‘right school’, at the ‘right time’.

## 4.2.1 Right Country

*‘Choice has a history within families and also, and crucially, it has a future. Choice is about getting from the present to a particular kind of class and social location in the future. It is about predication, imagination and assurance. This is why control is so important and also risk is ever present’* (Ball; 2006:273)

In an attempt to understand factors which influence parents’ choice of country in the international education market, parents were asked to explain the reasons for their choice. The interview transcripts reveal that all the parents had considered and rejected America. Interestingly, the data also reveals that both sets of parents; that is, those who send their children to the UK and those who send their children to Canada, only made reference to America when discussing their choice of country. One reason for this might be due to the fact that America is a popular holiday and education destination for Nigerians. Nonetheless, further analysis of the interview transcripts reveals that parents’ choice of country is influenced by their perception of how *conducive* and *compatible* they feel a particular country in the West is to African values and culture. Or, to put slightly differently, parents’ choice of country is influenced by the extent to which they feel its values and beliefs are similar or different to theirs.

The data shows that the main reason why these parents reject the US in favour of the UK and Canada is because they feel it is the least conducive to African culture and values in general, and in particular, Nigerian traditions of respect and reverence for one’s elders. For instance, while “Britain still keeps a lot of its conservativeness much more than you have elsewhere”(Mrs Bridge), America on the other is described by all of the parents as *“*too liberal”and *“*too lax for [their] liking”.

“America is definitely not where I would send my children to school at this impressionable age. They may go to America for their Masters [degree] if they wish but America is too lax for my liking, too liberal. We have visited America severally as a family, but it is not a place to leave young children. As I said, they are too liberal. Children get away with a lot in America” (Mrs Kuti)

“Living in America can do a lot of damage to a child even if they have their parents with them. I have relatives in America and I see for myself how their children behave. They don’t have respect at all for their elders. From experience I know that the UK is not as bad” (Mr Odili).

Like the country; or perhaps because of these parents’ perceptions of America, American schools are described as “more relaxed in a sort of laid back way” (Mr Akin) thus has“very little discipline”. Mrs Ayo’s comment that she would: “*probably* end up with a rock star” were she to send her son to America instead of the UK, identifies an assumption held by all of the parents, which is that the chances of their children losing their cultural heritage and identity and pick up un-African characteristics is much higher in America than in the UK or Canada.

As already mentioned, the UK and Canada are the two western countries chosen by my participants. Of the 25 parents (26 if the couples are considered as individual parents) who sent their primary and/or secondary school aged children to the West, four of them choose Canada while the other 21 chose the UK. Data from the interview transcripts indicate that the cost and the prospect of acquiring a Canadian passport were the two main reasons why these parents chose to send their children to Canada.

“The convincing thing about Canada was simply that fact again, 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 and then also comparatively it was cheaper than the US […] but the UK is still the most expensive” (Mr Akin)

Whilst this set of parents had rejected America because they too, like the rest of the group, felt it was the most *free* and *liberal* of the three countries, they did not subject Canada (or indeed the UK) to similar scrutiny. One explanation for this might be, having visited America on “several occasions”, these parents have come to believe they *know* America in terms of the potential risk it may pose to their children’s African identity. Conversely, they have no such experience of Canada. Parents’ lack of knowledge of the Canadian ways and culture may have made it appear a less risky place, hence their choice of Canada for their children’s education.

Still, given that “most parents don’t like sending their children to Canada because they don’t know their culture like they know British culture” (Nigerian agent 2), coupled with the fact that these parents did not express any specific concern about the suitability of UK in terms of how it may or may not impact on their children’s African/Nigerian heritage and identity, is quite revealing with regards to the significance of economic capital in the prevention and/or management of risk.

Since these parents have visited the UK several times, their silences on how suitable or unsuitable the UK with regard to the issue of risk is taken here as an indication that they perceive it as a less risky place. In light of this observation, one can infer that these parents’ decision to send their children to a place that they *do not know* is due to their limited economic capital. Having limited economic capital has meant, on the one hand, these parents are unable to protect their children from the ‘potential’ risks associated with educating their children in the West to the same extent as the parents who send their children to the UK. Subsequently, it is plausible to infer that this set of parents may inadvertently be exposing their children to more risk.

Alternatively, one can also infer that for the parents who send their children to Canada, the prospect of their children acquiring Canadian citizenship, which they perceive will in turn entitle their children to pay “home student fees” for their Masters degree; “even in America”, is seen as a very profitable return which outweighs any potential risks that the exposure of their children to Canadian culture may cause. To put differently, the *known*, that is, the guarantee of their children getting Canadian citizenship, overshadows the risk of the *unknown*; that is, the specific impact that Canadian culture and norms may have on their children’s African heritage and identity. This finding is similar to Findlay et al’s (2012:127) who also reported that the acquisition of ‘long-term residence and citizenship’ is a factor which influences British students’ choice of country when applying to international universities.

As already mentioned, while parents in the main perceive the West “too free” and thus unsuitable for a child of African heritage, most of the parents are of the opinion that the UK is more conservative than America. Importantly, unlike America, these parents believe that in the UK, “*children still know their place”.*

“Britain still keeps a lot of its conservativeness much more than you have else where. You see, the level of freedom for us, for children and all we see, like the American backgrounds, from movies some of us still thinks that Britain is the place” (Mrs Bridge).

“The UK is still conservative and that’s what I like about it. Children are taught respect and how to talk and children still know their place” (Mrs Kuti)

Also, besides“not having found anything better at home” as well as the “feeling that the Canadian education is still lacking one way or the other”(Mrs Ayo), evidence in the data suggests that the historical ties between Britain and Nigeria and parents’ own educational background are also some of the reasons why parents choose the UK.

“We decided to choose the UK because we were colonised by the British […]” (Mrs Ola).

“As Nigerians we have a tie with the British from the colonial days and that makes the UK more suitable than other countries because *we already use to their ways* […]” (Mrs Gbenga)

“The UK, I’m familiar with it. My husband and I both schooled here and I said I came at 13 […] I’m not familiar with any other part of Europe and I’m not familiar with the States. I’m familiar with the British education and Nigeria system is based on the British education anyway” (Mrs Adu)

“My husband schooled in the U.K. anyway. His A Levels and the university. He schooled in the U.K. so we are very familiar with the system (Mrs Ayo).

The historical tie between Nigeria and the UK is a major driving force in some of my participants’ decision to send their children to the UK. The shared history between the UK and Nigeria, as a result of colonisation, have not only made the UK *familiar* to my participants, but it appears to have also created a bond between them and the UK. Having been colonised by the British, my participants feel that they already know the British ways; that is, their culture and values. The comments below demonstrate this clearly.

“Yes, I see UK as part of us even though we are not under their rulership but they are not far away from us in terms of culture, in terms of respect and some other things […](laughs) United Kingdom is a kingdom. I’m a Yoruba man we operate in kingdoms so we have this traditional ways of doing things and they are not as free as United States where your child can arrest you” (Mr Oye)

These parents perception of the similarity between the British and Nigerian cultures not only eases their concern with regards to the loss of their children’s cultural heritage, it also engenders confidence in the British private education sector. Also, some of my participants were educated in the UK which means that they have knowledge of the product they are consuming. This knowledge simultaneously reassures them of the type of quality education that their children will be getting in the UK while guaranteeing them a good return for their investment in the British private education sector.

There is substantial evidence in the current study to show that parents’ judgement of risk and more importantly, acceptable risk, is also influenced by their social class. Throughout, there have been both explicit and tacit references to social status, particularly by the parents who send their children to the UK. Like most of the quotes already presented in this study, Mrs Chuka’s comment below exemplifies this,

“I have been to Canada for holidays twice; we visited Canada as a family a while back. It is a nice place but the much I know of their education, I won’t want to send my children there. It is a glorified Ghana, it is not the kind of place we will send our children to” (Mrs Chuka).

To send their children to a place which these parents perceive as second-rate; “*a glorified Ghana”,* poses a risk to their social reputation as a ‘well to do family’. As Mrs Chuka clearly states, Canada is not for people like them. Also, if we recall that one of the signs of quality education for this set of parents is exclusivity (chapter 3), then the fact that Canada is cheaper than the UK and therefore maybe more accessible to more Nigerian families might be seen as an unacceptable risk for these parents as Mrs Gbenga’s comment suggests: “*a place with too many blacks, mostly Nigerians, is not a place I want to send my children to*”. Moreover, as shall be shown in the next chapter, exclusivity is very important for these parents’ project of making their children into elites. To base their judgement of risk on how easily accessible a country is, or is not, to other Nigerians suggests that this set of parents;

**‘**know how to ‘read’ the future that fits them, which is made for them and for which they are made (by opposition to everything that the expression ‘this is not for the likes of us’ designates), through practical anticipations that grasp, at the very surface of the present, what unquestionably imposes itself as that which ‘has’ to be done or said (and which will retrospectively appear as the ‘only’ thing to do or say)” (Bourdieu, and Wacquant, 1992:130).

As mentioned earlier, in Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, this *knowledge* does not originate from consciousness as rational action theorists such as Goldthorpe (2007**)** might argue, but rather from the habitus. These parents’ international habitus in this instance (chapter 3). From Bourdieu’s perspective, individual’s and group’s decisions and choices are not arrived at through rational calculation; thus consciousness, but rather are structured and shaped by the habitus which is generated from the social fields. Although individuals’ actions and choices may *appear* to be informed by cognition, as Bonham (1999:30) aptly points out, ‘(i)t is in virtue of being socialised into common background of pre-reflective assumptions and orientations that agents have goals at all’. In other words, prior to being ‘thoughts’ (the conscious stage); the un-thought (the subconscious stage) have been systematically vetted by the habitus so that the *unthinkable* are removed while the *thinkable;* that is, our choices, goals and actions, are put forward as ‘thoughts’. To put more simply, habitus ‘delimit the thinkable and predetermine the thought’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:40).

The risk that their children may not return to Nigeria after their education is another issue that parents raised. However, the data shows that it is mainly the parents who send their children to the UK who expressed this concern. This finding is significant as it indicates the difference in both sets of parents’ aspirations for their children and thus their reason for consuming overseas schools in the first instance (discussed in more depth in chapter 5). Whilst the consumption of overseas schooling is meant to equip their children with the right amount of social, symbolic and cultural capital that would allow them to be competitive globally, these parents’ main aspiration is that their children will return to Nigeria and hold prominent positions in business and/or politics.

“I want him to spend time here (UK) and come back home. See how that society works and come back home and make our society work too” (Mrs Ayo)

“Who knows, he would one day become the president of Nigeria. If that happens he would be able to use all he has learnt in England in Nigeria to make it better” (Mrs Gbenga)

“I will be happy to let them go, but still trying to tell them that how will this improve your home country, Nigeria?” – (Mrs Tosin)

“I’m a believer in improving Nigeria. We have to improve Nigeria so we can’t give them all this education and leave them somewhere” (Mrs Chuka)

It is clear from the quotes above that, not to return home would amount to social and financial loss. With regards to social loss, it is apparent that these parents see their children as social messiahs, the panacea to all the woes in Nigeria. Armed with the appropriate knowledge, skills and dispositions, these parents hope that their children will be able to transform Nigeria to the type of country they wish it to be. Mrs Chuka’s comment that “*we can’t give them all this education and leave them somewhere”* indicates a waste of their investment should their children not return home after their education overseas. Conversely, on the rare occasion that the parents who send their children to Canada comment on the possibility of their children not returning home, they are neither perturbed nor overly concerned by it.

"It won’t surprise me if they (children) turn around and decided to stay there, to say daddy it is nice you know staying out here we want to remain here and stay back here as citizens of this great country [Canada] and come home once in a while to contribute towards the development and growth of our own country (Mr Kome)

# **4.2.2 Gender and religion as structuring factors**

*‘A key feature of risk in the “risk society” is the meshing of risk, responsibility and prudent choice’* (Kemsall, 2002:1 in Ball, 2006:265)

Whilst all the parents expressed their concern about the risk of losing African culture and values, the data indicates that for some of the parents, this loss has a more detrimental effect on girls.

“The culture aspect is neither here nor there but this is also important especially for a girl […] For me personally, in north in Hausa, the man marries the girl […] I mean whether one likes it or not I marry you, ... not that women are less superior or whatever but that is it. Most of the marriages in Africa, 97 to 98 per cent the woman move to the husbands’ house so what are we saying? […] you are packing your things away from your home to your husband’s” (Mr Bala).

Cultural beliefs with regards to gender construction seems to be at the fore here. Implicit in the comment is the idea that culture takes precedence over individuals’ preferences or class values. Mr Bala’s comment: “add to the fact that as a Muslim woman, she is expected to be submissive and obey her husband. She can’t do whatever she likes without consulting her husband first” also adds a religious dimension with regards to parents’ perception of the importance of preserving cultural values in girls.This was evidenced in Mr Abdu’s choice of country for his sons and daughter. Although Mr Abdu described the UK education system as the “best in the world” and thus “would have preferred all of them [children] to be in the UK actually”, he choose to send his daughter to Saudi Arabia while his sons were sent to the UK.

“As a lady, as a girl I was particular and bit concerned about releasing her to go to Europe, England or London. I found myself very very concerned, because she had an admission to go to A’level in London and I was a bit reluctant, luckily for me I got introduced to this university [in Saudi]” (Mr Abdu)

By choosing a country which he sees as reflecting both his religious and cultural beliefs, Mr Abdu was able to secure his daughter’s religious and cultural identities whilst still giving her an education which he considered to be of a better quality than those obtainable in Nigeria. By the same token, his cultural and religious beliefs became an obstacle to his daughter receiving the “best education in the world”. However, the security that Saudi Arabia gives his daughter in terms of safeguarding her religious and cultural identities seems to outweigh the benefits of having a ‘world-class’ education. Here, we see that gender determines not only the place a child is educated but also the ‘quality’ of education they receive. However, to do otherwise, that is, send his daughter to a place which might lead to her losing her cultural heritage and identity is perceived by Mr Abdu as an unacceptable risk.

Cultural construction of gender also appears to influence parents’ decision on which child to invest in the international education market. As she explained, Ms Ambrose is “a single mother so […] can’t really afford to have both of” her children in the UK “even though that would be the ideal scenario”. Yet, despite the fact that her son is the younger of her two children, and even though she acknowledges that her daughter will be “losing out” if she remains in Nigeria, Ms Ambrose chose to send her son to the UK while her daughter remained in Nigeria.

As her comment below suggests, this decision is based on the construction of boys as having and playing a more important role in the traditional African family than girls. In this sense, there is some risk attached to investing in a girl especially in a situation where parents are constrained by finance. On the other hand, an investment in her son will yield the best return, since as the “head of the family” he is the one that will be responsible; financially and otherwise, for the family in the future. Consequently, the decision to send her son instead of her daughter, to the UK where he will receive the “best quality of education money can buy” is influenced by her perception of a good return for her investment which itself has been shaped by her cultural beliefs and values.

“Don’t forget he is my only son so even though he is younger than his sister, he is the man of the family. He will be the head of the family. So it is very crucial that he is well educated, well trained as a proper gentleman”.

Throughout, the data in relation to the parents’ perception of the role and place of gender has shown that whilst they are keen to send their children overseas, this decision is influenced by traditional Nigerian values. Consequently, even though these parents might have acquired international habitus, when their cultural and religious values and beliefs are at stake, it is the national/traditional habitus that comes to the fore. Adding to the growing body of evidence that gender is a determining factor when it comes to access to education as well as the level of education one can attain in Nigeria (Institute of Education, 2011), the finding from my study has also shown that cultural influences on the education of boys and girls is not limited to the rural poor as it is generally assumed in education studies in Nigeria (Sibbons et al. 2006 cited in Theobald et al, 2007). Significantly, though, this finding has also shown that culture (relating specifically to tradition and/or religion) which is a variable that is not necessarily accommodated in Bourdieu’s frame, is not superseded by social class but rather a constituted variable in its own right, therefore warranting equal focus in the analysis of social practices.

What has been made very clear throughout is that the notion of maximum return for investment is a major influencing factor when it comes to parents’ decision to invest in the international education market. Mrs Osun’s comment that, while she would have loved to send all her five children to Ghana for their education, her limited economic capital meant she had to send the child that she believed would yield the most return for her investment. In this case, the deciding factor was neither birth position nor gender but rather on the “most brilliant of all (her) five children”. The above analysis in terms of the impact of factors such gender, religion and cost on my participants’ perception of risk supports the thesis that ‘risks’ are […] the outcome of socio-cultural processes’ (Lupton, 1999:2).

## 4.3 Right School

It is important to make the point that the ‘*parents’* referred to in this section of the chapter are those who send their children to UK based private boarding schools. This is because, of the two sets of parents (those who send their children to Canada and the UK), only the parents who send their children to the UK offered detailed explanations with regards to factors which influenced their school choice decisions in the international education market. For those parents who sent their children to private boarding schools in Canada, school choice was exclusively based on agents’ recommendations. The fact that none of these parents had visited Canada prior to sending their children there may account for their lack of detailed responses to this particular question.

Evidence from the current study suggests that recommendations from friends and relatives are one of the factors which influence parents’ school choice decisions. Other factors include the type of ‘A’ level curriculum (the International Baccalaureate or traditional A level) a school offers and the schools’ reputation.

Most of our friends send their children there but we did our own investigation (Mrs Chuka).

“most of our family friends, relatives already have children in the school and some of their children have already finished schooling here. So they give us information about the school and we know trust them” (Mrs Ola).

In the main, parents base a school’s reputation on three factors. These are its academic performance, history and type of families that send their children there.

“Hence for me the school records, past O-levels results, A-level results in universities, yeah!” (Mrs Chuka)

“I mean like Charter House they have 23-football pitch and the FA Cup was actually a Charter House initiative. So you know, there is that. It’s got an excellent reputation…” (Mrs Adu)

“These rich Nigerians are very competitive […] and try to copy each other so I know that if I tell them that this minister or that governor or that senator has their children in Kings, Harrow or Royal Hospital or that school they would want to send their children there because they know that the reputation of the school must be high for these calibre of people to send their children there” (Nigerian agent 3)

Nevertheless, a thorough analysis of the data shows that discipline is the most influencing factor when it comes to parents’ school choice decision in the international education market. Indeed, there is a sense among these parents that the aforementioned factors are secondary. As Mrs Philips explains, they are “bonuses” which parents “don’t worry too much if they are not there”. The quote below shows that despite the fact that the first school she sent her daughter to was “very good in academic aspect”, the lack of discipline resulted in Mrs Philips taking her daughter to another school.

“Though when she finished primary school here [Nigeria] we sent her to a school in England, it was called Holy Rosary in Devon and she was there for two years. She started there Year 7. She went there. The school was *very good in academic aspect* but discipline aspect they lack discipline because they allow the students to do whatever they want. It was excess, over. You know, like they go into town, they do all that things that we didn’t think it was right for 11 years old child to be doing you know. So we decided to send her to this school Whitehouse” (Mrs Philips)

The importance of discipline is further highlighted by Mrs Tosin’s comment below.

“Discipline discipline is important yeah! Good academic records, we will look at it, fine, but how is the school discipline? Can the student just sign out as if they are going, nobody calls me that this is the situation, you know, and I think with me, I think by the time my son had finished the school kind of realised that they had to bend a little to understand the kind of control some of we Nigerians want for our children, you understand what I am trying to say? They understood that yes Nigerian parent in “quote” is bothered about the fact that yes though she is sixteen she is not supposed to drink alcohol, you understand what am trying to say, though she is not supposed to wear mini skirt” (Mrs Tosin)

Whilst parents do send their children to schools that may not be the best academically or ones that do not have children from prominent Nigerian families, they do not “compromise on discipline” because “otherwise you lose the child” (Mrs Philips). As already discussed, the loss of African identity and values has both personal and social consequences. Chapter 5 will also show that, because the African identity plays an integral part in the formation of the type of identity these parents are trying to acquire for their children, its loss may not only have social implications but economic implications as well.

Throughout, the data shows that there is a preference for faith schools; Christian schools to be more precise. Most of these parents describe themselves as Christians, which might explain this bias.

“We are Catholics, I wanted one that has spiritual bias, you know, that will keep him along those lines, you know, someone who is God fearing, someone who is considerate, someone who will have good manners” (Mrs Amechi)

“I must also put that I’m a Christian and I believe strongly that with my Christian doctrine and I do believe that I, with help of God, put enough into him” (Mrs Ayo)

“So what is important to me is a school where they still instil the godly values into the children, was the first number one thing I wanted. Where they will make sure they go to church, where they will make sure they pray and where they will teach them about God” (Mrs Chuka).

The fact that non-Catholic parents also choose Catholic schools however, suggests that it is parents’ perception of faith school with regards to discipline rather than the school’s denomination that is influencing school choice here.

“But I must add that the school that our sons are in is a Christian school and that’s one thing parents should also be aware of when sending their children to the UK […]. For example, for my daughter when she turns 13, I am looking for a good Catholic school because they are even much stricter in terms of discipline. That’s what I have been told by a friend who has a daughter in a catholic school in the UK” (Mrs Bawa)

“The school they are in is a catholic school, even though I’m not catholic but I thought they are the ones that instil those things. I decided to settle for this school, more expensive than the other ones that probably I could have sent them to but it was worth it” (Mrs Chuka)

There is a sense throughout that faith schools were chosen because they espouse to “stricter” discipline practices and Christian values, which these parents feel are necessary if their children are to retain their African identity and values in a liberal society like the UK. Consequently, these parents perceive faith schools as the most suitable environment for educating Nigerian children in situations where they do not have their family and/or indigenous community, which might act as a reminder and enforcer of their cultural values and beliefs. Once again, it appears that when underpinned by religion, the parents in this study think highly of, and have confidence in, a school’s practice with regards to discipline and values. In other words, for these parents, a school’s religious status acts as an insurance policy which guarantees the retention of the African identity and values while instilling values and beliefs that are not only appropriate but also compliment African values at the same time.

## 4.4 Righttime

*“If you are sending your child to a different country, you want to have him have his culture especially also religion [...] I want to send my children when I know that my son or daughter have developed and have their own culture here before going there so that his culture would not be obstructed because of education. It is important that they have their culture and religion. It is more important than education for me personally”* (Mr Bala)

As indicated in the quote above, choosing the right country and the right school will only be effective as a risk management strategy if parents have instilled African values and culture in their children in the first place. Apart from stressing the importance of instilling their cultural beliefs and values in their children and that it is indeed*“more important than education”*, the quote also suggests that this needed to be done before a child leaves Nigeria.

Implicit in the language of the participants is the supposition that African/Nigerian cultural values and beliefs (the core ingredients in the formation of the African/Nigerian identity) cannot be acquired; at least not successfully, outside the continent. Hence, why parents want their children to “experience a bit of culture in Nigeria to a certain level before coming abroad” (Mrs Seiye). The implication of the latter point is that children born to Nigerian/African parents outside the continent may never acquire and/or know their cultural values and beliefs.

