Provincialising whiteness: *Òyìnbó* and the politics of race in Lagos, Nigeria

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I, Nicola Horne Anwoju, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Much academic work on racialisation processes to date has focused on a geographically restricted range of racial regimes characterised by white supremacy. This study broadens the geographical scope of analyses by looking at race-making practices in Lagos, Nigeria. I explore the geographical specificity of race-making in Lagos through interrogation of the concept of *òyìnbó* – a Yorùbá word most often translated into English as 'white person.' By highlighting the particular meanings attached to *òyìnbó*, and the political work that racialisation does in this understudied context, I argue for the need to provincialise understandings of whiteness in studies of global race-making processes. The project is based upon eleven months of ethnographic fieldwork with Lagosians of different generations and social demographics at three different research sites: a senior secondary school, the University of Lagos, and at a church. My findings suggest that divergent meanings are attached to *òyìnbós* in these contexts, which do not universally celebrate whiteness. Rather, the practice of race-making in Lagos predominantly addresses local political concerns, and common attributes associated with *òyìnbós* are primarily evaluated according to local people's own moral economy. This results in highly ambivalent attitudes to *òyìnbós* as individuals and to *òyìnbó* as trope. I suggest that these attitudes can best be explained by situating constructions of *òyìnbós* within their wider social context in Lagos. By centring local understandings in this way, I argue that the political practice of race-making in Lagos is not purely a reflection of a singular, global racial hierarchy, but a means of actively engaging with global and local power structures. I propose that seeking to understand the emic nature of divergent global race-making processes in this way has the potential to broaden academic understanding of these and related social phenomena.

IMPACT STATEMENT

Most researchers agree that racial categorisations are social and political, rather than biological. Nobody 'has' a race; it is not something written into our DNA, nor something we are born with. Instead, individuals negotiate racial categorisations with those around them in a process called 'racialisation'. The political nature of this process means that individuals can be categorised differently in different places. For example, the same person may be considered 'black' in some places, 'white' in others, and perhaps something in between somewhere else. On this basis, geography is important in the study of these processes as racialisation is something that, for the most part, happens locally.

Researchers have known for several decades, and generally agree, that racialisation processes differ in different places and have varied at different times. However, while researchers have looked at racialisation at different times in history, most research has been relatively restricted geographically. Researchers have tended to focus on countries with more diverse populations, where differently racialised groups living close together have been the focus of attention, often because these places are considered to have a 'race problem'. Because of this, the United States, South Africa and selected countries in Western Europe and the Caribbean have tended to dominate the literature. As a result, the experiences of these countries have had a significant influence on the ways academics tend to think about the politics of racialisation, when in fact, the experiences of these countries may be considered exceptional rather than a global standard.

The impact that this study seeks to make is in adding nuance to the ways that many researchers therefore think about racialisation. It seeks to do this in two ways. Firstly, with a focus on Lagos in Nigeria, it joins a small but growing number of academics who are looking at countries and places that have so far been understudied. It argues that racialisation does not only occur in places where differentially racialised groups live in close proximity, and that academics should expand the geographical horizons of their research. Secondly, this study argues that it is not enough to look at

racialisation in different places through existing lenses. Instead, we have to consider *how* different people in different places use racialisation processes, and *why* they do so. This can be challenging when such perspectives differ from those we expect. The data collected for this study, for example, do not support the idea of a single, global racial system. Instead, I suggest that racialisation processes in Lagos predominantly work to address local concerns, and by doing so, can be considered a means of actively engaging with global and local power structures within local frames of reference. I propose that seeking to understand the emic nature of divergent global race-making practices in this way has the potential to open up new avenues for pursuing racial equality.

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Finally, Zach and Maya Anwoju, who transform my world in the most spectacular ways: you are my greatest teachers, and I give thanks for each of you, every single day. Of course, this is for you.

Thank you, *e se o.*

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CHAPTER ONE:
Introduction

> What if we posit that, in the present moment, it is the so-called 'Global South' that affords privileged insight into the workings of the world at large? That it is from here that our empirical grasp of its lineaments, and our theory-work in accounting for them, ought to be coming, at least in major part?
> - Jean Comaroff & John L. Comaroff, *Theory from the South*, 2012 p.114

Having lived in Nigeria for a year before I started out on this project, I thought I knew how things would go. Looking back now, I see I had the false confidence of someone who is not yet aware of what they do not know. It was on a visit to Nigeria in 2016 that I first realised that there were things I could not explain; that awkward moment when what I was being told did not fit with the framework I had in my mind. It happened when I first went to the church that would later become one of my research sites. Still planning my research methods, I had yet to finalise how I would frame the nature of the project to potential research participants. At the church, I told some of the congregation there that I was planning to study perceptions of race in Lagos. Initially happy to help, people listened with interest. But when I mentioned racism, I was told that there wasn't any racism in Nigeria, "not like in South Africa." With this consensus, my ideas for the project were quickly dismissed. Not wanting to be unsupportive, one man suggested that I might want to look at something else. And so it was that I was introduced to Lagosian self-perceptions of racism within their own society; that is, that there was none. To me, Lagos was a thoroughly racialised place. As a light-skinned foreigner my presence in Lagos' suburbs would commonly prompt stares, children would point and call out to me, people would ask for or offer assistance. Across the city, seats would be dusted for me to sit down, hair admired, shy grins and giggles elicited as if I were some sort of celebrity. How could anyone possibly argue that racialisation did *not* result in differential treatment in Lagos?

As my research progressed, I realised that understandings of racialisation and perceptions of racism among my research participants had a particularly localised timbre – and both these understandings and their related perceptions were different from those that I had expected. Part of the issue was, as Cole (1996: 212) has also documented from research in Ghana, that I initially lacked the vocabulary to talk about racialisation in ways that were meaningful to many Lagosians. This in itself betrays the fact that race-making is necessarily a geographically-specific, as well as a historically variable, process. It also highlighted significant differences between folk and academic understandings of these concepts and processes. The fiction of biological races is well established in the literature, where racialisation is recognised as a process of categorisation for social and political purposes, rather than one based in biological fact. Following from this, academic definitions of racism refer to the discrimination and inequality that result from the deployment of forms of racialised power. Yet *race* was a far more meaningful concept to my research participants than *racialisation,* which most commonly prompted confusion. While *racism* was a more recognised word, after a while I came to understand that when my research participants talked about racism they were usually referring quite specifically to systems of legalised white supremacy, such as that of apartheid-era South Africa. Such systems provided a contrast to my respondents' narratives, which often sought to commend a comparable lack of 'racism' in Nigeria. But while these forms of 'racism' were critiqued, localised racialisation processes on the other hand, in which individuals were categorised largely based on phenotypical factors, were not generally seen as problematic, even though these too resulted in some people receiving preferential treatment over others. Indeed, racial prejudice of this nature, which I found to be widespread across the city, was portrayed in dominant narratives among my research participants – and enacted by Lagosians all over the city – in ways that underlined its very ordinariness. Pride in the fact that Nigeria had never experienced formal racialised apartheid was expressed in denials of the existence of 'racism.' That this was acknowledged to exist within a highly racialised social landscape that led to ongoing prejudice did not seem in any way contradictory to the majority of my research participants, many of whom also took pride in the idea that they had a good relationship with foreigners, and the British in particular.

At first, I considered that such understandings of racism might be the exception rather than the rule. Perhaps people didn't want to offend me, a British guest in their country, and so they were just being polite for my benefit. But others too have documented Nigerians' rebuttal of the notion that they are afflicted by racism (Siollun, 2021). Bonnett (2022: 1) cites similar evidence from India whereby racism is framed as something that "white people do", and notes the utility of "the geographical "othering" of racism as a Western problem or disease" for elites looking to influence domestic political agendas (Bonnett, 2018: 1201). Law (2014: 20) suggests that this is part of a wider pattern of denial as to the existence of racism, among both academics and governments, across a range of countries globally. So as time went on, and I realised that these perceptions were widespread in Lagos, I struggled – academically and personally – to understand why many people in Lagos framed their racialised histories and contemporary social realities in what I felt were unexpected ways. Research participants did sometimes talk about historical and contemporary injustices; discrimination that they had heard about or experienced themselves. But these were framed as matter-of-fact recollections, and I encountered little of the anger or animosity that I had anticipated, or that I considered would be justified. The most vocal critique of Nigeria's former colonial power I encountered in Lagos came from a man I met at Lagos State Ministry of Education. He was emphatic and passionate in his description of the injustices Nigerians have suffered as a result of their colonial past and what he perceived as their neo-colonial present. But even he, in his reasoned and articulate arguments, was careful to distinguish – repeatedly – between what he called 'Westerners' as individuals "who are quite okay," and their governments "who give with one hand and take with the other." And so it was from this place of significance dissonance between my empirical data and the theoretical framework that I had anticipated using that I started to explore the politics of racialisation in Lagos.

ÒYÌNBÓ AND THE POLITICS OF RACIALISATION IN AFRICA

Those initial conversations led me to seek to understand particular, localised forms of race-making, as they are conceived and enacted in Lagos, on their own terms. To

do so is the overarching aim of this project. Understanding a localised race-making system from the perspectives of those that create and live it in this way distinguishes this work from many other contemporary analyses of the globalisation of racialisation processes (Dikötter, 2015). The premise of this endeavour, however, is not an attempt to grasp '*the* native view', the existence of which, as Alexander (2006: 400) notes, is a "myth… [that] has been largely debunked". Rather, this project is prompted by recognition of the fact that across the world there are a multiplicity of terms that can be roughly translated as 'white person', usually with powerfully evocative local meanings that often appear to be overlooked by existing social theory (Bashkow, 2006). I centre this project around exploration of one such term commonly used in Lagos, as a means of exploring the geographical specificity of race-making: that term is *òyìnbó*. Originating in the Yorùbá language, which is widely spoken in south-western Nigeria, in parts of the Republic of Benin and across a global diaspora, the word *òyìnbó* (also *òyìbó*) is usually translated into English as 'white person' or 'European' (e.g., Fakinlede, 2003). Also a common term in Nigerian pidgin (Ajibade, 2013), the usage of *òyìnbó* in Lagos is in fact far more subtle than this translation might suggest, incorporating a wide spectrum of difference (Adejumo, 2005; Njoku, 2006). As I explore in Chapter 4, for example, the term can be variously applied to anyone not considered 'African', sometimes – but not always – including diasporic Africans and those of visibly multiple heritage. Translations of *òyìnbó* are therefore both revealing and obscuring, for these descriptors are themselves necessarily geographically and historically contingent. So, just as each of the translations variously offered for *òyìnbó* in English – white person, European, foreigner – are complex and contested, equally there is much localised nuance in the meanings attached to *òyìnbó,* which reflects the particularity of the race-making system from which the term emerges. It is in this space of negotiation, complexity, nuance and contestation that I seek to study the politics and practice of race-making in Lagos.

I take these imperfections in the translation of *òyìnbó* as my starting point. In doing so, while my purpose is to foreground the emic nature of *òyìnbó*, I equally maintain the concept reflects race-making practices that make this racial system comparable

with others found across the world. As such, my focus on the local in Lagos seeks to bring these emic accounts of racialisation processes from an area of the world that to date remains understudied in this field, into wider dialogue with existing theories of racism and racialisation. A focus on local terminology, then, is not to obscure the centrality of the work that racialisation does in Lagos (see Hall, 2011). Rather, through exploration of the ambivalence surrounding the meaning of such terms, my aim is to highlight that the work that the term does, as well as its academic interpretation, are both sites of political struggle. This contestation is apparent in debates about the term's etymology. *Òyìnbó* can be literally translated from the Yorùbá as "one with scratched and peeled skin" (*yin* meaning scratch, *bò* meaning peel), or according to Klein (2007), "peeled back honey" (*oyin* meaning honey), which she suggests is also linked to skin colour. But its origins are unclear, as while Adejumo (2005) claims the term was applied to arriving Europeans from the fifteenth century, primary sources date only from the 1800s (e.g., Peel, 2000: 218). Some of these early sources suggest the term could have originated in Igboland (Laird & Oldfield, 1837: 394), although Nwokeji (2010: 218) denies the origin of the word is Igbo, and some of my research participants – and Smith (2007: 201) – report that a different term (*onyeocha*) exists with almost-equivalent meaning in the Igbo language. Indeed, comparable terms to *òyìnbó* can be found in a wide range of different languages across African contexts: I have been referred to as *toubab* in Senegal, *yovo* in the Republic of Benin, *faranji* in Ethiopia and *obroni* in Ghana. From his work on *Naming and Othering in Africa,* linguist Sambulo Ndlovu (2022: 88) suggests that such names – including others not listed here – that reference "White people" across Africa "seem to be synonyms".

Looking at the ways in which the origins of *òyìnbó* and its perhaps-equivalent terms are disputed, and their etymologies contested, is therefore useful in that it provides insight into the contemporary politics of race-making – and the academic politics of studying racialisation processes – in different parts of Africa. While scholars of racial and ethnic studies have historically focused on ethnicity in Africa, more recently increased academic attention has been paid to race-making processes across the continent (Young & Weitzberg, 2021). An influential framing of this study of

racialisation in Africa results from the application of what Ian Law (2014: 162) terms "monoracism arguments" to African contexts (see, for example, Mamdani, 1996; Pierre, 2013; Christian & Namaganda, 2022). These arguments, often based upon analyses of the ongoing impacts of histories of transatlantic slavery and European colonialism, tend to view the existence of race-making practices within African societies as, in Law's (2014, p.162) words once again, the consequence of "a linear diffusion of Western racisms from the classical world onwards and outwards." Historian Moses Ochonu (2019: 22) provides an example of this approach in his assertion that:

> Colonial mentality's most poignant manifestation [in Africa] is in the widespread culture of social deference to expats of various hues of light-skin-ness – Arabs, Indians, Chinese, Levantines, and Europeans. Everywhere in Africa, local interlocutors accord those with lighter skin and straighter hair embarrassingly generous amounts of deference, even veneration, often at the expense of their own or other Africans' dignity and in disregard for preexisting protocols of hospitality. Across the continent, the lingering social currency of whiteness, nuanced, complex but discernible, seems to govern significant aspects of social and official relations.

It is on this basis that Ochonu (*ibid.,* p.26) argues that *òyìnbó* – and its perhaps-equivalent in parts of Ghana, *"Oburoni"* – are:

> morphological and social referents that often conflate physical attributes such as light skin… with a xenophilic belief that these markers are coextensive with superior ability, intelligence, and socioeconomic capital. This conflation exemplifies colonial mentality, for it is a manifestation of the afterlife of colonial race work. Oburoni and Oyinbo have origins in a socio-historical ethos in which a binary of white civilisation and black backwardness is a central defining character.

Linguist Sambulo Ndlovu's (2022: 87) work takes a slightly different approach in his assertion that early names for "White people" in Africa were initially motivated by "ethnophaulism and xenophobia", and as such may be considered forms of "decolonial rhetoric". While acknowledging the complex etymology of these terms in multiple African languages, however, Ndlovu (*ibid.,* p. 97) nevertheless goes on to argue that what may be considered formerly "decolonial" names for "Whites" are now "associated more with racialised opulence created by colonial capitalism" and as

such, "The high esteem with which Whites and whiteness are regarded in Africa confirms the effects of White supremacist theologies" (*ibid.,* p.99) in transforming the meanings associated with these terms. His analysis incorporates suggestions that European missionaries in southern Africa may even have "named themselves" to erase the "occult nuances" associated with the referents originally assigned to them in local languages (*ibid.,* p.99).

Yet, within popular culture in Africa, numerous challenges can be found that call into question etymologies of *òyìnbó* – and some of its perhaps-equivalent terms – that are premised upon a globalised and unidirectional racial hierarchy underpinned by monoracism arguments, within which whiteness is universally considered superior, advanced and civilised against a residual blackness. For example, Ayodeji Ogunnaike (2018: 108) notes that historically within Yorùbá theology, religious chants dating back centuries explicitly mention *òyìnbós* as "children of those who made Ogun [god of iron and thunder] into an idol". He suggests that this reference reflects both recognition of *òyìnbó* power – Ogun is associated with "high mobility, advanced technology, industriousness…and displays of force" (*ibid.,* p.108) – but at the same time, because Ogun is an *orìṣa* (god) rather than an idol, such a description also indicates "something… out of place" (*ibid.,* p.109). Ogunnaike explains: "Oyinbo had been closely linked and involved with Ogun…since they are the *descendants* of those who made Ogun into an idol, but they clearly did not understand how to… interact with him properly, which… can have disastrous effects." Such an analysis hints at the complexity of response that the term continues to provoke – balancing a recognition of power with an equal recognition of human shortcomings that is not commonly found within influential framings of the debate based upon monoracism frameworks.

More contemporary references to *òyìnbó* in popular culture similarly challenge the idea that the term is solely a reflection of reverence for global whiteness. Krings' (2015: 219) exploration of orientalist mimicry and cybercrime in Nigeria, for example, references Nkem Owoh's song, "I Go Chop Your Dollar," the lyrics of which include the following references to *òyìnbós*:

> *Òyìnbó* man I go chop your dollar / I go take your money and disappear / 419 is just a game, you are the loser I am the winner…

> That *òyìnbó* people greedy, I say them greedy / I don't see them tire / That's why when they fall into my trap o! / I dey show them fire.

Similarly, on popular news site *Pulse Nigeria,* Ayomide Tayo (2017) argues that, "The word "oyinbo" is now more of a mocking and condescending word than anything else", causing him to title his piece, "Are Nigerians racists or racially insensitive?" Perhaps-equivalent terms have also been more critically evaluated. Bailey (2005: 115), for example, reports from work in south-eastern Ghana that the Ewe word for "whites" – *yevu* – can be literally translated as "tricky dog," while Wanlov The Kubolor (2015) suggests *obroni* "stems from the Akan phrase "abro nipa" meaning "wicked person.""

It is amidst this popular challenge to influential academic conceptualisations of monoracism within African racial systems that I ask what the operationalisation of the concept of *òyìnbó,* as used in Lagos, can reveal about race-making practices in a particular time and place in contemporary Africa. My data also speak to some of this complexity in meaning and interpretation, but by seeking to understand *òyìnbó* within the terms of the race-making system from which it emerges, I argue that use of the term does not represent a simplistic manifestation of a globalised white supremacy. In this, I do not seek to downplay the existence or consequences of anti-black racism at multiple scales, which continues in many diverse geographical locations today. Rather, my work provides empirical evidence in support of recent attempts to reframe theoretical understandings of racialisation processes around the world, which seek to highlight the diversity of origins and forms found across a range of global race-making systems. Based upon Frank Dikötter's (2008) interactionist approach to global racialisation, and following the theoretical development of these ideas in Ian Law's (2014) conceptualisation of polyracisms and Alastair Bonnett's (2018; 2022) work on multiracism, my analysis leads me to suggest that people in Lagos actively *make race* for their own social and political purposes. On this basis, I argue that the race-making process in Lagos – based upon cultural ascription to phenotypic features – is *the same process* that occurs in all race-making systems, but

with a different intent to that posited by monoracism arguments. Clearly the impact of these localised race-making practices, compared to racisms originating in Euro-American and other contexts, has been far less significant globally. Yet just as colonial, imperial and racist powers throughout history have sought to make race to serve their own interests, I argue that people in Lagos also make race in pursuance of their own perceived social advantage. In this way, I suggest theorisations of a singular monoracism may be actively detrimental to understanding the local politics of racialisation in much of Africa.

THE UNIVERSALITY OF GLOBAL RACE-MAKING AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL SPECIFICITY OF *ÒYÌNBÓ*

To make such an argument may be viewed as controversial within the framework of the prevailing academic orthodoxy, which can be found in much Euro-American social science scholarship (McWhorter, 2021). From this standpoint, the – wholly accurate – recognition that "issues of race are always already about power" (Pierre, 2013: 4) has led to debates about whether those ascribed to non-dominant racialised groups have the power to themselves be racist. Bonnett (2022: 15) traces this to what he terms "the 'racism is prejudice plus power' equation", influential in the US during the 1970s, which he recognises "is still assumed to convey the message that racism is a White problem because it is they who have power." The continuing sway of this conceptualisation is reflected in the fact that Ibram X. Kendi (2019: 142) felt it necessary to explicitly state, in his influential guidelines for antiracism largely based on the US context, that "Black people can be racist because Black people do have power, even if limited." Nevertheless, the principle that those disadvantaged by their racial categorisation could – or should – not be capable of, or accountable for, what Wacquant (1997: 225) refers to as "the terrible sin of "racism"" remains influential in much progressive academic work in this area. Heavily based upon the particular racial politics of Euro-American contexts, and the US especially, this same thinking also underlies discussions in relation to other parts of the world around the relative agency of individuals to act upon the world versus the structural constraints that limit their ability to do so. As Jean-Klein (2001) has argued, viewing the 'sub-altern'

(in her words) as active agents in the deliberate reproduction of difference is politically challenging within the current academic environment in which a particular form of anti-racist theory has become dominant (see Chapter 2).

In relation to African contexts, early progressive scholarship in this area tended towards structural – and particularly colonial – explanations for Africans' predicaments (Ranger, 1983; Mamdani, 2001), and later evolved to balance this with incorporation of the role of African elites (Matory, 1999). More recently, Chabal (2009) suggested that the rise of the question of mass African agency reflects its appeal to academics who wish to counter Afro-pessimism, while at the same time, allowing academic avoidance of more difficult issues related to continuing underdevelopment in Africa. This has led to academics attempting to respond to the overdeterminism of the past with a recognition of African agency, but not so much as to suggest African culpability for the myriad issues facing the continent. As such, we see academic recognition of the existence of African agency, alongside increasing attempts to theorise its complexity in ways that avoid the question of liability, as in Guyer's (2017: 346) call to identify "the particular emergent substantive foci for such agency, which is neither so mundane as to revert to 'coping', nor so insurgent as to be 'resistance', but nevertheless, by sheer intransigent recurrence, will have wide implications". Similar balancing acts are prompted by the question of whether the concept of race, heavily rooted in Euro-American thought, is even applicable to geographical spheres outside of its intellectual origins (see Young & Weitzberg, 2021). Here again, the difficulty for left-leaning scholarship in this area is the inherent tension between recognition of the need to analyse diverse peoples and places on their own terms, and the desire for the universal application of progressive values based on the European Enlightenment. Indeed, Bonnett (2022:4) identifies the potential for a "new narrative of cosmopolitan supremacism" to emerge from this quandary, in which "international legitimacy is tied to possession of the capacity, supposedly uniquely Western, for interrogating racism."

It is by foregrounding the emic nature of race-making, then, that I suggest both subjects' agency – including that of non-dominant racialised groups – and the

subsequent universality of global race-making practices becomes apparent. As Kendi (2019: 140) argues, "Like every other racist idea, the powerless defense underestimates Black people and overestimates White people. It erases the small amount of Black power and expands the already expansive reach of White power." It is on this basis that privileging the understanding of localised frameworks for racial formation over the (left-leaning academic) imperative of espousing progressive values becomes vital, as failing to acknowledge the potential capacity of every people to make race is to wilfully disregard a substantial and important part of the global picture. In viewing race-making practices in Lagos from this perspective, I recognise that the global impacts of these race-making processes have been far less consequential than those originating elsewhere, in contrast to the more far-reaching implications of Euro-American racial ideologies, for example. As Bonnett (2022) argues, acknowledging that diverse forms of racialisation exist across the globe does not imply that these are equivalent. Yet still, despite being less geographically and historically impactful, race-making practices in Lagos nevertheless continue to have significant impacts upon social relationships.

Central to my argument, however, is not just that people in Lagos are active agents in their own race-making practices, but that these practices can be viewed as advantageous by many Lagosians. In other words, far from languishing – either helplessly or defiantly – towards the base of a global racial hierarchy, people in Lagos actively co-create race in ways that, as Jean-Klein (2001) suggests, both feed into and disrupt global racial hegemonies. Importantly, even when Lagosians are actively involved in reproducing hegemonic elements of this hierarchy, these practices are not necessarily counter to Lagosians' own interests. As I show in Chapter 5, dominant narratives among my research participants did not celebrate aspects of *òyìnbó* culture and practice – such as language – at random. Equally, in contrast to some analyses based on monoracism arguments, adoption of *òyìnbó* practices does not necessarily reflect an unquestioning reverence of either *òyìnbós* or their culture. Rather, behaviours characterised as *òyìnbó* that confer social status among people in Lagos are those that are most likely to assist and advance individuals in local and global interactions. The meanings – and social status – attached to these practices

are also highly localised; that is, they resonate most profoundly with a primarily Lagosian, rather than an international, audience. The consequence of recognising the existence of both prejudice and power among Lagosians, then, makes it necessary also, as Bonnett (2022: 15) argues, to acknowledge "a conceptually and geographically expanded notion of racism."

It is from this standpoint that I suggest that influential understandings of African racialisation processes within the literature can be productively explored. Analysis of the workings of racialisation processes in Lagos shows that racial ideology is a flexible tool, and one that can be re-purposed to suit the localised objectives of those that deploy it (see Chapter 4). So while the existence of a variety of race-making practices may well be universal, this project also highlights the geographical specificity of conceptualisations of race within particular local frameworks. In Lagos, this framework differs from that widely found in Euro-American scholarship in important ways. Firstly, in contrast to the fixed and largely static notions of racialised difference that tend to underpin monoracism arguments, local constructions of *òyìnbó* in Lagos are characterised more by ambivalence. As such, the localised race-making system is not characterised by a singular racialised hierarchy of value, whereby one racialised group is de facto superior to others. Rather, racialised attributes of both individuals and groups tend to be evaluated differentially according to their implications for social relationships and in relation to local political concerns. In a second significant difference, this results from a more fluid and dynamic understanding of the nature of social hierarchy, which directly contrasts with the largely static nature of racialised inequality commonly invoked by arguments premised on the existence of monoracism. A common theme within my research participants' narratives of *òyìnbó* power was its portrayal as limited in particular ways, and as a result, I suggest it can be considered more transient. While aspects of *òyìnbó* power were acknowledged in these narratives, this was equally balanced with a broader understanding that social status and the power that this brings is rarely, if ever, permanent. My argument follows, then, that these social frameworks differ across space because the social purposes that race-making performs in Lagos also differ to those that comparable processes perform in other places. In diverse locations, these processes differ

because they are serving different *interests*. Kendi (2019: 42) recognises that "racist power creates racist policies out of raw self-interest; the racist policies necessitate racist ideas to justify them". However, with a focus on the US context, Kendi does not consider how this might also be true in other places. Yet this same logic can also be applied to Lagos, where conceptualisations of race contrast with influential understandings within the literature (see Pierre, 2020).

It is in these ways that constructions of *òyìnbó* reveal an underlying race-making system in Lagos that is highly geographically specific in that it responds to localised imperatives. By seeking to understand Lagosian race-making practices on their own terms, my analysis suggests that dominant narratives among Lagosians portray a more fluid and opportunistic social environment, in which racialisation is one element of a wider kaleidoscope of social and political configurations of power. From within this framework, questions of relative race- or class-based privilege become subsumed within broader understandings of social status, based on a predominantly localised status economy. It is through examination of the intersections between race-making and the wider status economy in a particular place that I therefore suggest that studies of diverse racialisation processes globally can usefully relate to particular localities. While the process of producing race is likely global then, the specifics of how these processes produce difference – and impact on wider social relations – are highly geographically specific. From this standpoint, instead of conceiving of Lagosians as a largely monolithic racially dominated group, primarily engaged in resisting the hegemonic power structures imposed upon them by their others, such a conceptualisation invites us to foreground the ways in which people in Lagos are actively and continually engaging with global and local power structures within their own frames of reference. It is in this way that I suggest that particular iterations of global race-making may in fact be contributing to the provincialisation of whiteness.

PROVINCIALISING WHITENESS: TOWARDS A SUBALTERN GEOPOLITICS OF RACE
FROM LAGOS

In *Provincializing Europe,* Dipesh Chakrabarty (2008: 16) makes clear that his purpose
is not "rejecting or discarding European thought" because "European thought is at
once both indispensable and inadequate in helping us to think through the
experiences of political modernity in non-Western nations". Rather, for Chakrabarty,
"provincializing Europe becomes the task of exploring how this thought – which is
now everybody's heritage and which affects us all – may be renewed from and for
the margins" (*ibid.,* p.16). It is following Chakrabarty's lead that I propose the utility
of seeking to provincialise whiteness. This is not to deny the power of whiteness at
multiple scales and across multiple sites around the world. To take seriously local
race-making practices, and local framings of the underlying politics of these, should
not be seen as downplaying the existence and impacts of white supremacy where it
exists. But it is to question the assumption of the global applicability of that power,
and to foreground its emic nature. I therefore suggest there is often a fundamental
dissonance between theories of racism and racialisation – which recognise the fiction
of race, and emphasise the need for contextualisation of race-making – and the
application of this theory through forms of activism that are often focused on a
singular monoracism that unproblematically highlights the globalised nature of white
supremacism. To really understand white supremacy, I suggest, we must also explore
those instances in which whiteness is not hegemonic.

On this basis, my aim is to highlight the nuance and complexity of localised
racialisation processes, and to suggest that by being productively attentive to the
ways in which whiteness is not dominant – in addition to the ways in which it is –
scholars may open new possibilities to further advance racial justice. I start with the
submission, based on my data from Lagos, that the provincialisation of whiteness is
already a social reality for many people around the globe (see Chapter 5). This means
that, I suspect many people – and perhaps a global majority – might disagree with
formulations of whiteness as, in Pierre's (2013: 74) words: "development, modernity,
intelligence, innovation, technology, cultural and aesthetic superiority, and economic

and political domination". I therefore seek to build on existing theorisations of racialisation and whiteness through an understanding of race-making in Lagos not as the imposition of a globalised, monolithic, racist force, but rather as a strategic, localised manifestation of the continual practice of politics. At a fundamental level, this challenges the very existence of the concept of whiteness beyond specific social conditions. Indeed, it brings into question whether constructions of *òyìnbó* can even be categorised as whiteness at all – for who decides? I suggest that this conceptualisation gives us cause for optimism. Far from a perpetually captive people, still flailing under the impact of historical oppression, this study of racialisation in a particular African context illustrates that anti-black racism is not an insurmountable problem that will never be addressed. Indeed, my analysis suggests that people in Lagos are continually addressing these issues; perpetually striving, determined, audacious and innovative.

Underlying this conceptualisation is the fact that dominant narratives among my respondents did not tend to conceive of themselves as the passive recipients of a historicised racism originating elsewhere. Instead, these understandings of race are based on the incorporation of *òyìnbós* into Lagosian-centred framings of the world, largely on their own terms. My aim is to move beyond theorisations predicated on the need to cope with, or resist *òyìnbó* power, and binary models of agency and resistance generally, which Bonnett (2018: 1201) critiques as based upon "nostalgic fantasy." Instead, I suggest that people in Lagos tend to conceive of a social world and moral economy in which social competition and evolution among all actors – *òyìnbós* and others – is the norm. It is a world in which Lagosians are not marginal, but central. This is not to overlook the poverty and arbitrary violence experienced by many in Lagos. It is not to suggest that Lagosians do not see racial inequality and other social injustice. But it is to identify local race-making practices in Lagos as a response to these conditions, and to understand these responses within the local frameworks of understanding and experience (see Dixon, 1991). It is also to explain how these understandings strategically impact interactions with *òyìnbós* in a variety of ways, and to consider how these interactions in turn are shaping the world beyond Lagos. Nigeria has both the largest population and the largest economy in Africa.

Nigerians' common self-description as the 'giants of Africa' belies significant ambition and intent. Re-centring Lagosians in the understanding of the racialisation of their own social world entails more, therefore, than simply focusing on Lagosians as subjects. It also requires the centring of local perspectives and understandings of the world, and taking seriously the idea that the academy has something to learn from these. I suggest that, going forward, it will pay to take heed of the ways in which many people in Lagos seek to re-make the world in their own image.