In-depth analysis of the data reveals that the right time is determined by various factors. For example, my participants believe that it is the right time to send their children to study overseas when they have “developed and have [acquired] their own culture”. Or when children “have accumulated enough knowledge” about their culture. Besides ensuring that children have adequate exposure to, and experience of, their native culture and cultural practices, sending children overseas at the right time also means that they would have acquired enough cultural values and beliefs to sustain and preserve their African/Nigerian identity. Similarly, acquiring their culture before leaving for overseas also ensures that they do not leave Nigeria *empty* and thus run the risk of been “*filled with everything else but their own culture*”, which, as Mr Akpan points out, is how one might “*end up losing [ones’] child”*. Consequently, the *right time*, as a risk management strategy is these parents’ way of ensuring that their children are “grounded in”, and connected to, their African root and heritage prior to going overseas.

“But emm, we don’t want to put them abroad at an early age for one simple reason we want to put a lot of our culture into them [...] so I kept him back all these while (Mrs Ayo)

“We kept them here (Nigeria) until we felt they are old enough to go. When they have accumulated enough knowledge of our culture before we can let them leave for England. We wanted to make learn about their own culture first [...] because we know that if they leave without them then they can easily be corrupted, they will be filled with everything else but their own culture and that’s how you end up losing them” (Mr Akpan)

“Some people that we know send their children very early. we decided that we won’t do that so we held them back for a bit longer before sending them. We felt that they needed to learn our ways very well so when they are there (UK), they won’t forget that they are Africans” (Mrs Tosin).

The frequent use of words like ‘developed’, ‘knowledge’, ‘accumulate’, ‘learn’ as well as phrases such as “a certain level”may give the impression that parents have certain ways of ascertaining whether or not their children have accumulated the right amount of culture and cultural practices. The data however, shows that my parent participants’ perception of the right time is predominantly determined by, and linked to, the child’s age. Parents’ explanations that children are “kept back” because they are “*very young”* or are allowed to leave because they are “*old enough”* are clear indications of this. The data also show that children are generally described as ‘very young’, ‘impressionable’ or ‘immature’ when they are between 10-12 years and ‘old enough’, ‘matured’ when they are 13 years and above. Parents’ description of their 10 and 12 year olds as “impressionable” and “immature” suggests that they perceived children to be more susceptible to the risks posed by western culture and values at these ages. As a result, the data shows that only one of the parents had sent her son aged 9 and this is was mainly because his older siblings were already in the UK.

There is little evidence in the study which indicates that cost is one of the reasons why some parents do not send their children overseas until they are sixteen or seventeen years old. A financial benefit of sending children at the ages of sixteen and/or seventeen to UK-based British private boarding schools is that children spend two instead of 6 years before going on to university. On the other hand however, there is substantial evidence in the current study which shows that the main reason why the majority of the parents do not send their children overseas until they are in their early to mid-teens (13 to 16 years) is because they want their children to be “more grounded in Nigerian culture”;

“The older two were meant to come at *12* before we changed our mind and decided that we wanted our son to be more grounded in Nigerian culture before bringing him” (Mrs Adu)

“We wanted to make such that they know our ways. As you probably know, our ways are different from the Oyinbo (white person) ways. We have very different cultures. If we send them when they are still *very young*, they will end up not knowing our culture” (Mrs Okwu)

Evidence from the data shows that, in trying to keep children back until such a time when they feel that their children have acquired enough cultural values and practices, parents may inadvertently be risking their children’s academic success.

My first son did only one year before going to do his A levels and I found out that he couldn’t catch up quickly. He didn’t finish the GCSE syllabus. He was supposed to do 2 years for GCSE first that was why I moved the second one quickly and my last child quickly so that they don’t experience what he went through (Mrs Seiye)

In my experience I find out that children usually fail if they go in the middle of their GCSE. They are bound to get poor grades and I warn parents of this danger. Usually, I tell them that their children need to be in the school for a year or more if they want them to do well in GCSE or A Levels and get admission to one of the Russell group Universities (1 Nigerian agent - Nigeria).

Implicit in parents’ and agents’ narratives of the ‘right time’, is the counter-narratives of the ‘wrong time’. That is, there is also a ‘wrong time’ to send children overseas for their education. As the quotes indicate, the consequences for the sending children overseas at the wrong time can be dire. Apart from the anxiety that this causes children as they struggle to “adjust” and “understand” the new system, there is the danger of academic failure which may impact on their chances of going to “one of the Russell group Universities”. In sum, while sending one’s child overseas at the ‘right time’ may prevent them from losing their cultural heritage and identity, going overseas at the ‘wrong time’ on the other hand, may result in academic failure. Subsequently, the onus is on parents to decide the type of risk they are willing to expose their children to since their children will be exposed to some kind of risk whether they leave at the ‘right time’ or the ‘wrong time’.

Yet avoiding the wrong time is not as easy as one might first think. For example, parents are advised by agents against sending children “*in the middle of their GCSE”* or A’level. Parents are actually advised by agents to make sure that their children are already in the school “at least one year before” they have to sit for crucial exams like the GCSE or ‘A’ Levels. Herein lies the dilemma. If a child is sent a year before (s)he is meant to begin their A levels (aged 16), this puts them right in the middle of GCSE year. This in turn increases the likelihood of getting poor GCSE grades, which in turn might impact on their chances of getting into one of the top universities in the UK. In light of this, it appears that irrespective of the stage in which children are entering a school (GCSE or A Levels), the best way to avoid academic failure is to make sure that children complete the entire syllabus of that stage.

Having said that, one might argue that the ideal age to send children to the UK seems to be 13 and 14 years old. As well as ensuring that children have gained some exposure and understanding of their native culture, leaving at age 13 or 14 gives children enough time to get used to the new system. Crucially, leaving at these ages ensure that children are able to experience and complete both the GCSE and A’ Level syllabi, thus strengthening and increasing their chances of getting into a university of their choice. That said, caution should be taken when giving such directives as it invariably constructs risk as calculable while simultaneously making parents culpable (Dean, 1999).

## 4.5 Risk Management: A ‘rational’act?

*‘The cognitive structures which social agents implement in their practical knowledge of the social world are internalised, ‘embodied’ social structures. The practical knowledge of the social world that is presupposed by ‘reasonable’ behaviour within it implements classificatory schemes […], historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes […] and which function below the level of consciousness and discourse’* (Bourdieu, 1984:468)

Implicit in the discourse of risk is the idea that individuals are rational and active choosers who therefore are not only capable of avoiding risk, but are held culpable for exposing themselves or in the case of education, their children to calculable and avoidable risk. In other words, inherent in the discourse; particularly neo-liberal conceptualisation of risk, are the notions of agency and rationality. Such conceptualisation bears some semblance with the Rational Action Theory (RAT) (Jenkins, 1992; Calhoun, 1993; Bonham 1999, Adams, 2006, Goldthorpe, 2007) paradigm of social action. RAT posits that that individuals’ decisions;

‘are arrived at via the rational calculation of risks, benefits and the possibilities of success and failure within a framework of ends or goals and an awareness of competition’ (Ball, 2003:16).

As already shown, the sense that parents are aware of the ‘possibility of wrong or unsuccessful choice-making in the education market place’ (Ball, 2006:266) is palpable throughout. Even more palpable is a very strong belief among these parents that it is their responsibility to manage, minimise and/or avoid the risks that their children might be exposed to in the international education market. One can also infer that parents’ apparent awareness of some of the risks in the international education market and the choices available to them, as well as their assiduous deliberation of the pros and cons of the different choices coupled with their willingness to employ different risk management strategies, ‘presupposes agency, choice, calculation and responsibility’ (Elliott, 2002:298).

Furthermore, the data show that parents’ decision to send their children to the UK instead of Canada for example, is partly influenced by their observation of where people from their social circle are sending their children.

“You have different groups [...] am just talking about the people I know from where I am, my circle and all that, a lot of people are leaving earlier than that” (Mrs Amechi)

“Lot of their contemporaries too who left same schools also went to that place and for that reason we took them there” (Mrs Bridge)

Marketisation of education has also meant that parents are faced with multiple choices. It has also introduced an element of risk as well. Consequently, as the quotes above indicate, parents are looking to ‘other features of the social, spatial or temporal situation that will give them a focus for subsequent actions’; which in this case, is what people in their “circle” are doing (Bridge, 2001:211). When taken together, these points not only demonstrate how parents’ decisions and choices are constructed within the framework of ends or goals (Ball, 2003) they also indicate the way in which parents’ reflexively process risks; that is, ‘identification, assessment and management’ (Crook, 1999:175). The presence of goals and employment of different forms of risk management strategies arguably indicate that the risk management process is a rational and conscious process. That is to say, the information which parents ‘draw upon in developing their logics of risk’ emanates from cognition (Lupton, 1999:3).

Crucial to the Rational Action Theory (RAT) thesis is the idea of the rational and ‘conscious social actor engaging in deliberate calculative strategies’ (Scott, 2000:3). Also implied in the RAT framework is notion that modernity has produced rational and reflexive individuals who have weak ties with, and are therefore no longer dependent on and/or influenced by, external structures such as class, religion, custom and so on (Coleman, 1990; Stone, 2005; Whitford, 2002; Brooks and Wee, 2008).

Opposing the broad RAT position, Bourdieu has argued that the cognitive structure, that is, the human brain from which these so-called ‘rational’ thoughts/actions emanate from is *socially bounded, socially structured*’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126 my emphasis). In other words, ‘[t]he individual is always, whether he likes it or not, trapped […] *within the limits of the system of categories he owes his upbringing and training’* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126 my emphasis). Importantly, it is these ‘system[s] of categories’ in their incorporated and embodied state and operating as the habitus that ‘provide the cognitive and motivating structures through which [individuals] experience the world and organise their actions’ (Scott, 2006:169). Put differently, the habitus does not only ‘engender[s] aspirations and practices objectively compatible with the objective requirements’ (Bourdieu, 1977:77), it also ‘generates strategies which can be objectively consistent with the objective interests of their authors without having been expressly designed to that end’ (Bourdieu, 1993:76).

Further, as Stone argues, RAT’s future-focused emphasis on utility maximisation is undermined by ‘the conditionings and exercises from the past [that] have already predisposed the agent to do certain things as ‘*second nature’*, with ease, without pause for reflection’ (Stone, 2005:23 original emphasis). Contrary to RAT’s postulations, traditional structures and social relations continue to be influential precisely because they are embedded in, and embodied by, individuals before they come to make decisions and long before they find themselves in situations that demand a decision (Bourdieu, 1977).

Throughout this thesis, evidence has been presented to support the argument that, contrary to RAT approaches, elite Nigerian parents’ desires to send their children overseas for their education, their country and school of choice as well as the strategies employed to minimise the perceived risk in the international education market are products of their habitus. It also presents evidence to show how that their habitus encompasses deep-seated experiences of colonisation and class, as well as elements of traditional African culture, such as assumptions about gender construction and the place of children in society.

For example, certain country destinations, like America, are automatically rejected by many as ‘unsuitable’ for an African child while countries like the UK, because of the continuing colonial legacy, are perceived as the ‘only’ feasible choice. At the same time, the internalisation of class structures or hierarchies of wealth has meant that certain countries such as Canada and Ghana ‘are excluded […] without examination, as unthinkable’ by the elite parents because of their lower school fees but embraced by less wealthy parents, such as Mrs Osun and those who sent their children to Canada. In the case of the latter, it could be argued that they, ‘make virtue of necessity […] and come to love the inevitable’ (Bourdieu, 1977:77).

As already noted, Bourdieu does not make any allowance for factors such as religion, gender and race in his theory of social practice. This might be due to the fact that Bourdieu’s theory was designed for the analysis of the social group rather than the individual, hence why it is not suitable for the analysis of individual differences like religion within the social field/class (Warde, 1996). Still the idea of habitus as internalised social norms helps to explain the cultural and religious constraints evidenced in Mr Abdu’s and Ms Ambrose’s accounts. Bonham, (1999:130) explains that the doxa (developed in the field, and which has been defined as a ‘set of fundamental beliefs which does not even need to be asserted in the form of an explicit, self-conscious dogma’ [Bourdieu 2000:16 in Deer, 2008]), provides ‘a constitutive account of cultural constraint without the traditional conception of regulative rules or internalised norms’. That is to say, the concept of habitus provides an explanation for this seemingly passive adherence to what some might describe as out-dated cultural practices.

Ms Ambrose’s decision to invest in her son because he is the head of the family and Mr Abdu’s decision to send his daughter to Saudi Arabia even though he felt that she would not be getting similar quality of education like her siblings in the UK illustrate Douglas’ (1992:12) point that individuals’ perception of risk and indeed the risk they choose to concern themselves with, is determined by the ‘social forms in which those individuals construct their understanding of the world and themselves’ rather than their cognition. These parents’ unwillingness to trade-off their traditional values for seemingly better options and opportunities supports Bourdieu’s argument that ‘rationality’ is limitation by the habitus because it is ‘socially bounded’ ((Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:126).

These parents’ preference for schools with predominately white children has also revealed the structuring element of class and ‘colonial’ habituses. The significance of this racially and culturally informed choosing will be critically analysed in the next chapter, where it will be discussed in relation to, and in the context of, the formation of elite identify formation. It is worth noting here though that, for a group who claim that culture is “more important than education”.A group for whom the retention and preservation of their children’s cultural identity and heritage seem very important and therefore strategically places its children in countries where they have relatives in order to keep their children anchored and close to their cultural roots. It is both interesting and puzzling that they do not want to send their children to schools with a large proportion of black pupils, especially Nigerians. Research in the West has shown that, usually, parents - particularly affluent parents - tend to choose elite schools that are representative of their own ethnicity (see Saporito, and Lareau, 1999 & Weenink, 2008).

If it seems to be *rational* and *logical* for Nigerian parents to choose schools with a more varied ethnic and cultural mix, it follows that it may seem irrational and illogical to do the opposite – except, of course, if we take into account these parents’ ‘colonial’ habitus. As already shown in the study, one of the main reasons for, and functions of, the consumption of overseas schools is class/group distinction. In this case therefore, what might be at risk here is the collective image of this group as Nigerian elites. Douglas (1992:34) asserts that ‘increased risk […] leads to social closure’ and ‘the strengthening of the ‘lines of social division in a community’. Parents frequently use terms and phrases such as ‘elite’, ‘family names’and *“*well knownfamilies*”* when describing themselves and people “from [their] circle and “low class”, “money miss road” (a colloquial term used by Nigerians to describe the nouveau riche or as Mrs Gbenga describes it, “those with money but no class” when describing those from other social classes. Thus indicating that risk strategies are used to demarcate as well as communicate class boundaries (Douglas, 1992).

In the context of risk, the consumption of schools or places that are not accessible to many blacks and Nigerians or to use a Bourdieusian term, ‘imitators’ is a mechanism for avoiding ‘Others’ that ‘may pose a threat to the integrity of the […] symbolic body of the community’ or social group that these parents belonged or perceive to belong to (Lupton, 1999:3). Bourdieu’s (1993:115) assertion that the ‘simplest strategy’ for defending a group’s rarity; that is, its status, is by ‘shunning works [or places/spaces] that have become popularised, devalued and disqualified’ has been aptly exemplified by these parents’ manner of choosing and perception of risk. Having large amounts of economic capital has meant this set of parents are able choose a country and the type of schools that they believe will accentuate their social status while enabling them to protect their children from the perceived risks associated with educating children of African heritage in the West.

Historically, black or blackness has been constructed as the antithesis of white or whiteness (Fanon, 1967/2008; Du Bois, 2007). Fanon (1967/2008:146) goes as far as saying that ‘the archetype of the lowest values is represented by the negro [black]’. In other words, it is *risky* being Black (Lacy, 2007; Choules, 2006; Crespo-Sancho, 2012). Accordingly, Fanon (2008:166) argues that the colonised wants to be able to flee his/her ‘blackness’. He goes on to assert that the ‘*colonial condition’*; that is, the internalisation of inferiority complex has meant ‘the other (the coloniser/West) alone can give him (the colonised/Blacks) worth’ (Fanon, 1967/2008:119). From Fanon’s perspective, the alignment and association with white upper-middle classes confers “social estimation of honour” (Weber, 1930/1978:89 in Holme, 2002:180) on this group of black Nigerian parents. Thus validating their collective identity as the established class, whilst simultaneously reducing the perceived risk of status devaluation, which these parents believe using similar places as other Nigerian class factions might cause.

However, taking heed from Sayer (2005:123) who implores us not to ‘ignore the hierarchically structured nature of the competitions and struggles of the social [global] field’ when analysing individuals’ decisions, it can also be inferred that the preference for predominantly white schools is motivated by these parents’ desire to demonstrate that they are equal; particularly financially, to their white counterparts. In other words, this racially informed choice can be read as a demonstration of equality and/or respectability. The idea that these parents want to prove themselves ‘*at all costs’* (Fanon, 1967/2008:3 my emphasis), which includes strategies such as placing their children away from places which are predominantly composed of blacks or Nigerians becomes the Achilles’ heel in the respectability and equality argument. That is to say, the ease and apparent willingness of these parents to be derogatory to their kind, racially speaking, weakens the equality/respectability argument.

My participants’ desperation to prove their worth ‘at whatever cost’ means that this racially and ethnically informed choice is a search for, and validation of, this group’s collective identity; itself based on, and corroborated by, western values. At worst, my participants’ racially (and culturally, and status-oriented) driven school choice, is an imitation of the superior ‘Other’ (Ekeh, 1975). Still, the dialectic between black/white, inferior/superior and imitation/equality can be overcome, if we understand this act as parents *identifying* (denoting equality) with their white counterparts rather than *imitating* (which denotes inferiority) them (Reich cited in Fanon, 1967/2008:xxvii my emphasis).

## 4.6 Conclusion

*‘[Risks] only exist in terms of the […] knowledge about them. They can be changed, magnified, dramatized or minimised within knowledge, and to that extent they are particularly open to social definition and construction’* (Beck, 1992:23)

Adopting a socio-cultural analysis of risk, this chapter has identified and critically analysed the type of risk the parents in my study associate with educating their children in the West. It was argued that the loss of their children’s African heritage and identity is my participants’ main concern with regards to educating their primary and/or secondary school aged children in the West. The chapter also identified and critically examines the three main forms of risk management strategies employed by my participants to avoid and/or minimise this loss. The parents in my study primarily chose a country depending on their perception of the extent to which its culture and values are perceived to be similar to African cultures and values. The chapter argues that the parents who send their children to the UK perceive religious schools as more conducive for children since they are thought to espouse to similar values and beliefs as these parents.

The use of socio-cultural theory of risk allowed for an exploration of how factors such as gender, religion and social class influence these parents perception of risk and ‘good’ return for their financial investment. The chapter also reveals that some parents perceived countries that are easily accessible by most Nigerians as risky place for education investment. Consequently, the chapter argued that as well as being a mechanism for accentuating class boundaries, risk management strategies are also ways by which the more affluent parents in my study try to communicate their social status. More significantly, by adopting a socio-cultural analysis, the chapter was able to show that when parents’ cultural and religious beliefs are at stake, it is national/traditional habitus rather than their international habitus that comes to the fore. Thus, the chapter argues that ethnicity, gender and religion are important variables which should be analysed in their own right rather than subsumed within the discourse of class.

# Chapter 5

# The making of the Nigerian ‘elite’ Child

Several studies have explored the role of private boarding schools in the formation of elite identity in the West (Scott, 1991; Boyd, 1973; Bourdieu, 1996; Cookson and Persell, 1985). Research has shown that the attendance of the right school is crucial in the formation of elite identity as it ensures that ‘individuals are socialised to proper rituals of deference and decorum, and from which they receive the appropriate insignias and certifications’ (Williams, 1989:408). In his study of French elite schools, Bourdieu (1996) was able to show that schools like the Ecole des Roches play a dominant role in both the formation and maintenance of elite identity. Bourdieu (1996:79) describes the elite school as a social paradise whose main aim is to *separate* children from bourgeois families from ‘common, ordinary students’. Bourdieu argues that elite schools, through their ‘cultural activities’, ‘pedagogical action’ and social segmentation, are able to confer elite status on their entrants (Bourdieu, 1996:79).

Whilst the transformative capability of education has been weakened to an extent by democratisation, research suggests that elite private schools such as Eton and Harrow in the UK and the Ecole des Roches in France still command a worldwide recognition and prestige simply because their exclusivity remains preserved (Bourdieu, 1984, Walford, 2009). Unfortunately the same cannot be said for Nigeria where once prestigious (at least in Nigeria and Africa) schools and colleges such as King’s College, Lagos, St Andrew’s College Oyo and Methodist High School, Uzuakoli, (Bassey, 1999) have all experienced a reduction in elite status due partly to education expansion and partly to decrease in exclusivity practices. Consequently, Nigerian elites have come to rely on the international education market for the maintenance and/or acquisition of the status of elite. My parents participants’ reliance on foreign elite private schools for the (re)production and/or formation of elite identity has necessitated a move beyond ‘Bourdieu’s implicit and explicit methodological nationalism’ (Johnson, 2013:178). That is to say, Bourdieu assumes wrongly that the field of struggle is contained within the nation state (Johnson, 2013; Kenway and Koh, 2013).

In “The State Nobility”, it is very clear that the elite schools Bourdieu (1996) studied ‘were national to the core’ (Kenway and Koh, 2013b:287). As a consequence, the formation and maintenance of elite identity and reproduction; that is, the ‘state nobility’, is understood as primarily the role of national (local) elite schools. In problematizing Bourdieu’s work, however, Kenway and Koh (2013b:287) in their research examining the role of elite schools in the formation and acquisition of elite identity in Singapore, found that whilst elite schools in Singapore are more international than national, they are primarily the site for the reproduction and formation of the Singaporean elite class.

More importantly, Bourdieu’s (1996) analysis does not give recognition to the role of foreign deportment and accent in the formation and maintenance of local elites. In other words, ‘[Bourdieu] did not conceive of fields that extend beyond the nation state or capitals with exchange value around the world’. Neither did he ‘conceive of class or class relations that were not contained within national field of power’ (Kenway and Koh, 2013b:287). However, as Kenway and Koh (2013b:287) perceptively note, ‘capitals with the greatest exchange rate’ in a particular society’s field of power are not necessarily found in that society alone’. Therefore, maintaining a rigid focus that does not account for the global context where certain ‘western deportment’ is advantageous has implications when studying non-western societies like Nigeria.

That said, the central argument in Bourdieu’s thesis, that is, elite private schools as the site of (re)production and/or formation of elite identity is very relevant and central to the argument in this chapter. With respect to identity formation, the stance taken here is that identities are ‘a form of cultural capital that are worked and […] inhabited’ as well as being a kind of ‘reflective and interpretative agency’ (Skeggs, 2004:29), which, when activated, allows individuals to acquire ‘[a] multiplicity of self-definitions’ (Mishler, 1999:157), which, in turn, enables a easier movement between cultural and racial boundaries (Lacy, 2004).

One of the aims of this chapter is to critically examine one of the key social functions of elite private boarding schools; the formation of elite identity. There are three distinct, but inter-connected parts in this chapter. The first part provides an overview of some of the key differences discussed thus far in this study between theparents who send their children to Canada and those who send their children to UK for education. How these differences both relate to, and reflect the difference in the parents’ post-secondary aspiration for their children is also discussed.