THEORISING POLITICAL POWER IN LAGOS

Underpinning my argument is the theorisation of political power in Lagos as neopatrimonial. In this, I lean heavily on the work of Jean-Francois Bayart (2009), and Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz (1999) in viewing political structures in Lagos as primarily informal. My project is not comparative, so I make no claim as to the uniqueness of this political system in relation to Lagos, although often my research participants made the assumption that neopatrimonial relations shape politics across Africa. However, in recent years this theorisation of African politics has been subject to a cogent critique, initially in the work of Abdul Raufu Mustapha (2002) and later, and more influentially, in arguments put forward by Thandika Mkandawire (2015). As this theorisation is central to my thesis, I will address two of the main issues raised in order to justify my own theoretical stance. Firstly, both Mustapha and Mkandawire suggest that theorisations of neopatrimonialism focus on African elites at the expense of the masses. According to Mkandawire (2015: 568-9), "the logic of neopatrimonialism amounts to the rational pursuit of self-interest by a "big man" and his close cronies… in a context whereby the majority is driven by affection, primordial ties, ritual, and superstition, and is so mesmerized by the big man that its members often act in ways at odds with their own interests in the forlorn expectation that some of the crumbs of patronage will fall their way." My approach differs to this conceptualisation, however, because I suggest that within these systems *everyone* is embedded within shifting patron-client networks, whereby individuals are simultaneously both patrons to some and clients to others (Smith, 2007; Pitcher *et al.,* 2009). On this basis, all social actors – the 'elite' and the 'masses'

– understand and participate in the politics of redistribution and the continual negotiation of social legitimacy primarily by this logic. Mkandawire's (2015: 571) assertion therefore that "big man syndrome" relates only to "African leaders" – he explicitly names eight former heads of state – betrays his predominant focus on formal political structures at the expense of understanding that the same political logics necessarily apply to informal political networks at all levels of society. Indeed, as Bayart (2009: 237) argues, the "survival strategies" adopted by those in leadership roles *are the same as* those utilised by the masses, even if the stakes may be considerably different.

Secondly, Mkandawire's focus on explaining Africa's formalised political economy, at the expense of understanding the moral economy of its peoples, illustrates the fact that his argument rests on different parameters to my own. Mkandawire is explicit about the fact that his paper seeks to explain differences in economic performance across Africa, and argues that a neopatrimonial approach is unable to do so. Particularly pertinent to my project, he concedes that "neopatrimonialism can be used to describe different styles of exercising authority…and *social practices within states"* (*ibid.,* p. 564) – with my emphasis, as this is how I use this theoretical approach as the basis of my work. The difficulty comes when critiques such as Mkandawire's are read as undermining the basis of neopatrimonialism in all instances, rather than just in relation to the specific economic context that he outlines. My reading of Bayart, Chabal and Daloz and others is that they are also not attempting to simply explain different economic outcomes across Africa, but rather to theorise power relations more broadly. Yet beyond these continuing debates, however, the strongest justification for my adoption of a neopatrimonial approach is empirical. In the pages that follow, the voices of my research participants clearly support a theorisation of neopatrimonial power relations in Lagos, and significantly, it is one that views these power relations from the perspective of many people in Lagos, very much on their own terms.

SCALE OF ANALYSIS

My challenge to the existence of a uniform global racial hierarchy premised on monoracism arguments necessarily opens up the question of analytical scale. Bonnett (2022: 24), in his recent work on *Multiracism,* warns against "geographical reductionism and determinism" whereby it appears that "certain forms of racism are anchored in particular places." I attempt to address this throughout the thesis by making reference to 'Lagosians' as the focus of my study. In this, my approach is perhaps somewhat unusual. Many of the key works that I draw on, particularly in political science, typically take a continental view; anthropologists tend to focus on smaller scales, looking at ethnic groups or particular geographical locations within countries or cities. Sometimes, these scales are interlinked. For this project, thinking through race-making from the perspective of Lagosians, rather than choosing a national or ethnically-based scale of analysis, seems most appropriate for several reasons. Firstly, it aims to help avoid what Bonnett (*ibid.,* p.4) identifies as "anthropomorphic national generalizations". As virtually all of my experience in Nigeria is drawn specifically from Lagos, and given the diversity of the country, referring to Lagosians rather than to Nigerians seems more appropriate. Secondly, while this study is not comparative, the nature of Lagos as a mega-city is highly likely to have an impact on the perspectives of those living within it, and the type of people drawn to migrate to it. Lagos is one of the largest cities in the world by population size, and one of the fastest growing. Thirdly, within Nigeria, referring to Lagosians is a relatively uncontroversial categorisation (although see Sanni (2018) on the local politics of indigeneity in Lagos), rather than referring to ethnically- or regionally-based categorisations. The city boasts migrants from across not just Nigeria, but from all over Africa and beyond, and it is under the banner of 'Lagosian' that many are most comfortably subsumed. However, the majority of my research participants, and my wider social networks in Lagos, are primarily Yorùbá-speakers. Because of this, in the chapters that follow, I sometimes refer specifically to other scholarship on the Yorùbá to inform my discussion. At the same time, a significant minority of my research participants were not Yorùbá, and equally, Yorùbáland is of course far

bigger than Lagos alone. So, referring to Lagosians rather than to the Yorùbá, based on my data, is more accurate.

Referring to Lagosians, then, is a useful shorthand, but I do not mean the term to obscure the diversity, dynamism or complexity of either the city or its inhabitants, nor to suggest that my sample is representative of all Lagosians. In conceiving of 'Lagosians' as an analytic category, the territorial nature of the term is significant for my focus on the *localised* relevance and meanings attached to race-making. Rather than viewing the local in simplified opposition to the global, however, I recognise the existence of complex interlinkages across all spatial and social scales, and particularly the politics at play in defining any, in Massey's (1994: 9) words, "particular envelope of space-time." In this, I have found artist Lauren Godfrey's (2019) notion of a "porous chorus" instructive. Godfrey uses this term to describe flows of "people, organisations, buildings, pieces of furniture, steps and surfaces" – the animate and the inanimate, brought together through sound. Lagosians are by definition spatially linked through their city or heritage, but continual migratory flows of people and ideas into and out of the city are reflected in the idea of porosity. Similarly, the notion of a chorus is helpful in its implication that there is a unifying thread; a set of rules, norms or practices that many people follow. These commonalities among Lagosians, even those from the most divergent of backgrounds or circumstances, form the basis of my analysis. At the same time, however, a chorus allows for a diversity of perspectives, experiences and situations among Lagosians, as even among my relatively small research sample, not all participants agreed on all points. Yet often research participants would allude to the existence of this chorus of ideas, even if they did not agree with it themselves. Ultimately, however, despite my best efforts, I recognise that there is a level of geocentrism to my analysis. This may be considered, as Bonnett (2022: 24) also identifies, part of an "inevitable problematic" in that localised analyses must necessarily be rooted *somewhere,* and as such "dealing with questionable but necessary categories" (*ibid.*) – like 'Lagosians' – remains to some degree unavoidable.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THESIS PLAN

The overarching question for this project is:

RQ1.   How is race made and understood by Lagosians on their own terms?

In order to answer this question, I collected data in order to answer the following sub-questions:

RQ2.   How is race understood and recreated in the physical absence of racialised difference?

RQ3.   How is the concept of *òyìnbó* produced, understood and recreated in Lagos over time?

RQ4.   How are the meanings of *òyìnbó* negotiated in the day to day?

The project seeks to contribute to the wider literature by considering:

RQ5.   What are the wider implications of this research for:
    a) The existing racial and ethnic studies literature?
    b) Theories of racialisation and racism in an African context?

I take an ethnographic approach to this study, in order to gain insight into the social worlds from which the concept of *òyìnbó* has evolved. Following Ira Bashkow (2006), the primary focus of the project is therefore on Lagosians as race constructors, as much as it is on the racialised constructions that they produce. On this basis, I seek to analyse how people in Lagos tend to construct their own social worlds, and how this contrasts with ideas about the social worlds of their others, as a central tenet of the race-making process. To guide this analysis, I structured data collection around a series of three research questions. The first addresses the overall project aim by asking how race is understood and recreated in the physical absence of racialised

difference*; that is, it seeks to explore how race-making is significant, and what meaning is attached to its construction, among groups of Lagosians, rather than through direct interaction with difference. Much of the data collected to answer this question is drawn from semi-structured interviews and life histories, which together with participant observation help to produce an interpretation of the social universe and cultural symbolism of life in Lagos, from which constructions of *òyìnbó* are drawn. It is from this localised analysis that I aim to gain an understanding of the geographically specific terms that guide race-making practices in Lagos.

The second sub-question that this project seeks to address asks how the concept of *òyìnbó* is produced, understood and recreated in Lagos over time. To answer this, my research design incorporates three different geographical sites in which race-making may be emergent or embedded in Lagos. Taken together, these sites provide a snapshot of a life cycle in order to look at how ideas about *òyìnbós* might vary over time, or by respondents' age. The first research site is a senior secondary school in central Lagos, where my focus was on young people aged 14-16 years. The second research site is the University of Lagos' campus in Akoka, where I focused on students and staff of working age. Respondents at the third site were older people, who I recruited from within the congregation and clergy of an African-initiated church. This design is intended to collect data from a range of different perspectives in everyday situations, and to look at how ideas about *òyìnbós* might vary over time from these diverse yet relatively mundane contexts. The final sub-question I address asks how the meanings attached to *òyìnbós* are negotiated in the day to day, which I explore through analysis of a series of ethnographic encounters in which race-making comes into play, often alongside other axes of social differentiation.

In the chapters that follow, I start with a review of some of the relevant literature in Chapter 2, followed by a more detailed overview of my research design and methods in Chapter 3. Following these, the first three empirical chapters focus on the mechanics of race-making; that is, *what* race-making does, and *how* it does this in Lagos. Chapter 4 outlines the ways in which constructions of *òyìnbó* in Lagos represent a foundational, binary form of race-making, arising from a predominantly

local race politics, by looking at the social and political work that *òyìnbó* designation performs in Lagos. Chapter 5 continues with this local perspective by outlining how common imaginaries of *òyìnbós* are constructed and evaluated according to the specifics of a localised moral economy. Chapter 6 then develops this theme further by showing how understandings of *òyìnbós* build into a coherent system of knowledge upon which cultural ascriptions are based. Here, I argue that the key to understanding constructions of *òyìnbó* is understanding how people in Lagos tend to conceive of their own social world, and how this contrasts with the social worlds of their others.

The final two empirical chapters move on from the what and the how of race-making, to look at the purpose – or the *why* – of race-making processes in Lagos. Chapter 7 focuses on local perceptions of relationships with *òyìnbós*, and how these relate to widespread notions of Nigerian pre-eminence and the volatile nature of social hierarchy. By centring local self-perceptions in this way, I argue that the political practice of race-making is revealed as a means of actively engaging with global and local power structures within local frames of reference, and I show how consideration of racialised relationships through this lens can lead to quite different framings of these relationships to those widely found among African diasporas. In the final empirical chapter, Chapter 8, I draw together the foci of previous chapters to suggest that race-making may be considered useful for contemporary Lagosians because it informs the manner of incorporation of *òyìnbós* into Lagos' highly competitive social system. I illustrate the utility of these practices by looking at how constructions of race impact on material social interactions in Lagos and at other geographical scales.

CHAPTER TWO:
Provincialising whiteness –
Lessons from African contexts

It is a bold claim to state that *all* countries were racialized and created racialized stratified societies that are rooted in white supremacy.
- Michelle Christian, *A Global Critical Race and Racism Framework,* 2019 p.181

[T]o say that racism has become global does not mean that it is either uniform or universal.
- Frank Dikötter, *The racialization of the globe: an interactive interpretation,* 2008 p.1494

WEAVING THE LOCAL INTO STUDIES OF GLOBAL RACE-MAKING PRACTICES

For over four decades, academics have illustrated and emphasised the need for the social contextualisation – both geographical and historical – of race-making practices. Barbara Fields (1982: 144) recognised that "the assumption that race is an observable physical fact, a thing, rather than a notion that is profoundly and in its very essence ideological" is to analyse race from "the terrain of racialist ideology and to become its unknowing – and therefore uncontesting – victim." As Fields suggests, because the concepts of race and racism are themselves products of space- and time-bound ideologies, contextualisation of how and why they come to be used in specific places and at specific times is more revealing than attempts at universal definitions. Yet despite widespread scholarly agreement to the contrary, the notion that humanity is divided into discrete groups based on phenotype and descent remains a commonplace folk conceptualisation of difference around the world, as well as among a minority of academics (Saini, 2019). Categorisation of individuals to membership of one of these biologically-based groups as the basis of determining intellectual abilities or cultural traits underlies the supposedly natural basis of resultant racial hierarchies.

Since at least the early 1980s then, scholars have shown that, in Hall's (2011: 13) words, "Racial ideas are false categorizations because they yoke together much that is dissimilar on the basis of a little that is more or less the same." Indeed, Fields (1982: 144) explicitly laid out how, when it comes to racial classification, "the rules vary" not just between countries but also within them. To illustrate this variation, she re-tells the unverified but nevertheless instructive story of a US journalist questioning Papa Doc Duvalier, then President of Haiti, about the proportion of Haiti's population that was white. Duvalier's seemingly incredible reply that ninety-eight percent of Haiti's population was white prompted the journalist to explicitly enquire how white people were defined in Haiti. By way of answer, and to the journalist's surprise, Duvalier said he applied the infamous one-drop rule used in the US to define African Americans as the basis for classification of Haiti's white population. Contextualising these rules, then, is crucial to understanding not just the content of race-making – how individuals are classified – but, more importantly, for what purpose. From an overview of racisms from the Crusades to the twentieth century, Bethencourt (2013: 6) suggests that the utility of racism is linked to its service of underlying "political projects…connected to specific economic conditions." As Cowan and Brown (2000) similarly point out with regard to the mobilisation of ethnicities, illustrating the dynamism and geographical and historical situatedness of racial ideologies is only politically useful when considering wider questions about power. That social and political power must be integral to analyses of racialisation processes has more recently prompted scholars, such as Kendi (2019: 35), to define race not solely as a social or cultural construction, but as "a power construct of collected or merged difference that lives socially."

The study of racialised power at different geographical scales has effectively illustrated the processes and purposes behind racist ideologies. Racism creates new forms of power to include and exclude, redefining legitimacy of access to resources of all kinds, from employment and education to justice and healthcare. Asking these important questions about power, about who wins and who loses from the deployment of racist ideologies, has understandably tended to focus attention on the most extreme examples of legislative racial segregation – the US, South Africa – and

on Europe's former colonial powers, seen by many as the originators of contemporary racist ideologies. As Berg and Wendt (2011: 2) argue, on the basis of the Euro-American domination of this literature, it is unsurprising that "racism appears to have been a Western ideology tailor-made to legitimize the subjugation and exploitation of non-white peoples." Certainly, the fact that Europeans and their descendants are commonly the beneficiaries of racialised power at all geographical scales is not something that can seriously be disputed. Given the political and economic hegemony of European countries during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and latterly that of North America, that these populations effectively created a globalised racial hierarchy by utilising that power to sustain their own privileged positions appears to be a rational argument supported by much empirical evidence. It is the argument underlying Michelle Christian's assertion, in the epigraph above, that all countries have been racialised by a global white supremacy. Christian's recognition that this might be "a bold claim" appears something of an afterthought, buried as it is towards the end of her article, after clearly articulating precisely this argument.

Yet, as Frank Dikötter reminds us in the second epigraph above, global phenomena – including racisms – are rarely universal or uniform. To make such a claim is to contradict the well-established need for contextualisation of racialisation processes. How could it be that all people, in all countries, are in thrall to the same presumably top-down imposition of a global racial hierarchy when it is *the people themselves* that make race? By what process could a social construction, any social construction, itself have the power to reconstruct the entire globe in its own image? Why would those disadvantaged by such a system perpetuate this same hierarchy in this way? It is only relatively recently that such questions have been – often implicitly – posed, and that much needed nuance and important local textures, have begun to be added to our understandings of global racisms. Several embryonic literatures have emerged that may be seen as attempts to weave these local strands into the global picture. It is perhaps too early to suggest that this is an emerging field of enquiry, as so far these efforts remain characterised by largely disparate and disjointed conversations, separated by differing disciplinary, regional or national foci. It is my contention that

much could be gained by joining up some of these conversations, and for the implications of critical analyses of monoracism arguments to have more significant reverberations across the literature.

This project is therefore framed at the intersection of four emerging literatures, which have simultaneously started asking some of the same questions, but rarely of each other. I identify these as firstly, the comparative racisms literature, which incorporates a broader geographical focus of study beyond what may be termed Euro-American racisms, but which nevertheless has a tendency to apply Euro-American ideologies of race to these examples. Secondly, the African Studies literature has started to grapple with questions of race in sub-Saharan contexts, but often over-emphasises linkages to African diasporas at the expense of considering the significance of more local power dynamics. Third is the global racisms literature, which alongside a broader global focus, also allows for more localised rationales for race-making practices. To its detriment, however, most of this literature has tended not to consider racialisation processes in sub-Saharan Africa in any level of detail. Finally, what I call Majority World perspectives seek to situate and contextualise race-making practices within the social framework of those who live them. But within this embryonic body of work, the focus tends to be predominantly local without consideration of the significance of these at wider geographical scales. And so it is that by combining elements of each of these, I propose that scholars can potentially uncover exciting – and perhaps radical – opportunities to better understand global race-making practices. I outline this potential in more detail by considering each of these literatures in turn in the following sections. I try here to give a sense of the broader debates within racial and ethnic studies, but due to the size and diversity of this field – and in line with my own research focus – I draw particularly on analyses of whiteness. I conclude this chapter with consideration of how this project may develop these literatures further by outlining two key lessons from this study of African race-making processes.

1. COMPARATIVE RACISMS LITERATURE: MOVING FROM THE 'COLOUR-LINE' TO GLOBAL MONORACISMS

While the study of racialisation and racism has never been confined solely to within the borders of European and North American countries, the racial politics of these countries has exerted huge influence over the development of the resultant literatures. This commonly manifests in the study of what in the past has been termed 'race relations,' but there exists an assumption even today that racialisation matters most – and is consequently studied most – when the proximity of differentially racialised bodies make it seem most starkly visible. This logic has been applied to the field from its early days, when in 1903, American sociologist WEB Du Bois (2007: 15) famously introduced the concept of the "color-line" as "the problem of the twentieth century". To extend Du Bois' metaphor, academic interest is particularly stirred by movement in the so-called 'colour-line'; that is, when the position of dominant groups appears threatened or precarious (Pilossof, 2014). As a result, North American and European experiences of racialisation, along with those of their former overseas (particularly settler) colonies and territories, have been and continue to be the overwhelming focus of academic research. As reflected in this body of work, the 'colour-line' can most commonly be found in the USA and, to a lesser degree, Canada; in selected Caribbean countries and Brazil; stretching through the former colonial powers of Western Europe; and south to South Africa and Australia. This list is not exhaustive as this rationale has been applied increasingly broadly, but for convenience, I refer to this group as colour-line countries due to their relative dominance in the literature based on their apparent empirical relevance to the colour-line thesis.

That this should be the case is understandable given the significant role of racist ideas in driving European expansion (Berg & Wendt, 2011), and the particular importance of the American colonial experience in shaping racial ideologies that defined whiteness and blackness as opposing poles (Bethencourt, 2013). The continuing political and economic hegemony of the United States, and of Western Europe to a lesser extent, allows for particularly situated geographic and historical

experiences of racialisation to appear normative (Anderson, 2014), even if on a truly global scale, these experiences may be considered exceptional (Wacquant, 1997). The strict racial segregationist policies implemented in the United States and South Africa, for example, have few, if any, parallels elsewhere. This fact partly explains their ability to generate academic interest, but it also skews the resultant literature to consideration of what may be considered the extremes at the expense of the experiences of the majority. From this perspective, racial politics can consequently be framed as a 'problem' in the US and South Africa, but 'not so bad' in the UK, for example (Younge, 2020). It's the same logic that raises querying eyebrows when I explain I am studying racialisation in Nigeria.

Attempts to redirect attention towards racialisation processes in so far understudied regions of the world, such as Nigeria, have been slow. As geographer Alastair Bonnett (2018: 1212) reports, "Twenty or so years ago I was told that, because my university course deals with topics such as racism in China and Russia that its contents were "exotic" and not "mainstream". I was told the same thing in 2016." Part of the reason for this is the continuing implicit dominance of the colour-line rationale. As an impetus for broadening the geographical scale of racial analyses, contemporary academics often cite directly the second part of Du Bois' (2007: 15) quotation about the colour-line, in which he refers to "the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and in the islands of the sea". As a result, lamentations about the historical scholarly focus on the first part of DuBois' quotation, to the detriment of the global dimension of the latter part, have led to attempts at "drawing the global colour line" (Lake & Reynolds, 2008). Yet continuing to frame research around the notion of such a line itself leads to the tendency to restrict the geographical scope of analyses. To take Lake and Reynolds' (2008) work as an example, which explores how "white men's countries" went about drawing the global colour-line for which their book is named, the geographical focus on Australia, the US, South Africa and Japan makes for a very restricted sense of 'the global'. Such a limited global focus, where one is attempted at all, is common to studies of racism and anti-racism across the field (Bonnett, 2018).

Attempts at truly globalising the geographical scope of such work beyond Euro-American influence, however, have proved difficult and have attracted controversy. As Loveman (1999a) points out in a critique of Anthony Marx's comparison of "race relations" in South Africa, the US and Brazil – in which Marx claims his case studies are "obvious" choices – the colour-line rationale for case study selection in effect applies a particular understanding of racialisation processes onto differing countries and contexts. In earlier work, this application of US models of racialisation was explicit, as in research into why Brazil's black population did not readily identify with imported racial categorisations thought to advance their own racially-based interests (Loveman, 1999b). Latterly, however, the same tendency has occurred through the increasingly common application of the concept of global white supremacy, which is premised upon monoracism arguments rooted primarily in the Euro-American experience. The difference this time, however, is that the implicit nature of this claim is itself embedded within a particular anti-racist narrative that makes it much more difficult to flag, and consequently, to contest. This is apparent in the furore that followed publication of Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1999) much-rebutted critique of the "cultural imperialism" of the United States in establishing and perpetuating the notion of a single global racism. Bourdieu and Wacquant's argument, that theories of 'race relations' based on the US experience are "tacitly (and sometimes explicitly) raised to the status of universal standard" (*ibid.,* p.45) was roundly condemned for, on the one hand, stating the obvious (Lemert, 2000), and on the other for its "essentialist notions of an authentic American imperialist discourse" (Werbner, 2000: 147). Other critiques have suggested Bourdieu and Wacquant overplayed the extent to which academics in the US actively seek – or are able – to 'impose' their views and experiences onto social arenas in the Global South (Bonnett, 2006), and underplayed the influence of a broad range of geographically dispersed postcolonial scholars' work on anti-racisms (Werbner, 2000). Nevertheless, despite their paper's shortcomings, the controversy that Bourdieu and Wacquant's paper generated is interesting in itself because it highlights the academic politics at play in studies of race and anti-racism (Emirbayer & Desmond, 2012). Indeed, their attempt to highlight the hazardous nature of any dominant paradigm that is positioned beyond

academic scrutiny was instructive, and continues to be relevant (see McWhorter, 2021).

This is because we see today the increasing influence of such a paradigm in anti-racist notions of a global white supremacy. This concept was first introduced by philosopher Charles W. Mills (1997: 3), whose book *The Racial Contract* argued that:

> What is needed, in other words, is a recognition that racism (or, as I will argue, global white supremacy) is itself a political system, a particular power structure of formal or informal rule, socioeconomic privilege, and norms for the differential distribution of material wealth and opportunities, benefits and burdens, rights and duties.

For many contemporary writers seeking to move analyses beyond individual colour-line countries, theorisations of a global white supremacy reflect global monoracism arguments in continuing to juxtapose blackness against whiteness – thereby encouraging a geographical focus on global rather than national colour-lines – and in the process result in the application of particular histories and geographies of racialisation, taken from their original contexts, and extended to a much broader geographical canvas. Multiple studies over many decades now have shown how particular histories have led to the production of societies that can accurately be described as built on white supremacy, as in the United States (Baldwin, 1984; McIntosh, 1988) and the UK (Ware, 1992; Dyer, 1997), for example. The problem, however, is when this same logic is applied *globally* to peoples and places that have had quite different historical experiences and consequently therefore could be expected to exhibit diverse contemporary forms of racialisation (see, for example, Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre (2020); Allweis (2021); Christian & Namaganda (2022)). Often this slippage of scale seems so natural as to be done unthinkingly. Sara Ahmed's (2007) work on *A phenomenology of whiteness,* for example, documents her own experiences of racism at international arrivals in New York City and within academic departments in the UK. Yet despite this limited geographical scope, by drawing on Fanon's work Ahmed goes on to argue that "bodies are shaped by histories of colonialism… Colonialism makes the world 'white', which is of course a world 'ready' for certain kinds of bodies" (*ibid.,* p.153-4). The transition from New

York City and the UK, to the whiteness of "the world", is so taken for granted that it requires no further analyses or explanation.

The assumption that white supremacy exists globally is increasingly made, across academic disciplines, in ways that suggest that this racialised power construct is somehow divorced from the particularities of the geographically situated racial systems from which it emerges. Thus, in anthropology, Smalls, Spears and Rosa (2021: 155) introduce a special issue on language and white supremacy with reference to, "the grotesqueness of White supremacy in all of its targeted, capacious manifestations—interpersonal and institutional, mundane and spectacular, insidious and obvious, ritualized and emergent, local, and global." So too feminist critical race scholar, Sherene Razack (2022: 5) argues that, "anti-Muslim racism must be understood as a transnational phenomenon and one that contributes to the making of a global white supremacy" which is linked to "an international system of racial governance" (*ibid.,* p.6). While Razack concedes that "White supremacy shifts and morphs according to the specifics of geopolitics and socioeconomic class," she still goes on to conclude that, "a global white supremacy nevertheless persists" (*ibid.,* p.7). Similarly, in international law, Gevers (2021: 1655) claims that,

> with the "reinvention" of international law in the late nineteenth century, the term international came to incorporate elements of both the terms world and global: as a sociopolitical imaginary and an "instituted perspective," a world international lawyers lived inside (and produced), and a global perspective they took of (and used to take from) its Others… I aim to show that this "international" was a racial imaginary – a White International (or "White World" in Du Bois's terms) – that emerged from and reinforced Global White Supremacy.

To take another example among many, Kehinde Andrews' (2021: 206) argument that revolution through pan-African unity is "the only solution to the problem of racism", is built on an analysis of the histories of genocide, slavery and colonialism that centres "the West" to such a degree that China and Brazil are considered part of "the non-White West" (*ibid.,* p.138). Within this narrative, the possibility of global racisms plural, although mentioned, is quickly discounted because "the Western system… had the most damaging impact on Africa" (*ibid.,* p.79). Andrews' conclusion that,

"The problem is that society is built on a White supremacy that permeates every institution, intellectual framework and interaction within it", implicitly supposes the existence of a singular global "society" dominated by a monolithic "White supremacy". But how did transatlantic slavery and histories of European colonialism differentially affect racialisation processes in China, Mongolia and Saudi Arabia, for example? How are spaces in Thailand and Korea part of a 'world made white', when their histories of colonisation concerned not European countries, but Japan? As Wacquant (1997) points out, histories of racialisation are neither coterminous with, nor solely reducible to, the geographical limits of Euro-American imperialism. Equally, as I show in relation to Nigeria, there was a significant diversity of experiences both between and within those countries that were colonised by European powers, including in local understandings and contemporary responses to this period of history (see Chapter 7).

A second significant issue with theorisations of a global white supremacy is that its existence is often placed beyond academic scrutiny. The roots of this once again lay in the particular and powerful anti-racist politics dominant in colour-line countries, increasingly applied on a global scale. As Bonnett (2006) argues, it is contemporary *anti*-racist politics in the US that may now be considered culturally hegemonic, rather than that seeking to maintain the status quo. He identifies a particular theme within the backlash against Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1999) paper, mentioned earlier: "the idea that US race scholarship cannot be imperialist because it is *socially critical,* that is part of a heritage of *resistance.* Yet, if our focus remains on the last forty years, it is apparent that US influence over how ideas of race and ethnicity are construed in other parts of the world is most apparent in precisely this area; that is, within radical, counter-cultural and otherwise critical social moments" (Bonnett, 2006: 1090-1). Consequently, the binary distinction and pitting of blackness against whiteness common in the US, based on distinctive histories of slavery and colonialism, is increasingly found in scholarship that attempts to incorporate much broader geographical scales up to and including the global. Thus, in a paper that explicitly argues for a move away from a US-focus to "incorporate a global view on contemporary racisms", Christian (2019: 169) nevertheless reverts to the premise

that "we must see "the global" through the lens of "colonialism and slavery"", whereby (European) colonialism and (transatlantic) slavery are treated as monolithic and self-evident processes in need of no further interrogation or explanation. She goes on to posit that the resultant global white supremacy is "shaping *all* geographies and national racialized social systems but in different, nuanced and indirect forms" (*ibid.,* p.170). Exactly what these different, nuanced and indirect forms may be escape her analysis, however, as diverse examples from Mexico to India and Ghana are subsumed under the "concept of deep and malleable global whiteness [which] recognizes the persistence of white domination globally, and in all national racial social systems, even those that are ostensibly without white bodies and white institutions" (*ibid.,* p.179).

Neatly aligned with the dominant anti-racist paradigm, arguments such as that advanced by Christian either ignore or pay lip service to the importance of local contextualisation of racialisation processes. But more dangerously, the monoracism that underlines positions such as this one has become an orthodoxy that it is increasingly difficult to even challenge. Suzuki's (2017: 287) suggestion – based on race scholarship on East Asia, Latin America and the Middle East – that scholars should "analyze the realities of racial and ethnic phenomena of the non-Western world without a presupposed white supremacy lens" is dismissed out of hand by Christian (2019: 170) for "assuming that white supremacy has dissipated and/or is not relevant for some geographies". Yet herein is exactly where the difference and nuance that Christian herself speaks to is to be found. In what ways does white supremacy hold in some places, and not in others? How is whiteness constructed and understood by those who view it from the outside? And importantly, what purpose does such a power construction serve for people who seem to be disadvantaged by it? This thesis seeks to answer some of these questions, and in doing so, it draws on this literature to offer critique and challenge to the dominant monoracism paradigm in anti-racist studies. I do not deny the existence of white supremacy in the specific contexts of multiple social spaces, such as in colour-line countries, for example. I agree that the world is largely structured by a global economic system, itself based on histories of slavery and imperialism. But I do not see the process by which this

economic system could have created truly global yet singular racialisation processes in which the same meanings are attached to race regardless of geography. Rather, I see racialisation processes as a rational, individual and collective response to localised social and political conditions, which at the present time, would most likely include – but which cannot be solely reduced to – the impacts of global capitalism. I therefore seek to challenge the notion that the same anti-racist tools that have been developed to challenge racism in Euro-America can unproblematically be applied elsewhere, globally. It is through attention to the particularity of local racialisation processes that we will better understand how racial politics come into play and why – and importantly, how best to challenge the inequalities that result.

2. AFRICAN STUDIES LITERATURE: AFRICAN RACE-MAKING IN THE SHADOW OF DIASPORA

The second body of literature that I review here provides a further example of how the colour-line thesis has shaped the way in which academics have historically studied racialisation, here in the context of Africa. This has resulted in the development of a dual literature, which has historically focused on ethnic conflict in 'black' Africa within African Studies (Pierre, 2013), in parallel to studies of racialisation and whiteness in South Africa (Niehaus, 2013), which form part of the wider canon of scholarship in racial and ethnic studies. In this way, the South African experience is commonly divorced from regional African contexts to be considered an example of the 'global' colour-line at work. South Africa's special treatment in this regard – found in the notion that the country is an 'obvious' choice for racial analysis – is largely due to the fact that the legal formalisation and long duration of white supremacist rule under apartheid, and the comparatively high numbers of European settlers involved, allow the possibility of drawing direct comparisons between South Africa and other colour-line countries, and with the US in particular. Within African Studies, a significantly smaller amount of attention has been paid to whiteness in other former settler colonies. As Pilossof (2014) has argued, increased research on white populations in Africa can often be directly correlated with their own sense of precariousness; an argument that is reflected in the case of Zimbabwe, a country

that became the focus of increased academic interest following the controversial implementation of a 'fast-track' land reform programme from 2000 (e.g., Fisher, 2010; Hughes, 2010). Outside of the contexts that have the capacity to make headlines in other colour-line countries, analyses of whiteness in Africa have tended to be either historical (e.g., Callaway, 1987; Chennels, 1996) or of relatively specialised interest among African Studies scholars (e.g., see Uusihakala (1999) and Fox (2012) on whiteness in Kenya, and Armbruster (2010) on German immigrants in Namibia).

In line with my research interest, I pay particular attention here to the whiteness literature on postcolonial Africa. In common with much scholarship on whiteness, the focus of this work tends to be on the ways in which whiteness is made by, and in the service of, white people. This has meant that important contributions have been made to understanding the ways in which white minority populations in Africa have attempted to maintain power in the postcolonial period. However, it has also had the effect of emphasising the singular power of whiteness, thereby precluding any consideration of the ways in which whiteness might not be hegemonic. In this way, this scholarship continues the trend found within the comparative racisms literature of broadening the physical but not ideological horizons of analysis. For example, in a study of the discursive practices used by English-speaking white South Africans to maintain racially-based privileges under majority rule, Steyn and Foster (2008) illustrate the ways in which "white talk" has evolved to incorporate new discourses of anti-racism (for example, praise for Mandela) while still largely retaining its racist, conservative roots. This underlying sub-text is now revealed in more subtle ways, Steyn and Foster suggest, through for example, blaming majority rule for increased crime rates, or suggesting wealthy black South Africans are guilty of corruption or nepotism. Their paper makes a valid and convincing argument, but by focusing solely on how white South Africans create and maintain the "privileges" of whiteness, Steyn and Foster contribute to a literature in which the dominance of whiteness is rarely questioned or interrogated. Echoing the comparative racisms literature once again, work in this vein commonly makes the implicit assumption that the meanings attached to whiteness are transnational or global, rather than primarily linked to the

local practice of politics. For example, Steyn and Foster (2008: 28) infer the existence of a globalised whiteness through their relation of "the local formation of whiteness" among English-speaking white South Africans to "mainstream whitenesses in the rest of the neo-liberal global community". That neo-liberal global whitenesses should be "mainstream" is taken as read, reflecting a supposition that the white supremacy found in colour-line countries can exist globally, and independently of the peoples and contexts that give rise to racialised power constructs.

A significant challenge in this regard is the fact that the perspectives of less dominant groups have historically been significantly under-represented in the racial and ethnic studies literature. In the US context, journalist George Schuyler commented in 1927 that "The amazing ignorance of whites – even Southern whites – about Negroes is a constant source of amusement to all Aframericans" (in Roediger, 1998: 80). There is a corresponding trend within the contemporary African Studies literature today, particularly outside of colour-line countries. How black Africans, for example, make race – and why – is a question that few academics have empirically attempted to pose (although see Nyamnjoh & Page (2002) for a notable exception). Compared to the immense and diverse literatures devoted to documenting other peoples, that the Euro-American academy rarely considers those peoples' views of their others is illustrative of the problem (Bashkow, 2006). Historically, part of the difficulty is the one-sidedness of the accounts available, reflecting the relative scarcity of African voices in Euro-American scholarship more broadly. Curnow's (1990) paper exploring *African perspectives on the Western 'Other' in 15th and 16th century art* is an interesting exception, which by drawing on analyses of surviving ivory carvings traded between the Portuguese and African communities in present-day Sierra Leone and Nigeria, suggests that initial contact between Africans and Europeans was negotiated for mutual benefit. Yet even today, the recognition of Africans as active race constructors, rather than those passively racialised by more dominant others, is rare.

The tension between acknowledging localised African agency while also recognising the impacts of transnational or global processes beyond local control remains

integral to African Studies scholarship. Within the literature on racialisation and ethnicity in Africa, this tension commonly plays out in debates about the origins of racism in Africa. Historians have led the charge in this regard, offering sometimes divergent interpretations of the historical record. Mamdani's (1996) influential work, *Citizen and Subject,* for example, argued that contemporary racisms in Africa are largely a product of European colonialism, an idea that came to dominate the literature around the turn of the millennium, and one that still holds intellectual sway among contemporary left-leaning scholars. This argument was challenged by Matory (1999: 89), who by focusing on the role of African elites, denied their passive adoption of European racial vocabulary, suggesting instead that African nationalists' "peculiar shuffling" of ideas about racialisation was more linked to local social histories than to European intellectual projects. A similar emphasis on indigenous intellectuals and the influence of multiple sources of racial ideas, within both colonising and colonised populations, can be found in Glassman's (2011) work on racial politics in colonial Zanzibar. While recognising this hybridity, Hall's (2011:2) study of race in Muslim West Africa diverges from a focus on the impact of colonialism in arguing that "there are African histories of race." Increasingly, scholars recognise that "any attempt at systematic differentiation between 'native thought' and 'Western influence' is in vain" (Dikötter, 2015: 40). So too, as Young and Weitzberg (2021) point out, that there may have been pre-colonial African racisms and that these may have been shaped by multiple contemporary influences are not necessarily conflicting arguments. Nevertheless, the fact that an underlying quest for identifying the origins of racism in Africa continues (e.g., Pierre, 2020), in part belies the academic politics of this endeavour. Twenty-five years ago, Loic Wacquant (1997: 225) warned against the study of race via "the logic of the trial" in which the objective of study is to "convict or exonerate this or that society, institution, or group, for or from the terrible sin of "racism."" In a critique of this trend he notes, "It is as if revealing that subjugated categories also have their own ethnoracial distinctions would tarnish them and blunt the critique of racial domination" (*ibid.,* p.226). Yet today, scholarship on racialisation in Africa is often afflicted by precisely this logic, as the shadow of diaspora race politics looms large over the field.

We see this in the increasing influence of diaspora anti-racist politics on debates about racialisation in Africa. In many ways, this is part of the wider trend of superimposing the racial ideologies of colour-line countries onto the distinctive social and political situations of other, diverse places. But these debates become especially emotionally charged in relation to African contexts due to the particular role that ideas about Africa – as homeland, for example – play in the racial politics of colour-line countries. In this vein, when scholars argue for the need to place African racisms within an 'international context', they are commonly making reference to the social and historical contexts of racialisation in colour-line countries, and consequently aim to show how and why these contexts should be applied to non-colour-line African populations. These arguments emphasise colonial histories and transatlantic slavery as the basis of modern racisms, without exploring how these historical phenomena differentially affected different populations at different times around the globe. For example, Zimbabwean Panashe Chigumadzi's (2019) essay, *Why I'm no longer talking to Nigerians about race,* explicitly upbraids Nigerians for their supposed lack of racial solidarity due to their perceived dismissiveness of the anti-racist politics commonly found in colour-line countries. Chigumadzi (*ibid.,* p.7) recognises that many Nigerians do not share these politics: "Nigerians who dismiss our understandings of race often use their lack of experience of racial discrimination as the reason for their positions." Rather than exploring why Nigerians may have different understandings of racial discrimination, however, Chigumadzi instead directly applies the ideology of white supremacy common in southern Africa and the US onto Nigerian contexts. Nigerians' argument about their own experiences of discrimination in this regard, she states, is "unconvincing" because "different attacks on black bodies – whether on African soil or outside of it – [are] not unrelated to white racial capitalism and coloniality... All of us are suffering coloniality, it's just that the significant presence of white bodies in South Africa and the United States make it easier to visualize." (*ibid.,* p.3). Underlying Chigumadzi's position is the theorisation of a monolithic global white supremacy, divorced from its local social and historical contexts. She writes: "The sophisticatedness of white supremacy means that even with the visuality and presence of whiteness in one location and its invisibility and absence in another,

both spaces continue to suffer similar kinds of psychic, material and discursive impact." (*ibid.,* p.3).

The same premise underlies Jemima Pierre's (2013) work on racialisation processes in Ghana. Pierre's argument that "global white supremacy" structures postcolonial African societies hinges on the idea that global racial inequalities are universal and largely geographically non-specific. In her book, *The Predicament of Blackness*, Pierre (*ibid.,* p.xii) makes this claim to a universality of racialisation processes explicitly: "Confronting race in Ghana over the years both confirmed and normalized for me this society's banality – and universality. Ghana is not unique. How could it be?" she writes. As such, Pierre suggests the legacies of transatlantic slavery, colonialism and racial capitalism can explain everything from Ghanaians' skin bleaching practices to Jesus' depiction as a "White man". While Pierre's data include interviews with a range of Ghanaians, her analyses mention nothing about power relationships within and between groups within Ghana, instead focusing entirely on the international power dynamics between differentially racialised groups. From this perspective, anti-black racist ideologies become an untethered, international norm disseminated from Euro-America to the rest of the world. Consequently, Pierre's conclusions read as a rallying cry for recruitment to an international pan-Africanist cause, which is in fact heavily based on a US model of anti-racist politics. From an overview of the racial and ethnic studies literature pertaining to Muslim Africa, Young and Weitzberg (2021: 17) draw similar conclusions, in which they imply that in order to give analyses of racialisation "a global framing", it is necessary to situate them within "literature on the Atlantic world." Once again, the 'global' is limited in this case to the Atlantic world, and analyses of race-making practices in Africa are overshadowed by the experiences of the diaspora.

Such is the influence of these arguments on the field that I devote much of Chapter 7 to outlining how and why racial politics in Lagos is distinctive to and divergent from the anti-racist politics dominant in colour-line countries. The fact that my argument in this regard may be seen to be controversial is indicative of the power that this anti-racist framing now holds across academic fields (McWhorter, 2021). So let me

categorically state that I agree with the objectives and need for this type of progressive politics in many colour-line countries. However, it is my contention in this thesis that it is necessary to acknowledge how the global politics of race is neither uniform nor universal, and therefore we should not assume that race politics globally will be solely reflective of the experiences of colour-line contexts. Reflecting on the racial and ethnic studies literature within African Studies to date therefore, the contribution that this project seeks to make is in opening up these debates to consideration of how progressive politics in the diaspora may impede our understandings of racialisation processes in African contexts. In the 1930s, the Nigerian elite were sceptical of African American claims to race leadership, preferring instead to focus on local issues (Byfield, 2004). My data from Lagos suggest that, to a significant extent, this trend continues among the general population today. In the chapters that follow, I aim to paint a picture of the political climate in contemporary Lagos, and on this basis, I seek to place racialisation processes within their localised social contexts and to understand them in relation to the priorities of the people that perpetuate them. To do so challenges dominant anti-racist paradigms in productive ways. It suggests that Lagosians' failure to subscribe to pan-African solidarity politics is not due to a lack of empathy, as Chigumadzi (2019) suggests, but rather due to different understandings of the meanings attached to racialisation, which in turn necessitate different forms of political action. These forms of political action are not lesser because they do not conform to dominant anti-racist narratives around what appropriate and effective activism looks like. Despite claims to the contrary, African Studies to date has been slow to incorporate local understandings of race-making into wider debates about racialisation and ethnicity on the continent, particularly outside of the colour-line countries to the south. In seeking to address this omission, this project aims to open up empirical and theoretical spaces by also encouraging others to carry out further work across Africa in this vein.

3. GLOBAL RACISMS LITERATURE: POLYRACISMS AND AFRICA'S ABSENCE

A template for this approach can be found in what I term here the global racisms literature. This work shares the impetus found in the comparative racisms literature to move beyond a focus on colour-line countries. However, it diverges from this literature in also seeking to de-centre colour-line ideologies in the analysis of racialisation processes. One of the central tenets of the global racisms literature is a critique of the idea that contemporary racisms are solely the result of Euro-American expansionism and racial capitalism. Highlighting the Eurocentrism of this argument, Bonnett (2018: 1201) summarises this position as viewing "an *exclusive* focus on race as a Western "invention"… [as] inadequate and parochial." Loic Wacquant (1997: 26) called out this "oddly Eurocentric view" a quarter of a century ago. Ian Law (2014: 3) stated the point more forcefully in his argument that viewing racism as "a purely European invention" is an example of "supreme arrogance". Noting the ways in which racialisation has evolved differentially across time and space, Law instead introduced the theory of polyracisms. He defined this as: "the historical development of multiple origins of racism in different regions and forms", which he placed in opposition to "monoracism arguments positing a linear diffusion of Western racisms from the classical world onwards and outwards." He elaborated: "Hence, racism is also pre-modern (proto-racism), non-Western, non-capitalist (Communist) and the product of other varieties of modernity. This is over and above current hegemonic sociological accounts which privilege Western capitalist modernity as the sole engine of global racialization" (*ibid.,* p.39-40). In a series of books, written in collaboration with other authors under the broad heading *Mapping Global Racisms*, Law expanded this argument through consideration of the differential, localised and independent development of racisms in diverse social and geographical contexts, including in Russia (Law & Zakharov, 2017), China (Law, 2012), in relation to the Roma (Law & Kovats, 2018), and across the Mediterranean (Law, 2014) and Caribbean (Law & Tate, 2015) regions.

A similar theoretical argument is advanced in Frank Dikötter's work. An historian with a special interest in China, Dikötter (2008) has similarly drawn attention to the

restricted geographical horizons of racial and ethnic studies, which he sees as part of the underlying cause of common – but mistaken – explanations for the global dimensions of racism. The first of these explanations, which Dikötter refers to as the "common-sense model" (*ibid.,* p.1480), views global racialisation as a result of actual differences between groups of people, which although discredited within social science, remains periodically influential among a minority of academics (Saini, 2019) and retains widespread relevance in folk conceptualisations of race. Secondly, and more widely accepted, Dikötter identifies the "imposition model" (*ibid.,* p.1481), whereby racism results from the structures of global racialised capitalism, driven by unequal social relations due to a need for cheap labour. Thirdly, the "diffusion model" sees racism spreading from Europe such that European racial prejudices are replicated locally to valorise whiteness over blackness around the globe. Dikötter critiques each model for treating racism as a uniform phenomenon, replicating a Eurocentric bias, and stripping non-Europeans of human agency. He offers in their place an "interactive approach" to global racialisation, which "take[s] into account how racist belief systems were negotiated, appropriated and transformed within historically specific contexts" (*ibid.,* p.1494). Through this approach, Dikötter highlights how "local understandings of racism are important, [and therefore] we need detailed in-depth studies based on local languages, which have been all but ignored by the three Eurocentric models" he identifies. On this basis, Dikötter suggests that "appropriation, differential usage and re-signification… [are] the keys to understanding the rapid spread of racist worldviews in parts of the globe outside Europe" (*ibid.,* p.1482).

If Ian Law's polyracisms thesis and Frank Dikötter's interactive approach to the racialisation of the globe remain peripheral to the field of ethnic and racial studies at present, there are indications that this is changing. Among historians in particular, the rejection of European interpretations of world history has resulted in a similar challenge to widespread understandings of global monoracisms. Berg and Wendt's (2011: 2) edited volume on *Racism in the Modern World*, for example, "seeks to explore additional and alternative explanations of racism's historical significance by going beyond the dominant paradigms, which have focused on the development of

racisms within the framework of Western nation states…to take a closer look at the complex processes of diffusion, transfer, adaptation, and transformation of racial ideas in various parts of the world". In a similar vein, Anderson (2014: 782) asks, "What happens to twentieth-century race science when we relocate it to the Global South?" In geography, Alastair Bonnett (2018: 1199) builds on Dikötter's models of global racialisation to suggest links between "the geographically diverse nature of racialization and the plural nature of modernity." Yet, despite an implicit desire to incorporate understudied examples of racialisation, sub-Saharan African contexts remain underrepresented within this embryonic literature. While Dikötter (2008) draws on historical studies of the BaKongo and the Rwandan genocide, and Bonnett's (2022) recent book on *Multiracism* intentionally emphasises African and Asian examples, their work is unusual in this regard. Ian Law's edited *Mapping Global Racisms* series includes no examples from the African continent. Similarly, Berg and Wendt's (2011) volume, which includes chapters on Cuba, India, China, Japan, the US and Australia among others, devotes comparatively little space to African examples. By foregrounding the local politics of racialisation in Lagos, this project aims to rectify this omission by furthering our understanding of African race-making practices and highlighting the lessons that can be learned from African contexts.

4. MAJORITY WORLD PERSPECTIVES: PROVINCIALISING WHITENESS

If the global racisms literature provides novel theoretical frameworks for understanding local race-making practices, the final works that I review here provide empirical evidence in support of these. Often methodologically ethnographic, these Majority World perspectives illustrate that the provincialisation of whiteness is not solely an objective for the future, but an already existing reality for many. These studies are perhaps too disparate to be called a body of literature in their own right, as most are focused on regional or more local scales and tend to speak to debates within authors' own academic disciplines. Few are cited in theoretical work in racial and ethnic studies, to the detriment of this body of work. Yet together, these works provide a clear challenge to the dissemination model upon which conceptualisations of global white supremacy are based. Rather they lend support to Dikötter's

interactionism thesis, whereby racialisation is a negotiated process that takes place through engagement primarily with local social conditions with a view to addressing a community's own perceived problems. Majority World perspectives often reveal highly ambivalent attitudes to whiteness, and as such, call into question the very notion of a strict racial hierarchy upon which the idea of monoracisms is built. In this way, these perspectives lend credence to the argument that localised racialisation processes are primarily a rational response to, rather than an imposed result of, global economic and political processes. The lesson from these studies, I suggest, is that it is by being productively attentive to the ways in which whiteness is negotiated, challenged, denigrated – and indeed, provincialised – in these ways, as well as the ways in which whiteness is valorised, that we will better understand both racialisation processes in diverse social contexts, and consequently, better identify novel and effective anti-racist actions.

Looking at the world through a lens that pre-supposes global white supremacy, it is easy to overlook the multiple ways in which whiteness is locally negotiated and simultaneously contested. But we can find evidence of this type of negotiation and contestation in a wide range of contexts, including outside of colour-line countries. From Africa, Nyamnjoh and Page's (2002) work on understandings of *Whiteman Kontri* (whitemen's countries) among young people in Cameroon illustrates continuing struggles over the meaning of whiteness. For their research participants, whiteness was class-specific, for whites are "people whose problem should be that of disposing of excess wealth, not of earning wealth. And any white who is reluctant to live up to this representation has no business to be white" (*ibid.,* p.614). But otherwise, representations of whiteness among the group were "profoundly internally incoherent", with white people "simultaneously described as weak but strong, exploitative but hardworking, ugly but attractive" (*ibid.,* p. 630). From a study of Ghana, Pierre (2013) similarly documents that Ghanaians do not unquestioningly accept representations of whiteness as superiority. She writes: "Whites in Ghana – and throughout the world – represent modernity, technological advancement, industry, innovation, economic success, political leadership, and cultural superiority. There is also a moral economy that emerges from such "advancement"… Yet, what is

significant here is that [among Ghanaians] this understanding of Whites – of Whiteness – is almost forced, something that has to be accepted...however grudgingly" (*ibid.,* p.74). On this basis, Pierre reports that Ghanaian students also mentioned to her "negative aspects of Whiteness" (*ibid.,* p.74), including for example, representations of "White gullibility" (*ibid.,* p.86). This more complex picture of the politics of racialisation in African contexts is also reflected in Islamic texts from the north of the continent, which include both anti-black sentiments as well as valorisation of blackness across a range of time periods (Young & Weitzberg, 2021). In Chapter 5, I outline how Lagosians also tend to valorise some aspects of whiteness, but denigrate others. By placing these into the context of Lagosians' understandings of their own social universe, I look at some of the reasons behind this complexity.

Similar evidence has emerged from east Asian countries. Dikötter (2015: 10) reports that historically, "In China's imagery, Europeans were just another variety of physically defective creatures, provoking curiosity mingled with a feeling of repulsion and pity." By the mid-nineteenth century, when the threat from Europeans appeared more pronounced, official Chinese rhetoric referred to the English as sub-human 'foreign devils' or 'barbarian slaves', and an English textbook available at the time was simply entitled *Devil's Talk* (*ibid.,* p.25). As this perceived threat grew, a fear of racial extinction engendered a general sense of "white peril" by the end of the nineteenth century (*ibid.,* p.47). Throughout the twentieth century too, elite Chinese perceptions of a race struggle led to rejections of whiteness as superiority, as evident in Chinese poet Wen Yidou's letters home from the US, in which he wrote of the "accumulated indignation" of the racial discrimination he experienced there: "I have a nation, I have a history and a culture of five thousand years: how can this be inferior to the Americans?" he asks (cited in Dikötter, 2015: 99).

We find parallel themes emerging from studies of racialisation in Japan. Once again, as Suzuki (2017: 289) argues, studies of Japanese perceptions of their own national origins reveal "that under changed political circumstances, a racial ideology is rearticulated to respond to situational imperatives." As such, an early study of *The*

Social Perception of Skin Color in Japan (Wagatsuma, 1967: 420) documented how "Caucasian skin" was associated with both beauty and "negative attitudes" due to its perceived transparency. Wagatsuma (*ibid.,* p.426) explains this ambivalence thus:

> Though it seems somewhat painful for most Japanese to be frank about it (and many of them refuse to do so), there is among Japanese intellectuals a more or less unconscious, if not conscious, ambivalence toward the world of white people. Such an attitude is understandable if one takes even a brief glance at Japan's modern history. Japan, at first overwhelmed by an apprehension of the Western world's great power, caught up with the West in an amazingly short time. Then, feeling a sense of rejection over unequal treatment, Japan appointed itself a champion of non-white Asians. In this role, it boldly tried to win a place in the company of white imperialists. Failing disastrously after all, Japan found itself receiving a "democratic education" from its American teachers toward whom it felt the greatest rivalry mixed with admiration.

More recently, Bonnett (2002: 98) documents the ways in which notions of Japanese superiority over white people have been expressed in advertising that depicts "the failed and exhausted white" as "unable to keep up with the Japanese" and as "not capable of emulating Japanese efficiency and standards." He concludes from this that "The partial dethroning of European-heritage people as representatives of a superior white race does not necessarily imply the abandonment of whiteness as an ideal or model in Japan… It strikes me that traditional notions of whiteness in Japanese society… may be able to be redeployed in order to envision a renewed Japanese claim on whiteness" (*ibid.,* p.98).

The local politics reflected in racialisation processes is also apparent in south American contexts. Magnus Course (2013), for example, considers the role of the ritual clown – masked men who perform at traditional rituals – among the Mapuche people of Chile. By examining the widespread association of clowns with white people within 'indigenous' communities across the Americas, Course argues that, while clowns "seem to be so completely ignorant of social conventions: …they simply steal, fight, shout, and so on. Much the same can be said of white people, with whom clowns are so closely associated. Mapuche people frequently lament the fact that *winka* [whites] do not know how to be respectful. They frequently fail to greet

properly, to share, or be hospitable, and worst of all, they try and tell other people what to do" (*ibid.,* p.782-3). Course goes on to show that in portraying whiteness, the clowns risk 'becoming white' themselves, for their role as a ritual clown is not something that can ever be given up; once identified as a clown, an individual is permanently labelled as such. In this way, "Mapuche clowns, then, are truly abject, permanent embodiments of the implications of unbalanced and uncontrolled engagement with difference. Rather than a representation, they are, in both ritual and everyday contexts, a particular state of becoming, frozen and framed as a state of being" (*ibid.,* p. 793).

Lastly, Ira Bashkow (2006) has examined *The meaning of whitemen* in the Orokaiva society of Papua New Guinea. His ethnography documents the characteristics commonly associated with *whitemen* among the Orokaiva, and seeks to understand the meanings attached to whiteness within the social and cultural universe of the Orokaiva themselves. On this basis, Bashkow argues that for the Orokaiva, "whitemen are morally ambiguous figures which are evaluated differently depending on people's purposes in the context of speaking" (*ibid.,* p. 13), where some aspects of whitemen are highly regarded: the building of roads and schools, medical care, electricity, and material wealth, which the Orokaiva identify with a superior morality. In other ways whitemen are derided, with the "ignorance and hauteur of white administrative patrol officers parodied in a clown's performance at a village feast" (*ibid.,* p. 3). Bashkow goes on to suggest that, "Just as we in the West are primarily interested in what our history with others can reveal to us about ourselves, Orokaiva are primarily interested in what their shared history with the West can reveal to them about themselves. Thus, it is primarily their own concerns that we find reflected in the stories they tell about whitemen… This book is therefore actually about Orokaiva people, and not about white people. It is about the ideas that Orokaiva have about whites, and the role of these ideas in their culture today" (*ibid.,* p. 5).

Collectively, what these Majority Perspectives on racialisation usefully remind us, is that globally, while some racialised groups hold considerably more power than

others, dominant groups do not have sole power over the narrative that goes along with this. Indeed, part of the challenge for the dominant is to be open and aware of these alternative perspectives. Bashkow (2006) makes this point in framing his findings as a national security issue; he argues that a lack of awareness of others' perceptions hinders the ability to defend national interests. But I think the more interesting implication of Bashkow's work is in its implications for anti-racism studies. Along with the other works surveyed in this section, it shows that whiteness is not *always* representative of beauty, progress, and a standard to be emulated. Rather, the common theme within these works is a high degree of ambivalence towards whiteness. Ambivalent attitudes towards *òyìnbós* – as individuals and as trope – are also what I found among Lagosians. That this should be the case is reflective of the local – and global – politics of the racialisation process itself: it is a means of negotiating who is in, who is out, who has and who does not have. By looking at the underlying politics, we are able to better understand why racialisation processes are deployed in particular contexts. In this way, racialisation is often a method of *responding* to local and global inequalities, not simply an imposition and means of perpetuating these. It is to the detriment of the racial and ethnic studies literature that theorisations of monoracisms premised upon global white supremacy tend to dominate, overlooking the nuance, complexity and local politics of the many and differing Majority World perspectives on racialisation that can be found across the globe.

THE MAKING OF *ÒYÌNBÓ*: LESSONS FROM LAGOS

In this final section, and in view of the key themes in each of the four literatures outlined above, I suggest that this project offers two lessons, drawn from the context of Lagos, but relevant to the wider literature.

Lesson 1: It is necessary to understand race-making practices on their own terms

This project brings to the fore an inherent tension between accepting Lagosian race-making practices 'on their own terms', and the desire for the universal application of

progressive values largely based on European Enlightenment thought. This issue arose, for example, in relation to the existence of racialised 'mentalities.' This idea, which underpins a long and chequered intellectual history of essentialism and cultural determinism in Euro-American thought (Livingstone, 1992), is directly at odds with contemporary progressive understandings of racialisation. But in seeking to understand local perspectives on race, it was striking how frequently and consistently people in Lagos referred to the existence of an underlying 'African perspective' – the idea that Africans have a way of seeing and understanding the world which is fundamentally different to the way that they suppose others view it. Reference to an 'African mentality' or an 'African mindset' is seemingly uncontroversial both to the Lagosians that I interacted with, and to the many people that continue to contribute to its usage becoming commonplace in a variety of different settings across Africa and beyond. The term comes up in mass-market self-help books, such as that by Nigerian writer Jerry Bankole (2012), who seeks to help others "escape the collateral damage of the 'African mentality'". It was also used by a leading Angolan businessman who argued in a CNBC Africa op-ed: "Change an African's mentality, change the continent" (Campos, 2017). Nigerian academics have made similar arguments, including Africanist literary critic Abiola Irele, who in his book *The African Imagination* (2001: 16) argues for the existence of an "African universe", which he claims is reflected in "a coherent field of self-expression by Black writers in relation not only to a collective experience but also to certain cultural determinants that have given a special dimension to that experience and therefore to have imparted to Black expression a particular tonality" (*ibid.,* p.4). The Cameroonian theorist Achille Mbembe (2002: 272), in arguing against a geographically or racially based African identity, still maintains that such an identity – despite being "mobile, reversible and unstable" – is constituted through supposedly distinguishable "practices through which Africans *stylize* their conduct and life" (*ibid.,* p. 273). Similarly, Cameroonian Celestin Monga (2016: 29) does "not refute the illusion of distinct forms of African cultural productions reflecting ways of seeing the world and reasoning in certain situations."

Squaring seemingly essentialist notions of 'mentalities' with contemporary anti-racist theory and practice is academically challenging. It is tempting to overlook or dismiss empirical evidence that runs counter to the prevailing progressive orthodoxy, and many do. Chabal and Daloz's (1999: 129) attempt to broach the "hitherto virtually taboo question of mentalities" in an exploration of the relationship between culture and economic development in Africa has been branded "dubious" by Ferguson (2006: 5) and "almost racist" by Moore and Mawowa (2010: 234). Chabal & Daloz's (1999: 128-130) observation that numerous African scholars refer to the concept of 'mentalities' has also been dismissed by Mkandawire (2015: 570), who specifically critiques the practice of using "copious citations of Africans who tell delectable tales of mischief in the tropics" in order to "render the cultural link politically correct", arguing that authors do so in the hope that "the racism of the[ir] statements is shrugged off or goes unperceived." But it is not only academics that make these references. That people from a wide range of backgrounds – politicians, online bloggers, mass market authors, and many of the Lagosians that spoke to me – consistently refer to the existence of 'mentalities' or 'mindsets' makes it difficult to simply dismiss these ideas as Africans telling their own 'tales of mischief.' Indeed, not only is the *existence* of 'mentalities' not seen as lamentable in these accounts – even if the *type* of 'mentality' might be – it is also seemingly uncontroversial, viewed as a simple statement of fact. How then should academics resolve the inherent tension between European Enlightenment thought's desire for the universal application of progressive values, while at the same time seeking to give equal or privileged weighting to seemingly contradictory empirical and theoretical insights derived from the Global South?

The lesson from Lagos here, I suggest, is that in such situations the aim of understanding race-making practices *on their own terms* should not be so easily trumped by other concerns. This is particularly the case when these terms appear to be challenging, for it is by exploring the reasons for this apparent challenge that we can open up debate and potentially uncover useful insights. After all, a belief – among any group of people – in the existence of racially-based 'mentalities' is a fundamental form of race-making. As such I argue, for scholars of racial and ethnic

studies, this should not be actively overlooked but should form the *very object of study.* Instead of shying away from empirical data that challenge the prevailing orthodoxy, our research attention should actively focus on these invocations of race, wherever they are encountered, documenting their nature not as ontological fact, but in order to *understand the social purpose* that they serve (Fields, 1982; Bethencourt, 2013). As I illustrate in Chapter 8, the construction of racial binaries and their associated cultural ascriptions among non-dominant groups can also be seen as a deliberate and politically useful strategy, used to guide social interactions in order to maximise the potential for the accrual of social benefit to those mobilising racial ideologies.

In addition, through exploration of the concept of 'mentalities' in the specific context of Lagos, the usage and meanings attached to the term are revealed to differ in significant ways to the usage and meanings associated with the term historically within Euro-American scholarship. As I explore in Chapter 6, dominant narratives relating to 'mentalities' among Lagosians describe patterns of behaviour that are perceived to result from a series of fundamental – but not necessarily hierarchical – differences in the way groups of people view the world. Such a conceptualisation challenges the very basis of racialisation as an inherently hierarchical system of classification, an assumption that tends to underscore theorisations of global monoracisms. It instead opens up the possibility that significant theoretical insights can be gained from the diversity of race-making systems to be found across the world. Understanding race-making practices on their own terms, then, does not mean that these terms should not in themselves be interrogated. But dismissing the basis of these terms prior to their exploration prohibits even the possibility of weaving local perspectives into analyses of global processes. To understand the significance of racialisation to the people that live it and make it, it is necessary to understand the power dynamics within their own society or community. It is necessary to understand how people view themselves and their others. Centring Lagosian perspectives in this way acknowledges African agency in a way that can be challenging for left-leaning scholars (Jean-Klein, 2001). But it is through exploration

and understanding of precisely these politics – at multiple scales – that anti-racism efforts have the potential to be increasingly effective.