The second part of the chapter discusses the four ‘strategies of social distinctions’ (Hatcher, 1998:29); namely ‘Othering’; ‘bodily transformation’; ‘prolonged stay/contact’, and ‘British accent’, employed by the elite parents in the making of the contemporary Nigerian elite child. It is important to mention at this juncture that the chapter will only present parents’ perception of these concepts rather than engage in an in-depth historical analysis of the origins British accent. The chapter will not engage with linguistic analysis with regards to the formation and origins of the different types of British accent. Rather, the aim is to critically examine how the elite parents in this study are able to transform their children into (trans)national elites using the four strategies of social distinctions mentioned above; all of which take place within UK-based British private boarding schools.

The third and final part of this chapter discussesthe strategic uses versus the more subconscious use of whiteness in identity formation. The chapter argues that parents’ selective use of whiteness and their desire to retain their children’s “Africanness” demonstrates their reflexive ability which according to Fanon, has been undermined by colonisation, and therefore something blacks are not capable of doing. By the same token, the chapter also argues that these parents’ apparent lack of awareness of the racial implications with regard to their preference for, and consumption of, white culture demonstrates the durable effect of the colonial habitus. The chapter concludes with a critical analysis of the conceptualisation of ‘authentic African identity’ and how it constructs the identity of Africans who appropriate white culture as inauthentic on the one hand, and validates the hegemonic discourse of western superiority on the other. Consequently, the chapter argues for a new theorisation of (African) identity which is different from Fanon’s and thus takes into account the availability of an array of (re)sources from which individuals and groups can use to construct their identity in the 21st century.

## 

## 5.1 Parents’ post-secondary aspirations

*‘The interest the different classes have in self-presentation [and preservation], the attention they devote to it, their awareness of the profit it gives and the investment of time, effort, sacrifice and care which they actually put into it are proportionate to the chances of material or symbolic profit they can reasonably expect to see from it’* (Bourdieu, 1984:202).

Evidence in the interview transcripts show that all of the parents made several references to the quality; or the lack thereof, of Nigerian universities even though this was not the focus of this study. However, the evidential value of the data that was generated in this area cannot be underestimated as it shows, among other things, that the eventual acquisition of a foreign degree qualification is one of the main reasons why parents choose to send children to private schools overseas. In other words, overseas private boarding schools might be one of the ways by which parents prepare their children for entry into foreign universities. The fact that 12 out of 25 parents (4 of which are parents who send their children to Canada) send their children between the ages of 15 and 16, which is the GCSE year in the UK and the foundation year in Canada, supports this point.

With the exception of Mrs Osun the comments below typify parents’ views of some of the benefits of a foreign degree qualification.

“And I also think that for what we are paying for and the kind of education they’ve had I think that academically they would do a lot for themselves and they would *pick up descent professions* and have some *meaningful academic qualifications*” (Mrs Bridge)

“Basically for me that’s the number one issue and also if you want your child to be *marketable* because jobs are very rare you want him to come out from a very good school so that he can be competitive if he comes back after graduating so he can get a good job” (Mr Bala)

“I am happy [that my daughter is in the UK] because I know that at the end I will have a child that is bold, that is confident of herself and *know exactly what she is doing* and can stand *to defend the certificate she has anywhere”* (Mrs Ola)

These parents seem not only aware of the benefits of acquiring foreign education qualifications, but more importantly, they actively sought it for their children. The consumption of overseas schooling in order that their children can acquire “*meaningful academic qualifications”* which they can “*defend […] anywhere*” and, in turn, “*pick up decent professions,”* indicates a utilitarian motive behind this consumption decision. Whilst still heavily symbolic in the job market, parents’ decisions to consume overseas schooling appear to be driven by the use-value; that is, the utility/functional aspect of educational qualification, which is basically the acquisition of a job; albeit a good job (Sayer, 2005).

For Bourdieu, consumption practices – how and why individuals consume – are primarily concerned ‘with setting down status markers and creating social distinction’ (Chang and Goldthorpe, 2007:3). As argued in chapter 1, Bourdieu’s position is different from Veblen’s, where these actions are understood as emanating from the individuals’ consciousness. Still, a major aspect of Bourdieu’s theory of social practice in general, and his stylisation of life thesis in particular, is the notion that, apart from the scientific field, human practices in all social fields – consumption, education, economics or philosophy are motivated solely by *extrinsic* factors such as status expression and/or group distinction rather than *intrinsic* factors such parental ‘love’ (Allatt, 1996). Consequently, identifying the consumption of overseas schooling for its utility function is a significant point not only because it is a departure from Bourdieu’s analysis, it also offers a glimpse of other equally important but less instrumental motives such as parental love and responsibility, that may be influencing the consumption of (overseas) private schools (Allatt, 1996; Granovetter, 2000).

Key differences between the two sets of parents have been identified and analysed. It was argued in chapter four, that unlike parents who send their children to Canada, those who send their children to the UK show a preference for the acquisition of certain comportments and social competencies. Another crucial difference was that while parents who send their children to Canada neither show nor expressed any preference for predominantly white schools in the international education market, the parents who send their children to the UK demonstrate a very strong preference for these types of schools. And lastly, besides describing themselves as elites, the data shows that the parents who send their children to the UK are the only ones that expressed a desire for their children to become political or business elites (chapter 4). The comments below are indicative of this.

“I also believe that this background is a kind of leverage from which they would spring to those things we imagined them. I am into politics and I’ve been for more than a decade now and I think two of my sons and daughter are similarly inclined so they will come to Nigeria and I expect them to pursue this starting in Bayelsa (State) and go from there really” (Mrs Bridge)

“They will *sharpen* him. *Make him the kind of person he is been developed for*. A proper leader in whatever he does. Somebody who can lead. The school will give him all the skills he needs to succeed globally” (Mr Akpan)

“For example my husband and I have political ambitions for our son and he (son) keeps saying I want to be the president of this country (Nigeria) it might just be a child’s dream […] I want to be believe that *schooling in the UK, this school he’s gone to is going to mould him […]. So I think it is a stepping stone*” (Mrs Okwu)

“I’m building a leader not just an ordinary man on the road, I’m building a leader. Someone who will come back and be a leader of his country” (Mrs Ayo).

“Our country needs saving, seriously we need drastic action in this country. People with the *right ideas* on how things are done” (Mr Odili)

The comments above are very illustrative of the idea of ‘anticipatory socialisation’, which Kendall (2002:89) describes as ‘the process by which knowledge and skills are learned for [future] roles’. She explains that;

‘this process is particularly important for those who assume that they or their children have a significant leadership roles, economic responsibly, and social obligations to fulfil on behalf of themselves, their families, and the larger society’ (Kendall, 2002:89)

Crucially, the comments also suggest that for parents with children in UK-based private boarding schools, overseas education is about ‘starting their children on the road to power and influence’ (Glennerster and Pryke, 1973 cited in Urry and Wakeford, 1973). This evidence supports Glennerster’s and Pryke’s (1973 cited in Urry and Wakeford, 1973) argument that ‘the principal commodity which those who send their children to public schools are buying is not education but privilege’.

Another important finding of the study is that parents who send their children to Canada are seeking academic qualification, which ‘constitutes the condition *sine qua non* for entry into the field of power’ (Bourdieu, 1996:294). In other words, they do not yet occupy the field of power but are hoping that by sending their children overseas for their education they, via their children, will come to occupy this space in the future.

On the other hand, as elites themselves, the decision to send their children to UK-based private boarding schools is motivated by these parents’ desire to ‘strengthen inherited dispositions more than they inculcate new skills’ (Bourdieu, 1996:294). Although, inherited ‘position’ rather ‘dispositions’ is more appropriate in this study since the data indicates that some of these parents do not possess these so-called white British elite dispositions which they are seeking for their children. The key point here is that the parents who send their children to the UK do not use education the same way or for the same purpose as those parents who send their children to Canada. Rather, like the white British upper classes, education is used by these parents primarily for the acquisition of aristocratic aesthesis (Bourdieu, 1984; Scott, 1991; Smyth, 2009).

The difference in parents’ post-secondary aspirations for their children also suggests that for the parents who send their children to the UK, the consumption of overseas school is an end in itself (Bourdieu, 1984). So, whilst the consumption of overseas private boarding schools might be seen and used primarily as a preparation for foreign universities by those who send their children to Canada, the parents who send their children to UK based private boarding schools see it as a means by which their children can acquire vital deportments and social etiquettes that are considered crucial for the formation of an elite identity and which they might not necessarily acquire from universities. This key difference is relevant because it shows the parents who send their children to UK based British private boarding schools are the ones that are mostly ‘*committed* to the symbolic’ (Bourdieu, 1984:253 emphasis in original).

The difference in the parents’ aspirations for their children is a disposition within the habitus. Citing Bourdieu (1984:53-54), Waters and Brooks, (2010:12) assert that;

‘the ability to take such an instrumental view of education depends, importantly, on an individuals’ past and present material conditions of existence’ and the capacity to ‘withdraw’ from concerns over ‘economic necessity’.

Likewise, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992:99) assert that;

‘the strategies of a ‘player’ and everything that defines his ‘game’ are a function not only of the volume and structure of his capital at the moment under consideration and of the game chances they guarantee him, but also […] of his social trajectory and his dispositions (habitus) constituted in the prolonged relation to a definite distribution of objective chances’.

There is a broad sociological consensus that to qualify as an elite, individuals and groups *must* be in possession of scarce cultural capital and/or attributes that the large majority of people in that society cannot access (Boyd, 1973; Scott, 1991; Bourdieu, 1984, 1996; Cookson and Persell, 1985; Ostrander, 1984; Kendall, 2002). That is to say, the acquisition of elite status and identity involves particular ‘conditions of acquiring’ (Vincent and Ball, 2007:1074).

# Strategies for Social Distinction

## 5.2 ‘Othering’

*“Spatial location determines access to crucial social goods, and in particular the different kinds of […] education [and place of education, [which] have enormous significance for future life trajectory’* (Byrne, 1999:110)

Bourdieu (1996:286) asserts that ‘all reproduction strategies imply a form of *numerus clausus’*. He defines *numerus clausus* as ‘a kind of protectionist measure, analogous to immigration restrictions, a riposte to ‘overcrowding’ provoked by the fear of being ‘overwhelmed’ by invading hordes’ (Bourdieu, 1993:179). The idea of *numerus clausus* is even more crucial in the formation of elite identity because as Boyd (1973:18) accurately notes, being ‘relatively small’ as a group; in comparison to the rest of the population ‘is a concomitant of elitehood’ and practices of exclusivity. Thus, Bourdieu (1996:286) argues that;

‘elite schools fulfil the functions of inclusion and exclusion that together maintain the corps at a constant size by limiting either the number of its biological products […] or the number of individuals entitled to join it’.

In other words, rarity and social closure; or a reduction in those able to access the ‘circle of eligibles’ (Parkin 1979:44), are important elements in the formation and maintenance of the status of elite (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a, 2009b).

There is substantial evidence in the data demonstrating that the ratio of black to white pupils in a school is a significant factor which influences parents’ school choice in the international education market.As well as preferring schools with fewer blacks, the data shows that this set of parents are more content when the blacks in these school are not Nigerians but from other African countries like “South Africa [and] Kenya”. This is because, as the quotes below show, they want their children to be “*one of the very few Nigerians*” attending these schools*.*

“Like my first daughter we took her to where she is because the school is an international school, very international, with very few Nigerians there (Mrs Bridge).

“Ok we looked at the reputation of the school, we looked at the location. We didn’t really want a place where we have a lot of Nigerians so that was one of our priorities” (Mrs Nwankwo)

“Mary is one of the few Nigerian children in the school and that is another good thing about Whitehouse. They have Nigerians but not too much” (Mrs Philips).

“I found out he will be one of the few Nigerians in that school and one of the very few Nigerians that have been to Harrow and that is why I chose Harrow because I like to think my son is one of the very few Nigerians to have been to that school (Mr Okon)

“We haven’t paid all that money for our children to be in a place that is over populated by Nigerian […] We send our children to experience other cultures and way of life so that they can improve themselves so sending them where they will be mingling with more blacks or Nigerians for that matter defeats the whole purpose of sending them to school abroad in the first place” (Mrs Gbenga)

Before commencing an in-depth analysis of significance of this racially and ethnically driven school choice decision, it is imperative to draw attention to how none of the parents in the current study raised the issue of racism. This point is mentioned here because racism is usually an issue that is given precedence in studies which explore black families and education in the UK (Gillborn, 2005; Vincent et al., 2013) and the US (Lareau, 2002). There are two plausible reasons for the omission of racism in the narrative of the parents in the current study. The first and obvious reason is because the study is about Nigerian parents living in Nigeria as opposed to Nigerian parents living in the western countries like the UK where the possibility of being racially discriminated against is high (Vincent et al., 2013). The second reason could be found in the remark of one of the Nigerian education agents who commented that “these women [mothers who send their children to the UK], do not see themselves as black” (Nigerian agent 2). In other words, these parents are not concerned about racism because - in their eyes - they are simply placing their children among their kind; albeit, of a different colour. It is also plausible to infer that the parents believe that, whilst other social groups might be capable of racism, the white British upper class is perceived as a moral and respectable group and thus do not engage in racist acts (Sayer, 2005).

As clearly indicated in the parents’ narratives, the main reason why my participants want their children to attend predominantly white schools is because they want their children to be one of the very few Nigerians in these schools. Or more specifically, one of the very few Nigerians to have attended these schools. If we bear in mind that the principle of ‘*numerus clausus’* is an important element in elite identity formation (Bourdieu, 1996:286), then it follows thatthis kind of racially and ethnically driven school choice is a tactical device employed by these parents with intention of transforming their children into elites. According to Bourdieu (1996:79), ‘symbolic capital increases with the degree of restriction and exclusivity of the group [so] established’.

The principle of ‘*numerus clausus’* also means that by placing their children in schools, these parents are effectively seeking to ‘Other’ them. The concept of ‘Othering’ is usually used in sociological discourses to describe the experiences of dominated, disenfranchised and disempowered minority groups (see Fanon, 2008 and Sayer, 2005). Put differently, the discourse of ‘Other[ing]’ is usually framed and underpinned by the idea of the helpless and dominated individuals who are oppressed by the dominant group in any given society. In the current study however, and in the context of these parents’ motives, this is a self-imposed ‘Otherness’ (parents on children), which my participants hope will enable their children to access exclusivity. ‘Othering’ is used here to describe a particular type of strategy employed by these parents to enable their children attain the status of elite. Put yet another way, this kind of ‘Self-Othering’ is a kind of ‘defensive strategy’ (Bourdieu, 1993:134) employed by this set of parents to mark their children off from children from factions *within* their group, while simultaneously making ‘their children into a classed subject’ (Levine-Rasky, 2008:466).

This ‘Othering’ could also be described as a ‘defensive necessity’ (Demaine, 2001:185), which has been necessitated by, and necessary for, class struggle over status and positional advantage. Through the practice of ‘Othering’, parents are making their children more conspicuous as the few privileged blacks while simultaneously making them ‘the exceptions to the rule’ (Kendall, 2002:15). That is, one of the few blacks who have similar moral values and intelligence as their white counterparts (Wise, 2009; Jensen, 2005; Skeggs, 2004; Fanon, 2008; Rollock et al, 2011). Through ‘Otherness’ these parents’ children have been constructed as the few blacks that can, and have ‘*transcended* their blackness’ and thus are as good as their white counterparts (Wise, 2009:9 emphasis in original).

Being among ‘their kinds,’ or types of people these parents want their children to emulate allows their children to acquire a ‘genuine common culture’ (Bourdieu 1996:81) which, as Waters (2007:478) perceptively notes, ‘provides the foundation for an exclusive and ‘elite’ group identity’. Boyd (1973:22) asserts that without shared ‘values and interests […] they [elites] are not ‘”real phenomena” in any sense, but mere “phenomena of order”. Citing Parry (1969) Boyd (1973:22-23) concludes, ‘if the group does not act as a unified body, it is less an elite than a category of “top persons” in the particular sphere in question’.

Furthermore, by placing their children in a school in which they are the minority, these parents are effectively making their children become aware of their social status and life trajectory. Being among their social ‘equals’ not only endows their children with similar or related dispositions as their white counterparts, it also, arguably, enables the child to ‘love him[her]self’ and hence reaffirm his/her ‘confidence in [their] own values’ (Bourdieu, 1996:182). Self-confidence and confidence in their value as elites is crucial if their children are to acquire and exude the type of ease and naturalness necessary for, and associated with authentic elite identity (Bourdieu, 1996).

If we recall these parents’ perceptions of the type of children that attend UK-based British private boarding schools (chapter 4), coupled with the historical construction of western whites as superior and African blacks as inferior (Keating, 1995; Rollock et al., 2011), then one can infer that these parents are in effect assigning their children to ‘a group of superior essence’ (Bourdieu, 1996:112). Apart from ‘bringing about a real transformation’, which in turn is ‘likely to bring [the child] closer to the assigned definition’, Bourdieu (1996:112) argues that such assignment ‘will [also] lead [the children], both in their lives and in their work, towards the most lofty ambitions and the most prestigious enterprises’.

Finally, having their children in education institutions with children from perceived ‘similar’ socio-economic background enables their children to accrue valuable ‘transnational social capital’ (Borjesson et al., 2007:2) which they can cash in the future (Bourdieu, 1996; Lacy, 2004). Of the four types of capitals, social capital is the one with the least propensity to translate into other forms of capital, however Bourdieu (1996) asserts that it can increase the return of economic and cultural capitals. Equally, educating their children in UK-based British private boarding schools with predominantly white British pupils with similar socio-economic background, these parents arguably, are offering their children ‘a revered array of social, cultural and symbolic capital that can potentially be invested in any nation state and in relation to certain factions of any state nobility’ (Kenway and Koh, 2013b:287).

## 5.3 Prolonged stay

“To live a *proper life* you have to experience that *proper life*” (Mrs Ayo)

Svalastoga (1959 cited in Boyd, 1973:22) argues that an elite lifestyle ‘cannot be bought, but [has] to be learned’. Equally, Bourdieu (1986 cited in Skeggs, 1997:90 emphasis in original) argues that ‘it takes a considerable amount of schooling and extra-curricular work to impart the ‘*right’* cultural capital’. Moore (2008:114 my emphasis) also argues that ‘cultural capital has its highest value when it is […] *most highly formed*’. In other words, socialising with the right people, in the right place, for a long period of time is important if one is to embody elite practices and dispositions (Bourdieu, 1984). Evidence from the study indicates that while the parents who send their children to Canada are keen and pleased to know that their children would be spending less than a year in secondary school before entering University, the parents who send their children to the UK appear to be aware of the need for a prolonged stay in these educational institutions so that their children can “absorb” the right traits and dispositions necessary for elite membership.

“I went when I was eleven and I believe that the earlier you go to these schools the more you are able to absorb all the things that they teach them. I know nowadays people send their children when they are about to go to university, to do their A’Level. But I think education in Britain is more than that for us any way. We wanted our children to learn the British way. I mean the proper British way. The British aristocrats’ way of life, like the royal families and top respectable families like that (Mrs Gbenga).

The head-teacher’s and agent’s comments below also suggest that one of the reasons why parents send their children to the UK at this age is for “complete formation”.

“I think it depends on the child and it depends on what the parents want. I mean if you are looking for an A’ level preparation for university with *some* growth in character and interest if you like then that’s fine at A’ levels. But if you are looking for a *complete formation* you know, along the lines of what boarding school can do then you need to send your child when they are 13 or 14 or perhaps even younger. So it depends in the end what the parents and what the young person is looking for” (UK based white British head-teacher - 2)

“The longer they can stay in the school (UK-based British private boarding school), the more they can pick up the way they do things there and their accent will also change if they start school early there (the UK). You’ll find that they will begin to speak properly, like the real British people with real British accent” (Nigerian agent 3)

Implicit in the quotes above is also the idea that in order to acquire an elite lifestyle, one needs not only be located in what Bourdieu (1996:47) might describe as ‘space of possible virtues’ (which in this instance is the UK-based British private boarding schools), but, more importantly, that there is a prolonged contact with those from whom one intends to *learn* from or *emulate*. Mrs Ayo’s comment that: “to live a *proper life* you have to experience that *proper life*” illustrates this point aptly.

It can also be inferred that the ‘democratisation of status’, which has been caused by ‘an increase in the number of people who, freed from necessity, can now sit in at the game of status acquisition’ (O’Dair, 2000:345-346) has made the manner and process by which one acquires the elite lifestyle even more important in modern societies (Skeggs, 2004; Bourdieu, 1990; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; DiMaggio, 1982). The mode and manner in which one acquires elite status is even more crucial because as Skeggs (1997:102) perceptively points out, ‘there is a fine line between embodying and displaying dispositions’. According to Bourdieu (1984:95), ‘the mode of acquisition [of manners and dispositions] enables seniority within a class to be made the basis of the hierarchy within the class’. That is to say, the mode of acquisition helps to establish intra-class difference. Ms Ambrose like the other parents seemed aware of this when she comments that;

“What you see on telly […] those are not the real British culture. *The real culture, the traditional British culture* unfortunately is rarely *televised and you can only get it in places like these private schools”* (Ms Ambrose).

Savage’s (cited in Skeggs, 2004:136) remark that ‘the truly cultural never need [manner and/or etiquette] manuals’ further highlights the importance of a slow and prolonged stay in elite educational institutions for the acquisition of appropriate dispositions and etiquettes. A prolonged stay in these educational institutions will not only enable a “complete transformation” from a “rugged” and “brash” individual to a more refined individual, it will also enable a complete appropriation of the types of dispositions and lifestyle needed for this kind of social ascension.

In her investigation of the identity formation of British working class women, Skeggs (2004:136) notes that the newly rich (or imitators) are easily ‘recognisable because they have not been able to embody the disposition required [for membership into the elite group]’. This is because, as Skeggs (1997:102 my emphasis) argues, ‘appearing *to be* is different from appearing *as*’. Put differently, there is significant difference between dispositions that have been acquired through emulation or imitation and those acquired through prolonged socialisation. Prolonged stay in these schools will also give rise to the *naturalness* and *ease,* which in turn help to indicate the symbolic mastery of appropriate manners and refined accent essential for differentiating the emulators/pretenders from the real elites (Bourdieu, 1990; 1984; 1993; DiMaggio, 1982;Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a). According to Bourdieu, (1993:85 my emphasis);

‘the experience of ease is a quasi-divine experience. To feel oneself comme il faut, exemplary, ‘’just so’, is the experience of absoluteness, *the sense of being what one ought to be is one of the most absolute profits reaped by the dominant groups*’

Similarly, Sayer (2005:107 my emphasis) also notes that ‘a certain bearing and social *ease*, as assured, relaxed command of appropriate cultural goods […] brings the holder advantages, whether intended or not’.

The role of economic capital cannot be undermined in the acquisition and/or maintenance of elite identity particularly in non-western countries like Nigeria where western lifestyles and products are ‘the criterion for the indigenous elite class formation’ (Woolman, 2001:37). As shown in chapter 4 and 5, a prolonged stay in British boarding schools in the UK is very expensive. Having a large amount of economic capital allows these parents to ‘buy time’ and as O’Dair, (2000:344) correctly observes, ‘time is what allows one to acquire culture’. Making a slightly different point, Levine-Rasky (2007:405) postulates, ‘one must have the capacity to choose [the right place of education] in order to reap the economic, social and symbolic benefits conferred by social class’.