Lesson 2: The anti-racist effort needs to be global, but the effective content of this will be geographically specific

A second potentially powerful conclusion to draw from weaving the local into analyses of racialisation processes globally is that anti-racism efforts also need to be tailored to local conditions. In foregrounding the geographically specific, emic nature of racialisation practices, my argument does not seek to diminish the power and potential of global anti-racist alliances. Rather, I suggest better understanding of the localised meanings attached to racialisation, and of the political purposes behind race-making practices, will more likely point to more effective, localised anti-racist actions. Here, it is useful to look explicitly at the political nature of racialisation processes by examining their relationship to the wider social dynamics in any given locality. From her work in Ghana, Lentz (1998: 52) makes reference to the existence of different "registers of power" – such as through formal employment or traditional office – as potential routes to gaining social status. In the popular press, Storr (2021) has recently described these status-striving pursuits in terms of playing "status games". I suggest that it is through analysis of how racialisation processes both feed into and result from the particular nature of these largely geographically specific status economies that we will better understand the local logics of race-making. In doing so, I argue that race-making can be a source of status-striving for all social groups, not only for the most powerful. Understanding and analysing race-making practices among all social groups – including those that may be considered subjugated – in this way, raises the possibility that racial justice might actually be being pursued through the deployment of under-studied and divergent forms of race-making itself. In this way, I propose that these racialisation processes, as part of wider status games, can be deployed by different interest groups in an attempt to actively *reduce* broader social inequality. In other words, race-making processes in some parts of the world may be deployed in service of anti-racist aims. I suggest that

the provincialisation of whiteness, where it does occur, should be recognised as a potentially important part of this process.

This point can be illustrated with reference to the centrality of wealth to the racialisation process in Lagos; a particular association that is unlikely to be replicated universally, at least not to the same degree. In Lagos, the strength of the association between *òyìnbós* and surplus wealth is based on a factual, if generalised, correlation between race and class locally within Nigeria, and globally in the economic disparity between African countries and the rest of the global economy. Within west Africa, both Nyamnjoh and Page (2002) and Pierre (2013) also document a similar understanding of white people as wealthy. At the international scale, the wealth of African countries is significantly less than all other regions of the world (Desjardins, 2020) – reflecting a trend that has worsened throughout the post-colonial period (Adekoya, 2021). To understand the significance of this for racialisation processes, however, it is necessary to position this association within localised status games operating in Lagos specifically. In Chapter 5, I illustrate the particular significance of material wealth for Lagosians. I show how notions of extreme wealth, accompanied by ostentatious spending, have important historical roots for the Yorùbá in particular. I argue that in contemporary Lagos too, wealth remains of central significance due to the increasing dominance of money over other possible routes to achieve social status. In Lagos, wealth is the single most significant source of power, increasingly necessary to achieve success in all areas of social life – from politics, to education to family life.

Through an understanding of local status games, then, it is necessary to recognise racialisation processes in Lagos are intricately linked to perceptions of wealth specifically because of the centrality of material wealth within Lagosian society generally. *Òyìnbós* retain a significant amount of power simply because they are, as a group, presumed to be wealthy, and wealthy people in Lagos – variously racialised – command respect. But in addition, the connection between racialisation and wealth is also significant because, as I illustrate in Chapter 8, the assessments that people in Lagos make about *òyìnbó* wealth are also linked to an individual's own social

standing. In this way, wealth differentially affects the racialisation process itself, and its social implications. But in each case, understandings of *òyìnbó* are primarily positioned within Lagosians' own social and moral economies, both collectively and individually. As Bonnett (2002: 100) also reminds us, race is not "a free floating signifier" but rather, the power of racialisation is always "generated by its relationship with social and economic hegemony." It is the particular economic logics of Lagosian society that form the basis of Remi Adekoya's (2021: 98) observation that, "It is no coincidence that the world's informal racial hierarchy faithfully reflects its formal economic hierarchy." As such, Adekoya (*ibid.,* p.99) concludes: "Colourism will not be eliminated by well-meaning intellectuals telling people it is a bad thing; it will be eliminated when the white world stops being so much richer and more successful than everyone else… Wealth and success are what impresses the world today. The road to the end of white supremacy lies in economics, not sociology, history or semantics." As I show in the chapters that follow, this interpretation accurately reflects many local portrayals of the power of *òyìnbó*. In the search for anti-racist futures in Lagos, I agree with Adekoya that economics is a good place to start. And indeed, I make the case going forward that such economic inequality is, in part, what racialisation processes in Lagos actively seek to address.

But the point of understanding the geographical specificity of race-making is to acknowledge that effective anti-racism efforts also need to be locally tailored, and that these linkages between racialisation and wealth are not likely to be universal. This study is not comparative, and more work needs to be done in this area. But as a starting point, I was interested to note such differences in interpretation when watching, with a small group of Lagosians, a British-made documentary about the Himba people of Namibia. The documentary, called *The British Tribe Next Door* (2019)*,* saw a British television presenter and her family move to live in an exact replica of their own house – a three-bedroom terrace in County Durham complete with running water, wi-fi and twenty thousand possessions – amidst a Himba village in northern Namibia. In this semi-arid region, the Himba are predominantly livestock farmers and pastoralists who count their wealth in numbers of cattle. Over the course of their one month stay, the contrasts between the lifestyles of the British

visitors and their Himba hosts were played out. The series was divisive among British viewers and generated over sixty complaints to the UK communications regulator for being racially offensive. My viewing group was intrigued rather than offended at the show, but it was at the series' conclusion that it drew the strongest reaction from the Lagosians that I watched it with. The news that, at the request of the Himba community, the production team would be dismantling and removing the replica of the British family's home was greeted with whoops of disbelief. My Lagosian family and friends were incredulous that anyone would allow the house and its contents to be removed, and remained unimpressed with the fact that the production company would be donating a borehole to the Himba community to thank them for their hospitality. The Himba elders' decision that they had no use for any of the British family's material possessions was reasoned and deliberate, and reflected concerns that they had previously aired about the younger generation being tempted away from village life. But this understanding was completely at odds with that of my viewing group, who saw only a wasted financial opportunity.

In arguing for recognition of the central role of class within racialisation processes in Lagos, then, this project does not seek to make the same case for all peoples and places. Racial and class oppression are interlinked in various and contested ways, and as the Himba illustrate, there are multiple other social and political rationales beyond purely economic ones. The case that this project does seek to make is for increased academic attention to the local particularities of race-making, which through an understanding of the dynamics of local status games, can help inform localised anti-racism efforts. In drawing out such geographical specificities in race-making in Lagos, this project aims to both develop understanding of racialisation processes in a so far under-studied area, as well as to raise awareness of the importance of geographical scale in such analyses. This focus on the city scale is not intended as a dismissal of the need for wider geographical scales of analysis. If this study overemphasises the local at the expense of the global, this is intended as a corrective to an academic pendulum that has perhaps swung too far to the global in much of the literature to date. The aim of this project, to support work towards identifying and pursuing anti-racist futures for all, remains. Underlying this is the contention that to be better able

to reach this aim, we need to pay particular attention to the *geographical* specificities of both race-making and anti-racisms, as well as to the historical and sociological contexts of racialisation.

CHAPTER THREE:
Methodology

I had changed. Whatever the merits of anthropology to the world or of my work to anthropology, this experience had wrought many changes in me as a human being…

- Elenore Smith Bowen, *Return to Laughter,* 1964 p.290

The researcher's body scrutinized by the population being scrutinized: the irony made me at times excruciatingly self-conscious. More positively, it showed that embodiment, face and location apply to the researcher as well.

- Arun Saldanha, *Psychedelic white: Goa trance and the viscosity of race,* 2007 p.45

If all ethnography is produced from the porous intersections between the researcher's self and the field in which they work (Coffey, 1999), in the case of this project, it would be disingenuous not to explicitly recognise the ways in which I am central to the story of this research. Just as Smith Bowen suggests in the epigraph above, this research has also become a key chapter in my own story. This story is the result of a multi-faceted research process, to which Saldanha alludes in the second epigraph, and in which power differentials between researched, research and researcher have fluxed and inter-linked in diverse ways at different times. The research outcome cannot therefore be easily divorced from any of the broader contexts of its production. The background to this project, and the way the project has evolved, is closely linked to my personal involvement with Lagos, and more specifically, to particular Lagosians. My husband is Lagosian, and I first visited Lagos with him in 2011. Two years later, we moved together from London to Lagos and lived with his extended family in Festac Town, Amuwo Odofin. The area in which we lived, once a fashionable residential area, is now somewhat faded, and at least until the opening of the new Festival Mall there in 2015, it was possible for me to wander the streets of Festac for days or weeks without encountering another *òyìnbó.* Negotiating my place within this neighbourhood was challenging in ways I had not

expected. For the first time in my adult life, I had no job, little income as my husband worked at building a new business, no friends around, and the days spent while my husband was at work seemed long. Interacting with the Lagosians I met in Festac involved negotiating a significant dissonance between how local people seemed to perceive me, an *òyìnbó* with all that entails, and how I felt about myself at the time, unemployed and rather aimless. These interactions often illustrated local ideas about racialisation – and gender and nationality – that it was not possible for me to ignore.

Several months later, I started working for the British Deputy High Commission in Lagos. As a locally employed member of staff without diplomatic status, I became part of a quite different social environment in Lagos. Here, the relationships between 'local' staff and the UK-based diplomatic staff also explicitly involved issues of racialisation and nationality, as did some of the migration projects that I was employed to work on, and these played out in different ways again to my experiences in Festac. Yet in this environment too, the racialised nature of interactions was difficult to ignore. In this instance, I occupied what I sometimes felt to be a conflicting position as both a locally engaged staff member and an *òyìnbó*. It was during this period that I developed my initial research proposal, which focused on *òyìnbós* in Lagos and the impact that their migration journeys had on their subsequent behaviours and sense of self. While the impetus for the project was based on my own experience, through engagement with a wider literature I developed a growing appreciation of the local nuances attached to the term *òyìnbó*. While others had written about *òyìnbós,* it was usually in passing (Njoku, 2006; Ajibade, 2013) or in online discussion (Tubosun, 2009), rather than sustained analysis. My interest in Lagosian perspectives on these issues grew when it became apparent that, within the academy at least, these had largely been neglected. My research proposal, while stemming from personal experience then, did not seek to be autoethnographic as Mara and Thompson (2022) have controversially advocated, but to investigate localised racialisation processes by understanding the moral economies and symbolism that underscore these.

Interrogating the concept of *òyìnbó* as a means of exploring Lagosian race-making practices, with an emphasis on doing so on their own terms, therefore became my main research aim early on. A research design, involving three different physical sites for data collection, followed but placed little emphasis on my own positionality within the development of the project. Indeed, Coffey (1999: 118) notes that, while the personal lives and input of researchers has become a more widely recognised factor in research output, there remains disagreement over how far the personal "should divert the telling of the field." But although I did not seek to draw attention to it, throughout the research process I remained acutely aware of the ways in which this project is personal. During the planning stages, I looked at using existing social networks in Lagos to gain research permissions and to recruit participants. Personal contacts that I approached in this way were fully aware that I sought their help as a researcher and not just as a friend or family member, and all research participants gave informed consent, but my existing social networks provided important professional introductions to potential participants more widely. During fieldwork but outside my research sites, I attended family weddings, I spent five days at my son's bedside while he was in hospital with a chest infection, and we mourned the death of my father-in-law at a ceremony attended by several hundred people. Through all of these experiences and others, I continually understood more about the social imperatives and moral economies that shaped both ordinary and extraordinary life events within this ethnographic context. Then in the latter part of fieldwork, my daughter was conceived. Discovering I was pregnant initially focused my mind on the need to complete data collection, resulting in more interviews and focus groups being completed in the last two months of fieldwork as in my first six months in the field. The emotional rollercoaster I experienced in early pregnancy also became a key filter through which I interpreted events, at times making me more empathetic and attentive, and at others more distracted. On a practical level, I vividly remember carrying out interviews at the University of Lagos in those early weeks of pregnancy, during rainy season, unable to take anti-malarials or use mosquito repellent. It is hard to say precisely *how* any of these experiences might have affected my data, and the project as a whole, but I am certain that they did. As with any ethnography, of course, there was no control sample.

Equally, when my initial research findings were not as I had expected, it was again for personal reasons that I chose to pursue the path that I have. My data did not support the existence of the global white supremacy that I had anticipated finding. That this should be the case was broadly accepted when I discussed my initial conclusions with friends and family in Lagos, who gave feedback but did not dispute my overall framing. When I started talking to friends and colleagues in the UK, however, my work received a very different reception. A close British friend of Indian heritage told me that my analysis was probably correct, but that he was not sure it was my place to make these arguments. My supervisors were concerned about how I was representing Lagosians to a wider audience, and we discussed my argument at length in some of the most professionally challenging but productive conversations of my career. Later, I came across the global racisms literature which usefully guided the framing of my position, yet subsequently a colleague still commented that my intervention in the debate was "brave." But every time I was told, implicitly or explicitly, that I could or should not write this or that, I became more academically curious about the politics of the debate itself, and more certain that this was indeed an argument that needed to be made. I knew I would not be able to defend a thesis that drew conclusions I believed to be inaccurate. But more than that, when I felt torn between what I perceived as the expectations of the academy and the experiences I had in the field, I knew that my primary allegiance was to my own family, and particularly to my children. Too young to understand at the moment, perhaps one day my children might read this. If they do, it is important to me that they know what I found and what I think about it, so that they can make up their own minds about some of the related questions that are likely to face them during their lifetimes. I write this thesis then, to fulfil the requirements of a PhD, to further debate within racial and ethnic studies more broadly, but also at the back of my mind, as part of my story for my children. This is the personal race politics that runs through my work.
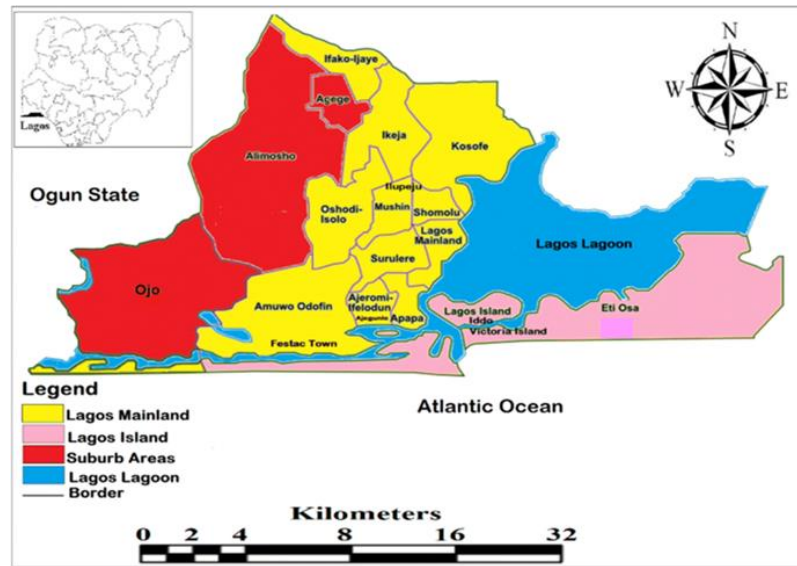
Figure 1: Map of metropolitan Lagos (adapted from Dano *et al.,* 2020).

As I settled upon my field site through circumstance rather than by design, I consider myself fortunate that Lagos is the sort of city that inspires – indeed, demands – superlatives, and in many respects has an outsize significance both within Nigeria and more broadly. With population estimates around twenty million people (Lagos State Government, 2015), Lagos is one of the largest cities in the world. While these figures are contested, conservative estimates put Lagos' population growth at between two and three percent per year (Potts, 2012), although some estimates are far higher (Obioma, 2016). Lagos' growth is in part explained by its relative wealth. From the 1830s, Lagos was one of the dominant slave-trading ports in the Bight of Benin (Fagbule & Fawehinmi, 2021). By the time the city was annexed by the British in 1861, Lagos was already an important regional city in its own right (Mann, 2007), and its well-established trading links made the colony largely self-supporting. Lagos went on to become the administrative headquarters of Nigeria under British rule, and at independence in 1960, Lagos remained the capital until the Federal Government was moved to Abuja in 1991. Lagos continues to be the country's financial centre and since Nigeria's GDP overtook that of South Africa in 2012, it is now the centre of commerce for the continent's largest economy. To put that into context, the economy of Lagos State alone is larger than that of the whole of Kenya

(Draper, 2015). Part of the significance of this research site, then, lies in its scale and related influence.

Besides the economic allure of Lagos, the city has an important cultural influence across Nigeria and increasingly to a wider audience given Lagos' dominance in Nigeria's cultural exports (Adedeji, 2010). In this sense, Lagos has in some ways come to define its inhabitants; Aina (2003: 176) speaks of 'Lagos life' as being "expressed in its own unique way, making its own distinct sense…" So too, Omotayo (2011) writes of *London life Lagos living.* To a global audience, Lagos' reputation is often tarnished by tales of violent crime, corruption and struggling infrastructure (Draper, 2015). Aríbisálà (2016: 53) suggests the city demands that one's "psyche [be] mutilated in order to fit into Lagos." But while my respondents did lament Nigeria's challenges, when asked about Lagos specifically they more usually responded with pride. To be Lagosian was meaningful to many; life history participants, two of whom were born outside of Lagos, recollected the time they first visited or moved to the city. Other respondents talked of the city being 'accommodating' and providing opportunities. Some made comparisons with other global cities, bringing to mind Obioma's (2016) description of his childhood perception of Lagos as holding, "a grand stature, evoked by the people who had visited or lived there. To the rest of us, Lagos was Europe within Nigeria… It had the tendency to render everywhere else provincial". Similarly, Enahoro (1966) has claimed, "you can never become a true Nigerian until you have passed through the grill, come to Lagos, or at the very least, aspire to come to Lagos" (quoted in Whiteman, 2012: 30). It is in this way that the significance of this research site also lies in the particularity of Lagos as a city. Beyond its outsize reputation, Lagos is home to millions of people, and it is the fabric of everyday life in Lagos that at once make the conclusions drawn from research here likely globally applicable on some levels, but highly localised in other ways.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH: POSITIONALITY, ACADEMIC ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFLEXIVITY

My approach to the project broadly attempts to balance an awareness of poststructuralist critiques of notions of objectivity in qualitative – and quantitative – research with the requirement of being professionally accountable for fieldwork ethics and research outputs. I recognise that there are always power dynamics inherent in academic research, in line with Rose's (1997: 316) argument that all knowledges, however produced, are situated, and all researchers connected to the social and cultural realities they seek to study. In her words: "there is no clear landscape of social positions to be charted by an all-seeing analyst; neither is there a conscious agent, whether researcher or researched, simply waiting to be reflected in a research project. Instead, researcher, researched and research make each other; research and selves are 'interactive texts'". At the same time, I have sought to balance this – particularly during the 'messiness' of fieldwork (Rose, 1997) – with the need to negotiate the sometimes complicated political realities that academic researchers also face. Horowitz (1993), for example, has highlighted the foundational tension between ethnographic theory that encourages researchers to 'decentre' power and authority (including their own), and fieldwork ethics, which necessarily view academics as singular and accountable. Horowitz (*ibid.,* p.135) goes on to describe the tensions between multiple interests in his own research practices thus: "I often feel torn between my own affections and convictions as well as the demands of diverse subjects. Employers insist that I keep their cover, and employees count on me to blow it, while my own employer hedges, "Do the right thing…but don't say anything that will get us sued!"" My approach to writing about my own fieldwork and wider research quandaries has been to be open about circumstances and the decisions I have made based on these.

In relation to such academic reflexivity, Emirbayer and Desmond (2012: 581) have critiqued the tendency to conflate "reflexivity with self-effacing self-disclosure, the ritualistic quality of which often serves more to establish legitimacy than genuinely to advance social science". To be clear, I do not claim or mean to imply that my

personal connections to Lagos might increase the authenticity of my work, however such authenticity might be measured, or indeed imagined to exist. In fact, my fear has been that writing an account considered *too personal* – documenting the impacts of pregnancy and the politics of familial relationships, for example – will serve to undermine rather than establish my academic legitimacy in a professional environment that continues to be dominated by men (Criado Perez, 2019). Yet due to the nature of the project, the management of personal relationships and pregnancy in the field were some of the most significant challenges that I faced. I write about these issues here due to the impact that they had on the research process, but also to directly challenge any residual notions that 'personal' relationships are somehow less deserving of analysis than 'professional' ones, and that the consequences of women's biology in particular is more suited to providing fodder for online forums than as a valid factor in academic analysis. I seek neither sympathy nor congratulations for doing my job, as do millions of others, while negotiating personal relationships and pregnancy. My point, rather, is that because this particular role as researcher requires an element of reflexivity, consideration of the factors with the most significant impacts on the research process should not be curtailed by outdated – and sexist – professional standards. At a wider scale, more open and honest conversations about the impacts of reproductive biology, as one example among others, to the point of recognising that these are truly everyday processes but with highly variable impacts, has the potential both to provide important methodological context for our research, as well as to create more inclusive workplaces more broadly.

In line with this, my approach to fieldwork followed a number of other contemporary researchers (Bashkow, 2006; Saldanha, 2007) in embracing aspects of my positionality and situatedness, rather than seeking to overcome social differences between myself and my research participants. Indeed, as Raffety (2015) suggests, it often seemed that attempting to overcome such differences in any meaningful way would not have been possible had I tried. Bashkow (2006: 15), for example, similarly documents using his own "whiteness as a research tool", through which he "was able to learn what my whiteness represented…through countless revelations, large and

small, of people's assumptions about my life, through the questions they asked me, and the roles they expected of – and indeed foisted on – me, their white friend." In my case too, my appearance never failed to provoke a reaction. While these responses to me were sources of data in themselves, my racialised social difference also often acted as a barrier; potential respondents were often initially wary of what involvement in the project might entail. It was here that other aspects of my positionality came to the fore in successfully building relationships despite social differences. My official immigration designation as a 'Niger Wife', combined with my ability to speak some basic phrases in Yorùbá, was widely welcomed and at times actively celebrated. Addressing a student assembly at my first research site, my initial greeting of good morning in Yorùbá elicited surprised and delighted laughter followed by applause.

It was therefore a combination of multiple elements of my positionality – my phenotypic appearance, gender, marital status and motherhood – that resulted in a particular social categorisation that seemed to resonate with local registers of status. This was not always the case; as a woman and a foreigner, I was excluded from my husband's family's meetings. But in other ways, aspects of this positionality helped me to build relationships with research participants. In an interview with a university professor, for example, I questioned what it meant to be Nigerian in a way that my respondent seemed to find challenging, resulting in his reply:

> …it's very complex. You are a Nigerian and so you have a right to ask all of these questions. You have a right to ask them.
> - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

The process of learning how to negotiate research access and social exclusion in the field was a key source of data in itself, for it was here that I was personally educated in the symbolism and operation of the localised status economy. While adhering to principles of research integrity, and specifically in relation to informed consent and voluntary participation, my fieldwork simultaneously operated within, and became a part of, the local social milieu. On some occasions, my actions did not yield the

intended results, and it was in these instances that I learnt the most. As I discuss further in Chapter 8, I am still learning.

ETHICS AND DATA PROTECTION

The project was approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee on 27 Sept 2016, and with amendments to the proposed duration of research and to the location of Research Site 3 on 30 August 2017. All interview and focus group participants were asked to give informed consent before taking part, including being given a clear explanation of the research objectives and opportunities to ask questions (Appendix 0.1). Participants are able to opt out of the research process at any time without explanation, and can veto the usage of any or all data that they provide. The project is registered with the UCL Data Protection Office and all data stored securely in line with their requirements. All adult participants had the option of anonymity, although many requested their data to be attributed to them by name. However, some adult participants' data has been attributed to a pseudonym even if they did not request this in order to protect the identities of others. The adult participants in this research are not considered vulnerable, and the research topic and design did not foreseeably cause harm to either participants or researcher. Research participants aged under 18 years are recognised as a vulnerable group and are therefore owed an additional duty of care (Schenk & Williamson, 2005). All data from non-adult participants has been treated anonymously, and informed parental consent for participation was received prior to research commencing with children. I undertook an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service check in line with UK requirements prior to undertaking research with under 18s. In addition, I explained to non-adult participants that all information they provided would be treated confidentially, except in circumstances where I considered that they or other participants could be at risk of serious harm, in which case I would report my concerns to a relevant authority. Copies of the final thesis will be available to all participants upon request.

RATIONALE FOR RESEARCH DESIGN

My research design incorporated three different case study sites in Lagos, which taken together provide a snapshot of a life cycle. In total, seventy research participants took part in interviews or focus groups across the three case study sites during eleven months spent conducting fieldwork. The first case study focused on young people aged 14-16 years, who I recruited in a senior secondary school in Lagos Island. The second case study looked at working age people, who were based at the University of Lagos' main campus in Akoka on Lagos Mainland. Case study three was with older people, who I recruited from within a church congregation also on Lagos Mainland. This design is intended to collect data from a range of different perspectives, rather than to suggest that age is the most important differentiator among Lagosians. I recognise that conceptualisations of age are culturally specific and contested, and further complicated in much of Africa by undocumented or inaccurate birth dates. As such, my sample is not intended to be 'representative' of Lagos as a whole, but rather to document and analyse examples of the ways in which race-making occurs and is understood in three everyday situations.

I recognise that this research design has its limitations in that it de-emphasises many other differentiating factors within Lagos' broader population, some of which are often considered to be more salient than the lifecycle framing I have chosen. Within the context of Nigeria generally, populations are more commonly analysed on the basis of their stratification by ethnicity, religion, gender or economic status. Other regional and party political affiliations within the country are often also noted for their national political significance through the allocation of state resources. However, while my research sample was not explicitly designed to recruit participants stratified along these lines, it should be noted that the three research sites nevertheless incorporated a degree of ethnic diversity among participants (particularly at Site 2), adherents to both Christianity and Islam (particularly at Sites 1 and 2), a broad gender balance at each research site (with the exception of Site 3), and across all sites combined, respondents were included from a range of socio-economic backgrounds. As such, while not the basis of sampling, some of these

stratifications – particularly gender and socio-economic status – are important themes that run throughout my analyses. Other groups that were not incorporated into this research design could usefully help to inform future research agendas. In particular, I would have been interested to sample from the relatively small but growing group of people who identify both as *òyìnbós* and as Lagosians. Future research projects could also more systematically incorporate data from super-wealthy participants, adherents to local religions, and respondents from other rural and urban locations across Nigeria and indeed more widely across Africa, none of whom were represented in this sample.

While this research design did not elicit data that provide a 'holistic' picture of Nigeria, then, its more unusual lifecycle framing nevertheless produced research encounters and associated insights that were interesting in other ways. For example, not deliberately sampling by ethnicity resulted in a predominantly Yorùbá sample, especially at sites 1 and 3, but with significant ethnic diversity within the postgraduate focus groups and university staff at Site 2. The contrast between how respondents talked about their own ethnic group and their comparisons with other ethnic groups in individual interviews, and how respondents in the more diverse focus groups negotiated the meanings attached to notions of 'Nigerian-ness', resulted in rich data relating to the significance of overlapping ideas about racial and ethnic difference. This directly fed into my analysis as to how notions of 'us' and 'them' – whether framed as *òyìnbó* or African; Igbo, Yorùbá or Hausa; or indeed Nigerian, Kenyan or Ghanaian – were mobilised in different circumstances and for varying purposes (see Chapters 4 and 6). Equally, sampling by age enabled some interesting comparisons by life stage, as for example, in the contrast between participants of different ages when explaining the underlying basis for an individual's classification as *òyìnbó* (see Chapter 4). Life history interviews with older participants also produced insights into perceptions of change across recent generations, resulting again in rich data that helped to develop my understanding of emic interpretations of a wide range of local social and cultural phenomena and events, beyond those related to an individual's age alone. In the following sections, I outline each of the three research sites and the data generated in more detail.

RESEARCH SITE 1: YOUNG PEOPLE

I conducted research at a senior secondary school in Lagos Island, which I shall refer to as Eko High School, over the course of four months from November 2016 to March 2017. In Nigeria, students attend senior secondary education from the age of 13-16 years, although some students at the school were several years older due to repetition of classes. Eko High School is located in an area that incorporates both Lagos' historical business district and a high-density residential area, parts of which have a history of poverty and crime (Kapuściński, 2002). The school employed approximately twenty teaching staff, and had a student population of around three hundred. Virtually all staff and students spoke Yorùbá, and many students indicated that they rarely left Lagos Island. Staff reported that the school previously struggled with violence in the local neighbourhood, trespassing on school grounds, and poor student behaviour, but that this had improved in recent years. A member of the school's management team described the school population at the time of research as fairly typical for a state-funded school in Lagos State. The school was funded through Lagos State Ministry of Education, making attendance free except for the cost of uniforms and some books and equipment. Optional subjects generally had class sizes of less than thirty students, whereas core subjects could have class sizes over forty-five students. There were sometimes not enough desks or chairs for students in classrooms, and some school furniture was in a state of disrepair. Electricity supply was fairly consistent to operate lights and fans, but the use of other technology to support teaching was rare.

Site selection and sampling

I met with the Tutor-General of the Education District during a field visit in April 2016, who outlined the application process for conducting research in schools, and indicated his support for the project. I gained formal approval for the research on 1 November 2016 (Appendix 1.1), and was directed to contact three schools as possible research sites, identified by the Tutor-General's office. Even with the relevant research approvals, my request for assistance with my research was

received warily by two of the school principals I visited, who seemed wary of my research agenda. The principal at Eko High School, on the other hand, was enthusiastic from my initial visit, and I started work there the following week. Due to the principal's support, I quickly became embedded within the school environment. He convened a meeting to formally introduce me to the senior management team, invited me to a parent meeting, arranged a staff mentor, and allocated me a desk in one of the teaching rooms. He asked me to address assembly one morning to explain my research to the students, explaining to them that the fact I had chosen Nigeria, Lagos, and particularly this school for my project was a sign that the school had been recognised "and is doing great things." Although some staff were more curious and enthusiastic about the project than others, all were helpful and none obstructive; a minority actively sought me out to attend one of their lessons, checking that I had not left them off of my list.

Sampling of students to be directly involved was negotiated through two teacher contacts, who selected students to approach and arranged for consent forms to be sent to parents, as approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee. From past research in primary schools in Amuwo Odofin on behalf of the Local Government, I found that students and teachers were often selected for participation as a way of rewarding them, or sometimes to showcase the school's best talent. My attempts to broaden potential participant recruitment, however, appeared to have limited impact, as the teacher overseeing this was clear that many families would not return consent forms even if approached, and that some students' behaviour was likely to make data collection very challenging. For the photo project in particular (see below), I was warned that students had to be carefully selected for participation as some may submit pornographic images. My requests to look at possible ways to diversify participation in this instance were dismissed as naïve. Nevertheless, my original aim to sample from 'middle Lagos' – neither those students who find themselves in very difficult circumstances, whose plight, according to Ennew (2011), often dominates research agendas in the global south; nor the Lagosian upper middle class or elite, whose lifestyles reflect a small minority of the overall population – seems in retrospect to have broadly been met.

Data collection

I carried out participant observation at the school on thirty-seven days during the research period. I took field notes in the form of a field work diary following each visit to the school, and I extended this to include notes about significant events outside of the school environment also. At the school, I observed lessons with fifteen different teachers across thirteen different subjects, including at least one observation with eight of the ten classes, which were split across three year groups. I also spent time in the staff room, with students during break and lunch times, attended inter-school sports, a visit from a state dental programme, and was invited to a staff retirement party at a neighbouring school. As well as noting participants' reactions to my own racialised appearance, I took extensive notes in all the classes I attended. In addition to participant observation, I carried out semi-structured interviews (Appendix 1.2) with five teaching staff, lasting between twenty-five and seventy-five minutes. Later in the research, I held three focus groups (Appendix 1.3) each with between four and eight student participants, one for each school year group. The Senior Secondary 1 (SS1 – students aged 13-14yrs) focus group was attended by eight boys, the Senior Secondary 2 (SS2 – students aged 14-15yrs) group comprised four boys and three girls, and the Senior Secondary 3 (SS3 – students aged 15-16yrs) group was attended by four girls. Focus groups were held within a classroom during lunch time, lasted between forty-five and sixty minutes, and were co-hosted with a Yorùbá -speaking research assistant who helped with translation where necessary. Where participants gave consent, interviews and focus groups were recorded; otherwise, I took handwritten notes during interviews. I recruited six other students, three boys and three girls aged between 14-17 years, to carry out a photo project. Students were briefed on the project (Appendix 1.4), and given a camera loaded with film for five days over the weekend. They were asked to take photos of things that they associated with *òyìnbós*, and then invited to attend a thirty-minute semi-structured interview, with myself and the research assistant, to talk about the images they took. Lastly, I interviewed the Deputy Director of Curriculum Services at Lagos State Ministry of Education in Ikeja regarding representations of *òyìnbós* within the school curriculum, and attended a one day

training workshop intended for teachers on the implementation of a new nine-year basic education national curriculum in state-funded schools.