Concurring, Skeggs (2004:136) contends that ‘the phasing, duration and intensity of time invested in acquiring competences [in] every day practices can convey an accurate idea of class position’. Citing Susman (1979), Skeggs (2004:136) posits that ‘aestheticisation [of every day practices like dressing, eating, walking etc] enabled the shift from character to personality’. According to Susman (1979:9 cited in Skeggs, 2004:136) ‘personality is the quality of being Somebody’. Consequently, being ‘Somebody’ or more precisely, becoming a (trans)national elite requires huge economical as well as ‘cultural resources’ (Skeggs, 2004:136). Putting it succinctly, Bourdieu (1984:251 original emphasis) asserts that ‘anyone who wants to *succeed in lif*e must pay for his accession’.

## **5.4 ‘Bodily’ transformation**

*“They also want their children to learn the British culture, the British way of life and a lot more […] The accent is also another thing they like. The British accent is a giveaway that you did school in England so they like that too and much more*” (Nigerian Agent 1).

‘One is not born noble, but one becomes noble. One must be noble to act noble, but *one would cease to be noble if one did not act nobly’* (Bourdieu, 1996:112 my emphasis). What Bourdieu is essentially arguing here, is that nobility or ‘elitehood' is not hereditary, neither are any of the so-called elite characteristics – which will be discussed shortly – biological in their origin. Rather, he argues that that nobility/ elite status is acquired through socialisation and thus socially constructed. Put simply, nobility is a social construction that has to be constantly reproduced in order that its value can be maintained. Waquant (2000 cited in Skeggs, 2005:141 my emphasis) contends that;

‘cultural practice takes its social meaning and its ability to signify social difference and distance, not from some *intrinsic property*, but from location of cultural practice in a system of objects and practices.

Nevertheless, these characteristics are important components used for maintaining elite identity and marking out those eligible for elite membership (Parkin, 1979:6). Boyd (1973:21 my emphasis) argues; ‘elites […] must have distinguishing features of *style* which set them apart from other groups and/or individuals not only from other societies but also within their own society’.

Mrs Gbenga, in her attempt to distinguish herself from other women within her social circle, illustrates Bourdieu’s (1996:316) claim that; ‘no noble title suffices in and of itself’ and as a result, ‘wealth, [like academic qualifications] when it is not accompanied by the appropriate “manners”’ is insufficient ‘conditions for access to the establishment’ (Bourdieu, 1996:316). Rather Bourdieu (1996:112) argues that ‘*manners and style* are among the *surest signs of nobility’* and confirmation of elite status (my emphasis).

“These [how to speak and dress properly] are the things that separate me from others who may have more money but not class. I don’t value material things which most of those so-called rich women are mostly concern with. You see them in parties wearing layers upon layers of jewellery and they are quite loud […] unfortunately most of these women don’t have elite background. They are not from elite families just fortunate to marry a man with money and you can always tell when you meet. The way they speak, their diction gives them easily away. [The way] they carry themselves tells a lot about where they are from. Believe me it shows, you can tell when a person is from lower class, you know ‘money miss road’ [a term used to describe people with money but not class]” (Mrs Gbenga)

As Mrs Gbenga’s explains, these women may have money but they have not acquired the essential ‘manners and deportment’ (Bourdieu, 1996:83), such as proper way of speaking or refined accent necessary for authentic elite membership. Sayer (2005:78) asserts that ‘outlay of money is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for gaining the know-how and feel for the game of high culture’. Instead one must acquire highly valuable cultural assets, what might be referred to as the ‘attributes of excellence*'* in Bourdieusian scheme (1984:66) which, in their embodied state help to distinguish ‘real’ elites from ‘wannabes’, to use Mrs Ayo’s terminology (Moore, 2008).

Just as the parents believe that there are hierarchies of whiteness (chapter 3), they also believe that there are hierarchies of Britishness. Authentic Britishness belongs to the white British upper classes, the vulgar which is attributed to the white British working classes and the fake, which one can infer from Ms Ambrose’ comment below, is any kind of British culture acquired by imitation for example, through the media instead of first-hand experience.This finding supports the notion that whiteness and/or whites are not perceived to have equal value (Skeggs, 2004; Reay et al., 2007; Williams et al., 2008).

“What you see on telly or in the media is not the real British culture and unfortunately that’s what most of our youngsters are *copying”* (Ms Ambrose).

Throughout the data set, the notion of improvement and/or transformation permeates parents’ discourse of the acquisition of elite identity. Parents’ narratives are littered with references to *personality* and *bodily* changes needed for the transformation from “commoner” to a “gentleman” or a “lady”. To become a lady or a gentleman, one needed not only to avoid “*dressing like* tarts” which for girls is wearing “revealing clothes” (Mrs Tosin) and for boys, it is the wearing of  *“hood[ed]” tops* and *“pierced ears and nostril”* (Mrs Ayo),individuals must also have knowledge of the *“*appropriately dress code for the different outings” (Mrs Chuka). Equally, if not more importantly, is that one has to have the right diction and accent. The role of right accent in the formation of elite identity in Nigeria will be discussed separately and in more depth later in the chapter.

As Mrs Ayo explains, gentlemen and ladies “are fashionable yet respectable”. Knowing how to dress for different formal occasions is very important for these parents because, if we can recall Mrs Gbenga’s comment earlier in the chapter, such events are class battlegrounds where true identities are revealed and the real elites are distinguished from imitators. In sum, the acquisition of white British upper-class habitus is these parents’ way of ‘invest[ing] their children with class’ (Levine-Rasky, 2008:465:466).

It has been noted throughout that these parents tended to focus more on how their children’s public personas/image and how they perform and/or present themselves in the public rather than their academic performance. One explanation for this might be due to the fact that it is through these public performances that identity is validated and authenticated (Skeggs, 1997).

Parents’ emphasis on appearance and conduct also suggests their desire to make their children into “respectable” individuals. Indeed it could be argued that all these *appropriate* ways of acting and speaking, of eating and walking. The appropriate diction and accent would be redundant and inconsequential were it not for the prevailing assumptions that they could transform one into a respectable person of class. Like being a ‘lady’ or a ‘gentleman’, the data suggests that respectability, as a class signifier (Skeggs, 1997) is perceived to be an integral aspect of elitehood. That is, to become elite, these parents believe that their children also need to acquire *respectability*. Respectability impacts how one carries his or herself while on the other hand, becoming respectable shapes how one perceives him or herself.

“I am not talking of the ordinary British people you see on the streets of London, who live on benefits. No, I want my son to copy the British aristocrats. I am talking about re*spectable* *gentlemen and ladies*. Children who are well brought up and know how to dress and talk in public” (Mrs Chuka)

You see how the princes dress […]. How they always look posh. You don’t see them piercing their ears or smoking in public like those boys and girls in London. Children from those kind of families know how to comport themselves in public. You won’t see the girls dressing anyhow. They dress like proper *ladies and gentlemen*” (Mrs Adu).

Skeggs (1997:3) posits that ‘respectability was also central to the development of the notion of Englishess”. She goes on to explain that in Britain, respectability has historically been constructed ‘as the property of the middle-class individuals’ (Skeggs, 1997:3**)**. Mrs Ayo’s comment that “*it is the elite culture that I want him [her son] to imbibe*” rather than white British working class whom she describes as: “*alcoholics and the abusive and the irresponsible and loose young men and women you find on the streets”*, suggests that the assumption of white British working class lacking respectability is still a view that is held at least by some of my participants. Citing Strathern (1992), Skeggs (1997:3) contends that ‘respectability embodies moral authority: those who are respectable have it, those who are not do not’. Due to the perceptions around respectability, more notably, the class specific nature of respectability, it has become an important element in the construction of elite identity for these parents.

The transformation and improvement discourse is further illustrated by Mrs Adu’s comment below.

“This school [UK based British private boarding school] has polished him which is what I expected as opposed to the ruggedness he got from Lagos [Nigeria] some of the brashness is gone. He is more of a gentleman and has some more values”.

Besides providing some support to the ‘right school’ thesis with regards to entry into elite circle, the comment also shows that these parents are aware that a ‘personality change’ (Fanon, 1967/2008:14) or ‘a change of nature’ is essential if one is to achieve ‘social promotion’ (Bourdieu, 1984:251). In the case of Mrs Adu’s son, the “*ruggedness*” and “*brashness*” that has been characterised here as typical of African or Nigerian disposition must be “polished” away and replaced with the gentility of western disposition, accent and comportments in order for him to become a gentleman and gain membership into the elite circle. Berghoff (1990:150 my emphasis) postulation that UK based private boarding schools is ‘effective instrument for bestowing gentility on the sons of the *rough* and *warty* industrial pioneers’ appears to be one shared by these parents.

Mrs Adu’s comment is a particularly interesting because it exemplifies Fanons’ (1967/2008:9) postulation;

‘every colonised people […] is elevated above his *jungle* status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country’s [the mother country being the colonisers’ country of origin] cultural standards. He becomes whiter as he denounces his blackness, his jungle[ness]’.

The desire to polish away what these parents see as ‘ruggedness’ or crudeness also suggests that these parents are aware that the body is a marker of class (Bourdieu, 1986). Bourdieu (1986) argues that body is the most indispensable materialisation of class and taste. According to Bourdieu (1977:94) ‘nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore more precious than the values given body’.

Similarly, Skeggs (1992:82) argues that, ‘class is always coded through bodily dispositions: the body is the most ubiquitous signifier of class’ where ‘relations of class, gender and race come together and are em-bodied and practised’. In a similar vein, Hancock (2005:440) posits that ‘the body is central to cultural meaning, not only because it serves as a medium of enactment, but because the body is the locus and embodiment of those very practices’. Put simply, ‘it is through the body that social classifications and values are inscribed in the body’ and where status is rendered (Hancock, 2005:440).

## 5.5 British Accent

*‘Entrance into “society” assumes that one refines one’s upbringing and lose one’s local accent’* (Bourdieu, 1996:316).

Bourdieu (1984:18) argues that ‘nothing more clearly affirms one’s “class”, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music’. I will extend this argument by arguing that nothing affirms one’s class and social status in Nigeria like the British accent (Woolman, 2001; Ekeh, 1975). The role of the ‘right accent’ (which is usually the accent of the former coloniser) both in the formation and acquisition of elite identity in former British (Wilkinson, 1970; De Mejia, 2002; Roy, 2009; Simpson, 2003; Pennycook, 1994; Woolman, 2001; Ekeh, 1975; Bassey, 1999; Bray and Ramsey, 2004) and French colonies has been well documented (Fanon, 1967/2008).

The data shows that all the parents, including Mrs Osun, see the acquisition of a foreign accent as one of the main benefits for sending their children overseas for their education. The prevalence of words like “accent”, “intonation”, “diction” in the interview transcripts of the parents who send their children to the UK-based private boarding schools, indicate that acquiring the right accent and the proper way of speaking the English language - pronouncing English words “the way it ought to be pronounced” - is very important to this set of parents. Unlike the other parents in the study, this set of parents are also very keen to point out that the accent and intonation that they want their children to acquire is the white British upper classes’.

The comments below are typical of parents’ view of, and preference for, white British upper class accent.

“My children now have the correct proper British accent. The accent of the British aristocrats and that is one of my goals. I love the way the British top class speak, very proper. This is different from the way most people speak in England. You hear many “Have been to” speaking badly. They don’t speak the correct, proper English, they say “init” instead of isn’t it. Things like that. This is gutter English. It is not how the British elites speak” (Mrs Kuti)

“What I want them to pick up is the posh British accent, real British accent. I really love it” (Mrs Ola)

Having the “correct proper British accent”, which can be described as a type of cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), is considered to be crucial in the acquisition of local and transnational elite identity for three reasons. Firstly, having the proper British accent is one of the ways by which these parents wish to differentiate their children from the “*have been to”*; a colloquial term used to describe Nigerians who have travelled to Europe and/or the USA. The need for such distinction further highlights the democratisation of status which was discussed earlier in the chapter. These parents are aware of the increase in the number of Nigerian families either living in the UK or now able to send their children overseas for their education, hence why they are keen for their children to acquire what they perceive as “posh British accent”, which they perceived to be exclusively that of white British upper class’.

Secondly, by placing their children in schools which enable them to acquire the accent of the “British top class”, these parents are systematically aligning their children (and themselves) to the white British upper classes. A similar finding was made by Rollock et al. (2011) in their study which explores the public identity of the black British middle classes. They noted that ‘language and accent were one of the central tools used by the black British middle class to signal their class status to white others’ (Rollock et al., 2011:1087). Fanon (1967/2008:25) argues that as well as giving blacks ‘honorary citizenship’ to the ‘Whiteworld’, the mastery of the coloniser’s language; manifested in the form of refined accent and diction, is also one of the ways by which the colonised can prove that ‘he has measured up to the [white/coloniser’s] culture’ that he/she has appropriated. Thirdly, acquiring an accent that is “different from the way most people speak in England” once again puts their children in the minority, which, as argued earlier, is important if their children are to gain membership into elite circles.

There is also evidence in the current study that parents perceive a Nigerian accent as an “issue” as well as a hindrance to social ascension and thus needs to be completely erased or, at the very minimum, concealed.

“I think her diction, that’s one. I know that people who, when we schooled in Nigeria we had, we tend to have issues with diction, I know that when you grow up in a particular section of the country, let’s say if you are Northerner you grew from the North and you went to school in the North you’ll have a particular kind of accent. Now that does not necessarily mean that you are not smart, it’s just your background but I know that when you have the opportunity to school in the UK, no matter the background to an extent your diction would be affected positively so that was a plus for me too. That was also a reason [for sending her children to the UK]. And I also looked it that she would be a better lady, in terms of how she composes herself or the way she looks at issues” (Mrs Okwu).

Implicit in Mrs Okwu’s comment is the idea that a typical Nigerian accent does not have the same symbolic and consequently, exchange value, as a British accent in the linguistic market. This therefore suggests that in order for one to acquire elite status in Nigeria, it is imperative to ‘lose one’s local accent” (Bourdieu, 1996:316). The desire to conceal their children’s Nigerian accent is also an indication that these parents want their children to become local as well as global elite. Unlike the local accent, the acquisition of a western and thus global accent is most likely to give their children access into the circle of the transnational elites (Hannerz, 1996). Furthermore, even though as Mrs Okwu commented that having a local accent “does not necessarily mean that you are not smart”, there is an implicit suggestion in her comments that having a Nigerian accent does depict one as lacking in intellect. In contrast, the possession of “the accent of the British aristocrats” enables their children to present themselves as intellectuals. Consequently, making white British upper classes’ accent one of the ‘attributes of excellence’ in contemporary Nigeria (Bourdieu, 1984:66).

Within the international business and academic community, it is not unreasonable to infer that a western accent; particularly when the possessor is an African, is more likely to be associated with class and intellect. In other words, Nigerians with a western accent might be considered as better read and well-travelled by their counterparts in the international community than those with local accent (Lacy, 2007). In this sense then, the concealment of one’s local accent is not only necessary but also essential if one is to gain access into, and acceptance from, the global elites. As Rollock et al., (2011:1080) accurately observe, blacks have historically been ‘devalued, positioned as working class, uneducated, and capable of only conversing using colloquialisms or ‘Negro dialect’’ in Europe and America. Subsequently, the acquisition of a refined accent, which for these parents is white British upper class’ accent, performs many functions. It engenders social ascension for blacks both locally and globally as well as conferring on its possessors the image of intellect and class (Bourdieu, 1990; Fanon, 1967/2008; Hunter and Hachimi, 2012).

The association of the ‘right’ accent or manner of speaking with intellect or as a sign of intellectual acumen is aptly captured in Bourdieu’s assertion that ‘I would have a man know everything and yet, by his manner of speaking, not be convinced of having studied’ (Antoine Gombaud and Chevalier de Mere – 1607-1685 in Bourdieu, 1984:71). Thus, as Bourdieu (1990:73) asserts ‘language is not simply an instrument for communication but a system of categorisation as well’. Bourdieu (1993:63) extends the argument, claiming;

‘words are not uttered solely to be understood; the relation of communication is never just a relation of communication, it is also an economic relation in which the speaker’s value is at stake: did he speak well or poorly? Is he brilliant or not?

By acquiring for their children what could be described as the right habitus; manifested in the form of appropriate etiquettes, intonation and accent as well as a taste and skills for leisure activities (chapter 4), these parents are dressing their children ‘in the trappings of nobility and intellectual grandeur’ (Bourdieu (1996:112**)** which, as Bourdieu (1996) explains are essential for membership into elite.

## 5.6 ‘Authentic’ African identity: A critical reflection

*‘Whiteness [can] ‘both master and transcend the white body’* (Dyer, 1997:23 in Preston, 2007).

A general observation which was noted in the literature on cultural appropriation is that while whites are usually constructed as savvy and strategic users when they appropriate black culture and/or dispositions (see Skeggs, 2004a), blacks on the other hand are, at best, constructed as victims in need of rescuing from themselves (Simpson, 2003; Appiah, 1986; Molande, 2008), and at worse pathologised as lacking self-worth and persecuted for *selling out* (Unwaachi; 1972; Mungazi, 1996; Woolman, 2001; Fanon, 1967/2008; Maylor and Williams, 2011). Ironically, these social constructions are mostly performed by other blacks. I shall argue here that the pathologisation and construction of blacks as victims when they appropriate white culture - is to a large extent - due to the notion of the *authentic* African identity.

In his analysis of the effect of colonisation on the psyche of blacks, Fanon (1967/2008) theorises that colonisation has developed in blacks an internalised inferiority complex. Consequently, Fanon argues that colonisation has simultaneously undermined blacks’ ability to be rational and reflexive in their thinking and subsequent actions; therefore, many blacks have come to desire everything white while abhorring all things ‘black’ at the same time. Framed within Fanon’s colonisation theory with its underpinning principle of social actions and preferences as an unconscious action, the desiring of white British upper-class culture by these parents; albeit for their children, can be understood as a passive and slavish consumption of whiteness. That is to say, unlike their white counterparts, these parents lack the reflexive capability needed for the successful and effective use of cultural appropriation.

However, my evidence shows that these parents do not consume white culture unreflexively. Rather, parents’ desire to maintain in their children their cultural heritage and roots (chapter 4) coupled with their preference for white British upper classes’ culture as opposed to British middle or working classes’ suggests both a strategic and calculative use of whiteness. These parents are combining the most valuable aspects of different cultures in order ‘to create the greatest value’ (Skeggs, 2004a:105). Further, the selective use of whiteness also suggests that whiteness is seen by these parents as a valuable capital; as artefacts, that can be bought and used in (re)producing and/or constructing a desired social identity for their children.

Similar findings have been reported in studies which have looked at the identity construction of black middle classes in Britain (Rollock et al., 2011) and America (Lacy, 2007). In her analysis of the public identities of the black middle class in the US, Lacy (2007:73) describes black American middle class appropriation of white American middle class accent and mannerism as ‘purposeful, instrumental strategies’. She goes on to explain that black middle class appropriate white American middle class culture in their attempt to ‘either reduce the probability of discrimination or curtail the extent of discrimination middle-class blacks face in their public interactions with white strangers’. Rollock et al., (2011:1085) also draw a similar conclusion with a close examination of the construction of black British middle class public identity arguing that black British middle class ‘use’ white culture for similar purposes.

The combination of British whiteness and Africanness shows that these parents are aware that ‘differences must be socially recognised and legitimated’ and that ‘total otherness, like total individuality, is likely to be unrecognisable and hence without value’ (Featherstone, 1991 cited in Skeggs, 2004a:149). Mr Okon’s comment that “I want a young man that his people can relate to when he returns” and Mrs Ayo’s comment that her son must still “prostrates when he is greeting his elders, when he comes across people from his culture” illustrates the nuances of the identity work at play. As well as displaying evidence of consciousness, the strategic use of both cultures also undermines and problematizes Fanon’s (1967/2008) postulation that colonisation has destroyed the colonised ability to be reflexive.

The selective and strategic use of whiteness also shows that, like the black middle class parents in Rollock et al’s (2011) study, these parents not only have knowledge of the game, they are also playing ‘the game’ (Bourdieu, 1993:74). ‘Thegame’ being the embodiment of whiteness by non-whites in order to survive and be successful in a WhiteWorld (Rollock et al., 2011). As explicated in chapter 3, knowledge of ‘the game’ has been acquired through these parents’ encounter and participation in the WhiteWorld. That is, through the participant in education (theirs and their children’s), occupation, travelling and spending considerably long time in the West. In other words, the parents’ knowledge and the feel for the game is emanating mostly from their ‘international’ habitus (chapter 3). It is also reasonable for one to infer that having experienced both worlds, that is Africa and the West, these parents have come to realise that ‘[black] capitals are not valued equally to white capitals’ (Maylor and Williams, 2011:350); hence their desire for their children to appropriate white British upper class culture.

However, like the respondents in Rollock et al.’s, (2011:1087) study, these parents seemed unaware that, by engaging ‘in the game’, they become ‘complicit in misrecognising this form of capital’ (Rollock et al., 2011:1087 also see Lundy, 2003). That is whiteness, as a social construct, forged by the West mainly through the discourse of ‘difference’ with the sole aim of maintaining its dominant position in the global field of power (Hall, 1993). Bourdieu (1993:74) posits that ‘those who take part in the struggle [class and/or race struggle] help to reproduce the game by helping […] to reproduce belief in the value of the stakes’. In Bourdieu’s theoretical frame therefore, the consumption of whiteness for social ascension perpetuates the hegemonic discourse of ‘West is best’ while simultaneously devaluing blacks and blackness.

There is no evidence in the current study to suggest that the types of psychological distress and feelings of betrayal and/or guilt that is often associated with groups who have had to accept the dominant groups’ values in order to move up the social ladder was experienced by my participants (see Reay 2010 for example). Rather, evidence in the data shows that these parents were unperturbed by the political and racial implications of their preference for whites (white teachers, white schools) and whiteness (white British upper/middle classes’ culture) nor do they seemed concerned by the assumptions impregnated in their use of words like “master” when referring to the British (for which there were few).

There is also no evidence in the current study which suggests that these parents felt any discomfort, embarrassment or shame when using such a word. Neither was there any evidence in the data to suggest that these parents found the idea of discarding some of the children’s Africanness or Nigerianness in order to acquire whiteness ‘difficult [or] tortuous’ (Reay, 2010:337). The absence of such concerns and emotions illustrate Bourdieu’s (1993:47) assertion that: ‘people who are the product of revolting social conditions are not necessarily as revolted as they would be if they were the product of less revolting conditions’.