Methodological considerations

Theoretically, conceptualisations of youth as contested (Burgess, 2005), dynamic (Christiansen *et al.*, 2006), and culturally specific (Waterson and Behera, 2011) are well established in the literature. I found Langevang's (2007) suggestion that children may be unused to, and uneasy about, being the source of knowledge, rather than recipients of it helpful in shaping my approach. While some of the young people in my sample were more vocal than others – particularly influenced by gender – I found that in participant observation, students were most likely to follow the lead of teachers present in their responses to me, reflecting Lamb and Brown's (2006) conclusion that young people's behaviours may be more of an attempt to please adults than an accurate representation of their own views. To counter this, in line with Raffety's (2015) recommendations, I planned additional focus groups to encourage young people to open up through collective dialogue rather than individual interviews. In the age and gender-based parameters that I laid out for each group, I broadly attempted to recreate the "naturally occurring group" that to some degree replicates everyday conversation dynamics in which ideas are shared and built (Kitzinger & Barbour, 1999). Within two groups, I requested gender homogeneous participation to try to prevent the tendency of boys to overshadow girls in discussions (Large & Beheshti, 2001). Similarly, I followed Kennedy *et al.'s* (2001) suggestion that young participants' age range should not be more than two years as differing stages of cognitive development can impede dialogue. At the recommendation of school staff and as approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee, I also provided refreshments – fizzy drinks and donuts – to encourage student involvement, although despite this, participation in the SS3 focus group remained lower than in the other groups.

Following Latham's (2003: 1993) suggestion that the research process itself can be viewed as "a kind of performance", I also used the student photo project as a further

attempt to increase the opportunity for young people to influence or direct the research encounter. The photos taken revealed a wide range of influences on participants' understanding of *òyìnbós,* and their choices relating to how to represent their perspectives on film. One participant focused on *òyìnbós'* historical involvement in Lagos (Figure 2). Other participants highlighted perceived differences between their own lives and tastes and those of their *òyìnbós* (Figure 3), which resulted in many images students tended to view positively – for example, photos of tall buildings and generators – and some that provoked a less positive reaction. One student described rather incredulously that he knew from films that *òyìnbós* like eating "half cooked egg." Another student's images were based on providing advice for *òyìnbós* (Figure 4). The photos themselves acted as a useful prompt for additional storytelling, and provided opportunities for further exploration of students' thinking about *òyìnbós*. The process also broadened the geographical and social scope of the research by incorporating sites and relationships beyond those directly linked to the school itself. Several students reported asking family, friends and neighbours for advice about which images to take, and one reported that her mother told her "what *òyìnbós* like to see" and accompanied her while she took the photos. As Langevang (2007) documents, I was aware that the process of taking the photos was likely to influence participants' usual practice, and that doing so raised ethical and safety considerations, such as if students travelled alone outside of their usual neighbourhood. I attempted to mitigate some of these potential issues through the briefing document and consent procedure, and remained mindful that all research participants under 18 years old are considered to be a vulnerable group. At the end of the process, all students that took part in the project expressed happiness at being chosen to participate by their teachers. They were offered copies of all of the images that they took, and some asked if there were opportunities for further involvement.

Figure 2: King's College, Lagos Island; the student explained they associated this image with *òyìnbós* because the college was originally founded by the British in 1909 (Photo by Interviewee 1, March 2017).

Figure 3: Green space in central Lagos; the student explained, "*Òyìnbós* like to visit gardens to entertain themselves at weekends." (Photo by Interviewee 6, March 2017).

Figure 4: Homemade *ọṣẹ dúdú* [black soap]; the student explained that "*Òyìnbós* should use it to make skin soft," and also took photos of "traditional" food and fabrics as a form of education for *òyìnbós* (Photo by Interviewee 3, March 2017).

RESEARCH SITE 2: WORKING-AGE PEOPLE

For the second research site, I conducted research at the University of Lagos' (known as UNILAG) main campus at Akoka over the course of three months from July to September 2017. Most of my respondents were postgraduate students and members of staff, but I also held a small focus group with undergraduate students. Participants at this site were aged between 18 – 65 years, but most were postgraduate students in their mid-twenties to early thirties. One of the first universities to be established following Nigeria's independence, UNILAG is a federally-funded university and one of the largest in the country by student numbers. The Akoka campus, located in Yaba to the west of Lagos Lagoon, is a largely self-contained site, home to all academic departments except the medical school, as well as a range of student accommodation and services. My research focused on two academic departments, one in the Faculty of Arts and one in the Faculty of Science in an attempt to encourage a diversity of views. While most of the staff I interviewed were Yorùbá speakers, the student population at the university was more diverse, and the postgraduate focus groups in particular included participants from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds across Nigeria.

Site selection and sampling

I found the working-age research location the most difficult to confirm of the three research sites. My initial idea was to base this site at a restaurant within a shopping mall, but I found it difficult to even approach staff and management about the project at the proposed site. After considering several other possible sites where my attempts to gain permission for research were unsuccessful, I met with The Registrar at UNILAG and gained formal approval for the research from her office on 30 June 2017 (Appendix 2.1). I initially approached four departments, two within each of the Faculties of Science and Arts, for assistance with participant recruitment. The project was well received in each case but due to time constraints I decided to focus on just two academic departments. UNILAG's second semester runs from early May until mid-August, followed by one month of final examinations, so time was limited. At the

time, many academic staff had voted to go on strike from mid-August, while non-academic staff were also due to join the strike action from September. The mood on campus was therefore predominantly one of uncertainty, as the prospect of strike action drew closer. Due to this, I was not able to attend student lectures or seminars, but instead focused on recruitment for interviews and focus groups. The Head of each department put me in touch with members of staff to arrange interviews directly, facilitated through administrative staff. Sampling of students for focus groups was also arranged through the admin office in the Faculty of Science. In the Faculty of Arts, I was provided with a student contact who recruited postgraduate students for focus groups through a snowball method. As many students were already preparing to leave campus, it was not possible to broaden participant recruitment beyond this.

Data collection

At UNILAG, I held three focus groups (Appendix 2.2) involving a total of twenty-two students, two composed of students from the Faculty of Science (one undergraduate group and one postgraduate group), and one involving postgraduate students from the Faculty of Arts. The undergraduate focus group was held in an empty classroom and lasted forty-five minutes with students who knew each other, drawn from within the same department. The postgraduate focus groups were held in a meeting room within a postgraduate residential hall and lasted between seventy and ninety minutes. These students were drawn from a range of departments within their respective faculties, and included postgraduates on different degree programmes and at different stages of their course. All groups involved students of both sexes. In addition, I carried out semi-structured interviews (Appendix 2.2) with eight academic and support staff in the Faculty of Science, and six semi-structured interviews with academic and support staff in the Faculty of Arts, each lasting between twenty and fifty minutes. Staff participants ranged in occupation, and included a science technician, an office administrator nearing retirement, a driver, a newly-recruited office trainee, three teaching fellows, one professor and a newspaper-seller, among others. Interviews mostly took place at the participant's place of work, or sometimes

in an administrative office or in an empty classroom. Where participants gave consent, interviews and focus groups were recorded; otherwise, I took handwritten notes during the conversations.

Methodological considerations

Working across two different faculties was important in that working styles and academic background varied and it was helpful to have a point of comparison. After gaining permission to conduct the research from each Head of Department, I was initially concerned that a top-down approach to recruitment may make potential participants feel pressured to take part. In the event, once I started to become known within each department, several participants sought me out to schedule interviews. Some administrators who initially appeared reluctant to take part also became more enthusiastic after I spent time with them in their office, and particularly after I shared details about my own life and connections to Nigeria. Many participants easily adopted the role of the expert during the interview, correcting my pronunciation as necessary, and freely giving me advice. Most were confident and happy to be cited in the thesis using their real names, and several were insistent that I did not give them a pseudonym. It was from the nature of the interviews themselves that I started thinking about the role of Nigerian pre-eminence in race-making processes, and I later amended interview prompts to ask more explicitly about notions of Nigerian-ness. Recruitment of postgraduate students for focus groups using a snowball method through a single point of contact did not seem to skew participation as much as I had feared. Not all participants knew each other, and some heard about the focus groups on the day and decided to join spontaneously. The results were probably more affected by the attendance of my point of contact within both groups. He took on a significant role within each in actively seeking to direct the conversation. Despite this, other participants' responses to his interventions generated interesting data, and in particular, worked to highlight potential differences between students' perspectives between and within the different academic faculties.

RESEARCH SITE 3: OLDER PEOPLE

My third research site was an African-initiated church, which I shall refer to as Christ's Church, from which I conducted research over the course of four months from April to July 2017. The church is part of the Aladura movement (meaning 'owners of prayer' in Yorùbá), a Christian denomination linked to Pentecostalism which formed in south-western Nigeria in the mid-1920s (Adogame & Omoyajowo, 1998). The church is predominantly Yorùbá-speaking, but with some youth services held in English, and at the time of research had a well-established congregation of over one hundred people. Located in a residential area in mainland Lagos, members met regularly in a purpose-built building. Aladura churches are led by a prophet, but are characterised by significant lay involvement in the church hierarchy, and my sample included long-standing members who held various positions within the church structure.

Site selection and sampling

I selected this site because my mother-in-law had attended the church for over thirty years, had good relationships with members of the congregation and clergy, and was happy to facilitate my introduction to potential research participants. I initially visited the church in April 2016, when I met with church leaders who indicated their support for the project. Initially, I had planned wider participant recruitment to carry out interviews with both the clergy and congregation. I amended this to focus on life history discussions with a smaller number of participants in an attempt to draw out how potential changes to race-making practices might have occurred over time. Participant recruitment initially proved challenging, however, as when I returned to the church in April 2017 to meet potential participants, they seemed reluctant to take part and agreed only to complete questionnaires rather than to meet face to face. I realised my approach had not been well received when one man told me that because he was retired, I should not think that he was not busy. I attended the meeting with the research assistant that I worked with at Eko High School, but when he stepped in to translate a miscommunication the church members stopped him,

telling him that they could understand English perfectly well. So I arranged a further visit to the church with my sister-in-law, who had known the potential participants since she was a child, and she discussed the project in more depth in order to reassure participants about the time commitment involved. Full of laughter and fun, my sister-in-law sang and danced during the church service before our meeting, and laughed and joked with participants afterwards. As a result of her intervention, four participants – three men and one woman – agreed to take part in the project, and my sister-in-law proceeded to distribute consent forms and make appointments for us to visit each at home the following week.

Data collection

My sister-in-law joined me for the initial visits with each life history participant at their homes, and helped translate questions regarding the consent form and research process. At their request, I gave each participant an outline of the interview question prompts I planned to cover in advance (Appendix 3.1). At subsequent visits, the research process with each participant developed its own routine; I sent the questions to my mother-in-law for distribution in advance, sat in what became my usual chair within each home, with the research participant also sitting in what became their usual seat for our conversations. While I directed the life history interviews through pre-planned questions, I prioritised listening during the interviews themselves (Goodson & Sikes, 2016), basing further questions on participants' replies. At my sister-in-law's advice, and as approved by UCL's Research Ethics Committee, I brought a small gift to each visit – loaves of bread, boxes of biscuits – which in some cases helped to build the research relationship, but in others due to the complexity of gift-giving etiquette, seemed to complicate it. These responses to the gifts themselves provided insight into social expectations, and the positioning of *òyìnbós* within these. With participant consent, I recorded all of our conversations, but noticed that participants often engaged in more free-flowing conversation before the voice recorder was turned on, or added more detail once I had switched it off. Initially, I did not plan the number of intended visits, and left this open-ended as different areas of our discussion led to the development of further

questions for later visits. As time went on, some participants opted out of the process in different ways, declining further visits, while others seemed keen to continue. The maximum number of interviews with any participant was five. Each interview had a broad theme as follows: *òyìnbós* in Lagos, memories of childhood, personal character, Nigeria and Lagos, and lastly, religious faith. I refer to all life history participants using pseudonyms throughout the thesis, regardless of whether they requested this, in order to preserve the anonymity of other research participants.

Life history participants

Mr Olaiya was the youngest life history participant, aged in his late sixties. He was married with children. Mr Olaiya was the only life history participant never to have left Nigeria, and he sometimes said he could not make comment due to a lack of international experience. Now retired, he had worked as a skilled tradesperson for many years. I visited Mr Olaiya at his home four times; he was always welcoming, but seemed to find my visits stressful at times, especially at the beginning. My efforts to put him at ease seemed to have an impact as time went on, but for each visit he continued to make extensive handwritten notes in answer to my question prompts. His answers were always thoughtful and factual, but often relatively short. At my third visit, Mr Olaiya requested that we cover any remaining questions in one final visit.

Mrs Ambode, the only female life history participant, was aged in her early seventies. Married with three children who had their own families, Mrs Ambode had travelled extensively to the UK, US and elsewhere for business and to visit friends and relatives. Born in Lagos, she had worked as a civil servant before setting up her own business so she could spend more time with her family. I visited Mrs Ambode four times at her home, and once at the church. She talked extensively in answer to my question prompts, telling me stories about her life back to her childhood, and she seemed to enjoy revisiting these memories.

Mr Faleti was the oldest life history participant, aged in his late seventies. He was married with six children, many of whom now lived abroad with their own families, and he had travelled extensively. Born in a neighbouring state, Mr Faleti had lived and worked for a private company in Lagos for nearly thirty years until his retirement. I visited Mr Faleti three times at his home. During my visits, Mr Faleti was keen to outline his ongoing achievements, and our conversations taught me a great deal about the local status economy – celebrating relative age and longevity, wealth accumulation, and formal titles and accolades. At my third visit, Mr Faleti declined to arrange further meetings due to other commitments.

Mr Afolayan was also in his late seventies at the time of my visits. He had been married twice with four children and several grandchildren, and had travelled internationally to visit them. Born in Lagos, Mr Afolayan had worked as a civil servant throughout his career. I visited Mr Afolayan five times at his home. He had a keen interest in current events and Nigerian history, and our conversations covered a wide range of topics. He also talked extensively and thoughtfully about his own life in response to my question prompts, telling stories that were often amusing and that at more than one point moved me to tears.

Methodological considerations

Recruiting participants at this research site through extended family came with advantages and disadvantages (Varley, 2008), as while my personal connections facilitated these introductions, my extended family relationships also positioned me within the social politics of the site before I arrived, and consequently influenced the data that I was able to collect. As well as potentially creating an expectation of participation for some people, it also likely influenced what participants chose to disclose and how they framed their answers, and I have been mindful of this in my analysis. Secondly, the process of building narratives over the course of repeated visits, alongside the development of professional relationships between myself and participants, produced quite different data from this site. In some ways, I conceived of this as the production of a text that documents processes of participants' sense-

making (Rapley, 2007), rather than simply life history interviews as a process of documenting facts. In this way, I sought to engage sympathetically but critically with the data generated, noting inconsistencies in participants' narratives, and recognising shifting subtleties in categorisations and ideas. Thirdly, although all participants spoke excellent English, I felt my inability to speak Yorùbá fluently was particularly significant at this site due to the personal nature of the some of the topics discussed. Some participants at times spent time searching for the word they were looking for in English, and I remained aware of the politics of using English to conduct qualitative research in Nigeria (Ngũgĩ, 1986).

DATA ANALYSIS

My approach to the data evolved during the fieldwork period itself, from an initial theoretically-driven focus specifically on the concept of *òyìnbó*, to a more inductive approach based upon wider frames of social meaning that my respondents revealed through our discussions. This shift was reflected in modifications to the questions that I asked research participants during the course of fieldwork, which developed to incorporate exploration of Nigerianness and Africanness as well as of *òyìnbó*-ness. Post-fieldwork, I analysed the data by conducting thematic analysis across the entire data corpus, including interview and focus group transcripts, and handwritten fieldwork diaries. Based upon Braun and Clarke's (2006) guidelines, my analysis involved several different stages. I started by re-familiarising myself with the data, which I primarily achieved through interview transcription and re-reading fieldwork notes. I transcribed the majority of the interviews, with the exception of focus group and photo project interviews, which were transcribed by a research assistant who also translated phrases in Yorùbá or pidgin used by respondents. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, and checked for appropriate punctuation to reflect the context of speakers' meanings. I then coded typewritten transcripts using NVivo, and coded handwritten research diaries manually. From the initial codes, I went through a process of developing themes (Appendix 4.1). Some themes were composed of practical information I had directly requested (for example, regarding participants' experiences or sources of information regarding *òyìnbós*). I generated other themes

in relation to the prevalence of particular codes that were the result of more open-ended questions, grouping together similar ideas or meanings that were reported by multiple respondents. I tried to be as inclusive as possible during this process, documenting a range of 'minor' codes mentioned by a few research participants as well as 'major' themes incorporating coded items mentioned by many. Although some 'minor' codes did not appear directly relevant to my research question at the time of data collection, some were eventually incorporated into my analysis – such as ideas about justice and protest. Other codes and themes, while they provided useful information about wider social context, were eventually discarded – such as much of the data collected about religion.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDAS

A significant limitation of the study is its implicit conceptualisation of 'Lagosian' and 'òyìnbó' as mutually exclusive categories. I was aware during fieldwork that my research sites did not include participants that self-identified as both Lagosians and òyìnbós, but broadening the scope of the project to incorporate an additional site was precluded by time constraints. Nonetheless, future research that incorporates these groups will likely yield interesting data that enrich academic understandings of racialisation in African contexts. This is particularly the case as research to date has documented the complex status of inter-continental migrants – such as those of Lebanese and Indian heritage – that initially migrated to west Africa several generations ago (Akyeampong, 2006), and in view of the fact that this inter-continental migration – particularly from China, for example – continues (French, 2014; Lampert & Mohan, 2014). Studies focusing on racialisation processes as experienced by second- and subsequent-generation minority groups in African contexts, especially outside of colour-line countries, would represent a useful modification of future research agendas more broadly. Incorporating the complex realities of local understandings of race-making, including the experiences and perspectives of minority groups, into wider debates about racialisation and ethnicity on the continent has the potential to open up new empirical and theoretical spaces, and for academic understanding to benefit from the insights that these bring.

CHAPTER FOUR:
Òyìnbó: The local politics of race-making in Lagos

> Lone white face in a sea of black, Furo learned fast. To walk with his shoulders up and his steps steady. To keep his face lowered and his gaze blank. To ignore the fixed stares, the pointed whispers, the blatant curiosity. And he learnt how it felt to be seen as a freak: exposed to wonder, invisible to comprehension.
> - A. Igoni Barrett, *Blackass A Novel,* 2015 p.11

> They are just like we black, the difference is colour because in everything the difference is colour, and the hair. They are just like we black, especially when I travel to US. There are some white as big and fatter than we blacks! Because I thought we blacks were the people who were very fat […] So, they are just like us. The only thing is that the colour, and the hair.
> - Interview with Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

In Nigerian novelist A. Igoni Barrett's (2015) Kafkaesque novel, *Blackass,* the protagonist – a young Nigerian called Furo – wakes up one morning with red hair, pale skin and freckles. My epigraph above is taken from early in the novel, when Furo first ventures out into Lagos' streets following his transformation, where in Barrett's words, he is seen as a 'freak'; viewed with wonder, but without comprehension. In this, Barrett captures some of the nuance of race-making in Lagos; Furo the *òyìnbó* experiences the power and privilege attached to pale skin, but also experiences harassment, insecurity and social alienation. Barrett continues: "[Furo] had always thought that white people had it easier, in this country anyway, where it seemed that everyone treated them as special, but after everything that he had gone through since yesterday, he wasn't so sure any more. Everything conspired to make him stand out. This whiteness that separated him from everyone he knew" (*ibid.,* p.52). And so Furo's experience of Lagos' racialised landscape is predominantly a *local* one. It does not attest to the effects of a simplistic monoracism that solely privileges whiteness above blackness. Instead, it hints at something more complex, more nuanced, and more ambivalent. It reveals the work of particular racialisation

processes in a world of various polyracisms (Law, 2014); racialisation processes that are brought to life by the people around Furo as much as by Furo's own appearance and actions. It highlights the geographical specificity of the work the concept of *òyìnbó* does. As such, the creation of otherness in Lagos, through the racialisation of difference, is related to the local practice of politics in which the racialised other becomes a crux against which individuals can compare and contrast. It creates an 'in' group and an 'out' group, as in the second epigraph above, where a life history participant seeks to assert racial unity. Yet in doing so, he simultaneously emphasises the difference between 'blacks' and 'whites': "they are just like us", repeated three times in this short excerpt, *they* are like *us,* "…the difference is colour, and the hair." *They* might be like *us,* but necessarily there is a distinction then. To be like us, they cannot be part of us.

I start the empirical chapters here, with a focus on the geographical specificity of race-making that constructions of *òyìnbó* reveal, for two reasons. Firstly, this is to emphasise that Lagosians collectively *make race,* and to reiterate that this is the very process that should form the focus of our academic endeavours to better understand race-making practices. But also because this very process of categorisation is foundational to understanding the political purposes of these practices, as I explore in subsequent chapters. This chapter, then, interrogates the concept of *òyìnbó* and in doing so, seeks to show how the practice of race-making in Lagos predominantly addresses local rather than transnational or global political concerns. I make this argument in relation to the political work that *òyìnbó* does in Lagos in four ways. Firstly, I develop the idea that the term *òyìnbó* is commonly mistranslated as 'white person', when in fact, the primary work that *òyìnbó* does is to demarcate outsiders based on their perceived un-Africanness. This usage of *òyìnbó* reflects a geographically specific world view found in dominant discourses among Lagosians, which holds Africans at its centre, literally othering – as in the epigraphs above – those who are not considered African, yet simultaneously evaluating those others according to predominantly local social and political priorities. Secondly, I look in more detail at the social and political work that the concept of *òyìnbó* does through its construction of this other against which individuals can compare and contrast,

apparent in the role of the concept in social critique. Thirdly, I show how the concept simultaneously works to reinforce what it is to be African by creating a dichotomy in which *òyìnbós* are a foil against which Africanness can be constructed, reaffirmed and socially policed. Finally, I take two examples that illustrate the explicit negotiation of the racialisation process in Lagos, highlighting how research participants made and assigned to racial categories according to their own prioritisation of aspects of otherness, and importantly, in relation to wider social considerations. As such, these illustrations highlight once again how the concept of *òyìnbó* can be utilised differently, dependent upon divergent political interests. Throughout the chapter, I explore the concept of *òyìnbó* as foundational to race-making in Lagos, and show how this primarily operates in relation to – and in order to address – local political priorities.

ÒYÌNBÓ AND THE LOCAL POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE AND AFFINITY

> We only see white, and different[iate] white from black. But those people who comes from overseas, they are not only white but they could be brown, could be black, could be almost orange or a different colour from our own. And the texture of the hair is quite different. So this indicates that *òyìnbó* – now – means somebody who is not African in nature.
> - Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

Dominant narratives among my research participants revealed that *òyìnbós* are widely distinguished primarily – although not exclusively – by physical appearance, and as I mention in the introduction, many people in Lagos translate *òyìnbó* simply as 'white person' – or commonly, 'white man' – for this reason. That Lagosians should notice and differentiate visible variations between people based on phenotype is unsurprising; many racialised systems of classification have been based on skin colour in particular because it is deceptively easy to apply (Bethencourt, 2013). Alongside this, research participants widely referred to hair type as an important marker in the racialisation process, reflecting the importance of hair styling within African cultures generally (Dabiri, 2019). But as Hall (2011: 13) points out, it is not the recognition of difference that is significant, but the "larger constructions of cultural meaning that coalesce to this difference" which in turn have "specific effects...on

particular social relationships." In other words, the social implications of difference rather than physical difference itself should be the focus of our analyses. With this is mind, in this section I argue that the primary purpose of *òyìnbó* in practice is to demarcate outsiders, which it does, as in the interview quotation above, by creating a binary racial distinction between those marked as African and everybody else. In this, it effectively works to reverse the focus on 'white racial purity' widely found in colour-line countries (for example, in the one-drop rule in the US), and centres Africanness to the exclusion of all other racial classifications. Although this classification is highly flexible and continuously negotiated, it is most often presented as an irrefutable and self-evident fact based in biology. The binary nature of the racialisation process in Lagos is foundational to its social purpose; there is no allowance for hybridity, as individuals can only be classified as African or not. While other classification systems operate in particular circumstances *within* the designation as African (e.g., Nigerian, Kenyan, or more commonly, Yorùbá, Igbo etc.) or *within* the classification as *òyìnbó* (e.g., French, Chinese, Lebanese etc.), these sub-classifications do not challenge the foundational nature of the African-*òyìnbó* binary itself. As I show in later chapters, various forms of cultural ascription attributed on the basis of this dualism help to inform the parameters of social interaction between people in Lagos and *òyìnbós* in deliberate and politically useful ways.

Despite the physically arbitrary and highly political context of the designation of an individual as *òyìnbó*, then, understanding the binary and oppositional nature of this racial categorisation is important in understanding how many of my research participants tended to conceive of their own social world (Chabal, 2009). Matory (1999) documents how an essentialist racial binarism was similarly evident in the thinking of Lagos' nationalist elite from the late nineteenth century. So too in an exploration of *African modes of self-writing,* Mbembe (2002: 254) notes that in "dominant African narratives of the self" this binary is also apparent in the tendency to conflate "racial and territorial authenticity" such that "Africa becomes the land of black people" (*ibid.,* p.256). In other parts of Africa too, such as among the Ewe of Ghana, there is evidence that historically all non-Africans were considered part of one people and one nation, defined by its physical difference (Bailey, 2005). This

projection of difference onto others is a political act of representation. For Edward Said (1978), representation creates and therefore controls that which it claims or aims to depict, meaning that there is necessarily a binary distinction between 'us' and 'them' in any process of representation, or in Said's analysis, between Orient (the 'other') and Occident (the West). A similar argument has been applied to the Western "invention of Africa" (Mudimbe, 1988). Central to these critiques of Euro-American representation is an acknowledgement of the power of the dominant to create narratives about its others, and the role of such narratives in perpetuating unequal power relationships, allowing, for example, Europe to remain "a silent referent" in the present-day production of historical knowledge (Chakrabarty, 2008: 28). Yet this politics of representation is not only applicable to those groups recognised as dominant. As Said (1978: 5) states explicitly, his thesis is not concerned with the realities of life in the Orient, but rather the politics of how outsiders understand these concepts in the abstract through their own cultural lenses. Said particularly notes the internal consistency of Orientalist ideas "despite or beyond any correspondence, or lack thereof, with a 'real' Orient", and on this basis, argues that Orientalism "is not an airy European fantasy about the Orient, but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment. Continued investment made Orientalism, as a system of knowledge about the Orient, an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness" (*ibid.,* p.6).

The same argument can therefore be applied to race-making practices in Lagos, where understandings of *òyìnbós* are framed according to local cultural logics, even when individuals have little direct contact with *òyìnbós* themselves. As Dikötter (2015: 4) suggests, "Every civilisation has an ethnocentric world image in which outsiders are reduced to manageable spatial units." For people in Lagos the purpose of this, however, is not the perpetuation of unequal power relationships, but rather can be seen as a proactive form of engagement with these in an attempt to reduce inequalities and seek social advantage. Importantly, local race-making practices in Lagos reflect a significant and sustained investment in the construction of *òyìnbós*. One reason for this is that an investment is simultaneously made in local

constructions of Africanness, which as Monga (2016: 26-7) notes, is itself a form of "artificial but *patiently constructed* otherness, asserted and acknowledged, [which] is particularly pronounced among many Africans" [my emphasis]. As such, ideas about *òyìnbós* were often relatively consistent among research participants from different social backgrounds, but they were applied differentially according to the particular situation and the purpose of speaking in each social context. The ways in which difference is projected onto *òyìnbós* therefore varies greatly, depending on individuals' specific purposes in given situations. But the significance of the investment made in creating and sustaining this other, in the construction of *òyìnbó*, is in service of – to use Bethencourt's (2013) term – locally-based 'political projects' as much as it upholds globalised ideas about race. Recognising local agency in this way then, is not to deny that people in Lagos operate within a wider context of global racial inequalities. But it does invite us to consider the possibility that representations of *òyìnbó*, even when reifying notions of whiteness, can simultaneously be working to reinforce the binary distinction between an African 'us' and an *òyìnbó* 'them' in ways that may be viewed as advantageous by many Lagosians.

For Said (1978), the othering process that leads to divisions of humanity into 'us' and 'them' is a necessarily hostile one, involving the seizure of power over others through their depiction. Such binary classifications are commonly associated with colonial constructions of knowledge, Eurocentrism and racial discrimination. But among my research participants, local constructions of *òyìnbó* revealed a more complex picture because, although necessarily ethnocentric, these representations were characterised more by ambivalence than by hostility. This is because the race-making process is primarily related to local political concerns, such that *òyìnbós* as individuals, or as trope, may be useful to individuals in some situations and therefore evaluated positively, but may be less so in others and therefore viewed negatively. In this relationship with local politics, we would expect understandings of *òyìnbó* to be highly malleable, context specific and always in flux. Indeed, as Bashkow (2006) argues, there is no inherent reason to assume that us/ them antinomies should be solely prejudicial toward the other. Through his work on the social construction of

whiteness among the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea, Bashkow finds that "ambiguity characterizes not only the *evaluation* of whitemen as good or bad, attractive or repulsive, better or worse than Orokaiva themselves, but also the very *otherness* of whitemen, their difference and distance from Orokaiva" (*ibid.,* p.13). In this, he points to a "perpetual tension" (*ibid.,* p.13) within cultural constructions of otherness, between the projection of difference on the one hand, and an affinity borne out of the need for comparison on the other. He explains: "Whitemen are a cultural other for Orokaiva, but this does not put them in a decisively different ontological realm. Rather, Orokaiva draw whitemen into a shared moral universe with them as part of the very process by which they distinguish whitemen from themselves" (*ibid.,* p.13-14).

We see the same process at work with similar outcomes in dominant constructions of *òyìnbó*. The Polish-Nigerian writer and academic Remi Adekoya's (2021: 69) recollection of his childhood in Lagos captures this process of othering, without an assumption of prejudice, when he writes: "I always knew that the Nigerians who called me *òyìnbó* never considered me a worse kind of human being because of my *òyìnbó*-ness. They saw me as a different kind of human being, but not a worse kind. And that is a big difference. So while being othered in Nigeria didn't feel nice, it never felt humiliating." *Òyìnbó* designation in Lagos, then, is the result of a process that highlights difference in particular social situations, while at the same time assuming a shared basis for evaluating that difference. As such, while this process is highly context specific, there were nevertheless trends among my research participants who often evaluated *òyìnbós* according to common moral principles and shared social concerns. For example, many respondents conveyed that *òyìnbós* are respected for their assumed wealth and technological expertise, but some also critiqued them for a tendency to be greedy and exploitative. In Chapter 5, I map these imaginaries of *òyìnbós* onto local social values and political concerns to illustrate this process in more detail. In the next section of this chapter, I consider *òyìnbó* as a foil against which individuals can compare and contrast, both individually and collectively, in what I term 'seeking difference'.

ÒYÌNBÓ AND SEEKING DIFFERENCE

In his study of race in Muslim West Africa, Bruce S. Hall (2011: 22) makes an important distinction between the idea of racial identity versus the deployment of what he calls "racial arguments". Hall describes becoming "less and less comfortable with the paradigm of identity" found in the ethnic and racial studies literature, and instead argues that "[i]n West Africa and elsewhere, race is an abstraction and a form of argument; it is used for specific and concrete reasons to do particular kinds of social and political work." This framework speaks directly to my data from Lagos, for when my respondents' narratives invoked a sense of their own 'Africanness' in contrast to *òyìnbós*, they were not commonly referring to any sort of shared essence of African identity, nor to pan-Africanism in a political sense (Chigumadzi, 2019). This makes sense if we place these understandings within local systems of meaning, whereby as I outline in Chapter 6, dominant narratives among my research participants widely celebrated notions of self-sufficiency and competitive drive over actions that may produce social benefit for the wider community. In Chapter 7, I go on to argue that this forms a basis upon which many Lagosians assert their own pre-eminence, underpinned by local systems of self-perception and meaning, and consequently leads to social behaviours that are directly at odds with the assumptions underlying the existence of a racially-based pan-African kinship. So to contrast an African 'us' with an *òyìnbó* 'them' is not necessarily to claim primacy of an African (or pan-African) identity in Lagos. Rather, as Hall suggests, it is to mobilise local racial politics for other purposes.

After Bashkow (2006), I suggest that one of these purposes can be thought of as *seeking difference*, as once *òyìnbós* are conceived as being radically different to Africans, they can then become a foil against which individuals can compare and contrast. I term this seeking difference, because the work *òyìnbó* does here is to represent an idealised other against which people in Lagos can evaluate their own shortcomings, either as a collective or in terms of an individual's situation. In other words, *òyìnbós* represent a sort of ideal scenario, usually but not always in terms of behaviour; they represent a desirable form of difference. Of course, this is not to say

that any specific *òyìnbó*, or even *òyìnbós* as a collective could ever fulfil this desire for difference; rather, in deploying the idea of *òyìnbós* in any given situation, individuals mobilise racialised arguments through the foil of *òyìnbó.* When doing so, they are not in dialogue with *òyìnbós,* real or imagined, but are actually addressing key concerns about their own society, or their own personal circumstances (see Pierce, 2016). *Òyìnbó*-as-trope has little to do with *òyìnbós* themselves, then, rather it is a way of drawing meanings attached to *òyìnbós* into local frameworks of the moral, political and social universe. The rest of this section looks in more detail at this process firstly in relation to seeking collective difference, and then secondly in terms of seeking difference as individuals.

Seeking collective difference

Seeking difference as a collective may be thought of as a kind of critical self-reflection. Many local narratives in Lagos reveal a keen awareness of perceived collective shortcomings, and discussions of these in relation to national or local politics, or even in relation to extended family circumstances are an everyday occurrence (Smith, 2007). Common to these discussions are lamentations about social failings and a related critique of political leadership. Where my research participants' narratives recognised shortcomings in behaviour that were perceived to bring about social and political situations that they disliked, *òyìnbós* were sometimes invoked as an alternative onto which an ideal-type solution could be projected:

> Mr O: Now the problem that we are having in our country is that we all are maybe we don't know our right from left. So that's the reason why you see all these elite, they are cheating us! Now some, something's that happening that they are doing here. They cannot do it over there [in *òyìnbó* countries].
>
> NH: Like what?
>
> Mr O: Their corruption. Now, you can see how Obama is managing […] in US. See the withdraw [end of presidential term], how he's managing it. You cannot just say, I do [what I want]!
> - Mr Olaiya (Site 3), June 2017

In this, it is not that *òyìnbós* are considered without their own flaws; more that the issues that tended to dominate my respondents' narratives in relation to their own society were the focus of attention, and those attributes that they ascribed to *òyìnbós* were the positive counterbalance to their own perceived collective faults. The assignment of such attributes is not random; often, my research participants' narratives considered the attractive aspects of *òyìnbós'* perceived lifestyle – such as affluence – to be a direct consequence of specific behaviours, which as I explore in later chapters include being disciplined and unsuperstitious. Therefore, when behaviours associated with *òyìnbós* were evaluated positively, it was not because these characteristics were the only attributes commonly associated with *òyìnbós*, but rather because they were the opposite to those which respondents' narratives tended to lament within their own community. Several of my research participants explained that high unemployment in Nigeria leads people to commit crime, sometimes violent, in order to feed themselves and their families. In relation to these issues, many laid blame with politicians who, they claimed, had mismanaged the economy, failed to create enough jobs, and had not addressed issues of insecurity and lawlessness. In other words, these narratives reveal a perception that political leaders were *not* being disciplined and unsuperstitious, and that it is these flaws that had created the social problems that my respondents sought to address. Other, largely negative, attributes associated with *òyìnbós* – for example, that they can be exploitative – were clearly not so relevant to this situation, so they were not mentioned.

Seeking individual difference

The same process occurred when respondents sought difference within their own personal circumstances. This came up in conversation most often when women were talking about aspects of their personal relationships with men with which they were dissatisfied. The circumstances that provoked dissatisfaction covered a range of behaviours; sometimes women were indignant about a perceived verbal slight, at other times they alluded to emotional or physical abuse. Few women spoke to me openly about domestic or sexual violence, but some referred to it in general terms. A

friend once asked if my husband had ever beaten me. When I told her no, she did not reply for a moment, before saying quietly, "Nigerian men are fond of beating their wives." Her questions about *òyìnbó* men revealed a perception of them as being less violent. But mostly, women invoked the idea of *òyìnbós* in less harrowing situations. During one interview with a man, his wife came into the room at one point and asked what my research was about. When I told her, she replied:

> You know the difference between white and black, is that you know, if your husband will tell you, "I want to receive a guest"[…] He would have told me beforehand, you understand? I didn't know. I just saw you now. So that is the difference between black and white, our mentality. Especially men. So maybe you can explain it… it's not common with whites.
> - Research participant's wife, May 2017

Here, the idea that an *òyìnbó* would have forewarned his or her spouse about a visitor may link to a perception of *òyìnbós* as respectful, but in this instance, the primary purpose of the comment relates not to *òyìnbós*, but to this woman's relationship with her husband. The comment was designed, and succeeded, in embarrassing the woman's husband, my interviewee, who was clearly irritated by her interjection. The man's wife sought different behaviour in her marriage, and used the idea of *òyìnbó* to broach this.

When ideas about *òyìnbós* are invoked to seek difference in this way, both in collective and individual circumstances, they are often used to mobilise racialised arguments attached to constructions of others precisely because these others are outsiders. There is a safety that comes from the distance between 'us' and 'them'; it is easier to say I'd like things to be more like 'them' in the abstract, than to directly address the people involved in the situation. This is especially the case when there is a power imbalance between an individual's own position, and those that they perceive could potentially bring about the change that the individual seeks. It is not a coincidence that a number of women referred to *òyìnbós* to seek difference in their personal relationships with men – whereas none of the men did – as this reflects broader gendered power dynamics in Nigeria (Smith, 2007). The following quotation

was an unprompted response at the end of an interview with a married woman who had four young children, and it illustrates this point well:

> I want to talk in the area of marriage. I know that the white people are more caring to their spouse, yes, than in our own culture. In this side of the world when a woman is married, it's expected that anything we are going through in the marital affair, and the negative, we have to keep *bearing it* and *bearing it* and *bearing it* [words emphasised], all because of your children. It's not so in the Western world. If you are not comfortable in your marriage you are able to quit... and nobody will victimise you, nobody will look down on you, and look at you as something seriously wrong and all of that. So I think the Western world is good at that. But we still need to work on it in Africa... because that makes our men to do some things that are naughty. You know if you're aware that, you can't go on there [in the marriage], even your parents will tell you go back there, you have to keep enduring and enduring and that's why some people are into abuse of all sorts...
> - Mrs Faremi (Site 2), Sept 2017

In these instances, narratives that invoke *òyìnbó* behaviours as worthy of replication do not signify that *òyìnbós* are held in unquestioned high esteem. Within a framework of global monoracisms, such discourse is often read as evidence of, in Pierre's (2013: 75) words, the "valorization of Whiteness and its embodied agents (racialized as White peoples) [which] takes on many forms, from religious iconography to language." But by positioning these narratives within a predominantly localised system of racial classification, we are invited to view the race-making process as part of a foundational, but not necessarily hierarchical, social stratification system. Within this, dominant narratives among Lagosians use *òyìnbós* to critique aspects of their own political system both because of the fact that *òyìnbós* are not perceived to be directly involved in that system, and as a means for individuals to take part in the local political process itself. References in conversation to those things that *òyìnbós* are seen to do well suggest that the speaker is well read, politically aware, and actively thinking about how to address local social problems. As Pierce (2016) suggests, these narratives themselves form part of the ever-changing terrain of local politics, and therefore feed into the playing of predominantly localised "status games" (Storr, 2021). It is by being part of these very conversations, inputting ideas, identifying problems and possible solutions, that individuals manoeuvre within the status economy of their own society. Just as when my

respondents' narratives compared and contrasted *òyìnbó* behaviours in seeking individual change, holding up *òyìnbós* as an example of collective achievement indicates that the speaker is engaging with – and seeking to influence – local differentials in social status and power by productively contributing to these discussions.

ÒYÌNBÓ AND (SELF-) POLICING: THE CREATION AND RE-AFFIRMATION OF AFRICANNESS

As well as aspiring to difference through comparison with an idealised other, Lagosian discourse also frequently incorporates the word *òyìnbó* to directly describe or refer to other Lagosians. Sometimes, usually in reference to phenotypic appearance and particularly related to fair skin tone, this usage can be complimentary, embedded as it is in notions of physical attractiveness linked to colourism. However, these narratives also feature the word *òyìnbó* as a form of disparagement, either in relation to phenotypic difference or to behaviour. In these ways, the direct usage of *òyìnbó* within Lagosian discourse is a form of policing within communities; and importantly, despite its many positive connotations, the word *òyìnbó* is also often used within narratives that tease, reprimand or bully. As such, the usage of *òyìnbó* is highly context specific, and through this ambivalence, it speaks predominantly to local registers of difference and power, rather than to transnational or global formulations of whiteness that suggest whiteness represents a de facto superiority. This contrasts, for example, with Pierre's (2013: 77) assertion that usage of the perhaps-equivalent term *obruni* in Ghana "point[s] to the ways that Whiteness assumes privilege and is deployed as identity, status and property… [or] as an indicator of goodness or attractiveness." Rather, the concept of *òyìnbó*, especially when used to police behaviour in this way, is mobilised to define and re-assert 'acceptable African behaviours', in effect reinforcing a predominantly localised, shared sense of Africanness.

Òyìnbó and phenotypic difference among Lagosians

In relation to phenotypic difference, and specifically to skin tone, dominant narratives among my research participants revealed that paler skin colour is generally favoured, but naming this explicitly by calling a (darker-skinned) Lagosian *òyìnbó* can have varied meanings dependent upon the actors involved and the circumstances. As such, when individuals explicitly refer to each other using *òyìnbó*, more than anything else the work the concept does is to define difference against Africanness as a baseline. Correspondingly, when research participants who had fairer skin spoke about this, they often did so hesitantly, viewing the idea that they could be regarded or referred to as *òyìnbó* with caution or suspicion, aware that what might appear to be a compliment may in fact be teasing, or bullying. That the concept of *òyìnbó* ultimately represents otherness in Lagos means that it is exclusionary; calling a Lagosian *òyìnbó* therefore suggests a separation, a distinction. This can be complimentary, for example, if two people are linked romantically. According to one postgraduate focus group participant:

> Male student: If the word is used to describe a fair complexion African, the suggestion is, that the reference is beautiful, is charming and attractive […] And in fact ummm… the listener would be very appreciative to understand that the speaker is saying that "You're beautiful, I like you, I admire you."
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

But when other research participants talked about this in interviews, whether in the abstract or based on their own experience of having a fair complexion, they rarely talked about calling another Lagosian *òyìnbó* in the context of being complimentary. Rather, this was almost always framed as teasing or joking, as here:

> Mr O: Even there are some [pause]… Africans, even Nigerians that we call *òyìnbó*. But calling them *òyìnbó* is just making jest of them.
>
> NH: So how does that work…? What is the meaning of…?
>
> Mr O: You know when you are an African, basically an African is a black man. And you come out in a very light complexion… Okay, I have a WhatsApp group. One of our members told me… she is very light in complexion, almost as white as you, so we call her midway *òyìnbó*. *Òyìnbó* midway. That is almost

òyìnbó. But she is not *òyìnbó*, so when you call people like that, an African like that, I mean a black African, as far as I am concerned – or in Lagos – you are just making jest of them.

NH: But it's not an insult?

Mr O: It's not an insult.
- Mr Osibote (Site 1), May 2017

The point at which teasing or making jest becomes insulting or hurtful, of course, is not always clear cut. One research participant, who asked me not to record our interview, described to me how her fair complexion had always marked her out as she was the only person in her family to have fair skin. From childhood, she recalled other children calling her *òyìnbó* and even as an adult, she would still be referred to as 'the *òyìnbó*' in her neighbourhood. Her account of this was matter of fact, as if she was used to the attention that her skin tone attracted and had learned to accept it. Yet she clearly did not relish such attention; it seemed she found it tiresome rather than something to celebrate, and certainly she did not communicate any sense of pride in that aspect of her appearance, as you might expect to find in something generally conceived of as, in the quotation from a postgraduate student above, beautiful, charming and attractive. Indeed, while the meanings attached to the usage of *òyìnbó* in Lagos are highly context specific, and the concept itself highly malleable, at a localised level this usage always once again highlights difference, and as such it lends itself just as much to jest and bullying as it does to compliments. Among children especially, this drawing attention to difference may mean it is more likely to be derogatory than complimentary, as in this example from my field notes, which took place when I joined in conversation with three academics in a corridor at UNILAG:

> Dr S is a tall man whose face is warm and expressive. His skin is a pale complexion that looks freckled in places. The second man is shorter and stockier; he has a big smile also and is quick to laugh, quite loudly. Among all of them, the conversation is quick and noisy, and they laugh often. They ponder my project for a while, agree that it is an interesting topic. They mention the song that children often sing, *òyìnbó pepe…* and sing some of it for me. Then Dr S says that when he was a child, other children used to tease him for his complexion, calling him *òyìnbó* and singing a song about him. He says he will have to sing the song in pidgin. When I ask what it means, he

doesn't reply, but another colleague tells me it means that he is an *òyìnbó* that has been dropped in palm oil and only partially fried. "Gosh!" I exclaim. The others continue talking and laughing about their memories of childhood songs, but Dr S says, more quietly, "but I did find it rather hurtful." I tell him I'm not surprised, that it doesn't sound like a very nice thing to say to somebody. The other two men are quieter for a second. "No," Dr S replies, "I guess it wasn't."
  - Field notes, 18 Aug 2017

In this way, then, *òyìnbó* is a highly flexible signifier. That phenotypic difference – and especially fair skin tone, which is widely viewed as desirable and positive – should also form the basis for teasing and reprimand, explicitly through usage of the concept of *òyìnbó,* highlights the importance of the localised meanings attached to race-making. This may partly relate to local perceptions of people with albinism, a group that experiences significant discrimination, social exclusion and stigma across Nigeria (The Albino Foundation Nigeria, 2018). Indeed, such is the significance attached to skin tone in Lagos that in several interviews research participants referenced people with albinism explicitly when I asked them how they distinguish *òyìnbós,* on the basis that both groups have fair skin. Some respondents also reported that people with albinism could also be referred to as *òyìnbós*, despite there being a more specific translation in Yorùbá (*àfin*), and one explained to me that this was a form of politeness due to the social stigma attached to the condition. Other research participants suggested that referring to people with albinism as *òyìnbós* was more flippant, as here:

What I grew up to know is that if you are not black, you are *òyìnbó*. I don't know how... Even albino, we call them *òyìnbó*. We call them frustrated Europeans. [...] Or we call them fake *òyìnbó* because they are light in complexion.
  - Mr Osibote (Site 1), May 2017

But aside from genetic conditions such as albinism, much literature documents prejudice based on skin colour in a variety of countries around the globe (Hunter, 2007; Bethencourt, 2013), and Pierre (2013) dedicates a chapter to "skin bleaching and the colored codes of racial aesthetics" in her book on race in postcolonial Ghana. Lagosians too, operate within wider racialised environments that tend to place value on lighter skin shades. It is for this reason, then, that the varied significance of this

label indicates its embeddedness within a predominantly local racialised landscape, in which it speaks to a complex local politics of inclusion and exclusion.

Òyìnbó and policing behavioural difference among Lagosians

As well as highlighting phenotypic difference, my respondents also used the word *òyìnbó* to reference behaviours within the local community that are considered 'not African'. Research participants made such references in relation to a wide variety of scenarios from not eating spicy food, to adopting an accent considered fake. In these instances, this usage of the word was rarely complimentary. Indeed, when research respondents referred to calling other Lagosians *òyìnbó* in reference to behaviours that it was considered had been consciously adopted, the primary purpose of this usage of *òyìnbó* appeared to be to call out such behaviours. In doing so, these narratives reveal participation in a localised, collective effort to (self-) police behaviour in order to define and re-affirm a sense of Africanness. In this way, this usage also speaks primarily to local politics and structures of power, rather than to transnational or global racialised contexts. Often framed around a binary distinction between an *òyìnbó* versus an African way of doing things, usage of *òyìnbó* in this context was primarily a form of teasing or reprimand with the intention of modifying others' behaviours. As such, *òyìnbó* is invoked not because whiteness is a standard to be emulated, but to the contrary, because Africanness – variously defined – is the baseline against which the appropriateness of behaviours is evaluated. The following examples from interviews illustrate this, and also highlight the range of behaviours that can be called out under the broad banner of *òyìnbó*:

> Male student: If the word is used to describe someone who acts in a pseudo-African way, then there could be a pejorative emm… perspective to it, and it could be sarcastic. So if someone, who, let's say; she is brown in complexion and decides to bleach her skin to, you know, become, overly fair, we call the person *òyìnbó*: there's sarcastic implication to that usage.
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

Similarly:

These set of Nigerians, or this set of *Africans* [word emphasised], they are abandoning African culture, African way of life, and they are adopting Western way of life. You get it now? That they are more attracted to the ways the Westerners do their things. They are acculturalising themselves to the way of life of the white man. And there is this tendency for them to get excused, more often than not, that in an African family setting, you know we have this communal way of doing things, of living. So, if you see somebody that on his own has decided to live typical *òyìnbó* life, within that family it is always that such a person is usually excused. Don't mind him…it is one of those *òyìnbó*…let us continue doing our own thing.
- Mr Lawal (Site 1), Mar 2017

Both of these examples hinge on a binary distinction between *òyìnbó* and African ways of doing things, but yet together, they also reveal a highly malleable notion of Africanness. Fair skin tone, for example, can be considered a source of beauty, yet using skin lightening creams can be ridiculed for suggesting an individual is trying too hard. The social purpose of utilising *òyìnbó* to tease or reprimand in this way, then, shows how usage of the word speaks primarily to a localised status economy and correspondingly local registers of power. There is no steadfast baseline against which the 'true Africanness' of particular behaviours can be measured, as this is entirely context specific. We see this particularly in perceptions around the appropriateness of accent and language. On one hand, the ability to speak English with a foreign accent can be perceived to reflect a high level of education or ambition:

So our parents might even encourage us in that, to work with *òyìnbó*, you will *be able to speak and you will be like them*… They can even take you to overseas. That is the perception, what our mothers and fathers always encourage us. They see us talking to *òyìnbó*, they want to…. They want us to build that relationship so that they can assist us in doing many things.
- Mr Adekoya (Site 1), March 2017 [emphasis added]

Yet on the other hand, as Udofot (2003) also notes drawing on Ayo Banjo's earlier classification of spoken Nigerian English, the same behaviour can be reframed as an attempt to adopt a faux accent, and as such can be the basis of ridicule:

During my undergraduate days some ladies tried to show off err.. to show that they are educated by trying to speak like the white people. And we gave them a nickname, pepper-less. Pepper-less means, someone who speaks as if

he doesn't eat pepper. And the pepper can be very hard in the mouth, but they speak as if er.. they are not Africans.
  - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Similarly:

Male student: [I] have this experience when I was in high school. OK, my school mate use to call me *òyìnbó*, based on how I speak English and to me it was sarcastic. It was like they are... they were mocking me.
  - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

In each case, usage of the concept of *òyìnbó* reveals that the term is always highly context specific, and that this primarily relates to local political concerns. The utilisation of *òyìnbó* in these ways has little to do with actual *òyìnbós*, but rather its primary social purpose is to impact upon a highly localised status economy. It does this by providing a method of modifying the behaviours of others by invoking the concept as a means of creating in-groups and out-groups. Thus, reference to *òyìnbó* between people in Lagos signifies an attempt to partake in local politics rather than a simplified manifestation of a global monoracism. In Chapter 5, I show how such representations of *òyìnbó* map onto local moral economies and political priorities in more detail. In the final section of this chapter, I consider how narratives that explicitly negotiate and defend the concept, even when faced with its inherent shortcomings, illustrate its usefulness primarily in relation to local political agendas.

ÒYÌNBÓ AND THE LOCAL NEGOTIATION OF RACIAL LOGICS

The fourth and final way that the concept of *òyìnbó* is firmly enmeshed in local rationales and cultural logics is in relation to the negotiation of the racial logics that it seeks to represent. In Lagos, as elsewhere, a person's race is widely viewed as an irrefutable biological fact, but examination of how my research participants made – and unmade – racial categories reveals a far more fluid process by which individuals were racialised in the moment, according to a wide range of criteria – phenotypical and material. As such, there is considerable flexibility and malleability to racial concepts as they are deployed in Lagos in different situations for different purposes.

In this section, I look in more detail at the uncertainties and discrepancies that arise during the process of race-making in Lagos as a result of these negotiations. As with all racial concepts, òyìnbó is unable to withstand any form of sustained interrogation; as soon as you start to scratch the surface, the cracks in racial logics soon start to appear. Here I look at two examples of the ways in which the concept of òyìnbó falls short; or rather, two scenarios where the racialisation process is explicitly negotiated because the binary racial logic behind òyìnbó somehow fails to apply. These examples may be thought of as uncertainties or discrepancies, because despite respondents' assertions as to the obviousness of the òyìnbó categorisation, these scenarios commonly prompted them to consider, or re-consider, the racial logics that they were attempting to explain. The first example relates to the negotiated racialisation of individuals of visible dual or multiple heritage; the second to the racial categorisation of African Americans. Through these examples, I illustrate how individuals make and assign to racial categories according to their own prioritisation of aspects of otherness, and importantly, in relation to wider social considerations. As such, these illustrations highlight how the concept of òyìnbó is utilised differently among people in Lagos for their own, predominantly localised political purposes.

Negotiating racialisation through visible multiple heritage

Contemporary folk understandings of 'race mixing' are based on extensive histories of a supposed association between the ideas of race and blood across multiple social contexts. This invocation of linkages between racial categorisations and ideas about genealogical bloodlines dates from at least the sixteenth century, when European discourses of nobility based on blood were repurposed and took on renewed social significance in Spanish colonial contexts (Torres *et al.,* 2012). Across early Iberian-American societies, notions of race were intricately bound up with discourses about blood purity, lineage, honour and nativeness that served as one of multiple mechanisms that sought to create and reinforce social hierarchies (Chaves, 2012). While European colonialism in Africa and Asia produced less extensive racial taxonomies, it was nonetheless influenced by these earlier colonial experiences across the Americas (Bethencourt, 2013), as evidenced through the importation of

Spanish and Portuguese racial vocabulary such as *negro*, *mestizo* and *mulatto*. The colonial power dynamics amidst which references to 'race mixing' became prominent meant that, from the official perspective of Europe's colonial powers at least, the creation of interethnic offspring – pejoratively labelled miscegenation – was variously perceived as a problem to be policed (Stoler, 2010); even while the colonial system itself has been characterised by Young (1995: 166) as a "desiring machine" driven by a nineteenth century "fascination with people having sex – interminable, adulterating, aleatory, illicit, inter-racial sex" (*ibid.,* p.171). The resultant stigmatisation – and worse – of individuals deemed to be the product of racial 'mixing' was driven by the threat this represented to the narratives of purity proffered by dominant groups, which as Young (*ibid.,* p.169) documents, even led some to the conclusion that the British Empire should be dismantled to prevent such "racial fusion". The social impacts of this history continue to play out across the diaspora also, where, as Boakye (2019: 123) argues in the British context, "black-white mixing" continues to be seen as "an affront to the natural order of things", whether manifesting in terms now considered derogatory (such as 'half-caste') or in those that may seem innocuous (such as 'mixed race', which Boakye (*ibid.,* p.42) describes as "a status that challenges concepts of nationhood, race and ancestry while being shackled to those very same ideas").

Yet the social context of contemporary Lagos, while undoubtedly influenced by colonial histories and present-day diaspora politics, is nonetheless also distinctive and not singularly reducible to the impacts of these influences. In Lagos, a significant difference is to be found in the fact that Africanness is the baseline against which difference is measured. On this basis, while dominant narratives in Lagos frequently make reference to blood and mixing in relation to those of visible multiple heritage, these references take on a meaning that, while linked to Euro-American folk understandings of racial categorisation, is not directly translatable due to this distinct difference in emphasis. If an individual's association with blackness continues to be considered negatively, or has a tendency to be exoticised, in diaspora contexts (Boakye, 2019; Dabiri, 2019), an individual's association with *òyìnbó*-ness is not necessarily considered positively in Lagosian ones. Rather, the invocation of racial

categorisation in Lagos speaks to an underlying politics through its utility in creating in-groups and out-groups which are not based solely upon a globalised racial hierarchy, but are actively negotiated in relation to more localised contests around access to various resources. As Hall (2011: 317) argues, "Racial categories matter when they can be called on and developed by people to frame problems, define opponents, and mobilize support. Appeals to race… are always arguments made about the world that are not wholly shared or agreed upon by everyone in a particular milieu." Among my research participants, we can see this in the differing racial logics invoked in the classification of an individual who 'fits' widely held folk conceptualisations of what it means to be 'mixed race' – my son.

The negotiated racial classification of my son, whose father is Yorùbá, revealed a generational divide among my research participants that reflected their differing political priorities. Young and working-age interviewees unanimously – but independently – agreed that my son, aged two years at the time, was *òyìnbó.* This was despite the fact that I consistently introduced my son using his Yorùbá name, and that he often wore locally-tailored African outfits. Here, the racialisation process typically acknowledged his visibly multiple heritage, but respondents nonetheless attached particular meanings to his phenotypic appearance to classify him as *òyìnbó*:

> He is *òyìnbó*! If you check… […] So you look at him, he looks different but what you will know is this is a two-colour baby, either the mother is white or the father is white. […] So he's *òyìnbó*, we call him *òyìnbó* too.
> - Mr Abasiri (Site 2), Sept 2017

Despite drawing on phenotypic 'evidence', however, the process of racialisation in these instances was heavily influenced by respondents' perceptions and assumptions about our family's economic status and lifestyle. It was the interplay between the phenotypic and the material that informed the racialisation process (Saldanha, 2006). For them, my son was probably *òyìnbó* because of his phenotypic features, but definitely so because of his assumed access to wealth. The car I drove, our trips to the UK, our clothes and possessions all drew out, for these Lagosians, that my son and I lived the assumed lifestyle associated with *òyìnbós*. Even when my son once visited the secondary school where I was working wearing locally-made *bùbá* and

ṣòkòtò, students and staff widely admired his outfit, but one teacher commented, "Look at *òyìnbó*!" When I queried this based on his dress, she replied that yes, his outfit was African, "but look at the shoes…" One of the academics at UNILAG, who had not met my son, articulated this here:

> He is *òyìnbó* definitely […] because economically, politically and by orientation, […] he has access to Britain because you are a UK [citizen], probably you have a dual nationalism now, I don't know. But obviously [he] can go to England anytime because of you, I know this.
> - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

For young and working-age Lagosians, my son's classification as *òyìnbó* revealed the political prioritisation of material wealth as a – if not *the* – key indicator of social status. As I explore in more detail in Chapter 5, this closely reflects the highly localised dynamics of the local status economy, whereby wealth – and particularly ostentatious displays of wealth – are of pivotal importance. Designating an individual as *òyìnbó* in this way – even one who ostensibly has a claim to Africanness, such as my son – purposefully creates in-groups and out-groups. Adekoya (2021: 34), who is also of visible multiple heritage, describes his own experiences as an object of Lagosians' racialisation processes thus:

> there is a difference between who Africans consider 'black' and who is considered black here in Britain. In Nigeria, people don't look at me and see a black person. The Nigerian who hasn't had much contact with people of different races looks at me and sees an *òyìnbó* (white person)… The Nigerian with a keener eye for racial subtleties looks at me and sees a mixed-race person… Not someone they would instinctively feel is 'one of us'.

Adekoya (*ibid.,* p.52) goes on to articulate the social significance of racialisation as a proxy for wealth in Lagos, precisely due to the particular importance of wealth, and perceptions of wealth, in this society:

> In my middle-class Lagos secondary school…how adept you were with your fists and mouth were definitely important in determining your place in the (male) pecking order. But more important than that was how much money your parents had. In a country where 70 per cent of the population is poor, money is the main thing on the mind of most Nigerians most of the time.

The majority are wondering how to survive, the rest how to make sure they never become poor, always possible in a country with no social security system. Most Nigerian behaviour is driven by economic calculations. Growing up in Lagos, I learnt very quickly that my assigned spot in the economic hierarchy determined whether I would be treated deferentially, dismissively or somewhere in between…

In my case, my mixed-race features conjured up associations with whiteness in the minds of Nigerians. Everyone knows white people are rich, so the default instinct was to treat me well based on that association. In reality, my family was in the very middle of the economic range, by no means rich and not even upper-middle class, which is the minimum most Nigerians would expect from anyone associated with the wealthy world of whiteness. This general overestimation of my economic status meant I had to engage in significant verbal acrobatics to keep people believing we had more than we actually did…

In an honour culture where your value is not derived automatically from your status as a human being, but from the esteem in which others hold you, the last thing you want to do is disappoint people's expectations. In honour cultures, esteem is subject to constant review. If my family had become poor overnight, my light skin would not have saved me from the contempt Nigeria's middle and upper classes show the country's poor. In Nigeria, race only matters in the context of class.

Adekoya's outline of local racial logics neatly summarises the rationale of the majority of my research participants. Their decision, albeit perhaps a subconscious one, to categorise my son as an *òyìnbó* was based on an understanding of the rules and incentives of the status games that they themselves were involved in playing. But not all of my research participants shared this view. For the older generation at my third research site, my son was categorically not *òyìnbó*. For this group, all aged in their sixties and seventies, the negotiation of the racialisation process prioritised not material wealth, but patrilineality. This represented a generational difference in the way in which racial logics were applied and negotiated, in which the most important factor in the racialisation process for this group was an 'African tradition' whereby children belong to their father. Two of the male respondents referred to this explicitly in relation to my son, as here:

No, because…he is not *òyìnbó* […] When you see him, although he resembles you, but you will see that there are two blood inside him. So with those two blood, and in our own culture here, in our own culture in Africa, it is the men that has the ownership of the children. So, he is our son.
- Mr Faleti (Site 3), May 2017

Here too, the same narratives in relation to bloodlines and 'mixing' were also utilised, but for quite different political purposes. Mrs Ambode, the sole female life history participant, did not speak directly about patrilineality in relation to my son but also maintained that he is not *òyìnbó*, even despite mentioning that *òyìnbó* blood is 'very strong':

> They can't call him *òyìnbó* because he's going to have mixed colour. But if your baby is as white as you are, because usually we learn that the *òyìnbós*, their blood is very strong. […] But your baby cannot be called *òyìnbó* because he is going to have a mixed blood. He is already having mixed blood in him. You can't call him *òyìnbó*.
> - Mrs Ambode (Site 3), May 2017

Although Mrs Ambode does not reference 'African custom' explicitly here, in a different interview she invoked patrilineal logic when recalling a time she worked with an *òyìnbó* woman in the civil service during the 1950s. This woman married a Yorùbá man and they had seven sons, after which her husband decided to take a second wife because he said he wanted a daughter. Mrs Ambode recalled the difficulties the *òyìnbó* woman faced during this time, and said that she eventually left Nigeria. When I asked if the woman went without her children, Mrs Ambode replied: "Of course, they won't allow her to carry [take] them." For the older generation, then, the significance attached to patrilineality outweighed any other social or economic considerations in the racialisation process, revealing an apparent generational divide in the type of status games that individuals play. All now in retirement, for my older research participants there were limited opportunities available for them to be actively involved in the localised status economy based on their ability to procure additional wealth. For this reason, these respondents invoked and prioritised notions of 'African tradition' in their negotiation of the racialisation process because of the continuing status that such traditions enabled them to claim. For male participants, upholding patrilineality contributed to their own social status not just within their household, but within their wider community. But even for Mrs Ambode, who as a woman did not stand to gain status directly from patrilineality in the same way, the idea of upholding 'African tradition' – of successfully negotiating the raising of her own family in line with these ideals – also enabled her to claim

social status on the basis of her achievements in this area. In this way, *òyìnbó* can be seen to be a highly flexible signifier, applied differentially according to an individual's prioritisation of the meanings attached not only to racial categories, but also to the highly localised politics surrounding particular subjects and the ways in which they attempt to negotiate their position within wider social contexts.