There are two possible reasons why these parents might seem undisturbed or concerned about what their consumption of whiteness may imply. Firstly, when analysed within Bourdieu’s theoretical frame, the absence of the types of emotions cited above could be interpreted as an example of the durable effect of the ‘colonial’ habitus which these parents inhabit. Bourdieu (1990 cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:24) puts this aptly, when he argues;

“the submission of workers, women, minorities, and graduate students is most often not a deliberate conscious concession to the brute force of managers, men, whites and professors; it resides, rather in the unconscious fit between their habitus and the field they operate in. It is lodged deep inside the socialized body. In truth it expresses the somatization of social relations of domination’

These parents seemed at ease with the consumption of white culture and accept the idea that whiteness is superior to blackness because the ‘[white]world encompasses [them]’ (Bourdieu cited in Bourdieu Wacquant 1992:128). As Bourdieu explains, they accept the hierarchical structure of the world (West as dominant and Africa as dominated and the depiction of black and blackness as inferior to whiteness) because they are the product of the WhiteWorld and ‘because it has produced the categories of thought that [they] apply to it’ and thus ‘it appears to [them] as self-evident’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:128). In other words, this set of parents desire white culture (for their children) because their ‘mental structures have been moulded by these structures [Western hegemonic discourses]’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:130). Bourdieu (1993:46) concludes that, ‘when internalised history [colonial habitus] is in perfect harmony with the history of things [Western hegemonic discourse], there is a tacit complicity of the dominated with domination’. Consequently, the durable effect of the ‘colonial’ habitus has not only ensured the lasting domination of whites, it has also made blacks accepting of this dominance.

If we recall that the consumption of whiteness (in all its symbolic and embodied forms) is one of the means by which these parents used to distinguish themselves and their children from challengers within and outside their social field (chapter 3 and 4), then a critique of whiteness or any display of doubt of its value for that matter, will not only devalue the source of these parents’ and their children’s social statuses, it will also weaken the very foundation on which these group of parents, like their predecessors (Ekeh, 1975; Belk, 2000), build their social identity. Indeed, Ekeh (1975:96) goes as far as claiming that ‘the African bourgeois class depends on colonialism for its legitimacy’. Thus, the second reason why these parents seemed accepting of whiteness and its associated assumptions and implications is because it is vital for their familial identity as elites in Nigeria. Without adopting whiteness, these parents and their children will become one of the ‘undifferentiated’ masses in Nigeria (Bourdieu, 1986:469).

There are some African scholars like Moumouni (1968:284-292 cited in Woolman, 2001:37) who are advocates of the notion of the authentic African identity and thus argue for the ‘safeguard [of the] ‘African originality’ and the ‘African personality’ in their ‘most authentic and most positive aspects’. There are others like Mungazi (1996:50) who go as far as arguing that ‘Africans who accept western culture must, of necessity, reject the viability of their own culture’. As a consequence, there are three inter-related significant assumptions embedded in the authentic African discourse.

The first, and arguably the most crucial, is the idea that racial identity originates from ‘one people, with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of references and meaning’ (Fanon in Hall, 1994:393). As already shown in this chapter, these parents are acquiring for their children what could safely be described as western culture or more precisely white British upper class culture. Besides showing that identity formation is anything but simple, these parents’ narratives have revealed the weakness in identity theories which formulate (racial) identity as static, innate and stable as postulated by Fanon (cited in Hall, 1994). On the contrary, like the respondent in Dolby’s study, these parents’ desire for their children to appropriate white British upper class culture suggests that ‘[racial] identity is not circumscribed by the borders of the nation-state […] or any narrowly defined race or ethnicity’ (Dolby, 2000:12). Rather, due to globalisation and modernity, individuals’ identity, racial or class, can be created from an array of sources (Dolby, 2000; Chang and Goldthorpe, 2007; Munro, 1996; Featherstone, 1991; Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009).

Moreover, the idea thatthere exists an authentic African identity and that this identity comes primarily from one unchanging source essentialises race and thus constructs it as natural; the same kind of argument used to justify and validate the hegemonic discourse of Western superiority years ago. Hall (1993:6) argues that such an essentialising argument ‘is weak because it naturalizes and dehistoricizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological, and genetic’. In a similar vein, hooks (1994:425) critiques Fanon’s model of identity formation describing it as too rigid and ‘one-dimensional’.

The second postulation in the authentic African identity discourse is the notion that one cannot possess a Nigerian (African) and British (western) habituses at the same time. In other words, one cannot have two or more identities at the same time. Indeed, within the logic of authentic identity discourse, the idea that these parents can have two habituses; a national/local and international habitus will be rejected. There is no ‘and’ in this theoretical framework, only ‘or’. That is, one can either have a Nigerian *or* British/western habitus but not both. To attempt to have both will result to the acquisition of an inauthentic African identity.

Speaking specifically of the blacks in the British diaspora, Gilroy (in Hall, 1993:6), warns against ‘the logic of a binary of opposition’ not least because, as Hall notes (1993:5) ‘it is […] unable to grasp the dialogic strategies and hybrid forms essential to the diaspora aesthetic’. The authentic vs inauthentic African identity binary is also ill-equipped to comprehend the complex nature and sources of identity formation in the 21st century where globalisation has not only limited the way in which people have control of their lives (Giddens, 1996), but has also provided individuals with an assortment of possible sources for identity formation.

A longitudinal study, which maps the life trajectories of my participants’ children as well as investigating how these children cope with their dual or multiple identities would be extremely useful. However, as argued earlier in chapter 3, evidence from the study suggests that, bar Mrs Osun, the parents in this study have dual, and at times conflicting, habituses, and by extension, have acquired two identities themselves. Importantly, there is no evidence in the current study to suggest that both identities or to use Du Bois’ (2007) phrase, these ‘two souls’, are causing ‘internal turmoil’ in these parents.

It may be that the authentic/inauthentic binary was necessary in the 1950s and 1960s when African countries like Nigeria were still under colonial rule and therefore making the colonized feel that the only way by which they could assert their authority and maintain as well as validate the authenticity and value of their culture was to maintain their African identity in its ‘totality’. In other words, the rawness and immediacy of colonial experience at those times is what might have given rise to the authentic (African) identity discourse. But as Fanon (1967/2008:64) himself notes, ‘it is not possible for [him] to be objective’ in such situations. Therefore he could not appreciate, as Hall (1993) and hooks (1994:425) do, that the discourse of authentic African identity only ‘reinforces and sustain white supremacy’.

Lastly, there is the implicit assumption in the authentic identity discourse that a complete rejection of white culture is essential if one was to maintain his or her authentic African identity. In this framework, there is certainly no room for a hybrid identity or a diasporic aesthetic or an ‘international’ habitus. Consequently, blacks who appropriate white culture are pathologised and constructed as victims at the same time (Fanon, 1967/2008). It is worth asking, however, if a rejection of white culture is what is needed for one to acquire and sustain ones’ authentic African identity, then it begs the question, should Africans reject the idea and principles of western education? The intention here is not to advocate for the unreflexive consumption of white culture neither is a total rejection of the appropriation of white culture suggested. Indeed to do the latter is to suggest that blacks, unlike whites, do not possess the reflexive capability required for the strategic use of cultures outside of their own.

Instead, my intention is to argue for paradigmatic shift away from a position that construct blacks that appropriate white culture as victims or worse still, one that pathologises them when they do, thus rendering their identity inauthentic in the process. Rather, the objective here is to argue for a paradigm that accommodates and understands identity as flexible and fluid and thus conceives identity construction as a personal project carried out by individuals or in this case, by parents, with the primary aim of constructing for their children, the best possible identities which utilise certain capitals, and in turn will allow their children to move easily across different cultural and racial boundaries (Lacy, 2004). A move towards such understanding of identity will also make the notion of multiple identities conceivable and acceptable.

Moreover, the issue of symbolic domination, which, I will argue is not only an inherent part of racial identity discourse, but is also driving the discourse of authentic African identity, is a very complex one which requires complex solutions rather than one as simplistic as the rejection of western lifestyles and dispositions. The complex nature of symbolic domination was highlighted by Bourdieu (1987 cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:23-24) when he writes:

‘If, to resist, I have no means other than to make mine and to claim aloud the very properties that mark me as dominated (according to the paradigm ‘black is beautiful’) […], is that resistance? If, on the other hand, I work to efface everything that is likely to reveal my origins, or to trap me in my social position (an accent, physical composure, family relations), should we then speak of submission?’

Further, Bourdieu asserts that ‘resistance can be alienating and submission can be liberating. Such is the paradox of the dominated and there is no way out of it’ (1987 cited in Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:23-24). Although, I would disagree, however, with Bourdieu’s notion, that there is no way out, but rather like Fanon (see ‘The Wretched of the Earth’ {1967}) believe there is one.

## 5.5 Conclusion

*‘Public schools are used as a means of indoctrination. They provide training in ‘norms of intra-class loyalty and elite tastes and manners’ as well as generalised, non-vocational subject areas’* (Boyd, 1973:71).

The chapter has critically examined one of the perceived social functions of UK-Based private schools. That is, the transforming of these parents’ children into national and global elites. The chapter critically analysed the four strategies of social distinction involved, arguing that through the process of ‘Othering’, these parents are able to construct their children as the few blacks that are able to transcend their blackness. Consequently, the chapter argues that these parents are not only enabling their children to have confidence in their own value, but simultaneously assigning them to ‘a group of superior essence’ as well (Bourdieu, 1996:112).

However, contrary to Fanon who contends that colonisation has led to the gentrification of the African psyche and as such, blacks unreflexively desire and consume white culture, the chapter reveals that the parents in this study strategically rather than passively consume white culture. The chapter concludes with the argument that the discourse of authentic African identity cannot grasp nor explain the complex nature of transnational (elite) identity formation in the 21st century.

# Chapter 6

# The Soft-Selling of ‘World-class’ Education

*‘Taste is what brings together things and people that go together’* (Bourdieu 1984:241)

The notion that education is a commodity and thus strategized and interacted with, like any other commodity by those that provide or consume it, has been long established (Adnett and Davies, 2002; Lury, 1996; Allatt, 1996, Symes, 1998; Alexander, 2010). In chapter 3, it was shown that education is not consumed simply for its utility function (academic competency) but also for its social functions (social competencies). Similarly, research in the UK shows that schools are aware of parents’ desire to be with their kind and consequently, as the data in this study demonstrates, they are orienting themselves towards ‘meeting the perceived demands’ of their clientele (Gerwitz et al., 1995:189).

Studies on school marketing strategies in the West have also found that, to attract certain types of families, for example the white middle class parents, private schools tend to play on the emotions and ambitions of this group of parents (Cookson and Persell, 1985; Sedden, 2001; Lynch and Moran, 2006; Cucchiara, 2008). Cucchiara (2008:171) goes as far as arguing that private schools’ advertisements ‘involve implicit and explicit appeals to status’. Similarly, Caputo (2007:178), in her study of middle class parents’ school choice in Australia, also found that the marketing strategies employed by private schools are underscored with hidden assumptions about class, race, gender and family form’.

Studies have shown that in order to increase and/or maintain the value and rarity of their product, Western private schools are creating ‘symbolic distance’ from their competitors whilst showing prospective parents that ‘*the right sort of people* [that is], *people like them* or people of even higher social status’ send their children to these schools (Cucchiara, 2008:171 emphasis in original). Since rarity equates high status and quality, elite private schools must seek ways of ‘bringing back scarcity’ (Bourdieu, 1993:114). They also demonstrate an awareness of, and need for, monitoring and restricting membership to the ‘circle of eligibles’ (Parkin 1979:44). The ‘circle of eligibles’ is usually occupied by the dominant group in any society and elite schools are one of the sites for the (re)production of this distinguishable individuals.

While very few studies have explored how and why indigenes of non-western countries acquire and maintain elite status via their consumption of overseas education (for example see Waters, 2006, 2007; Sin, 2013), even fewer have explored why and how these schools construct, maintain and sell themselves as higher status schools to non-western parents. Consequently, the study of the international education market has been a one-sided process involving only the scrutiny of the consumers of overseas schools (Zhang, 2009). Apart from creating significant gaps in the field of the international education market, it is reasonable to argue that not subjecting the *product* and the *sellers,* that is, ‘the whole set of agents engaged in the production […] of the *social value* of’ western schools(Bourdieu, 1993:140), to similar scrutiny as the consumers, goes on to validate the superiority of western education system over others in Africa and the Far East. By focusing primarily on the consumers of schools in the West, sociologists give ‘apparent confirmation to [their] *distinction*, which, as shall be shown later in the chapter, is based on no theoretical foundation’ (Bourdieu, 1993:139 my emphasis). Such a focus would not only help to legitimise western schools’ claims, particularly BBS-UK, that they are “the best in the world”, it may also make academic scholars complicit in the hegemonic discourse of ‘West is best’ (Shonekan, 2013).

## 6.1 The value and meaning of ‘world-class’

Studies have shown that ‘Education UK’ is a highly desirable and sought-after global brand (Hazelkorn, 2012; Waters and Brooks, 2010; Findlay et al., 2012; Sin, 2013). According to Okazaki et al., (2010:20), a global brand ‘is defined as a symbol of a given global culture, which consumers may purchase to reinforce their membership in that segment’. The increase in the number of schools and countries now competing in the global education market (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003; Borjesson et al., 2007; Waters, 2006; Kenway, et al., 2013), has meant even elite private boarding schools in the UK ‘now find it difficult to attract enough pupils of sufficiently high academic ability to fill their boarding places (Walford, 2009:721).

One might also argue that increased market competition has not only intensified the struggle for ‘reputable capital’ in the field of international education (Brown, 2000), it has also intensified the search for world-class status among schools (Lynch and Moran, 2006; Deem, et al., 2008; Alexander, 2010; Findlay et al., 2012). Like any field, the field of international education is ‘an area […], a field of objective relations among individuals or institutions competing for the same stakes’ (Bourdieu, 1993:133). What is at stake here is the dominant position in the field of international education and of course, the world-class status that comes with such a position.

The concept ‘world-class’ is problematic, not least because its meaning is ‘fluid [and] dependent on context’ (Deem et al., 2008:85). Some have also argued that the arbitrary use of the concept by so many education institutions has led to the loss of credibility (Deem et al., 2008). Wolf (2002 cited in Alexander, 2010:803) remarks that ‘in recent years, the term world-class has become a political and marketing slogan’ with little or no attempt made by those who proclaim it ‘to define its meaning’. As if to justify the lack of a global definition (which is imperative since *world*-class denotes a globally recognised brand and quality), the former vice-chancellor of the University of Brighton in the UK, claims that ‘world-class is one of those things which apparently, you know it when you see it’ (Watson, 2006:13). Thus implying that only individuals with the right habitus can *recognise* and *appreciate* world-class education. Nonetheless, Alexander (2010:801) asserts that in general, ‘world-class’ is defined almost exclusively in terms of tests of student attainment in a narrow spectrum of learning’.

Despite the lack of a global consensus on the definition of world-class education and the *emptiness* of the term (Lang, 2005), studies in the HE sector have reported that to occupy a position ‘within an imagined or rank-list world hierarchy’ (Findlay et al., 2012:120) secures and maintains an institution’s place in the field of HE education (Alexander, 2009; Lang, 2005). Lang reported (2005:34) that findings from an American study of Ivy League colleges and universities indicate that factors such as ‘prestige and name recognition’ were ranked ‘significantly ahead of academic programme’ by parents and students when asked to rank factors that influenced their college choices. Findlay et al., (2012:120) also reported that UK students seeking to study abroad tended to associate world-class status to universities that are ‘well known for their reputation’.

In light of the above, one can infer that ‘world-class’ status is a type of branding which, as well as operating on emotional and subconscious levels, is deliberately used to help create connections between the products and services ‘being marketed and broader conceptions of lifestyle and identity’ (Greenberg, 2000 in Cucchiara, 2008:169).

# 6.1.1 Soft-sell technique

‘Low-pressure [soft-sell] selling […] is not driving the prospect into a buying decision, but letting him reach the decision himself; *not selling him, but letting him buy’* (Bursk, 2006:152 my emphasis)

While having world-class status is useful, for example in attracting potential students, I shall argue that the growth of the international education market (SCIS, 2013) has meant even so-called world-class and high status schools cannot rest on their laurels alone. The recent commission of a research project by the British Council on behalf of the Independent School Council (ISC) to investigate the viability of Nigeria as an investable market for British Boarding schools in the UK (BBS-UK); a market that they had previously taken for granted, is a clear indication of the increased competition in the international education market (Brooks, 2011). Findings from my research indicate that, in order to secure their dominant position in the field of international education, BBS-UK and to a lesser extent, British Private Schools in Nigeria (BPS-N) have had to devise ways of maintaining their brand image as the ‘best in the world’. Evidence from my data also suggests that BBS-UK, through their sales representatives, that is, the education agents and head-teachers, are employing a ‘soft-sell’ approach (Okazaki et al., 2010:23); what Bourdieu might describe as ‘hidden persuasion’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:169), which is subtle enough to go undetected as a sales technique but effective enough to ‘sell’ BBS-UK as world-class and high status schools.

Ideally global brands should sell themselves, and to some extent, as shall be shown later in the chapter, they can and do. However, as argued earlier, the growth in the international education market has meant it is now imperative that world-class schools like BBS-UK highlight their distinctive values in order to reaffirm their uniqueness and their world-class status. Unlike a hard-sell marketing approach which ‘is based on direct and explicit content that emphasises product advantages and performance’ (Okazaki et al., 2010:20), soft-sell is a ‘more subtle and ambiguous’ sales technique which ‘tends to elicit more implicit and abstract responses […] whose interpretation may require less cultural specific cues’ (Okazaki et al., 2010:25).

Citing Lin (2001:90), Okazaki et al., (2010:23) argue that a soft-sell approach creates a desire for ‘the product through image and emotional appeals without bombarding the consumers with the obligatory facts and proof’. Alden et al., (1999:79), argue that soft-sell technique is a more appropriate technique for selling ‘global brands’. Like Bursk (2006), Alden et al., (1999:79 original emphasise) assert that, due to its reliance on images and emotional as well as status appeal, soft-sell approaches are able to communicate ‘*visual aesthetics* in a semiotic sense’ without running the risk of ‘mis-specifying the symbols that are reflective of [global brand]’. Subtlety is a key aspect in the sale of global brands since ‘a more direct and tangible approach’ will lead to a devaluation of the product (Alden et al., 1999:79).

The aim of this chapter is to examine how BBS-UK construct and maintain their image as providers of world-class education as well as high status schools. This is considered a significant contribution to the discourse of international education since these processes play important roles in the branding of these schools as ‘world-class’ in the first place (Lang, 2005; Lynch and Moran, 2006). The chapter also aims to critically examine how agents and head-teachers *sell* BBS-UK to prospective Nigerian parents. However the chapter does not seek to interrogate schools’ prospectuses and websites (see Symes 2003 for example). Rather, the chapter will critically investigate key aspects of BBS-UK, which agents and head-teachers “would consider […] a *given* andsomething they would […] *mention*” (British agent 2) when discussing BBS-UK to prospective parents. Also, the fact that BBS-UK rely on “word of mouth” (Nigerian agent 3) makes the soft-sell approach all the more important as a marketing/advertising technique.

The chapter begins with a critical analysis of the notion; which is widely held by parents, agents and British head-teachers, that BBS-UK are “the best in the world”. Using the concept of colonial habitus, the chapter explains how BBS-UK might have come to occupy the dominant position in the field of transnational market and how the construction of BBS-UK as a global brand might in turn enable them to occupy the dominant position in the field of education.

The chapter then goes on to examine how both BPS-N and BBS-UK use British whiteness, as raised in the previous chapter, to maintain their world-class status before going on to critically analyse the admission process of BBS-UK. It is argued that the admission process is also a mechanism by which BBS-UK maintain their world-class status and their brand image as high status schools. Furthermore, the chapter argues that the differences in the admission processes between BBS-UK and private boarding schools in Canada, are related to, and a reflection of, their respective positions in the field of international education market. Framed within the soft-sell theory, the chapter concludes with a critical examination of how agents and head-teachers *sell* BBS-UK to prospective Nigerian parents. It focuses on the three distinctive features most commonly cited by agents and head-teachers of BBS-UK; namely, an establishment for the *elites*, providers of *holistic* and *individualised* education. By discussing what the gatekeepers perceived as the distinctive features of BBS-UK, the chapter attempts to reveal the struggle that occurs in the field of international education and the subtle but effective strategies employed by BBS-UK to maintain their world-class status.

# Constructing and Maintaining a ‘World-class’ image

## 6.2 BBS-UK: “The best in the world?”

‘*Independent school education in the United Kingdom has a long established tradition, and a brand name in both British and international markets based on high status, academic excellence and preparation of young people to play significant roles* *in economy and society*’ (Foskett and Hemsley-Brown, 2003:188).

As argued in chapter 3, the parents who send their children to BBS-UK believe them to be “the best in the world”. This comment by Mrs Ayo illustrates this point: “If you look at the world […] look at the *world* […] look *everywhere else* where education is being run properly, *I’m here to find a system that beats the U.K*.” Sin (2013) reports a similar finding in her study, which explores Malaysian students’ perception of UK universities. Like the parents in my research, Sin’s respondents perceived UK education to be the best in the world.

A careful analysis of the data also reveals that agents and head-teachers also share this view.

“I think probably the third reason is the *reputation* of the UK boarding education which has a very *high reputation throughout the world*” (Head-teacher 1- UK).

“I believe that the UK, when it comes to education, the British are the best in the world and these parents know this that is why they prefer to send their children to the UK because the *British schools are the best in the world*. Their private schools are the best even better than America” (Nigerian agent 2)

“I’ll say that we have the best private education system in the world’ (British agent 1 – UK)

“OK, I think probably the British education is taken seriously in the whole world and it is probably *the best education in the world*” (British agent 2 – UK)

Interestingly though, when parents were asked to explain or give an example to illustrate why they think BBS-UK are the best in the world, a point that was not interrogated in Sin’s study, their responses typically were that they cannot “put it in words” (Mrs Philips) or that “it just something people know” (Mrs Seiye). Significantly, like the agents and head-teachers, these parents believe this to be a ‘fact’.

“I cannot pick it (laughs) I can’t pick it. Somehow I just know England is better (Mr Akpan)

“It’s not like other countries and somehow I just believe education in the UK is the best” (Mr Bala)

“As I have said, the British private boarding schools are recognised as the best worldwide. They are the best full stop. There is no denying that fact” (Ms Ambrose)

“To be fair to these parents the UK is the best without a doubt” (Nigerian agent 1).

When one of the head-teachers was asked what he thought was driving BBS-UK’s *image* as the best in the world, he was quick to point out that it was not an image; that is, not *imagined* but a reality instead; a ‘fact’.

“I mean I don’t think it is an image, I think it is actually true that we have schools, boarding schools and some day schools as well which have an ethos which is about being really very, very good indeed in what we do in the classroom and also what we offer outside the class room as well” (Headteacher 1- UK)

The fact that BBS-UK are accepted “without a doubt” by agents, head-teachers and parents as the best in the world even though they cannot articulate the reasons for this assertion supports Fanon and Bourdieu’s thesis that individual and groups’ action and choices ‘function below the level of consciousness and language’ (Bourdieu, 1984:466). Consequently, the parents and head-teacher’s responses cannot be fully understood unless one appreciates and acknowledges the context in which these beliefs are generated. The key context here is the differential spatial position occupied by Britain and Nigeria in the global field of power. While the UK is near the top of the global social ladder, Nigeria is much closer to the bottom rung (Shonekan, 2013). These differences have not only given rise to the ‘colonial habitus’, they have also shaped and conditioned both the psyche of Nigerians (colonised) and the British (colonisers) (Fanon, 1967/2008).