Negotiating racialisation through local perceptions of African Americans

A second example of the highly negotiated nature of racial categorisation can be found in narratives regarding the classification of African Americans. These again highlight how the concept of *òyìnbó* is used differentially in Lagos for predominantly local political purposes. I refer here to African Americans specifically, rather than to diasporic Africans generally, as this group represents a particular challenge to the concept of *òyìnbó* because of the dissonance between (some) African Americans' racialised appearance and the constructions of social meaning that research participants tended to attach to this. Within frameworks of global monoracisms, we might expect to find evidence of racial – and a corresponding political – solidarity between those racialised as black in Lagos, and across the diaspora. Chigumadzi's (2019) call for racial 'empathy' between such groups is reflective of a wider impetus in the literature that seeks to reinvigorate pan-Africanism as a result of more widespread recognition of the globalised nature of oppression emanating from the deployment of white supremacy (see Mills, 1997; Pierre, 2013; Andrews, 2021). But in Lagos, African Americans are just as likely to be categorised as *òyìnbós* as not, highlighting the locally embedded nature of the racialisation process itself, which necessarily prioritises the political concerns of communities in Lagos, rather than the racially-based political aspirations of a wider African diaspora. According to these predominantly local racial logics, as I have shown, my research participants most often prioritised an individual's economic status – read through the lens of their own "symbolic universe" (Dikötter, 2015: 2) – in the negotiated process of racial categorisation. *Òyìnbó* in these instances can become a shorthand for, to paraphrase Appiah (1992: 8), 'a foreigner with money.'

Published evidence of this can more readily be found in the context of Ghana, where government policies to encourage the return of Ghanaians from overseas, combined with the marketing of historical sites associated with transatlantic slavery to potential tourists in the US, have resulted in the development of what Schramm (2009: 21) refers to as "an African American diaspora in Africa." Here the concept of *obroni* is similarly stretched and negotiated in an attempt to categorise individuals and groups that do not readily fit the binary racial logics invested in the term. In her study of *Blackness and whiteness in the context of homecoming to Ghana,* Schramm also notes the importance of economic status in the racialisation process, whereby African Americans are often referred to as *obroni* by Ghanaians due to local perceptions that they are "well-off" (*ibid.,* p.19). The fact that this classification can be "extremely distressing to people who have come to Ghana to escape from White rule and fulfil their aspirations of an African...identity" (*ibid.,* p.19) prompted the Ghanaian Ministry of Tourism to implement an educational campaign among Ghanaians to replace usage of the term *obroni* with *Akwaaba Anyemi* – an artificial greeting meaning 'welcome brother or sister' in a combination of two local languages. Yet despite this, the dissonance between African Americans' and Ghanaians' racialised understandings – and their corresponding social expectations – remains a source of antagonism, such that, as Pierre (2013: 177) suggests and Schramm (2009: 19) reports, Ghanaians have a tendency to "get on much better with White people than with African Americans."

So too among my respondents, the differential and inconsistent ascription of *òyìnbó*-ness to African Americans reveals the negotiated nature of both the term and the underlying politics of its usage. Particularly in group settings, hypothetical questions about the categorisation of African Americans prompted explicit negotiations between research participants as to how to define and use the concept of *òyìnbó*, as in these examples:

> NH: So, what for example about African Americans?
>
> Female student: They are *òyìnbós* too.
>
> Male student 1: We call them *òyìnbó* also.

NH: What if they are dark [skinned]?

Male student 1: No, no, we don't call them *òyìnbó*.

Male student 2: No. What she's saying is African Americans…

Male student 1: Yeah?

Male student 2: Eh, who are dark skinned. Do we still refer to them as *òyìnbó*?

Male student 1: Once they know […] you're from there, you're not from Africa…

Female student: In a nut shell, apart from the skin colour, the border around us says you're not an African.
  - Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Similarly, in a student focus group at the senior secondary school:

NH: If somebody is European, and their skin is black, are they *òyìnbó*?

Male student: They call them black, maybe black American.

NH: Black American. But are they *òyìnbó*?

Female student 1: They're not *òyìnbó*.

Translator (in English): Do you call them – what do you call those that have, they have black skin…

Female student 1: Like us.

Translator: …but they're not from Nigeria?

Male student: You can differentiate them from their speech.

Translator: Do you… what do you call them?

Female student 1: Half-caste.

Translator: You call them half-caste?

Female student 1: Yes.

Female student 2: No, they're not half-caste… because, they're not part of us. You know it is when…

Female student 1 (speaking to fellow student): Give it to us fast! [Tell us straight!]

Female student 2: …we cannot call them half-caste, because, for example, if they're Americans, it is when they're Nigeria or any other country and Nigeria together, that's when we can call them half-caste. But now I don't have a specific name to call them than black American, black Europe, black anything.
- SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

Such negotiations also reveal the inadequacy and political nature of the language used in attempts to pin down the messiness of racial concepts (Bethencourt, 2013). Boakye (2019: 394), in his exploration of the varied vocabulary applied to and by black Britons, also illustrates the inadequacy, and recognises the "power paradigms" of racial language. But as with similar terms across the globe, it is the very slipperiness of the term *òyìnbó* – its flexibility and malleability – that underlines its utility in adapting to address individuals' own political imperatives in any given social situation. Whether in the designation of those of visibly multiple heritage, or in the categorisation of African Americans, my research participants rarely questioned their own deployment of racial language and logics. On just one occasion, an interviewee explicitly mentioned his own struggle to reconcile racial language with its supposed realities:

There is a word that we use for children from interracial marriages that some find derogatory. Mulatto. I don't know if you've heard that before. So if you permit me, just for the sake of this, *just for lack of a better word* [emphasis added].
- Dr Chukwu (Site 2), Sept 2017

But mostly, research participants utilised racial concepts, including *òyìnbó*, as a factual representation of their racialised environment. When the neatness of the African-*òyìnbó* binary was challenged by the hypothetical categorisation of African Americans, my research participants never questioned the underlying racial logic, but rather sought an alternative descriptor. In the following examples, respondents appear to almost stumble upon alternative words to describe African Americans when their existing racial vocabulary seems to fall short:

NH: Is there any time a black person can be *òyìnbó*?

Mr A: No, no no no no. Black is black, white is white so there's no two ways about it.

NH: What about black Americans?

Mr A: The black American, we don't call them *òyìnbó* because they are not white… So they don't call the Americans… they call them Americans, they have another…they know they are not white. They call them Negro because they are not totally… very few of them that have that white ehh… they are not even white.
- Mr Adekoya (Site 1), March 2017

Similarly:

Miss A: …the Americans, they are not white. But they are *òyìnbós* as well.

NH: So you can have black *òyìnbós*?

Miss A: Yes. You know, growing up, we used to call them Yankee. Yes. You have the Yankees, and then the *òyìnbós*, so then those from England. We didn't have a lot of Asians around. We had more people from Britain and all that here. And then the Yankee.
- Miss Alatishe (Site 1), March 2017

In both of these examples, the alternative word offered for African Americans – Negro, Yankee – does not seem immediately apparent to either interviewee, more something that is grappled for or stumbled upon. At times during interviews, this search for a different word seemed all the more fervent, as if ignorance of the correct word – or indeed, an inability to supply a word that covered the particular circumstance we were discussing – would have been a personal embarrassment. In this way, the seeming obviousness and irrefutability of race causes individuals to vehemently defend its flawed logics, even – and perhaps especially – when explicitly faced with its own internal inconsistencies. Race-making seems so natural, so basic that an inability to actively apply racial logics to any given situation, no matter how far reality deviates from pre-determined categories, makes the individual appear lacking rather than the flawed system they are attempting to apply. In this way, my research participants were active agents in the racialisation process, not just in the ways that they understood and attached localised meaning to physical difference, but also in the varying ways in which they flexed and applied racial concepts –

including *òyìnbó* – in negotiation with each other, and in conversation with their others, dependent on the specifics of each situation.

CONCLUSIONS

The idea of *òyìnbó* helps individuals to make sense and create order within their social world, a world that holds Africans – in the abstract – and Africanness at its centre. In this chapter, I have looked at the ways in which *òyìnbó* operates as a highly geographically specific racial concept, evident in how people in Lagos actively reproduce difference in ways that are significantly related to their own social and moral imperatives, even while they are operating within wider global power structures. Here, the geographic specificity of race-making is important; when Lagosians are the reference population, it is clear that the concept of *òyìnbó* is not simply part of an imposed racial hierarchy that unproblematically manifests Euro-American (or alternative) racial ideologies, wholesale, onto this part of Africa. Rather, people in Lagos are themselves active agents in creating and upholding sometimes complex understandings of difference, based on their own circumstances, and filtered through local understandings that shape conceptualisations of a social and moral universe. This geography matters when we consider who, how and why we make race.

Reading this geographically specific racial politics on its own terms, I have argued that the primary work that the concept of *òyìnbó* does in practice is to create a binary racial distinction between those marked as African, and everybody else. Yet, as I have shown, *òyìnbós* do not unproblematically occupy space towards the top of a global racial hierarchy in Lagos; rather, their position in Lagos is actually far more ambivalent and constantly negotiated. While by definition, *òyìnbó* is always exclusionary – defined by what it is not – this ambivalence is evident when the term is applied to those categorised as African in Lagos, where the concept of *òyìnbó* can be the basis for both compliments and for teasing. As such, *òyìnbó* is not just a noun categorising difference, but a process through which individuals can seek difference and create and re-affirm a sense of Africanness among themselves. In addition,

through the examples of the negotiated racialisation of those of visibly multiple heritage and of African Americans, I have illustrated the flexibility, malleability and negotiated nature of the designation of *òyìnbó*, and highlighted the predominantly local politics attached to its usage. Building upon this, in the next chapter I look in more detail at how imaginaries of *òyìnbós* are related to specific local values and concerns in Lagos, and show how these ideas about *òyìnbós* are constructed and evaluated according to a predominantly local moral economy.

CHAPTER FIVE:
Òyìnbós imagined

[Our actions] are justified by the belief that our status game is not an act of shared imagination that's local to our kin, but real. And if our criteria for claiming status are real, that means *everyone* should abide by them. We have a spiteful and snobbish habit of judging all people by our rules, whether they're playing with us or not. It's by this logic that an American can look down on a Chinese person who spits in a street, whilst a Japanese person can look down on that American for blowing their nose.
- Will Storr, *The Status Game,* 2021 p.159-60

In Africa, there is – and it is hard to admit this – a reverence for whiteness. Africans have been brainwashed into believing that anything white is better, anything American is better. Even their black people are better.
- Alexis Sinduhije, *Welcome to America,* 1998 p.4

In this chapter I illustrate the argument that race-making is necessarily geographically specific by looking in more detail at what that geographic specificity looks like in the particular context of Lagos. I do this through consideration of how *òyìnbós* are imagined. I outline how attitudes to *òyìnbós* in Lagos tend to be characterised by high levels of ambivalence, as attributes attached to *òyìnbós* that are generally considered positively – their association with wealth, for example – exist alongside attributes attached to *òyìnbós* that are generally considered negatively – such as their ignorance of social obligations. I suggest that this ambivalence stems from the fact that, as journalist Will Storr suggests in the first epigraph above, any attributes attached to *òyìnbós* are predominantly evaluated in line with local values and social priorities. As such, in order to understand the political nature of racialisation processes it is necessary to look explicitly at their relationship to the wider social dynamics in any given locality. In this chapter, I illustrate how ideas about *òyìnbós* intersect with the particular nature of localised status economies in Lagos, which Lentz (1998: 52) refers to as navigating different

"registers of power" and Storr (2021) terms as playing "status games". Ideas about *òyìnbós* feature in these games in complex ways: offering status in some ways, but not in others. Such an analysis of the geographical specificity of race-making challenges arguments premised upon global monoracisms that suggest, as in the second epigraph above from Burundian journalist and politician Alexis Sinduhije, that Africans have been "brainwashed" into a misplaced reverence for whiteness. In this chapter I counter this argument by showing that *òyìnbós* do not always assume a position of automatic power and privilege in Lagos; they are not universally feted as individuals, and nor is their culture and practice unquestioningly celebrated. Rather, I veer away from universality and towards particularity, or singularity (Jazeel, 2019), in considering how dominant narratives among Lagosians imagine *òyìnbós,* and importantly, how these narratives evaluate *òyìnbós* according to local political priorities. It is the very ambivalence that characterises how *òyìnbós* are imagined, then, that reveals that race-making practices in Lagos can, at times, actively work to provincialise whiteness.

This chapter therefore discusses in more detail how imaginaries of *òyìnbós* relate to social values and local concerns in Lagos. I start by showing the crucial interlinkages between money, power and status in Lagos, and in the next section below, I outline the significance of wealth accumulation in my research participants' narratives. Based on this, I argue that *òyìnbós* retain a great deal of power and garner respect due to their association with wealth. However, this is not the whole story, as *òyìnbós* are also often derided for failing to understand social expectations around the appropriate redistribution of wealth, and I explore related perceptions of *òyìnbós* as selfish and exploitative. I then go on to look at forms of cultural expression and practice associated with *òyìnbós* that are often evaluated positively, and as such, can be used to signal status in Lagos, such as fluency in European languages, particular accents in speech, and knowledge of *òyìnbós*. Lastly, I counter these with examples of the ways in which other attributes attached to *òyìnbós* can be considered culturally inferior, particularly in relation to food and to dress. I argue that the elements of *òyìnbó* practice that can be used to signal status in Lagos are not randomly selected, but intersect with the local status economy in ways that create

social capital for individuals and groups able to demonstrate their competence in these. Throughout this chapter then, I demonstrate that any value attached to constructions of *òyìnbós* in Lagos is not primarily related to a global racial hierarchy borne of the histories, geographies or theoretical approaches of elsewhere. At times, race-making practices in Lagos feed into and reproduce these hegemonic structures, but at other times local understandings and productions of difference work to challenge and subvert these same structures. Either way, people in Lagos are active agents in these race-making practices, whereby constructions of *òyìnbó* are not universally celebratory nor randomly ambivalent, but deliberately recreated in service of particular social and political purposes.

WEALTH AND NARRATIVES OF STRUGGLE IN LAGOS

One of the key lessons that I suggest can be drawn from this thesis is that while the pursuit of racial equity requires a global effort, the effective content of this will be geographically specific. In order to understand the geographically specific purposes of race-making, then, it is necessary to map the meanings attached to the production of race onto the broad parameters of local status games. In Lagos, the cornerstone of many status games is money. This is, of course, reflected in a range of scholarship on Nigeria more generally. From Karin Barber's (1982: 434) observation that "Wealth, as a means of self-aggrandisement, has always been an attainable and a supremely desirable goal for Yorùbá people", to Daniel Jordan Smith's (2017: 212) more recent assertion that Nigerians "expect, admire, and envy the conspicuously ostentatious...because most ordinary Nigerians want a lot of money and the things that it can buy." Focusing on Nigeria's oil boom during the 1970s, Apter (2005: 215) notes common "signs of success" at the time, which included: "private jets, mansions, expensive lace, and displays of extravagant largesse, as in the "spraying" of guests with new naira notes..." Nigerian self-help author, Jerry K. Bankole (2012: 53), goes further in stating: "We have no respect for life when it comes to money" because "It doesn't matter how; we must just amass so much wealth. Since money equals life here, we gasp for it like a man would gasp for life, when he is drowning." Adekoya (2021: 52) summarises the impact of this situation thus: "money is the main

thing on the mind of most Nigerians most of the time." As such, in contemporary Lagos, economic status continues to be the most socially significant factor in the playing of multiple status games. In making this argument, I do not claim that Lagos is entirely unique in the central role that wealth plays within the local status economy. Rather, I seek to emphasise that it is necessary to understand the *particular local dynamics* of status games – wherever they are played – in order to situate the meanings attached to race-making practices.

The reason that money has such profound significance in Lagos is because, while individuals in other societies may play multiple games to earn status – through educational achievements, eco-credentials, parenting skills or business acumen, for example – wealth alone has increasingly subsumed virtually all other routes to achieve social status in Lagos. Guyer (1995) notes this transition across Africa, where historically wealth was primarily invested in people, but is now increasingly invested in things. As such, money is often a prerequisite to even access games in order to play for status across what Lentz (1998: 52) refers to as different "registers of power", such as through traditional office. Indeed, from its roots in local religion, chieftaincy itself has become commodified because wealth is often necessary to obtain such titles (Matory, 1993). Educational qualifications too, once important in conferring influence and status in Nigeria, are increasingly gained via financial payments for admissions and exam passes (Smith, 2007; Nzeadibe *et al.,* 2022). Similarly, money drives politics at all levels in Nigeria, reflecting Chabal and Daloz's (1999: 154) suggestion that elections in Africa can more usefully be analysed "in terms of material exchange rather than in terms of ideological rationality". Even getting your name on the ballot in Nigeria can cost millions of naira (Smith, 2007), so politicians necessarily have to recoup their losses once in office, and continue spending in order to remain there (Barber, 1982). Pierce (2016: 156) reports that prevailing in the Nigerian justice system is also often "a matter of marshalling a variety of resources, of which the "true" facts of the case are often less important than money and political standing." In personal relationships too, increasing amounts of money are necessary for marriage – described by Bayart (2009: 240) as "the *sine qua non* of social recognition." Monga (2016: 41) confirms that "if the woman is

desired for her beauty, the African "man as object" is also sought after for his purchasing power". Substantial amounts of cash are additionally required for successful parenting, befitting burials for elders – in fact, for virtually all rites of passage, which in themselves are key symbols of status in Lagos (Smith, 2017).

As such, when I asked research participants how success is defined and measured in Lagos, the answer I received, across all three research sites, was near unanimous and unambiguous:

> Nigerians have… well, they want to live big. In this country, when you are successful you want people to know. Then you are riding a big car, you have about so many cars in your compound, so many wives and concubines. […] This [Olubukola] Saraki, the senate president, he has so many houses in Lagos here, in Britain, in America. You know he is from Kwara State, he has so many houses there. And yet now he is the senate president, free food, free everything. Where could I take all this money to? And he is educated-o. But their mentality, that is it. To carry so much money er… to behave as… I don't know whether you read the papers, some people bury money in the graveyard!
> - Mrs Ambode (Site 3), June 2017

Similarly:

> NH: How is success measured in Nigeria, then?
>
> Prof D: I will start with my understanding of the Australian dream. I mean, I know the Australians believe that you are successful only when you have your house near the waters, […] unlike in Nigeria where success is you have a lot of money, and you have many wives. Beautiful wives, not just wives. So you must have a lot of money, you must build houses, not one or two. In Nigeria you can have forty, you can have a hundred. And so you measure success, success in Nigeria in terms of money.
> - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Also:

> Female student: Like in our situation, like the stage we are now, we really, really cherish money more than our lives, or more than anything that is around us.
>
> Other students: Yes! Yes!

Male student: Some mothers sell their child, maybe for 50 million naira [£130,000]. I'm not selling my child, some mother, sell their child for 50 million naira.

Female student: Yes… some thinks, like some parents, Nigerian parent they think money solves every problem that they have. Money always solve, that's the belief of everybody in general. Money solves the problem that you have. If you have money, your *wahala* [troubles] is solved.
                            - SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

Underlying the drive for material accumulation among many people in Lagos is a framing of local status games in terms of success in the face of 'struggle'. Narratives of struggle were common among my research participants, and indeed, for many Nigerians this struggle is very real. Around one in three Nigerians – more than seventy million people – live on less than US$1.90 per day; and unlike most countries in the world today, this number continues to rise (World Data Lab, 2022). Across Africa, the challenges of surviving in what Mbembe (2002: 271) has termed a "situation of chronic scarcity" have been well documented. Monga (2016: 5), for example, describes how, "Arbitrary prohibitions, great humiliations, little vexations, and a thousand forms of torture make up the daily life of each Cameroonian citizen." So too, Thieme (2013: 400) reports on the "struggle against the hardships of everyday life" amidst Nairobi's "hustle economy". From the perspective of researchers in Africa, Guyer (2017: 345) notes that many contributors to Wale Adebanwi's (2017) edited volume on *The political economy of everyday life in Africa* are "explicitly working in conditions they depict as turmoil, chaos, violence, instability, or simply mundane emergent unpredictability and/or failure of any coherent system to actually work in the way it purports to do". Yet beyond the material challenges of the everyday, Dixon (1991: 68) suggests that this sense of 'struggle' relates also to a longer-term perspective in which, for the Yorùbá in particular, "there is considerable concern with achievement during life, and with moving from obscurity at the beginning of life to public renown by the end of it." He elaborates: "By far the strongest desire [among the Yorùbá], and one which gives meaning to life and underpin[s] a person's actions in the world, is to be remembered by one's descendants (and ideally by the wider community) as someone who achieved something in life. The pinnacle of life (a time of "struggle") is realised at an

individual's funeral, when his qualities and achievements – the educated children, titles, houses, factories, businesses, and the like that a successful individual accumulates – are enumerated. They serve as a testament to the ability to succeed in life" (*ibid.,* p.67).

For this reason, narratives of struggle are not only linked to economic circumstances. Thieme (2013: 406) also describes Nairobi's informal settlements as contexts "where it was assumed that everyone was *struggling,* despite variations in income levels and heterogeneous modes of managing budgets, savings, and life prospects" [emphasis in original] to the point where, "It was not acceptable to no longer be struggling". So too, many of my research participants conveyed that they were struggling even when they were relatively wealthy. Reports that respondents were 'not [financially] comfortable', or that 'we are [just] managing' were as usual among those with stable employment, children in fee-paying schools and perhaps one or two cars, as they were among those with much less. Indeed, narratives of struggle are also relayed more widely in Lagos by those that are already, by any standard, extremely wealthy. For example, in 2015 the multi-millionaire musician Peter Okoye, best known as former member of the band P-Square, responded to a police campaign that advised not flaunting wealth in order to reduce the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime. Posting a photo of five luxury cars parked outside his mansion, Okoye wrote on Instagram: "So if you work your ass off and buy all dis cars will you hide them in your garage? Pls feel free to show off what the good lord has blessed you with. *Because e no easy*" [emphasis added].

A final, important common feature of many status games in Lagos, to which Okoye also alludes in his call to "show off" wealth, is the necessarily ostentatious nature of symbols of success. As Chabal and Daloz (1999: 160) note, "Ostentation remains, and is likely to remain, one of the chief political virtues in Africa… Far from becoming less prevalent, the present norm of success seems in practice to be pushing politicians into an ever more frantic search for the means of patrimonial ostentation." In contemporary Lagos, ostentatious displays of wealth – large parties, generous gifts, financial support for kin – are central features of local status games, to the point

where Chabal and Daloz (*ibid.,* p.42) argue that they are "intrinsic to the existing socio-political order" on the basis that, "Not to display wealth opulently would be tantamount to an admission of low collective self-esteem." The social expectation that wealth will be shared in these ways is shared by the general population, such that Smith (2017: 18) argues that this type of conspicuous consumption could be more accurately described as "conspicuous redistribution." Assigning these behaviours to greed, however, is to interpret local status games and their associated economics via external criteria, for profligate spending in Lagos is not primarily about "instant gratification" (Mayer, 2016: 22). Rather, as Apter (2005: 39) argues, it is a "rational investment in a mobile fund of favors, obligations, and networks… [that is] not a matter of moral compromise but of survival, obligation and advancement." As such, despite a tendency to focus on the illicit financial flows of Nigeria's super-rich minority (e.g., Igwe, 2021), it is important to bear in mind that this desire for, and performance of wealth permeates Lagosian society at all levels (Joseph, 1987: 7). As such, individuals from all walks of life most commonly operate within status games that reward ostentatious symbols of success, leading to what Apter (2005: 39) has characterised as a "highly volatile prestige economy," heavily linked to *perceptions* of wealth as well as to wealth itself. Nwaubani (2010) notes that this, "Nigerian obsession with image often approaches neurotic proportions." In Lagos, this commonly manifests in the fact that, as Smith (2017: 20) notes, "aspirations for money [in Nigeria] remain deeply tied to highly valued social and cultural projects", and results in sometimes extraordinary levels of ostentation, which work to re-assert patrons' legitimacy in a system of social hierarchy that is periodically susceptible to wholesale change (Chabal & Daloz, 1999: xx).

ÒYÌNBÓS AND IMAGINARIES OF WEALTH

It is within the context of this highly competitive status economy, heavily premised on perceptions of wealth, that people in Lagos add meaning to their constructions of *òyìnbó*. *Òyìnbós,* as a Lagosian power construct, by definition operate within these highly localised understandings of wealth and struggle. But *perceptions* of wealth are necessarily relative, and ideas about *òyìnbó* wealth are therefore related to

individuals' own financial status and social standing. As such, the significance of *òyìnbó* status has to be negotiated within the social hierarchy of each particular scenario. Much of the social status attached to *òyìnbós*, then, is dependent upon the relative socio-economic circumstances of those present, and their understanding of *òyìnbó* levels of wealth in relation to their own. In other words, in Lagos *òyìnbós* are placed, individually and as trope, within the hierarchy of local status games – and the result is largely dependent upon who is playing. Generally speaking, extremely wealthy Lagosians are unlikely to attach the same significance to *òyìnbó*-ness as less wealthy Lagosians, reflecting the relative security of the wealthy in the upper reaches of the local status economy – as well as within materialistic status games at broader scales. I explore examples of this and consider its implications in more detail in Chapter 8. But, as I go on to show later in this chapter, while wealth is of central importance to many status games in Lagos, it is not the only indicator of status within these. Other factors can also influence social hierarchies in Lagos, but importantly, ideas about *òyìnbós* can continue to impact the localised status economy even in the physical absence of racialised difference.

As the majority of Lagosians are not wealthy, however, dominant constructions of *òyìnbó* in Lagos partially define *òyìnbó*-ness by an assumption of surplus wealth, and a consequent lack of struggle. Central to these understandings of *òyìnbós* is not just that they "have money" – a phrase widely used in Lagos – but that they have *money to spare*. As Nyamnjoh and Page (2002: 614) found among Cameroonian youth, "whites" are "people whose problem should be that of disposing of excess wealth, not of earning wealth. And any white who is reluctant to live up to this representation has no business to be white." In Lagos, so strong was the association between *òyìnbós* and wealth among the majority of my research participants that this wealth was rarely mentioned explicitly in interviews; rather it formed the implicit basis upon which the majority of my daily interactions were framed and understood. The following example from my field notes illustrates this:

> In Spar, my groceries have been rung through the check-out when I get my debit card out to pay. "Sorry," the assistant tells me, "POS is not working." Most of my shopping is already in carrier bags. Exasperated, I ask why she

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didn't tell me I could only pay in cash before we started. The cashier, a young woman, smiles and says, "*Òyìnbós* always pay cash." The bill is ₦17,000 [£44] and luckily, I have enough cash to pay it. When I take the bills out of my wallet, the cashier nods her head in satisfaction.
- Field notes, 9 June 2017

The association between whiteness and wealth has been similarly documented in other contexts. In South America, for example, Bonnett (2002: 85) notes that "whiteness has come to be associated in Peru not simply with the ideals and norms of the old elite but with…consumerism. Whiteness is connoted as a lifestyle, symbolically tied to the pleasures of a consumption-led identity (pleasures such as freedom and choice)." So too, Appiah (1992: 162) references the significance, indeed primacy, of material wealth in the construction of the African-*òyìnbó* binary in a discussion of Kwame Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, in which he claims: "It was natural for [Nkrumah] to speak of "our" country anywhere in (black) Africa. At the level of generality at which Africans are opposed to Europeans, it is easy to persuade us that we have similarities: most of "us" are black, most of "them" white; we are ex-subjects, they are ex-masters; we are or were recently "traditional", they are "modern"; we are "communitarian", they are "individualistic"; and so on. That these observations are, by and large, neither very true nor very clear does not stop them from being mobilised to differentiate, in part because, in the end, *"they" are mostly quite rich and "we" are mostly very poor*" [emphasis added].

Similarly, perceptions of *òyìnbó* wealth and lifestyles in Lagos are based on the material circumstances in which people commonly encounter *òyìnbós*, either in reality or in the media, and on a factual – if generalised – understanding of disparities in the relative wealth between African countries and other regions of the world economy. *Òyìnbós* in Lagos, whatever their reason for being in the city, are – almost without exception – relatively wealthy, often extremely so in comparison with local living standards. As such, based on their own experiences, the Lagosians who contributed to this study – none of whom were extraordinarily wealthy – rarely distinguished between different economic subsets of *òyìnbós,* as Ghanaians and Ugandans distinguish between 'development Whites' (business people) and 'Peace Corps Whites' (volunteers or tourists) (Pierre, 2013: 79). Within the local status

economy, the dominant narrative of *òyìnbó*-as-wealthy appeared to be a reasonable assumption – albeit a generalisation – based upon a range of social evidence. This assumption features heavily in dominant narratives amongst those who are not themselves exceptionally wealthy. Adekoya (2021: 52), for example, writes of his childhood in Lagos: "In my case, my mixed-race features conjured up associations with whiteness in the minds of Nigerians. *Everyone knows white people are rich*, so the default instinct was to treat me well based on that association" [emphasis added].

ÒYÌNBÓS AND THE ABSENCE OF STRUGGLE

On this basis, dominant narratives among my research participants conveyed a perception that a key consequence of *òyìnbó* wealth is an associated absence of struggle. As such, this perceived absence of struggle forms a defining feature of *òyìnbós* as a category, as described here:

> Female student: To us… errm… we feel, we feel *òyìnbós* are very, very much more special… than us.
>
> Female student 2: Yes.
>
> Female student: We think they have more than what we have. Like, and, in some Nigerian thoughts, *òyìnbós* don't use to… don't suffer. They only think they enjoy. Like the way we watch some movies, they [*òyìnbós*] do enjoying, enjoying, enjoying. You don't see them in… all this… in *abule* [small village].
> - SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

The notion that *òyìnbós* are removed from the need to struggle – an important narrative through which the Yorùbá in particular tend to portray and understand their own lives (Dixon, 1991) – was further evidenced by my respondents' references to other aspects of *òyìnbós*' perceived lifestyles. As Bonnett (2002) also documents in Peru, elements of such a "consumption-led" lifestyle (*ibid.,* p.85) include the availability of – and financial investment in – leisure time, and the high quality of possessions. Both of these elements contribute to making what my research participants often described as an "attractive lifestyle", and I consider each in turn.