Viewed through a Fanonsian lens, these parents’ responses reveal how the field has helped to *condition* their dispositions and also their perception of Nigeria and Nigerians. That is, parents’ responses are based not on *fact* but rather are a reflection of how the field which they inhabit has conditioned them to perceive the West in general and Britain in particular.If according to Davey (2012:513), ‘how and where an institution is positioned [in the field of education] reflects the habitus of the individuals who inhabits it’, then one could also argue that these parents’ habitus shapes, and determines an institution’s position in the field of education. Alternatively, one could infer that these parents’ description of BBS-UK as “the best in the world” might be their way of highlighting their class position and displaying high-class taste at the same time.

Bourdieu (1993) posits that an institution’s position in the structure of its field influences how its products or services are perceived. It is also safe to infer that the reverse might also be the case. Specifically, how the consumers perceive an institution’s services and/or products influence its position in its field. Following the logic of Fanon’s colonisation theory, as well as helping to create BBS-UK’s reputation as the best in the world (Binsardi and Ekwulugo, 2003), these parents’ unwavering and unquestioning acceptance of this claim also plays a significant part in securing and maintaining as well as legitimising their dominant position in the field of the international education.

Parents and agents’ absolute belief in the superiority of BBS-UK over other private schools in the world would enable BBS-UK to continue to enjoy and secure the highest reputable and cultural capitals there is in its field (Bourdieu, 1993). Subsequently, BBS-UK has come to assume the very important and undisputed (as far as some of the parents, agents and schools are concerned) role as ‘the educational establishments reserved for the ‘elites’’ (Bourdieu, 1993:119). In other words, besides making Britain the site par excellence, thus giving it monopoly in the elite education market (Bourdieu, 1993), colonisation has also constructed BBS-UK as brands that sell themselves; at least to indigenes of former colonies.

As argued in chapter 1, unlike Fanon (1967/2008), Bourdieu (1984) does not believe that discourses influence individual’s perceptions and lifestyle choices (Lovell, 2000; Sayer, 2005). Bourdieu (1984:468) argues instead that, ‘historical schemes of perception and appreciation which are the product of the objective division into classes […] function below the level of consciousness and discourse’. Thus in Bourdieu’s scheme, hegemonic discourses such as ‘West is best’ which have been strengthened by historical events like colonisation (Kenway and Koh, 2013a) would not have any influence on how my participants perceive western products.

A comparative study by the multinational management consultancy McKinsey (2007:6) reveals that Britain is not in fact, one of top ten countries with ‘the best-performing school systems as defined by the OECD’s [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] Programme for International Student Assessment [PISA]’. The PISA assesses knowledge and skills in literacy, mathematics and science of fifteen year olds in all OECD countries as well as some countries outside the OECD (McKinsey, 2007; PISA, 2009). The PISA assessment (2009; 2013) shows that the UK performed below average in literacy and mathematics, coming in 26th and 28th places respectively; 16th in science. In fact, the 2009 PISA report shows that four of the five top performing countries are far eastern countries like China (1st place), Korea (2nd), Hong Kong 4th and Singapore (5th) (OECD, 2010).

In light of PISA’s findings, why do the parents, agents and head-teachers still describe British education as ‘the best in the world’? Evidence from the quantitative data shows that three of the parents with children in BBS-UK are the owners of high status private schools in Nigeria. One of the parents was also the commissioner of education at the time of this study. With this amount of interest and ‘expertise’ in education and British education in particular; Mrs Adu’s comment reflects this “Good School Guide is like a second bible. I always buy one every year to keep up on what’s going on”,it is not unreasonable to argue that some of the parents and all of the agents and head-teachers might be aware of the OECD’s findings. So why then do these participants still believe “without a doubt” that BBS-UK are the best in the world?

I argue that the unconditional faith in the British education system, particularly, BBS-UK, in the face of such strong evidence, is an indication of the internalisation of hegemonic discourse of western superiority as argued by Fanon (2008). Alvesson (2002:117) asserts that ‘discourses position the person in the world in a particular way and at a given time, prior to the individual having any sense of choice’. From this position, and in light of the available empirical evidence, it is safe to infer that BBS-UK’ reputation as a global brand is not necessarily based on high ‘academic excellence’ as Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2003:188)suggested, but rather as a result of the available discourses such as ‘West is best’ which shape and influence non-western perceptions of western products.

Similarly, it is plausible ‘that much of the positional advantage that [British] private schools enjoy’ (Symes, 1998:140) is precisely because of the fact that they (the West) have access to the symbolic power which non-westerner countries are subjected to (Bourdieu, 1984; Fanon, 1967/2008). Critically, the ‘collective mis-recognition’ of BBS-UK world-class status by all involved; that is, the parents, agents and head-teachers, is crucial in the construction and maintenance of BBS-UK’s image as a global brand (Bourdieu, 1993:138).

## 6.2.1 The Colour of ‘World-Class’ education

‘*The underlying assumption of this […] impression management into schools is that appearance […] can be the benchmark of educational quality, and that the school which pays due attention to its image in all areas of its endeavour will stand out from its rivals and will be perceived as a worthy and well-managed school with a sound educational performance’* (Symes, 1998:137)

Research has shown that the image of a school plays a significant role in how it is perceived by prospective parents (Weenink, 2009; Symes, 1998). Studies have also found that tuition fees (Weenink, 2009); the curriculum and the admission process (Cookson and Persell, (1985) as well as the prospectus and uniforms (Symes, 1998) are some of the ways by which private schools in the West ‘enhance their positional advantage in the education market’ (Hirsch, 1976 in Symes, 1998:138).

Evidence from my research shows that British whiteness is one of the ‘distinctive strategies’ (Bourdieu, 1993:111) which both BPS-N and BBS-UK employ to both construct and maintain the impression of a world-class education institutions.

“All schools have a cut off point. You know, they will only have a certain amount of Japanese, Chinese, Russians or Nigerians because they want to keep the British culture alive because if you have too many foreign students, you lose that [British] tradition so they have a cap” (White British agent/consultant)

“They’re British schools in England and people are choosing them because they want to learn about *British culture* and so the balance has to be right. It has to still be an *English school*. So most of the schools I work with wouldn’t have any more than maybe 15 or 20 per cent of the children who are international (White British agent 1)

“It is the Englishness, the British culture that is one of the attraction to foreign parents so they [British private boarding schools] *are quite careful about it* […] it is very important that they remain English because parents are buying [the] *Englishness*” (White British agent 2)

Two important points, which deserve further analysis, emerge from the above quotes. Firstly, it is quite apparent that BBS-UK are not only aware of the significance of “Britishness” in foreign parents’ school choice decisions, but that British whiteness appears to be the main mechanism by which BBS-UK project and maintain their world-class status.The need to maintain BBS-UK’s ‘whiteness’ has not only highlighted the importance of a tightly controlled admission process, in relation to foreign students, it has also indicated the highly selective nature of the admission process into BBS-UK.

Paradoxically, research suggests that overseas pupils play a significant role in the BBS-UK’s ability to construct and claim world-class status (Findlay, et al., 2012). In their study which explores the motivation of international student mobility, Findlay et al., (2012:124) reported that BBS-UK are keen to emphasis the ‘international make-up’ of their pupils as this allows them to lay claim to having ‘world-class’ status. In other words the admission of a few foreign students; preferably African and Asian students as they would be more effective in projecting the ‘international’ image, is used to legitimise and authenticate BBS-UK world-class status.

Secondly, the significance of British whiteness in the construction of world-class status has meant BBS-UK have at their disposal sufficient symbolic capital with which they can construct themselves as world-class institutions. That is, their access to a powerful symbolic capital such as British ‘whiteness’ has enabled BBS-UK acquired a dominant position in the field of international education. What is revealed here, in the context of international education, is that British whiteness is not only a form of symbolic capital but a form of reputable capital as well, both of which some would argue are essential for winning the struggle for dominance in field of education (Bourdieu, 1993; Brown, 2000). Nonetheless, Bourdieu’s postulation that all the agents involved the construction and ‘production of sacred goods’ are not conscious of the effect and significance of the strategies they employ is refuted by the strategic admission of foreign pupils by BBS-UK (Bourdieu, 1993:138).

Cayla and Arnould (2008:86 cited in Okazaki et al., (2010:21) argue that ‘branding is a specific form of communication’. Research has shown that in many developing countries, and perhaps in Africa in particular, prestigious connotations are usually attached to Western products. Associations with ‘Westernness’ and ‘Americanness’ can add value to many kinds of commodities and services (Classen and Howes, 1996:188). Okpara and Anyanwu (2011) argue that in Nigeria, the perceived ‘foreignness’ of a product is one of the main attractions to the consumption of goods even when these products are of a lower quality when compared to Nigerian products. Both empirical and anecdotal evidence from fieldwork shows that; perhaps due to its ‘visibility’, British ‘whiteness’ and/or ‘Westernness’ are some of the ways by which BPS-N attempt to ‘create the impression of a well-heeled establishment’ while ‘alluding to a range of understated meanings’ like world-class and high status schools at the same time (Symes, 1998:143).

During the fieldwork, it was noted that most private schools in Nigeria, including the so-called ‘private schools for the poor’ (Dixon, 2012), tended to describe themselves as ‘international’ schools. The excessive use of very English sounding names like ‘Pampers’, ‘Regents’ and ‘The Grange’ amongst private schools in Nigeria was also noted. Shonekan (2013:185) made the same observation with Nigerian music artists, noticing ‘glaring similarities’ in the name choices adopted by Nigerian musicians ‘to African American hip hop artists’. I concur with Shonekan (2013), who argues that the use of English sounding names is one of the ways private schools in Nigeria (or Nigerian musicians in Shonekan’s case) attempt to communicate their ‘Westernness’. The same reason could also be given for the use of British, French and America curriculum, which is boldly declared in the prospectuses of Nigeria’s top private schools, and also why most of them liaise with foreign countries in their struggle for reputable capital. Marginson (1995 cited in Symes, 1998:136) posits that;

‘[the] symbolic ascription of value to enhance the desirability of what otherwise might be perceived as run of the mill products and service has become an important feature of the dynamics of modern market, influencing the demand practices of consumers, altering their subjectivities’

The interview transcripts of a white British consultant for BPS-N and BBS-UK reveals that being white and British is one of the key requirements when recruiting head teachers for top private schools in Nigeria. He explained that this would “never be stated in the advert”, no doubt because his company would be in breach of the UK employment and equality legislation. However, the fact that a UK-based recruitment agent is used to recruit head-teachers for BPS-N suggests that at the very least, British individuals are specifically sought for these positions. Furthermore, anecdotal evidence suggests that over 60 per cent of the head-teachers of the top ten private schools in Nigeria are white British. Taken with the British consultant’s comments, it is clear that proprietors of these top private schools in Nigeria prefer white (British) people for the position of head-teachers. However, it stands to reason that such attitudes validate the ‘cultural hegemony that gives cultural imperialism the durability and strengths to reiterate and assure Western superiority’ (Shonekan, 2013:192).

Apart from assisting in the creation of a world-class status, there is a perception amongst Nigerian agents that having white British teachers enables BPS-N to charge what some parents described as “exorbitant prices” (Mrs Ayo).

“Put an expatriate head and a few white teachers in a [Nigerian private] school and you’ve got a money making machine. A thriving business” (Nigerian agent1)

“These schools [BPS-N] are a lot more expensive than your average private school in Lagos and I think this is because they employ white people. It kind of justifies their school fees because a lot of Nigerians know that it is not cheap to have expatriate workers, especially British expatriates as opposed to Chinese or Lebanese or Indian expatriates. So they accept the cost of the school fees that the school charge them” (Nigerian agent 2 – Nigeria)

Furthermore, the data show that one of the ways by which BPS-N attempt to manage parents’ expectations in respect of quality and value for money, is through the strategic positioning of the few white British teachers as head of departments. The conversation between the head-teacher (British head-teacher 1 - Nigeria) of a BPS-N and his wife, who is also the head of Early Years, demonstrates this.

Head-teacher (White British male): I’m the head and the school is divided into three departments – early years which is the first three years of a child’s life at school, lower primary which is Year 1,2 and 3, upper primary which is 4,5 and 6. Each of those three departments is in the charge of an expatriate head of department; usually a British person. At the moment all British. That hasn’t necessarily been the case I think, has it (asks wife). Mrs M was head of department wasn’t she? (wife nods)

HT: (pauses) is she British? She is African but not Nigerian. Sierra Leone? I’m not sure.

Head of Early Years: I think it was. But she was British though. I think she was British

HT: and then we have three or four expatriate teachers in the school who don’t have management responsibilities as such but who bring to us extra degree of Britishness if I can put it that way and enable us to have expatriate teachers in most year groups and that means that the children would, every three years will have a year with an expatriate teacher and I think for all sorts of reasons, the parents quite like that.

As well as demonstrating the strategic positioning of white British teachers, which as one of the head-teachers explains, is to ensure that “Britishness [is] sort of sprinkled in the school” (British head-teacher 1 - Nigeria), these comments also show that where a black person is the head of a department, emphasis is placed on the individual’s nationality rather than their race. The head-teacher and his wife are quick to point out that while the individual may be black, they are “not Nigerians” but rather “British”. In other words, the teacher may *appear* black but they are white inside, in *essence*. Here, we see an example of the ‘transmuting power’ of Britain as the producer of high quality teachers (Bourdieu, 1993:147). Evidence from the current study suggests that highlighting British links either to the curriculum used, or where a black teacher was trained, is very important if parents are to be reassured of the quality education that BPS-N are providing. What has been shown thus far however, is that even in its most invisible form (*externally* black, *internally* white), whiteness, British whiteness in this case, still holds more currency than blackness in general, and Nigerian blackness in particular.

From a Bourdieusian perspective, ‘what is involved [in the construction of world-class education] is not the rarity of the product, but the *rarity of the producer*’ (Bourdieu, 1993:147 original emphasis). In other words, it is the rarity of white British teachers in Nigerian private schools, which is helping BPS-N to acquire and maintain world-class status in Nigeria. However, the devaluation of Nigerian and/or black teachers have been instigated by the ‘collective belief in the value’ of British whiteness and BBS-UK by all parties involved; the parents, agents and white British head-teachers (Bourdieu, 1993:147).

To further project their world-class status and their reputation as a high status school, both of which would increase their desirability, BPS-N also employ “a few white teachers” (White British head-teacher 1- Nigeria)**.**  Indeed, as indicated in the head-teacher’s narrative below, the chance to be *taught* by white teachers is one of the main reasons why some of parents choose BPS-N for their children.

“One of my first visitors (as a head-teacher) was a parent who said he wants his child to be in the class of the expatriate teacher the following term and I checked with the proprietor and said this is what he is requesting but I am not likely to accede to his request, are you OK with that and he said if I don’t he may well take his children out of the school and she (the proprietor) said I’m fine with that. And I said to him, I’m very sorry this is the way that we do it and if you don’t like it you can take your children out but I’m very sorry we are not changing our policy. So they (Nigerian parents) are very well behaved about it, aren’t they (asks wife)? And we try to be very fair about it too” (White British Head-teacher 1).

While schools might not “accede” to parents’ demands that their children are taught only by white teachers; not least because they believe that there are “some cracking good Nigerian teachers” (British head-teacher 1 - Nigeria), they are however aware that having white British teachers is the “main selling point” for BPS-N (white British head-teacher 3 - Nigeria). To avoid situations where “parents don’t feel they are getting what they pay for” (White British Head-teacher 3 - Nigeria), the data show that some schools have devised what I have termed here as ‘*white rota’.* The ‘white rota’ is a kind of system which ensures that each child in BPS-N is taught at least “every other year” (White British head-teacher 2 - Nigeria) by a white British teacher. Whilst not every BPS-N uses this system; viewing it as “racist”, with “40% of [its] teaching staff white British” (white British head-teacher 3- Nigeria), even schools which have refused to use the ‘white rota’ are still able to reassure parents that they are getting their monies’ worth.

It is important to point out that the ‘whitening’ process discussed thus far is not the kind of marketing information that would be found in conventional marketing sources such as a school’s website and/or prospectus. Yet, I argue that it is one of the most cost effective marketing approaches employed by so-called world-class schools. In the context of marketing, such a ‘whitening’ process is an epitome of the soft-sell approach. Firstly, it is a process that uses imagery in the form of white British, and to a lesser degree, foreign students, in the construction, maintenance and selling of BBS-UK as world-class education institutions. Secondly, it is an indirect and subtle approach, which ‘tends to elicit more implicit and abstract responses’ (Okazaki et al., 2010:20). Thirdly, it is an insidious marketing approach, which engenders prospective foreign parents to consume BBS-UK without needing to bombard them ‘with the obligatory facts and proof’ (Okazaki et al., 2010:23). Lastly, the use of British whiteness in this way means BPS-N and BBS-UK are not selling themselves to prospective parents but ‘letting [them] buy’ (Bursk, 2006:152).

Bourdieu (1984:2) argues that ‘a work of art has only meaning and interest only for someone who possesses the cultural competence’ and the *right* habitus. If one is to apply the logic of this argument to the ‘soft-sell’ theory, then one might argue that the effectiveness of the soft-selling approach is dependent on consumers’ habitus. That is to say, the use of whiteness and references to elitism (discussed below) will only be effective if the targeted clientele have the right habitus. Since the soft-sell approach relies on subtlety, I will argue that the targeted clientele must be able to decipher the messages being communicated by the sales’ representatives, which might be difficult without the internalisation of certain ideals, taste, lifestyles and preferences, hence the habitus. In the case of the parent participants, both the colonial and class habituses have proven to be useful.

## 6.2.2 Admission Processes

*‘Schools can and do deflect undesirable class ‘choices’ and encourage desirable ones as their own institutional survival as a particular type of school demands it’* (Lynch and Moran, 2006:228)

The data shows that the admission process is one of the main ways by which BBS-UK attempt to maintain their reputation as “the best in the world” and their image as high status schools. Evidence from the current study suggests that there are different stages in the admission process. Although very little data was gathered on the admission processes for Canadian private schools. The first stage is the search for the right school, which could be through an agent, personal recommendation or the Internet. The search is then narrowed down, schools are contacted and the formal admission process begins. This is the second stage of the admission process. Parents are usually asked at this stage to pay a non-refundable sum of money to secure a consideration by these schools. This step in the process is usually followed by a planned visit to the schools. The third and final stage is the formal acceptance of a place and the procurement of the appropriate visa.

However, the data shows that these stages do not necessarily happen in a linear manner. For example, while some of the parents decide to send their child to a particular school prior to a visit, like the parents who send their children to Canada, others visit several schools before reaching a decision. Also, some parents prefer to correspond with the schools directly despite the fact that evidence from the data suggests that there are some benefits from using agents. For instance, using a reputable agent not only guarantees that their child will be granted a student visa, it can also ensure that their child is admitted into BBS-UK of their choice.

“We are 99% confident that all the families she [a well known Nigerian agent] works with are genuine and meet all our criteria so we usually grant her the visas” (head of the visa section - British embassy, Lagos).

“Sometimes there can be a situation where a parent rang a school, the school may not have a space but if we rang them they might just find one. Because we do build up very close relationship [with the schools] so we get on with the admission team very well” (British agent 2).

My data also indicate that agents also provide other services such as finding schools, completing the necessary forms (including visa applications), coaching the child for entrance exams into BBS-UK and in some cases, accompanying the child and parents on their first school visits.

There is some evidence in the study which suggests that the processes involved in gaining admission into a BBS-UK are both more time consuming and costly than Canada. The data reveals that it can take as little as “three months from start to finish” (Mr Akin) to gain admission to a Canadian private boarding school. This period includes the time parents take to make the decision to send their child to Canada, through school selection, to the point when the child finally leaves for Canada. A similar process for BBS-UK takes between one and two years to complete as the quotes below indicate.

“Oh yes! Oh yes! It took me the best part of a year and a half to finish that experience you know; I will go, book an appointment, go and visit this school. I then started narrowing it down to various other criteria, you know, so with that you know, we were able to decide that well, let him go here” (Mrs Tosin)

“I think we started [the admission process] a year or so before she left for the UK. My wife was told by one of her friends who already have children in the UK that we needed to begin early if we want to get our first choice so we started early” (Mr Odili)

“I put her name down like 2 years ago, so even when I called to say I’m bring her application forward it wasn’t too strange because I had been in touch with them. They tell you if you want to apply to a school make sure you do it a year or two in advance. We kept up with the registrar and I’m used to doing that anyway” (Mrs Adu)

As indicated in the last quote, one of the reasons for the difference in time frame could be attributed to the fact that parents seeking to send their children to BBS-UK are expected to formally register their interest by completing a registration form and paying a registration fee at least a year before their child is due to start. However, there is no evidence in the study to suggest that the same condition applies to private boarding schools in Canada.

As already mentioned all parents who chose the UK visited several schools; making two or more trips to the UK, before deciding on which school to send their child to.

“We also had to visit the school. I visited the school, she visited the school. She had two choice so she had to go to all the choice to pick the one she prefer and checking through their hotels, checking through their classes, and the comfort and checking through their pupil … I went to the place twice before, first before she took the school, then after when she decided for the school, I went again to make sure that it is OK” (Mrs Ola)

“My husband took him, he spent a night at the school to experience boarding school, showed around the school as they do. He just had a day at school, classes, boarding etcetera. That also helped prepare him” (Mrs Amechi)

“It involves a lot of travelling back and forth from the UK because my wife had made arrangements with about seven schools and we couldn’t see all of them in one trip so I think she ended up doing about two or three trips with our son” (Mr Odili)

“As a matter of factor in January I had to travel to London with my son and we visited about five schools. In fact he got admission in three he just only took one” (Mr Akpan)

There is some evidence in the study which suggests that these visits are crucial as some schools demand that prospective students sit their entrance exams in the UK instead of Nigeria. These personal visits might also make the difference between getting and not getting your child an admission into a school of your choice. As one of the agents explained: “it shows that you’re serious and not just going to waste the school’s time” (Nigeria agent 2).

Analysis of the data reveals that the “commitment” referred to here by both the schools and agents is financial. So, rather than simply being a reflection of parents’ *intention* to sending their child to BBS-UKs, these visits are also one of the ways by which schools and agents check that prospective parents are both aware of and can meet, “the huge financial commitment” (Nigerian agent 3) involved.

Furthermore, findings from my study suggest that schools and embassies rely on the agents to weed out the ‘wrong parents’ or ‘risky parents’, which are usually parents who are considered either as financially not up to the task or ‘time wasters’. Since the agents are paid “commissions” or “a percentage of the annual school fees each year the child is in the school (Nigerian agent - 3) by the schools, it is imperative that they send the “right family to the school”. Sending the wrong type of parent to BBS-UK will also “damage [the agents’] reputation with the schools” (Nigerian agent - 1).

Parents also need to demonstrate their financial capability to the British embassy in Nigeria as well. In addition to having evidence that the school fees have been paid in full, the British embassy expects parents to also have the equivalent of at least a year’s school fees in their bank account several months before applying for student visas on behalf of their children. By way of quantifying the financial cost involved in the consumption of BBS-UK, one of the agents explains that, “you can probably send two or three children to Canada for the price of one child in the UK” (Nigeria agent 3). In contrast, there is some evidence that parents who chose Canada are allowed to pay the school fees in instalments: “The owner will issue you the admission letter as long as you pay the first batch” (Mr Kome).

“Boarding schools in the UK are not for the poor or people who are gathering *kobo kobo* together (scraping pennies). No. You can get away with that if you send your child to Ghana but not schools abroad. That is just the truth. My experience tells me that people who can afford the UK are self-made millionaires or top politicians of *high calibre*. *They are people with household names*” (Nigeria agent 2)

“It costs about 3 to 4 million naira (12 to 16 thousand pounds) a year just for one child so I know that except you are very rich you cannot afford to send their children there (UK). If you are an ordinary salary earner, the UK is not for you except you are a politician, now that is a different case altogether. (Nigeria agent 3)

Emphasis on parents’ financial capability is also an attempt by the agents to indicate to prospective parents that BBS-UK are reserved only for families with a large amount of economic capital. Therefore, besides ensuring that only the *right* economically viable parents are selected, it is clear that the long and expensive admission process into BBS-UK is another means by which these schools create and maintain their image as high status education institutions. It has been suggested that the admission processes in elite schools are deliberately designed to be complex; and in this case costly, in an attempt to give the impression of prestige and high quality (Ball, 1995, Cookson and Persell, 1985). A more complex and costly admission process also enables BBS-UK to create exclusivity, which I will argue is the commodity that generates the most power in the field of elite education (Gaztambide-Fernandez, 2009a; Zweigenhaft, 2012; Gaztambide-Fernandez et al, 2013).

It is also reasonable to infer that BBS-UK’s position in the field of international education market might be one of the reasons why they (and the British embassy in Nigeria) are not only able to make these demands on Nigerian parents but also why BBS-UK are quite blasé about actively marketing themselves to Nigerian parents in the past (Brooks, 2011). On the other hand, as well as making less stringent financial demands on parents, Canadian private boarding schools appear to actively highlight the benefits of schooling in Canada; the most commonly cited (by agents and parents) being the acquisition of a Canadian citizenship (Findlay, et al., 2012). In the context of marketing however, attracting potential students with the prospective of acquiring citizenship could be described as a hard-sell approach, which as argued earlier, is not an appropriate sales technique for selling a global brand like BBS-UK (Alden et al., 1999; Okazaki et al., 2010). The data shows that the differences in the admission processes in BBS-UK and private schools in Canada is related to, and a reflection of, the different position which these schools occupy in the field of international education.

While a less expensive process might make Canada more attractive and accessible, it would also arguably weaken its cultural and reputable capital in the long term (Bourdieu, 1993). It was argued in chapter 3 that the parents who sent their children to the UK are not only seeking exclusivity, but see it as a sign of quality. If the view is taken that the production of cultural capital (which is essentially what these schools are selling) cannot be realised without ‘creating perceptions of distance and association’ (Davey, 2012:519), then the fact that Canada is cheaper and easily accessible might be construed by parents as indicating the education there to be of lower quality (Weenink, 2009). Conversely, a more demanding and expensive admission process allows BBS-UK both to limit and control the number of people that are eligible for, and have access to, their ‘product’ and thereby protecting its rarity (Bourdieu, 1993).

This may seem illogical in a pure economic sense particularly if one takes the view that the aim of the producer is to ‘draw the maximum possible profit from his capacity to steal a march on his competitors’ (Bourdieu, 1993:110). But we must remember that these schools are competing for elite parents rather than the general masses. Thus, it is in their interest (and their clients’) to maintain the rarity of their product if they are to retain both their reputation as the establishment for the elites and their dominant position in the international education market. It could also be argued that in order for the BBS-UK to maintain their dominant position, they must be seen as *disinterested* in the economic aspect of this transaction.

I argue that not showing any apparent *interest* in the number of students they are able to recruit at any given time, is the most effective and conspicuous way for BBS-UK to communicate their (supposed) world-class status. Put another way, by showing no interest in numbers, BBS-UK are able to communicate the idea that they are about ‘quality’ rather than ‘quantity’. This supposed disinterest in quantity helps to reaffirm their world-class status and thus maintaining the status quo.

Evidence from the data shows that parents’ understanding of ‘ease’ and ‘difficulties’ with regards to access to foreign countries, varies. For example Mrs Osun did not consider the West because she perceived it to be more difficult to access. On the contrary, none of the parents who send their children to BBS-UK saw the admission process as difficult or indeed complex.

“The agents help with the admission. After that we deal with the school direct. It is quite an easy process. We send them credentials and then they process everything. My children didn’t need to sit for any exams because we sent the school their credentials. So the admission was based on their credentials and of course our ability to pay the school fees” (Mrs Bawa)

“We sent her transcripts. They looked at it if she was legible and she was and that was it. The admission process itself was smooth” – (Mrs Okwu)

“It wasn’t difficult. They just wanted to see that the parents can afford the school fees, that’s basically it and the school had given them admission and that’s it. (Mrs Ayo)

Describing the admission process as easy and straightforward indicates two significant points. Firstly, it shows that these parents perceive the admission process as easy precisely because they have the right amount of social, cultural, economic and symbolic capitals that make the process easier for them. Secondly, and related to the first point, it highlights ‘a bourgeois ethos of ease, a confident relation to the world and the self’ (Bourdieu, 1984:339). With admission based primarily on parents’ economic capital, one can infer that admission in to a BBS-UK is mainly ‘dependent on the *wealth* and *wishes* of parents, rather than the *ability* and *efforts* of pupils (Brown, 1990:65; my emphasis).

# 6.2.3 Selecting the ‘right’ pupils

As already indicated, BBS-UK do not follow pre-determined admission process or processes. For instance, whilst some schools are happy for the children to sit the test in Nigeria under the supervision of their current school, others are satisfied with just the child’ transcripts.

“Emm, his papers [exam papers] were sent to the schools at home and we took the exams there [Nigeria] emm, they couriered back to them and emm he did ok and we filled all the forms and that’s it and they took it up from there” (Mrs Ayo)

However, there are also some schools for which the entrance exams are not only mandatory; they also demand that children sit for them in the UK. The data shows that for some parents, the latter is perceived as a sign of quality.

They don’t care what your O’level result is about, they base you, because they think their own test is foolproof. If you pass it they give you an unconditional offer. They don’t go with your transcripts. So if they are gonna take that kind of risk they can’t risk sending the papers to Nigeria where the teachers can give one hour instead of 45 minutes just so that the child passes. So you have to come here [UK] and do the exam (Mrs Adu)

“We had to take him to UK to sit for the test because they don’t send the test over to Nigeria like other schools […] I like their style because it means that people cannot cheat their way into their school and I think that’s why they are one of the top boarding schools in the UK” (Mr Odili)

“[Finley College] do not conduct their test outside the UK so our pupils have had to go to the UK to sit for their aptitude tests. Now this is their policy but I don’t necessarily agree with it because we can supervise the test here if it is arrange at time when my staffs are less busy. As you can imagine going to England to write a test that lasts no more than 2 to 3 hours is quite an expensive exercise but surprisingly they are most of our parents’ first choice” (3 British head-teacher - Nigeria)

Even though academic ability is one of the selection criteria, there is substantial evidence in my data which indicates that it is not the main basis for selection. Rather, as the quotes below demonstrate, more weighting and considerations appear to be given to other abilities that the child possesses.

“UK boarding schools first and foremost want to know what interests and skills the child has” (3 British agent - UK).

“So we are looking at people who are going to have positive impact upon the community, upon each other if you see what I mean. So those are the sorts of things we are looking for. Not just the academic, although, obviously, we need people who can cope academically but also what are people really going to benefit and really going to contribute” (1 British head-teachers - UK).

Indeed, as Mrs Adu explains, the lack of outside interests and social skills often result in refusal by schools.

“There are some schools that, I mean Grange is very very good school. A lot of the children have even left Grange because Grange has changed now. They were getting high marks but when they were coming here (UK) they weren’t taking them because that’s all they knew, academics. *Socially they were not very valuable* so now in places like Grange you have to do extracurricular whether you like it or not you do two three. So they have something to talk about apart from you go to school” (Mrs Adu)

It is also quite clear that the entrance exams are written for, and favourable to, those children who are already exposed to the kind of education that is practiced and valued by BBS-UK. Indeed, evidence in the data shows that all the parents who chose the UK had previously sent their children to BPS-N. This is important for preparing the children for admission into BBS-UK because as Mrs Adu explains, attending these school make the child more “socially valuable” and appealing to the prospective schools*.*

The comment of one of the British agents is revealing in relation to the importance of a prospective foreign pupil having a valuable ‘asset’.

“A lot of the Japanese children that we place in British schools have incredible musical talent and therefore one of the things the schools love about that is that they can play the piano beautifully or the flute, violin, or whatever they may play and that is *enhancing the school community*. It’s not necessarily to do with nationality it can be to do *with skills*” (British agent 2)

As argued earlier, BBS-UK are keen to limit the number of foreign pupils in their school in order to maintain their “Englishness”. Consequently, one could argue that the admission of foreign students is further limited by, and based on, their perceived value. That is to say, BBS-UK are selecting the type of children (and family) that will “*enhance”* and maintain their world-class and high status image at the same time (Lynch and Moran, 2006). Also apparent in the data is that BBS-UK are not only implicated in ‘class game’, they also ‘actively interpret and redefine the rules of the game as it is played out on their own stage’ (Lynch and Moran, 2006:225). A significant implication is that the selection processes in BBS-UK ‘have less to do with ability or willingness than background and style’ (Cookson and Persell, 1985:49). Consequently, through its admission process, BBS-UK invariably becomes one of the key gatekeepers of ‘the circle of eligbles’ (Parkins, 1979:44).

The complexity of BBS-UK admission process has meant Mrs Adu, like the other parents who send their children to BBS-UK, have had to draw heavily on their cultural capital, which are their ‘general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about school system, and educational credentials’ (Swartz, 1997:75) in order to secure admission for their children. Here cultural capital becomes ‘a powerful resource’ (Swartz, 1997:75) which not only enables ‘appreciation’ but also an ‘understanding’ of the system in which one is operating in (Swartz, 1997:76). Consequently, cultural capital ‘functions simultaneously as instruments of communication and as instruments of knowledge (Bourdieu, 1971:295 in Swartz, 1997:83).

It is quite obvious that the admission process of BBS-UK displays ‘unmistakeable tendencies towards social closure’ (Berking, 1996:190 in Ball, 2003:112). However, rather than employing what Bourdieu (1984:162) calls the ‘brutality of discriminatory measures’ these schools are instead using ‘the charms of apparent absence of discriminatory measures’. So while information on websites and schools’ prospectuses may give the impression that anybody, provided the parents can afford the fees, can apply to BBS-UK, admitting children based on their “talent” and “skill” ensure that only families with a ‘feel for the game’; itself shaped by the composition and volume of the ‘right’ social, cultural and economic capitals, can get their children admitted into these schools (Lynch and Moran, 2006).

The ability to instigate social closure is an integral and important role in the competitive struggle for reputable and symbolic capitals in the international education market. This is because, besides helping to maintain the image of BBS-UK as the primary site for elite reproduction, social closure ensures that the wrong type of students; that is, those without the right kind of social skills are not admitted. As Cookson and Persell, (1985:57) point out, ‘if the “wrong” students are admitted, then the historical mission of the schools to mould patrician and parvenu into an elite cadre will be jeopardised’. Additionally, by activating social closure, BBS-UK are able to bring ‘back scarcity’, which Bourdieu (1993:114) asserts is imperative both in maintaining the value and status of a product and the consumer of that product. According to Bourdieu (1993:114), when ‘goods that belonged to the ‘happy few’ [privileged few] become common place the rarity of the product and the rarity of the consumer decline’.

## 6.3 ‘Selling’ high status schools

*‘On the basis of the positions that the various agents or institutions occupy in the structure of the field [...], it is possible to predict, or at least to understand, the aesthetic positions they will adopt, as expressed in the adjectives used to describe their products or any other indicator’* (Bourdieu, 1993:134)

Research has shown that implicit and explicit reference to elitism is one of the sales strategies used by top private schools to portray themselves as top quality and high status schools and attract the middle and upper class parents (Cucchiara, 2008, Weenink, 2009; Symes, 1998). The interview transcripts of the agents and head-teachers indicate that the use of positive abstractions and images is one of the main tactics by which the BBS-UK attempt to sell BBS-UK as high status schools. Throughout, abstractions and adjectives such as “best”, “high quality”, “excellence”, “world-class” and “international reputation” are used by Nigerian agents to describe BBS-UK.

“The UK is the best because it just is […]. Most of our leaders were educated in the UK and top leaders from other countries including the UK all schooled in top UK boarding schools and many of these parents know this and want this for their children. They dream that their children will be top politicians or top people in whatever field they chose” (Nigerian agent 1)

“I have worked for many politicians and heads of States over the years and I can tell you that many of them, at least ninety per cent of these people send their children to top British public schools from a very young age because they know it is the best in the World, it has no rival as far as international boarding schools are concern” (Nigerian agent 2)

“They [Nigerian parents] want to go where the British elites send their children to. So usually I tell them Richard Branson went to this school and princess Anne’s daughter went to that school, and they are happy for their children to go there too. We do a lot of work to make sure that their children get into these schools” (Nigerian agent 3).

Comments like “produce the upper echelons in most advanced society in the world” and “most of our leaders were educated in the UK and top leaders from other countries including the UK all schooled in top UK boarding schools” are blatant attempts by the agents to brand BBS-UK as high status schools and providers of world-class education. Equally, claims like “at least ninety per cent of these people [“heads of States”] send their children to top British public schools”, are agents’ attempt to indicate ‘the social alignment of the [BBS-UK]’ to prospective parents (Symes, 1998:143). Both inferences, that is, the types of parents who use BBS-UK and the life trajectories of those who had attended BBS-UK, are means by which the agents and head-teachers appeal to the upward mobility aspirations of the Nigerian privileged classes (Cucchiara, 2008; Caputo, 2007).

Studies on parental school choice decisions have found that ‘an identification with the institution and its ‘clients’ is an important component of choice (Ball et al., 1996:100). It is therefore safe to infer that reference to elitism is a soft-sell approach used by agents to attract the right kind of parents to BBS-UK. Since elitism is a concept and practice that cuts across social and cultural boundaries, it does not require individuals to have specific cultural cues in order to understand the hidden assumptions which underscore its use (Okazaki et al., 2010); therefore making elitism an effective soft-sell technique. On a slightly different point,as well as helping to create a symbolic distancefrom other private schools in the international education market, the symbolic use of positive abstractions and images also allows BBS-UK to **‘**create and demarcate their own and exclusive target groups’ (Weenik, 2009:509).

Linking BBS-UK to elite groups is what gives *form* to the positive abstractions and adjectives that the agents and head-teachers use to describe BBS-UK. Lee (in Demaine 2001:162) argues that ‘the circulation of value can only occur when values take on objectified form through some specific instance of representation’. So, while abstractions and adjectiveswhich agents and schools ‘used to describe their products’ (Bourdieu, 1993:134) are crucial in the creation of BBS-UK’s “international reputation for *excellence”*, associating them with well-known elites like “Richard Branson” and “Princess Anne” is what eventually turns what might be described as a ‘myth’ (whilst being educated in Britain may give one an advantage, to hold any political position in Nigeria other factors like tribe, religion and having an influential political godfather are equally, if not more, important) or ‘collective fantasies and facades’ (Zukin, 1991:219) into the ‘epitome of reality’ (Chatterjee, 2007:296).

## 6.3.1 Holistic Education

*“Certainly a school as Whitehouse which places great emphasises on the development of character and the development of people who will be working for others, we are talking of men and women, in other words people who would be willing to make contribution to society and not just to be selfish and do things for themselves. They are expecting their children to grow in character and to become very well-rounded young people by the time they leave a school such as Whitehouse and also they are expecting that their children would have done their very best in what they do academically but also in the other contributions they make to the school. Whether it is sport or music or drama or whatever that they would really have done their very best and to make the most of the opportunities that a school like this is able to offer young people”* (British Head teacher 1 - UK).

Throughout, head-teachers and agents are very keen to stress that British private boarding schools give their pupils more than academic qualifications. Indeed, there were several references to “broad” and “holistic” education. Comments like “what they [BBS-UK] *promote is everything else*” (Agent 2– British and UK based) and “they [BBS-UK] promote an all-round child” (British head-teacher 2 - UK) are attempts by agents and head-teachers to indicate the ‘broadness’ of the type of education they provide. Similarly, one of the head-teacher commented that BBS-UK will also produce “men and women […] who would be willing to make contribution to society and not just to be selfish and do things for themselves” while another remarks that BBS-UK will not only “develop [children] into fine young men and women” who will go on to “*achieve in their different fields in the future*”.

From Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, emphasis on holistic and broad education are the head-teachers’ way of indicating that in BBS-UK, academic and social competencies are pulled together to endorse a ‘specific logic of distinction’ which in turn ‘secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors’ (Bourdieu, 1986:245 in Ball, 2003:71). It also implies that BBS-UK are adept at combining ‘the “intellectual” advantages of public education with the “moral” assurances of private education’ (Bourdieu, 1996:290). As a consequence, BBS-UK are packaged as generating ‘surplus meaning’ (Demaine, 2001). So, whilst they may be more expensive than private schools in Nigeria and in Canada for example, their supposed ability to develop the child intellectually, socially, physically and morally, as well as *guarantee* class reproduction; hence the surplus meaning, means that BBS-UK have been successfully constructed as good *value for money.*

The interview transcripts show that the head-teachers are also quite keen to describe the “vast array of activities” and “opportunities” that are provided in British private (boarding) schools.

“The holistic approach to education that our independent schools have which is very much not just focus on the academics […] so drama is important, music is important, sport is important, learning about the community, leadership […] and that’s isn’t just about academic qualifications” (Agent 2– British and UK based).

Throughout, more emphasis is placed extra-curricular activities, music and foreign language than academic achievements. Indeed, when the academic curriculum is mentioned, it is to point out that the school, perhaps unlike other schools, BBS-UK are not “just [about] test and the exams” and “offers more than just the academic curriculum”. On the other hand, head-teachers were keen to describe in great detail the number and type of extra-curricular activities they provide.

Since world-class education is measured by academic attainments (Alexander, 2010), one might expect agents and head-teachers to at least mention BBS-UK’s academic achievements.However their desire to focus less on academic and more extra-curricular provisions supports the thesis that the use of a soft-sell approach means consumers are not bombarded ‘with the obligatory facts and proof’ (Okazaki et al., 2010:23). Emphasis on extra-curricular provision on the other hand, allows the agents and head-teachers to indicate to prospective parents both the *volume* and *value* of the type of cultural capital which BBS-UK endow their pupils with.

Bourdieu (1993:121) argues that ‘the glorification of sport [and extra-curricular activities] as an essential component’ of education is a way of differentiating bourgeois education from petit-bourgeois education and social curriculum from academic curriculum. According to Bourdieu (1993:121), the emphasis on sports is also an attempt by top private schools to define bourgeois education as ‘‘energy’, ‘courage’ ‘willpower’, the virtues of ‘leaders’ and perhaps above all personal initiative, (private) ‘enterprise’, as opposed to knowledge, erudition, and ‘scholastic’ submissiveness’.

Moreover, since Nigerian primary and secondary syllabi ‘focuses on the acquisition of knowledge and skills relevant for *functional living’* (UNSECO, 2008 my emphasis) placing emphasis on extra-curricular activities allows the head-teachers and agents alike to make a clear distinction between both the curricular as well as the consumers of each curriculum. A broader point that needs to be made here is, due to their perceived world-class status, BBS-UK are not only (co)constructors of *valuable* social activities, they have become responsible for distinguishing between valuable extra-curricular activities like music and less valuable extra-curricular such vocational activities like soap making which was discussed in chapter 3.

Placing emphasis on the extra-curricular activities is also a means by which BBS-UK are ‘projecting the class identity of the school to the wider community’ (Light and Kirk, 2000 cited in Lynch and Moran, 2006:227). To put yet another way, emphasis on provision of extra-curricular activities is one of the tactics used by the BBS-UK head-teachers and agents, consciously or unconsciously, to ‘denote [the] separate circuits and lifestyles’ of their clienteles (Vincent and Ball, 2007:1067). The packaging of BBS-UK as bourgeois education institutions is crucial both in terms of maintaining their brand image as providers of world-class education and also in attracting the right kind of family because as Bourdieu (1984: 241) perceptively points out, ‘taste is what brings together things and people that go together’.

Another claim made by the agents and head-teachers alike, is that, due to the broadness of their curriculum, BBS-UK are able to facilitate the moral development of its pupils. The comment from the British agent demonstrates:

“you know, you feel like school has laid the foundation; discipline and morals and respect and all that a child should be brought up on to make them an *amazing citizen*, you know *a human being*” (White British Agent 1 –UK).

The mirroring of parents’ values and beliefs (chapter 3) in their sales speech demonstrates the insidious and subtle nature of the soft-sell technique.

By way of explanation, the agent went on to suggest that British private boarding schools are able to develop morality in children because they “have kept that tradition”.

“They’ve [British private boarding schools] kept that, private schools have kept that tradition […] So therefore when a child comes out at the other end they are very well prepared and very well-mannered for dealing with the world and dealing with whatever comes their way” (Agent 1 – British and UK based).

Including the word “tradition” when describing BBS-UK is considered here as an effective distinction strategy because, amongst other things, as Symes (1998:144) points out ‘history and traditions […] have a peculiar cachet surrounding them’. In his research, which explores private schools’ prospectuses, Symes (1998:145) argues that;

‘tradition is a valued asset in the image politics of these schools, with usually a page or two in the prospectuses of many private schools […] assert their commitment to traditional values and beliefs, of which they must be seen to be important guardians’.

In the context of morality, the use of ‘tradition’ suggests that British private boarding schools have maintained what perhaps can be described as traditional or old-fashion views of discipline. For international parents like Nigerians whose views on discipline may be very different from those advocated in contemporary Britain, the idea that BBS-UK have kept with tradition is both appealing and reassuring as the quotes below demonstrate.

“Nigerian parents want to know that hmm, that there is a proper structure to the school and that their children would be safe and secure and that the children would understand that they have to, they need to hmm, stick to the rules more or less in order to succeed and hmm, that is something that comes up time and again with Nigerian parents. They are very keen to know that there are going to be proper structures and their children are going to have clear guidance and clear rules by which to operate” (British head-teacher 1 - UK).

“In my experience I find that Nigerian parents are very hot on discipline. They want schools to be very strict with their children. They will tell me that I should not hesitate to punish their child if they misbehave. But I tell them we don’t endorse draconian punishments here but we are still very strict with our students and they know that there are consequences for their actions” (British head-teacher 2- UK).

“[…] UK boarding schools are quite strict and Nigerian parents are comforted by this fact” (Nigerian Agent 2).

Claiming that British private boarding schools “have kept that tradition” also implies that they have history which in turn suggests that these schools have come a long way and therefore have stood the test of time. Similarly, the idea that “British tradition is old and long suffering” (Nigeria agent 1) and “have been around for awfully long time” (British agent 2), invokes the notion of history, originality and robustness as well; all of which are inter-related. When taken together, these ideas help to create an image of an institution that is fortified against social and educational failures and one that offers its pupils authentic rather than watered-down or counterfeit version of the *original* education precisely because it is ‘old’ and “have kept [with] tradition”.

The analysis above indicates that *history* and *tradition* are used by the agents to communicate longevity. Also implied in the agents’ narrative is the belief that longevity is one of BBS-UK’s strongest weapons in their fight for dominance in the field of international education. As one of the British agents explains, “being around for a long time seems to command worldwide respect, for knowing what you are doing”. Longevity becomes a symbolic capital as well as the yardstick by which education institutions in the international market are measured against. Bourdieu (1993:144) argues that ‘the space of aesthetic and ethical positions, which is the product of a *historical accumulation*, is the common *system of references* in relation to which all those who enter the field are objectively defined’ (my emphasis). He goes on to assert that;

‘there is no other criterion of the existence of an intellectual, an artist or a school than his or its capacity to win recognition as holding a position in the field, a position in relation to which the others have to situate themselves’ (Bourdieu, 1993:145).

## 6.3.2 ‘Individualised’ education

*‘The field of education has its own hierarchies of institutions and its own competing valuations of and struggles over different kinds of capital. The definition and pursuit of goods therefore take place according to contested criteria, which reflect the different positions of the competing groups within their field’* (Sayer, 2005:80)

Besides catering for the holistic development of the children, head-teachers and agents are also keen to stress that they provide individualised education. The head-teacher’s response below demonstrates this aptly.

“We pride ourselves in meeting the needs of each individual child. We ensure that we get the best from them allowing each child to reach and achieve their potential. You can say that we are child focused that is to say that the child is at the centre of everything we do” (2 head-teacher –UK)

Implicit in the comment is that the British curriculum is designed to meet the needs of “each child”. In other words, BBS-UK provides each child with a ‘bespoke’ curriculum, which is tailored to meet individual children’s need in order to bring out the best in them so that they can “reach and achieve their potential”. Research has found that the notion of ‘maximum development’ is one of the marketing strategies which advertisers employed to appeal to the sensitivities of parents, particularly mothers (Kenway and Bullen, 2001).

Interestingly, there is some evidence in the data that suggests that this personalised treatment is extended to the parents.

“First and foremost I go and visit the parents who have their children in Whitehouse. This is part of the service we provide we do it in other parts of our commitment to provide an excellent education for children. You know […] not all parents are able to come often to UK from Nigeria which is a long distance so I, part of the reason why I go is to meet with parents and talk through the progress their children are making” (British head-teacher 1 – UK ).

The fact that not all BBS-UK provide this service is another example of the increased struggle in the international education market. In this instance, it is plausible to infer that the provision of this specific type of service is a ‘distinction strategy’ (Bourdieu, 1993:115) used by this particular school to distinguish itself from other BBS-UK while highlighting its distinctive value at the same time. The provision/depiction of a service that is both unique to this school and one that is not stated on their website or prospectus is another clear indication that BBS-UK, via their head-teachers and agents, do employ soft-sell techniques.

Bourdieu (1984:230) argues that ‘the field of production, [...] could not function if it could not count on already existing tastes’ and there are evidence in the current study which supports this thesis. The data shows that concepts like holistic and broad curriculum are used deliberately by BBS-UK because they reflect parents’ perception of quality education.

“Parents are coming to us because they are buying into, I mean the independent education concept whether it is an academic school or school that supports children who are not academic. The concept for them all is the same, holistic education. So I guess the concept that they are buying into is that holistic approach” (Agent 2 – British and UK based).

The fact that agents are aware that the individualised education is what parents “are buying into” and more importantly, that agents will “consider it a *given* and something they would […] mention. That they would get the *best academically* out of any child that they are educating” (white British Agent 2 – UK) indicates that agents and head-teachers are ‘deliberately create[ing] connections […] between the goods being marketed and broader conceptions of […] identity; that is, good parent identity in this case (Greenberg, 2000 in Cucchiara 2008:169). Furthermore, terms like ‘broad’, ‘holistic’ ‘individualised’ education, are highly-charged language that can be used to appeal directly to parents’ emotions as well as class identity (Okazaki et al., 2010). Greenberg (2000 in Cucchiara, 2008:169) posits that, not only does branding operate ‘on emotional and sub-conscious levels, it is designed deliberately to create connections between the products and services ‘being marketed and broader conceptions of lifestyle and identity’. Still, this is not to suggest that parents are passive recipient of sales information since, as Ball (2003:112) aptly points out, ‘the education market does not invent or import an entirely new values system, rather it draws upon views which are already embedded within societies’.

## 6.4 Conclusion

Using Fanon’s colonisation theory has been very useful in revealing the role of colonial habitus in the construction and maintenance of BBS-UK’s world-class status. It was argued that Nigeria’s colonial history makes Nigerians receptive of this notion of British being the best in education. Consequently,the chapter argued that BBS-UK’s world-class status is based not on facts but rather on internalisation of the hegemonic discourse of Western superiority. The chapter also argued that white British and BBS-UK admission process are two ways by which BBS-UK maintain their position in the field of transitional education market while maintaining the ‘circle of eligibles’ at the same time (Parkin 1979:44).

The chapter also argued that agents and head-teachers’ emphasis on ‘extra-curricular’ provision and ‘traditional’ value as well as references to elitism are soft-sell approaches that allows BBS-UK to attract the right clientele while simultaneously maintaining their world-class status (Lynch and Moran, 2006). Whilst BBS-UK might be recognised as a global brand (Findlay et al., 2012; Sin, 2013), by revealing the soft-sell approach used by BBS-UK via their sales representatives, the chapter has also demystified the idea that, due to their world-class status, BBS-UK do not need to ‘sell’ their product. Rather, the chapter argues that the agents and head-teachers’ desire to stress the “array” of extra-curricular activities that are provided by BBS-UK rather than their academic achievements is an indication of the use of soft-sell approach, which Alden et al., (1999) argue is more frequently used to sell global brands that seem to ‘sell’ themselves.

# Chapter 7

# Conclusion, Contributions and Limitations

*‘Few countries protect the inherited colonial privileges of the educated elite as African countries do’* (Uchendu cited in Bassey, 1999:56).

The thesis has shown that the consumption of western-based private schooling by the parents in this study has been motivated by multifaceted and interrelated factors; namely, social distinction, social reproduction and maintenance and elite identity formation. The democratisation of education in Nigeria is perceived by these parents to have diminished the overall quality of education in Nigeria and blurred class boundaries while devaluing the high status that was once attached to education in colonial and early post-colonial eras.

Evidence from the data reveals that some of these parents had not only acquired their current social and economic positions via education, they are also depending on it for their reproduction. The data also shows that these parents are of the opinion that they had received quality education “during their time” because education was only accessible to the “very lucky few”. More importantly, these parents believed that the quality of education was high in early post-colonial era schools in Nigeria because schools were managed by white British. However, independence has not only led to a reduction of white British experts within Nigerian schools, it also led to the increase in the number of those now able and willing to use the education system. Both of these factors, in these parents’ view, have in turn led to poor quality education in Nigeria. Consequently, unlike the British middle and upper classes who are still able to rely on their national and local education market - both private and state schools, for their reproduction - the Nigerian privileged classes have increasingly come to rely on the international education market for this function.

Evidence reveals that for most of the parents in my study, quality schools are characterised by the following:

* *Exclusivity:* Charge high school fees and therefore are mainly accessible to black children from affluent background.
* *Authenticity* and *Originality:* That the schools based in, or have very close ties with the UK, use British curriculum and adopt the ethos and pedagogical approaches used in BBS-UK*.*
* *Whiteness:* They are managed by, and have a high proportion of white British teachers, and in the UK, they are attended predominantly by white British upper and middle class children.

Utilising Bourdieu’s work, the thesis was able to show that in order to ‘conserve’ their socially and economically privileged positions the parents in my study have had to redefine ‘quality’ education. For example, the data shows that these parents went to school themselves in the 1960s and 70s and, for them, high quality education was ‘free’, centred on ‘passing exams’ and linked to local in-country reputation. By contrast, they now perceive quality education in terms of ‘expensive fees’, ‘extra-curricular activities’ and ‘international exposure’. Besides enabling them to acquire for their children valuable identities such ‘modern’, ‘cultured’, and ‘educated’, the thesis argued that this kind of reconversion strategy allows these parents’ to devalue and relegate to ‘second rank’ (Bourdieu, 1984:247) the education received by the majority of Nigerians. In other words, by employing such ‘reconversion strategy’, the parents in this study are able to ‘gain an advantage over the other classes’ while ‘reshap[ing] the structure of objective relations between [them and other] classes’ (Bourdieu (1984:157).

Besides constructing quality education in a way that puts it out of the reach of most Nigerians, the thesis argues that by defining quality education in the above terms, these parents are, consciously or otherwise, perpetuating the idea that only certain types of schools in a particular geographical area are capable of producing high quality education. The thesis also argued that the consumption of western-based schooling, particularly as offered by British private boarding schools, has become one of the most effective mechanisms for the monopolisation ‘of the emblems of ‘class’ […] or the legitimate manner of appropriating them, in contemporary Nigeria (Bourdieu, 1984:249-250).

Findings in the thesis reveal that the habitus - defined ‘as [a] deeply internalised dispositions that generate[s] ‘thoughts’, ‘perceptions’, expressions, and actions’ (Roksa and Potter, 2011:302) - does not only shape these parents’ engagement with the international education market, but has also meant the parents are ‘not equally inclined and prepared to enter’ this market (Bourdieu, 1984:557). Consequently, the findings suggest that there are significant differences in the parents’ perception of ‘quality’ in education, ‘risk’ and the ‘post-secondary aspirations’ for their children. For example, evidence from the data shows that while Mrs Osun, the parent with the least economic and cultural capital, was still concerned with the ‘pragmatic’ aspects of education, the other parents were more concerned with the social and aesthetic (form) aspects. Similarly, while the parents who sent their children to Canada were mainly concerned about their children acquiring foreign degrees, the elite parents who sent their children to Britain were more concerned about transforming their children into (trans)national elites.

Further findings suggest that these elite parents were more ‘committed to the symbolic’ (Bourdieu, 1984:253) partly because of their desire to distinguish themselves, and their children, from ‘the pretentious challengers’ (Bourdieu, 1984:251), and partly because they see their social and economic positions as ‘fortresses to be defended and captured [and maintain] in a field of struggles’ (Bourdieu, 1984:244). By sending their children to UK-based private boarding schools, the thesis argues that these parents are able to create social, symbolic and geographical distances between themselves and other class factions. These ‘distances [which] need to be kept’ (Bourdieu 1986:472) in turn allow the elite parents to continue ‘to monopolise socially and economically advantageous positions’ (Weber, 1945: 241-2 in Brown 2000).

Bourdieu (1984) postulates that status positions are expressed by ‘above all else a specific lifestyle’. Weber (1968 in Bourdieu, 1984) also made a similar point arguing that individuals often validate their social positions and status by consuming a ‘style of life’ in agreement with or in opposition to others. Therefore, this thesis has argued that by sending their children to UK-based private boarding schools these elite parents are able to express and maintain their social status by ‘communicating [their] removal from practical necessities’ (Gartman, 2002:261). That is to say, the consumption of BBS-UK, with annual school fees of £30,000 (<http://www.aprivateeducation.co.uk> accessed 2-03-2010), enables these parents to express an *elective* distance from the world of ‘material constraint and temporal urgencies’ (Bourdieu, 1984:376).

The thesis argues that when viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, the instrumental use of education is a product of the habitus instead of a simple conscious calculation on the part of my participants. That is to say, while these parents’ choices, actions and decisions might appear as emitting from cognitive structure, evidence in my data suggests that their class as well as their ‘colonial’ habituses have shaped their preferences and perceptions. Bourdieu (1984:175 my emphasis) asserts that the habitus:

‘transforms necessities into strategies, constraints into preferences, and without any *mechanical* determination, it generates the set of ‘choices’ constituting life-styles, which derive meaning, i.e. their value, from their position in a system of oppositions and correlation’

Significantly, findings from this thesis have shown that culture (relating specifically to tradition and/or religion) and race are important factors which influence individuals’ choices, preferences and actions and therefore equal importance should be attached to them in the analysis of social practice (Vincent et al, 2013b).

As indicated in chapter 4, the elite parents in this study perceive countries such as Ghana and Canada that are accessible to most affluent Nigerians as ‘risky’ places to send their children. Similarly, schools with predominantly black and/or Nigerian pupils are perceived by this set of parents as risky and therefore not for people ‘like them’. Instead, their interview data shows that these parents prefer schools with predominantly white British pupils. The thesis argues that selecting schools with few black and Nigerian pupils allows these parents to simultaneously align themselves with their white counterparts and communicate that their children ‘have *transcended* their blackness’ at the same time (Wise, 2009:9 emphasis in original).

Data from this study also shows that, in contrast to the parents selecting Canada or Ghana, these elite parents are motivated, in part, by the desire to transform their children into respectable “ladies and gentlemen” in order that they might become local, as well as transnational, elites. To achieve this, these parents are sending their children to UK-based private boarding schools in order to acquire what they perceived as the ‘attributes of excellence’ (Bourdieu, 1984:66) notably white British upper class dispositions, deportments and accent. They are very aware, like many non-westerners, of the symbolic value attached to whiteness in general (Molande, 2008; Shonekan, 2013), and British whiteness in particular (Mejia, 2002; Roy, 2009). Following on from this, the thesis argues that by seeking to cultivate an essentially white British upper class habitus for their children, these parents are effectively dressing their children ‘in the trappings of nobility and intellectual grandeur’ (Bourdieu (1996:112).

Adopting Fanon’s theoretical framework and working with the concept of ‘colonial habitus’, the thesis has revealed a very intriguing, yet disturbing fact; which is that decades after colonisation, there is still a sense among Nigerian elite parents that in order to be a person of value in contemporary Nigeria, one must embody or more precisely, be an embodiment of western values, ideals and attributes. In other words, a person of value in Nigeria is one who though ‘black in blood and colour’, is white ‘in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect’ (Macauley, 1995:430 cited in Molande, 2008:186).

However, there is an important qualification to be made here. At one level, these parents may seem to fit Fanon’s classic model of ‘black skin, white mask’ and to have a reduced reflexive ability, especially when it comes to the acculturation of white culture. Yet at another level, they continue to place a very high value on certain aspects of their own cultural position. For example, the data show that the elite parents in the study not only make a conscious effort to instil and maintain their children’s Nigerian heritage and identity, but are also very selective when it comes to the type of white culture they want their children to emulate. Such strategic use of whiteness/Britishness and blackness/Africanness indicates that these parents are highly aware that ‘total otherness’ is ‘without value’ (Featherstone, 1991 cited in Skeggs, 2004:149), thus refuting Fanon’s original thesis.

Chapter 6 showed that the representatives of British private boarding schools, notably the head-teachers and education agents, are very aware that class and race are two key influential factors within elite parents’ decision-making in the international education market. Evidence from their interviews indicates that British whiteness and references to elitism are two of the sales strategies that they employ. Consequently, BBS-UK are ‘cast in language of exclusivity and distinctiveness’ in order that they are effectively marketed (Davey, 2012:519).

Due to their subtleness, the use of these kinds of sales techniques, also referred to in this thesis as soft-sell technique, means that the agents and head-teachers do not actively need to *sell* British private schools to these kinds of parents but rather they let prospective parents ‘*buy’* from them (Bursk, 2006:152). More significantly, the thesis argued that because the habitus (both ‘class’ and ‘colonial’) is ‘a structuring structure’ (Bourdieu, 1984:170), and ‘function[s] below the level of consciousness’ (Bourdieu, 1984:468), it has made the soft-sell approach a powerful and effective marketing technique for selling global brands like BBS-UK as it helps to maintain the understated but powerful value of such products. In essence, it helps to make BBS-UK brands that sell themselves.

One of the implications of these parents’ characterisation of quality education is that schools in Nigeria, particularly state and private schools that run a Nigerian curriculum and/or are managed by Nigerians or blacks in general will ‘never’ be able to provide education of a sufficiently high quality for Nigerian elite parents; at least not one that can perform the ‘social function of legitimating social difference’ (Bourdieu; 1984:7) which is what these parents are seeking. A broader implication is that, because of the internalisation of western hegemonic discourse such as ‘West is best’ by indigenes of former colonies, educational systems in African countries like Nigeria will ‘never’ be able to provide ‘quality’ education now or in the future.

Given the low quality of education provided in most state schools in Nigeria, these parents’ ability to purchase ‘quality’ education has meant they are able to insulate their children from the social and educational risks associated with the documented low standards of much schooling in Nigeria (Tooley and Dixon, 2007; Theobald et al, 2007; DFID, 2011; Institute of Education, 2011; National Planning Commission, 2010; Santcross, et al., 2010; House of Commons International Development Committee, 2009; Adebayo, 2009; Dixon, 2012). At the same time they are able to increase ‘their child’s objective chances of obtaining valued certificates’ (Ball et al., 1996:101). A clear consequence of their decision to ‘opt out’ of Nigerian education is that they contribute to the widening of the country’s glaring educational inequality.

It is also plausible for one to infer that the disparity between families that can send their children to ‘quality’ schools overseas and those that cannot, may undermine equalisation schemes such as the ‘Education For All’ (EFA) currently pursued by national and international organisations like DFID (2011) in Nigeria. Except of course the EFA (Education For All), like the Universal *Basic* Education scheme (UBE) is concerned with issues of accessibility and provision of *basic* education rather than the provision of ‘quality’ education.

## 7.1 Thesis’s Contributions

My thesis extends the sociology of education in three significant ways. First, it extends established Bordieusian analysis of the links between education and social distinction by applying this analysis to non-western elites and their engagement with the international secondary education market. Additionally, it broadens Nigerian sociology of education which, to date, has tended to focus on the challenges of improving standards in, and access to, basic state schooling and which has not generally applied any kind of Bourdieusian framework.

Second, it contributes to the emerging field of the sociology of international education’. It does this in two distinct ways. First, it reveals the role of key social actors notably head-teachers and educational agents, in shaping ‘the rules of the game’ that define the field of British international secondary education. By doing so, the thesis explores and challenges the basis on which schools such as UK-based private boarding schools might claim to be ‘world-class’ education establishments. It also reveals the direct and indirect means by which these gatekeepers help to construct, maintain and ‘sell’ British private schools as a global brand. Second, the thesis extends the sociology of international secondary education by showing that the international education market is not risk-free, as often implied in studies that have examined the use of this market by non-western parents. Third, it offers an analysis of the still-neglected dynamics of the international private school market and its non-western consumers.

The thesis also makes a modest theoretical contribution by extending classic Bourdieusian analysis of the habitus through exploring the idea of the ‘colonial habitus’ as inhabited by elite Nigerian parents. It does this by combining a critique of Fanon’s colonial theory with insights from literature on colonisation and the formation of elite identity in colonial Africa as well as emerging sociological research in this area. As an analytical tool, the ‘colonial habitus’ was very useful in variety of ways. As well as insisting that race is given equal prominence with class, it also allowed the interrogation of race as one of the key structuring factors shaping and influencing my parent participants’ perceptions of western-based private boarding schools. Further, it suggests how and why schools such as UK-based private boarding schools are able to construct and maintain their ‘world class’ image. Finally, the thesis adds a new, if modest dimension to the sociology of consumption by exploring how and why privileged Nigerian parents consume private education. In doing so, it also adds to the existing body of literature on elite private schools as positional goods which are used as a mechanism for social distinction and differentiation by the privileged classes.

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## 7.2 Limitations and new directions

Like all studies, this one has inevitable limitations. Three particular limitations can be identified here. Firstly, the comparative elements of the study would have been strengthened if I had structured my original sample to include a higher number of Nigerian parents opting to send their children to private schools outside Britain. The views of the four parents who sent their children to Canada were extremely illuminating and it would have been beneficial to have gathered more extensive data from participants like them. Whilst it was never my intention to generalise the findings from the study beyond the Nigerian elites, having such a small sample has meant that the findings relating to the parents who send their children to Canada cannot be said to be representative of Nigerian parents who choose this option. Although validity is not necessarily measured by the quantity of respondents in qualitative studies (Lincoln and Guba, 1989; Johnson and Waterfield, 2004; Smith et al, 2009), including a higher number of these participants might have enhanced the overall reliability and credibility of my findings.

Further and related to the first point, focusing entirely on the parents who sent their children to UK-based private boarding schools, and by implication, only on the UK private education market, has necessarily limited my analysis of the wider international education market. For example, I could only report the voices of a particular group in what is a complex and very important phenomenon, that is, the consumption of western-based schooling by Nigerian elites, who are themselves differentiated in significant ways.

As explained earlier, not having contact in any of the American private schools in Nigeria made it very difficult for me to recruit Nigerian parents who might have sent or considered sending their children to the US. Nevertheless, the inclusion of a similar number of Nigerian elites that sent their children to the US would have allowed me to explore similarities or otherwise between the two sets of parents; for example their perceptions of ‘risk’ and ‘quality’ education. Do they have similar post-secondary aspirations? Do they perceive and use blackness and whiteness in the same way? These are very important questions which would broaden our understanding of the Nigerian elite parents’ engagement with the international secondary education market. A comparative analysis might also give some insights into the extent to which the tie between Nigeria and Britain, via colonisation, rather than the hegemonic discourse such as “West is best”, is an influencing factor in Nigerian elite parents’ decision to educate their children outside the shores of Nigeria.

Secondly, my analysis of British private boarding schools in terms of how they market themselves might have benefited from exploring other sources of information such as the schools’ websites, brochures and other promotional material. This would have provided a valuable visual dimension to the study and also allowed a more detailed critique of the head-teachers’ and agents’ comments. Such triangulation (Carpenter and Suto, 2008; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2005; Goldstein, 2002; Clark and Creswell, 2008) would have allowed me ‘to develop a more detailed and multifaceted account’ of how British private schools market themselves to prospective parents while increasing the reliability of my findings by ‘strengthening [the] credibility’ of this qualitative research (Smith et al. 2009:52).

Thirdly, and more significantly, the thesis could have benefited from the analysis of the personal experiences of Nigerian children who are currently studying in UK-based British private schools. It could be argued that without such analysis, my thesis can only provide a one-sided understanding of Nigerians’ engagements with the international education market. However, the aim of this study was to offer an in-depth analysis of how one key group of people – elite Nigerian parents – perceive and engage with that market. In doing this, it has opened up the possibility of a new and very valuable area of enquiry that could take a more longitudinal view of the experiences and life-chances and trajectories of their children.

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1. There are different models of RAT (Goldthorpe, 2000). In the main RAT models fall into two categories which Hechter and Kanazawa (1997:194) describe as ‘thin’ and ‘thick’ or ‘sociological rational choice models with the ‘thin’ models being the weaker of the two. Hechter and Kanazawa (1997:194) argue that while the ‘thin’ models are ‘unconcerned with particular values’, the ‘thick’ ones perceive wealth as the ‘common value’ in human relation. ‘Wealth is commonly valued because it can be exchanged for a multitude of other goods in the market’ (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997:194). Nonetheless, like the ‘thin’ models, the ‘thick’ models are also economistic and individualistic in their approach (Hechter and Kanazawa, 1997; Scott, 2002). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Boudon (1974) defines ‘primary effects’ as social class inequalities that influence students’ academic abilities while ‘secondary effects’ are the cost and benefits associated with various educational options by students from the different social classes. To put simply, secondary effects are ‘the effects that condition the choices that people make’ (Need and de Jong, 2000:75). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)