The first element of this lifestyle is the availability and ability to invest in leisure activities. This formed the basis of contrasts between what my research participants often framed as a 'typical' *òyìnbó* lifestyle, characterised by the inclusion of leisure time, and a 'typical' African one, where opportunities for leisure activities were considered far fewer. Indeed, the basic availability of forms of recreation in "*òyìnbó* countries" was itself sometimes contrasted with a lack of recreation facilities in Lagos, as here:

> Their [*òyìnbó*] country is better than Nigeria, […] they have places like emm… places they go […] just to enjoy themselves. Like places like an amusement park and all those other places… or maybe on weekends, just to relax and enjoy themselves.
> - Photo project transcript 6 (Site 1), March 2017

Such positive perceptions of leisure time and facilities were common in my data, even if the specific choices that *òyìnbós* make as to how to use their leisure time were not ones that my respondents would necessarily make in the same way. Swimming is one example of this. While living in Festac Town, my swimming lengths of a local hotel's swimming pool generated stares from hotel staff and guests alike. A similar perception of the unusual nature of *òyìnbós*' leisure activities is conveyed in the following quotation:

> When you go to Bar Beach, you know these *òyìnbó*, they like exercise. They go there to swim, with their family, with their wives and some other…. Even, you know, we, we the black people, we don't normally like these er… swimming pants. But when you go there, you saw these *òyìnbó* people in their swimming er… ahhh! See *òyìnbó*! Their swimming pants and their swimming something…
> - Mr Olaiya (Site 3), May 2017

In Lagos, swimming (outside of one's employment) is mainly a pursuit of the relatively wealthy who can access pools, and even in these instances swimming for exercise rather than for fun remains rare. Recreational exercise in general, although an increasing trend in Lagos, is not a common pursuit among those that work long hours and commute long distances, leaving them with little time or energy for exercise outside of their daily activities. While this may be changing, the perception

that *òyìnbós* have the time, energy and money for gym memberships and other forms of exercise represents a significant difference to the lifestyle most people in Lagos live. Many of my research participants, particularly at sites 1 and 2, aspired to this type of perceived *òyìnbó* lifestyle, then, without necessarily seeking to incorporate the same leisure choices into it.

A second feature of the way my research participants commonly portrayed *òyìnbó* lifestyles related to the assumed quality of the products *òyìnbós* use. Within these narratives, *òyìnbós*' perceived wealth was once again evident in the idea that they commonly discard products that are still of good quality, even after some use. Many people in Lagos experience this first-hand through the thriving second-hand market for a wide variety of items – from car parts and electronics to clothes and shoes – originating in non-African countries. One postgraduate student recalled "scavenging" such items directly from *òyìnbó* homes on an estate during her childhood:

> Female student: [W]e want to go, where emm... white people dispose their, their stuff, their trash, they used to call it *òyìnbó dirty*, that is the dumping place of the white man. There are always scavengers who wants to go there every time, because they're going to find valuable stuff. They're going to find toys, they're going to find shoes, good shoes and so the general assumption, popular assumption is that, if you can find your way into the white neighbourhood [...], you're going to come out with value stuff too.
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

The association of *òyìnbó* possessions and products with quality in Lagos, and the widely available second-hand market for such items, is reflected in the fact that the Yorùbá word *tokunbo*, literally meaning "from overseas", is often used as slang specifically for second-hand products, especially cars and electronics. Central to this perception is the idea that *òyìnbós* only use high quality items, and that they have the ability to be able to replace these before they are worn out. Yet importantly, the association of *òyìnbós* with quality among my research participants was not purely based on reverence for *òyìnbós*. Rather, it was based on respondents' actual experience with products from different parts of the world, which reinforced notions of *òyìnbós,* wealth and quality in context-specific ways. Advertisements for second-hand products from abroad, for example, often specify where the products originate,

Figure 5: A shop front in Lagos specifies that it stocks "UK used" products (Photo by author, August 2017).

reflecting the fact that not all foreign imports are considered of equal quality (Figure 5). Postgraduate students similarly confirmed that they differentiate *between* products from abroad, explaining that new products available to the mass market in Lagos are often from China, and that while new Chinese products are more affordable, they are usually of poorer quality than used products imported from Europe or the US. I asked the group whether Chinese products were *òyìnbó* products too, based on the definition they had given me earlier, and received this clarification:

> Female student: Okay, there are classes to this *òyìnbó* thing. […] So, if you give me a US product, second hand, fairly used, and you give me a brand new Chinese or let's say, Indian product, I would not even think it twice.
>
> NH: Is that based on your experience?
>
> Female student: Yes! For example, Nike. I do a lot of sports. […] The tennis shoes from China and the tennis shoes from America are two different things. The Chinese ones are actually very hard, the sole. They actually affect your heel.
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

In these ways then, a range of information, derived from day to day experiences, feeds into dominant narratives in Lagos that portray *òyìnbós* as both wealthy and without struggle. This information is filtered, as Said (1978: 6) suggests, through specific, local cultural lenses to create an internally consistent "system of

knowledge" about *òyìnbós*, which feeds into common racialised perceptions about their lives and behaviours. This knowledge about *òyìnbós* is in turn evaluated according to predominantly localised social priorities and cultural understandings. In short, ideas about *òyìnbós* necessarily map onto the local status economy in Lagos in complex ways. In relation to wealth and the associated lack of struggle supposed to come from this wealth, my respondents' imaginaries of *òyìnbós* tended to result in the positioning of those racialised as non-African towards the top of the social status hierarchy. Due to the importance of wealth to multiple status games in Lagos, it was this association more than any other that contributed to the ways in which *òyìnbós* were understood and enacted in Lagos.

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION AND SOCIAL OBLIGATIONS

If *òyìnbós* are imagined to rank highly in the local status economy because of their assumed wealth and enviable material lifestyle, however, this is not the whole story. My research participants also revealed a wariness of *òyìnbós*, and at times were overtly critical, because of the perception that *òyìnbós* commonly fail to understand other important aspects of local status games, particularly with regard to social obligations around the appropriate use and redistribution of wealth. Literature relating to multiple African contexts illustrates that successful negotiation of the rules surrounding wealth redistribution is in many ways as important for an individual's social status as the accumulation of wealth itself. As Chabal (2009: 81) writes: "status is not attached to wealth per se but to its visible use, particularly its appropriate distribution… This means that those who succeed away from home, particularly abroad, are still expected to meet local normative standards if they are to have their achievements endorsed by the community and turned into… social capital." Adekoya (2021: 122) also reports the significant respect his father was able to earn in Lagos through his "benefactor status" among extended kin. Similarly, in northern Ghana, Lentz (1998: 51) notes that, "the claim to some degree of redistribution is inherent in all popular images of good wealth and legitimate power." My research participants often referred to such redistribution as making a

"contribution to the community", and such contributions were explicitly mentioned as a prerequisite to being considered successful, as here:

> Well, success is measured in our community by wealth and how you have contributed to the community to develop and grow. If a man is bankrupt then he cannot do anything at all to help the community to develop. He is not considered a successful man. A man should be able to contribute to the development of the community and he should be able to have a good family, children, the wife, and even the extended family, he should be able to protect them.
> - Mr Afolayan (Site 3), July 2017

For my interviewees, this sense of community was something that defined their own social experience, both as a resource that could be called upon from others and, by contributing to the community themselves, as a source of social status. One postgraduate focus group participant described it as a "sense of brotherhood" whereby resources are shared, even among those who have little. He explained this further:

> Male student: You know, she's poor, [I] am also poor, okay but I'll be so happy to share my worth with her, you know […] You can visit me without giving a call or without booking appointment. You can just bump on me. I'll welcome you. Whatever I have for food, we share.
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

At the same time, being in a position to distribute wealth and support others in these ways was an avenue to increased social status and a source of significant prestige. One life history participant explained that he was the only child of his own mother, but that he had many half-siblings. That he had been able to support these siblings in various ways was relayed to me as an achievement. He described his role in the family thus:

> We take ourself as one […] all my children, my brothers and sisters, I thank God I was an instrument for their growth. I see to the education of some, I see to the one who say he doesn't want to go to school, he want to do all this artisans, mechanic and so on. I was an instrument to almost all of them…
> - Mr Faleti (Site 3), May 2017

In this way, dominant attitudes to, and expectations around, appropriate wealth distribution are related to the symbolism of predominantly localised status games. This is reflective of a political system that tends to privilege communalism over individualism, and informal over formal political and economic channels. Chabal and Daloz (1999: xix) argue that African societies are characterised by "a high level of government and administrative inefficiency, a lack of institutionalization, a general disregard for the rules of the formal political and economic sectors, and a universal resort to personal(ized) and vertical solutions to societal problems". It is this personalisation of politics – both at the national and local levels – that underpins the social system in Lagos, such that "the overall aim of politics is to affect the nature of such personal relations" (*ibid.* p. 158). Wealth redistribution is a central tenet of this system, reinforcing the imperative to accumulate wealth in the first place, such that in Bayart's (2009: 242) words, "a man of power who is able to amass and redistribute wealth becomes a 'man of honour'".

In Lagos, then, the legitimate exercise of power rests on an implicit mutual agreement between patrons and clients – at all levels of society – that wealth, and other resources, will be redistributed via extended social networks in exchange for continued support. According to Chabal and Daloz (1999: 107): "Rank, prestige and, above all, legitimacy will be proportional to the extension of the clientelistic circle." While social incentives for redistribution, therefore, are significant, it is also a social obligation to do so. Individual patrons can be flattered or shamed into sharing their wealth, and in extreme cases, witchcraft invoked or violence used by clients to achieve this objective (Bayart, 2009: 233). In many ways, the unequal and hierarchical nature of wealth redistribution via this method privileges patrons over clients (Smith, 2007), although the power of clients in awarding status to patrons should also not be overlooked. Dixon (1991: 73), for example, suggests that ""the people's court" is a recurrent nightmare for those in positions of authority in Nigeria." Similarly, Fagbule and Fawehinmi (2021: 81) report that historically "ritual suicide" was a "constitutional remedy for unpopular Yoruba rulers". Yet as one person's patron is another's client, virtually everybody in Lagos is positioned within

the patron-client system, and importantly therefore, individuals tend to understand wealth distribution – and play status games – primarily by this logic.

ÒYÌNBÓ SELFISHNESS AND EXPLOITATION

A failure to actively seek and to redistribute wealth, therefore, leads to reduced ranking within local status games, including for *òyìnbós*, who are evaluated by the same social logics. Those who do not meet their obligations in this way can face considerable antagonism and social suspicion. Pierre (2013: 171) documents a similar dynamic in Ghana, whereby Ghanaian "expectations of diaspora Blacks" include that "they should feel a responsibility for the economic wellbeing of their "brothers" and "sisters""; a responsibility that, if eschewed, can lead to "acrimony" (*ibid.,* p.175). One life history participant described this with reference to a biblical story:

> There are cases of people who are… the story of that rich man in the Bible, who has a brother. And Lazarus [the brother, is] a beggar sitting down under his table. When the [rich] man dies he was in hell. He was not in hell because he was rich, he was in hell because he don't use his wealth to better the lot of common people. Lazarus suffered! He was eating the crumbs that the dogs were eating under [the] table and the dogs are licking his wounds, and he [the rich man] didn't support Lazarus with money to bring him to a better place position in life.
> - Mr Afolayan (Site 3), July 2017

More generally, those who are deemed not generous enough within their social networks are considered either inept at wealth accumulation, or selfish (Chabal & Daloz, 1999), often leading individuals to opaque accounts of their own finances to friends and family (Thieme, 2013: 401) in order to reduce the social expectation of redistribution. As *òyìnbós* are often associated with wealth in abundance, any seeming reluctance to share their own good fortune therefore generates similar suspicion and fuels perceptions of *òyìnbó* selfishness. For some of my respondents, this was broached as if *òyìnbós* commonly failed to understand such social obligations but could be taught or coaxed into doing so, as in this advice that was directed at me:

> And as our wife in Nigeria, if there's a little you can contribute more, you do. Even in the family circle, you do. When the country move forward, everybody will enjoy, not one person enjoying the wealth of the whole country alone.
> - Mr Abasiri (Site 2), Sept 2017

But more commonly, my research participants recognised *òyìnbó* behaviours regarding wealth redistribution, or lack thereof, as selfishness more explicitly, which they roundly condemned:

> Like what our father, former President Olusegun Obasanjo, was saying the other day: "Look, all these white people! Some of you people just came here to come and siphon our money." Not doing anything to this country, which is not good. Anywhere you are is your home. You make it here, you make the environment comfortable for people. It's not just that I need this money, so I make this money and I can just go out.
> - Mr Olaiya (Site 3), May 2017

At times, perceptions of *òyìnbó* wealth and selfishness were directly contrasted with respondents' collective self-perception of being generous, even if this generosity was constrained by financial circumstance:

> Male student: If I have a brother, I am doing so well. I'll not let my brother go down. Will I? I won't. He can be going down, I'll pull him… But, look at it, we're way… back. The truth is, if the white people don't [want to] do anything, they don't do [it]. […] However, when it comes to giving grants or doing those kinds of things, it is when you have so much that you can give out. As [I] am sitting down right now, I cannot give a grant to somebody to go and study in a secondary school because I don't have [the means].
> - Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

These sentiments were extended by some research participants to the extent that *òyìnbós* were considered exploitative. At the individual level, examples of this included *òyìnbós* over-working domestic staff for low pay. Key to this framing of *òyìnbós'* tendency to exploit others was not necessarily the long hours that were expected, as such working conditions are common in Lagos, but that *òyìnbós* could afford to pay their staff better for such work, but declined to do so. More broadly, at times interviewees identified the wider relationship between Nigeria and non-African countries as one deliberately based on inequity, particularly in relation to economics, as secondary students and postgraduate students describe in these examples:

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Male student: In Nigeria, our country, we help, we use to help all those UK, umm… US people. We sell our petrol, our resources to them. But when it's now comes to our own turn, for them to help us, for our resources, they now increase their money, their dollar. They increase their money, so that we… it will be difficult for us… because they look and saw us as if we're very rich.

Female student: They're not ready to give something, unless we help them to do something. […] They love umm… anything that is resources which is not their own. They will want to get it.
         - SS1 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

Similarly:

Female student: They are [the] product of our backwardness.

Male student: I think I agree with what she said. It's the effect of long years of colonisation. Over time, we've come to believe that […] the whites are more superior. That we need, we always like to seek for their approval in whatever we do. […] Over the years they've ensured that ummm… that we keep on, you know, running back to them in terms of advice or whatever, that we keep on relying… even economically. There are lots of institution that is being set up like all these umm… all these international banks and all of that, so that to keep Africans perpetually in poverty. So that we keep relying on them. And most of all these […] aids are not really aids. They're kind of chains to tie us…
         - Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Critical narratives such as these were not reserved by my research participants only for their *òyìnbós*. Viewing constructions of *òyìnbó* as one part of a broader social environment, however, highlights the necessarily ambivalent nature of these constructions. Due to the central importance of wealth accumulation in Lagos, and the perception that *òyìnbós* commonly fail to adhere to conventions around the appropriate redistribution of wealth, we can see how *òyìnbós* can at times be evaluated positively amidst the social kaleidoscope of status and power in Lagos, but at other times they can be derided. Similarly, *everyone* can be evaluated positively at times but at other times critiqued, dependent upon their actions and the implications of these for an individual's own interests. As Pierce (2016) has argued, such narratives of social critique are never purely statements of objective fact, but are always a means of seeking to affect the discursive domain of politics itself. In this way, the highly ambivalent position of *òyìnbós* in Lagos illustrates the importance of understanding the geographical specificity of race-making. To do so, we must

understand the moral economy and social priorities of the people who are producing racialised constructs, and consider their reasons for doing so. Moving on from *òyìnbós'* key association with wealth in Lagos, I now consider two further examples of how imaginaries of *òyìnbós* are constructed and evaluated in line with local expectations. The first example looks at other ways in which attributes widely attached to *òyìnbós* are generally evaluated positively, and illustrates the political utility of this evaluation as a means of signalling a higher social status in Lagos. The second examines attributes attached to *òyìnbós* that my research participants commonly considered to be inferior to their framing of their own cultural practice, demonstrating again how imaginaries of *òyìnbós* are not universally celebrated in Lagos, but are always subject to ongoing social negotiation.

ÒYÌNBÓS AND SIGNALLING STATUS IN LAGOS

In this section I consider how *òyìnbós'* association with specific cultural norms and practices, which I refer to collectively as *worldliness,* tend to be evaluated positively in Lagos and as such, the adoption of which can be important signifiers of social status among local people. Under the umbrella of worldliness, I include particular forms of language and accent, and knowledge about *òyìnbós* and their countries. The status conferred by each of these areas is in many ways linked again to wealth. Yet while particular elements of *òyìnbó* culture and practice – such as their languages – can be used to confer significant social status in Lagos, other aspects of *òyìnbó* culture and practice – such as their food and dress – are widely considered inferior to what my research participants portrayed as African alternatives. As such, these examples demonstrate how localised forms of status-striving in Lagos link to globalised status games in important ways. Aspects of *òyìnbó* culture and practice are not emulated or celebrated in Lagos at random. As such, adoption of *òyìnbó* practices – such as obtaining fluency in European languages – does not necessarily reflect an unquestioning reverence of *òyìnbós* or their culture, as arguments premised upon global monoracisms might suggest (e.g., Chigumadzi, 2019). As Bonnett (2002: 93) documents in the case of Japanese "absorption of Western social habits and technologies" – including "approaches to warfare and political

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governance" – the "principal aim was not to achieve assimilation into the West but Japanese independence." Similarly, attributes attached to *òyìnbós* that confer social status in Lagos are also those that are most likely to assist and advance individuals in global interactions, as I explore in Chapter 8. Despite this, however, the meanings – and social status – attached to them resonate most profoundly with a primarily local, rather than an international, audience. As Green (2019: 372) argues, all elite groups adopt distinguishing symbols of power, and since the eighteenth century across west Africa, "ruling classes [have] created a growing distance between themselves and their subjects" through "importing outside clothing, education and religious practice". This practice, now on a wider scale, continues today. Now, I take two of the elements that constitute worldliness in turn – language, and knowledge about *òyìnbós* – to illustrate how these imaginaries of *òyìnbó* culture and practice can signal status.

Language and accent

From Wali's (1963) seminal call for the development of literatures in African languages to Ngũgĩ's (1986: xiv) statement of "farewell to English as a vehicle for any of my writings", the status and usage of European languages in Africa has long been controversial. Irele (2001: xii) claims the "flourishing of literature by Africans writing in the European languages is one of the significant cultural events of our time", and notes that – in literature at least – African languages do "not appear to have received recognition as a determinant in the contemporary political, social, and cultural experience of the continent" (*ibid.,* p.5). Against this backdrop, while the 1979 constitution recognises Hausa, Igbo, Yorùbá and English as official languages in Nigeria, English is most commonly used in official functions including government, the judiciary, education, business and literature (Gut, 2015). By extension, Nigerian English has become the lingua franca of the educated elite, in part due to the lack of an ethnically neutral indigenous language. It is in this context that my respondents commonly associated competence in the English language with being highly educated, and with wealth and power (Adegbija, 2000). As Bankole (2012: 78) writes: "In the Anglophone nations of Africa, your ability to speak good English is what

measures your intelligence, and significance." Similarly, the Nigerian author and publisher Chika Onyeani (2006: 85) suggests that, "If you want your children to be successful, you have to send them to British Schools… The highest honor is accorded to them if they could speak the language with [a] British or French accent. It would even accord them higher dignity if they let everyone know that they had forgotten how to speak their native tongue… As a victim of my own irrational ignorance and stupidity, I have two children who have no knowledge of my culture or my language."

The association of the English language with 'civilisation' and 'development' was common among interviewees across my three research sites. For example:

> NH: What's different about growing up today from when you were growing up?
>
> Mr F: The difference is much. You know, the effect of civilisation now has brought things very wide. The gap is very wide, because in those days, what did we know? We don't know anything […] But now, with the effect of civilisation, so many things has developed. […] We call this age, it's a jet age. Even before we go to school nowadays, we begin to speak English. But in those days, we don't even start speaking English until we are in that… I think Standard 3.
> - Mr Faleti (Site 3), May 2017

Similarly:

> Female student: Most parent they don't want their children to speak Yorùbá language anymore. They want the English language.
>
> NH: Why is that?
>
> Female student [*whispering*]: Because they see it as…
>
> Male student: Because they see the Yorùbá language as a taboo.
>
> NH: And do you know why?
>
> Male student: Like abomination.
> - SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

In addition to the status conferred by fluency in English, some research participants also attached significance to an individual's accent in spoken English. As discussed in Chapter 4, being perceived as feigning an *òyìnbó* accent can result in ridicule. But my respondents also frequently mentioned accent in spoken English as one of the key defining features of *òyìnbós,* and those accents viewed as genuinely *òyìnbó* were commonly viewed positively, as here:

> I'm a social linguist, I'm in language and I've been studying English all my life. I should be able to change my accent at any time I wish. So if I want to speak like a Nigerian, I want you to know that I'm Nigerian, I will speak with a…the proper accent. But because I know I'm in an academic place and the people expect certain level of competence, so I change my accent to British accent. So everybody, "Ohhh! You have good accent, eh!"
> - Dr Ntekim-Rex (Site 2), Sept 2017

But my data also reveal a more complicated picture in terms of the local meaning and value attached to language and accent, as not all of my respondents supported the idea that the English language dominates in Lagos both in practice and in terms of pride. Indeed, of approximately five hundred languages spoken in Nigeria (Blench, 2012), English is only spoken with any fluency by between ten and thirty percent of the population (Connell, 2006). So too English-based Nigerian Pidgin is only spoken by around thirty percent of Nigerians, and has no official language status in the country (*ibid.*). In addition, according to Blench (2012: v), the number of Nigerians speaking African languages – particularly Hausa and Yorùbá – rather than English as a second language, is significant and increasing. Several research participants, and especially Yorùbá speakers, conveyed pride in their language as a cornerstone of their identity, as in this unprompted assertion at the beginning of an interview:

> I'm Yorùbá by tribe. And my language is pure Yorùbá. Speaking of English is a borrowed language.
> - Mrs Adebayo (Site 2), Sept 2017

This sentiment is echoed in Nigerian author Yemisí Aríbisálà's (2016: 22) claim the Yorùbá language is "more sophisticated than English (which is the child of rape of Frenchmen and Germans) and superior to French, which is by far superior to English." During fieldwork, the continuing importance of African languages in Lagos

was evident in the fact that while many Lagosians speak excellent English, I met few people who were born and raised in Nigeria that were not also fluent in at least one African language – and for many Yorùbá speakers in particular, this remained their primary language.

Within this more complex language landscape, I suggest that the continuing status of the English language in Nigeria cannot solely be attributed to, as Chigumadzi (2019:3) suggests, "white racial capitalism and coloniality". At the same time, the continuing use and promotion of African languages – and hybrids such as Nigerian Pidgin – does not necessarily reflect an explicitly counter-hegemonic desire to address the "adverse consequence of the imposition of English in Nigeria" (Fasan, 2015: 8). While the link between *òyìnbó* languages, accents and notions of competence in Lagos are manifestations of the colonial legacy (Memmi, 1990; Olaniyan, 2000), it is important not to overlook the contemporary significance attached to language and accent in relation to the local status economy. For my research participants, the symbolic meaning attached to language resonated most profoundly with a Lagosian, rather than a broader international, audience. In this way, competency in English continues to be an important indicator of social class in Nigeria (Adegbija, 2000), and linguistic links to the world beyond Africa also represent cultural capital in the Bourdieusian sense, due in part to low levels of faith in the national education system (Smith, 2007). But this aspect of *òyìnbó* culture and practice is not emulated or celebrated in Lagos at random, and continuing usage of European languages in Nigeria does not necessarily reflect an unquestioning reverence of *òyìnbós* or their culture. Rather, gaining proficiency in foreign languages – and not only those originating in Europe – is most often viewed as a means of enhancing educational credentials and business opportunities.

In this way, while the majority of my research participants' primary language was indigenous to Nigeria, foreign languages continued to be important as a potential link to non-African countries and peoples in the opportunities that this may afford. Pidgin English was initially adopted in this vein as a trading language in coastal areas of what was to become Nigeria several centuries before colonisation (Fasan, 2015). As a

consequence, Green (2019: 378) reports that African nobles were increasingly sending their children to be educated in Europe from the late seventeenth century, where "One of the key skills that African traders and rulers hoped their children would learn through this education was proficiency in the European languages needed to trade successfully. Like elites in all societies, they hoped that by expanding their skillset they would enable their children to reap greater profits in business and political negotiations with the outside world." Several of my research participants reported that they would like their children to speak "like an *òyìnbó*" in order to improve their employment prospects. We see this same trend more recently in the fact that increasing numbers of Nigerians are also opting to learn Chinese languages (Olayoku, 2022). In this way, *òyìnbó* languages and accents were not necessarily prized because they carry any intrinsic value. Proficiency in English, therefore, is valued in Lagos not simply because it is a relic of Nigeria's colonial history, but in an increasingly competitive global job market, it is also a highly marketable skill. A professor of English at UNILAG, who has also studied the Yorùbá language, made this point rather more forcefully:

> [*Òyìnbós*] came all over from England to discover other parts of the world because of the development of science and technology. And so, they came to Africa […] And if you know the status of English in the world today, then someone like me won't regret to have… to be part of the *òyìnbó*, if I'm transferring the meaning, because of the way I use the language to speak and to write.
>   - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Knowledge of òyìnbós

Linked to language and accent, the second aspect of worldliness I consider is knowledge of *òyìnbós* and their countries. Several of my research participants were keen to emphasise this knowledge, and indicated that having it differentiated them from most other Lagosians:

> But one quite interesting thing is that as children we could not differentiate between all the different ethnic groups, that is the white person from England, the white person from America, and the white person from Australia, the white person from Canada, and incidentally, and curiously, the

Lebanese, the Libyan, or any other person who has the so-called white colour. So-called in the sense that, the variations are not differentiated by many of us. And up to today, you wouldn't believe it that some Nigerians, some adults, cannot differentiate between Americans and um… British, Canadians and Australians. But because I've travelled to all these places, when I saw an Australian, I will know.
- Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

In a life history interview, another respondent spent some time illustrating the extent of his knowledge in this area as a means of positioning himself in relation to his community, and it was a subject to which he repeatedly returned:

Some people… do not even know the difference between an English woman and a French woman, as I've said… But from their language, their pronunciation of certain words… An English man speaking English is quite different from Americans. Because Americans *roooll* [word emphasised] their language, when they're speaking like this, they always add *rrr* or something like that to their language. And even their spellings of course, like 'labour' or something like that, it is quite different…
- Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

As with language and accent, this type of knowledge works as a method of stratifying Lagosian society, predicated as it is on a level of education that many Lagosians do not possess, and signifying a level of global exposure possessed by even fewer. It links also to geographical mobility, and particularly intercontinental mobility, itself a reflection of the social stratification of Lagosian society. Only a small number (less than ten percent) of the people that I interviewed had ever made such a journey, although more had travelled to neighbouring countries in Africa. The majority of secondary school students I spoke to had never left Lagos State, and some rarely left Lagos Island – an area in central Lagos of less than ten square kilometres. But foregrounding the meanings attached to knowledge of *òyìnbós* and their countries in the local and cultural vernacular of Lagos illustrates how the concept of *òyìnbó* is commonly operationally divorced from *òyìnbós* themselves, as individuals or as a collective. The meanings attached to knowledge about *òyìnbós* in Lagos resonate most profoundly with a local audience.

When considering how elements of worldliness signal social status in Lagos, it is important to realise that when individuals seek to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of *òyìnbós,* this is not necessarily an uncritical reflection of reverence for *òyìnbós.* Rather, this works to signify educational attainment, and in the process lays claim to a form of social status that is predominantly locally derived. It lays down a baseline of understanding upon which social interactions can take place, and in the case of interactions with *òyìnbós,* it is a method of building rapport. The possession of similar geographical knowledge can feature in the status games of places outside of Lagos too; a point made by a professor at UNILAG when he noted that "many British people cannot differentiate a Nigerian from a Kenyan". As such, knowledge of *òyìnbós,* just as mastery of *òyìnbó* languages in Lagos, can be seen as a resource at the local level. Lisa Heldke (2013: 400) describes as "cultural colonialism" practices whereby those in the global North "regard members of a colonized culture as "resources," sources of materials to be extracted to enhance one's own life." While global power differentials mean that these practices are not equivalent, they equally should not preclude recognition of the fact that similar ideas about *òyìnbós* can also be used as a resource within communities in Lagos. *Òyìnbós* are (usually) exotic in Lagos. Their difference often appears strange and noteworthy, and mastery of this difference, the ability to interpret the meanings and understand the vernacular of elsewhere is a skill, particularly celebrated within Lagos' more highly educated social circles. Analyses that interpret these aspects of worldliness, tightly interlinked and mutually reinforcing as they are, as simplistic reverence for *òyìnbós* overlook crucial, locally based perspectives and the meanings attached to them. While these elements of worldliness, and their relationship to *òyìnbó* culture, may reflect and work to reinforce existing global inequalities that privilege *òyìnbós,* other narratives among my research participants were more overtly critical of imaginaries of *òyìnbó* culture and practice. In the next section, I consider critiques of *òyìnbó* food and dress, which together provide examples of how my respondents did not portray *òyìnbós* as universally culturally superior. It is again by understanding these critiques in relation to local social values, reflecting the geographical specificity of the race-making process itself, that we can more effectively explain the ambivalence with which *òyìnbós* tend to be imagined in Lagos.

Although food and dress codes associated with *òyìnbós* were the cultural practices most commonly critiqued by my research participants, this disparagement formed part of a broader pattern of negative evaluation of aspects of *òyìnbó* lifestyles, and particularly of perceived *òyìnbó* influences in Lagos. For example, respondents also lamented *òyìnbó* influence on music and on rites of passage such as engagements and weddings. Some blamed *òyìnbó* influence for perceived social ills, explaining that "Western education" was responsible for Nigerians' involvement in internet fraud scams, and for the introduction of cocaine and its associated "mental problems". Many people in Lagos appeared to also be vigilant for ways in which *òyìnbós* may be attempting to dupe them with substandard products. I was undertaking participant observation in classrooms in November 2016 when social media was full of warnings about 'nylon rice', where Nigerians were apparently being tricked into buying 20kg bags of 'rice' that appeared to be normal, but upon placing the product into water for cooking the 'rice' would float. Only then was it obvious that the product was in fact small pieces of nylon. One school teacher reiterated the idea – common on social media platforms – that nylon rice was being imported from China. For many people in Lagos, who take pride in their street smarts and survival mindset (see Chapter 6), to be duped in such a way – by *òyìnbós* or otherwise – inflicts a particular wound on the collective psyche, hence the social media furore nylon rice created. All of these examples, however, are indicative of the ways in which *òyìnbó* imaginaries are heavily related to local value systems in ways that continually reinforce and recentre particular social and moral understandings of the world. In this *òyìnbós* are not respected or admired due to anything intrinsically 'good' or 'superior' about them, but rather are constantly re-evaluated according to common locally-based goals, values and social priorities. In relation to food and dress, as I show here, *òyìnbós* invariably fall short.

Food

When I meet new people in Lagos and they learn that my husband is Yorùbá, they usually greet me again, now as their wife, and then invariably ask about food. Do I eat *eba*? Can I cook *amala*? Smith (2007: 57) documents the same linkage in south-eastern Nigeria between in-law status and the ability to consume "the local food most Igbos seem to assume will be least palatable for Westerners." Among my research participants, there was a clear distinction between "our food" and *òyìnbó* food. A life history participant made this distinction when describing a time when his niece, who lives in Europe, came to visit:

> She tried to eat our food, but most days she likes cornflakes… that food that relate to the white people. Not necessarily our…*gaàrí*, *eba*, *fufu*.
> - Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

Just as with the racialised *òyìnbó*-African binary, in this conceptualisation there is no middle ground between what constitutes "our food" and *òyìnbó* food, and in this way, food too is racialised and reinforces the categorisation of *òyìnbó* as otherness. Part of this differentiation is reflected in language, as there is no easy translation or direct equivalent of popular Nigerian dishes – *egusi, fufu, moin-moin* – in English. Similarly, many *òyìnbó* foodstuffs are not simple to translate into African languages. For instance, Fakinlede's (2003) *Yorùbá Modern Practical Dictionary* does not include a translation for the cornflakes mentioned in the quotation above. In a practical sense too, Nigerian meals often incorporate specific ingredients or preparations that are not widely available in *òyìnbó* countries, producing the growth of specialised markets trading in Nigerian food imports across the diaspora. So despite the dramatic dietary variations that you might expect in a country the size of Nigeria, the idea that there is some sort of underlying unity to "our food" was commonplace among my research participants. As food writer Aríbisálà (2016: 25) explains of Nigerian food: "We are talking about a form that is played with, recreated, enhanced and reduced daily by millions of people in a vast eclectic entity that feels more like a continent than a country. And yet that form is so similar in particular aspects, we immediately recognise it wherever we see it. The number of ingredients available to

create our soup is undocumented, but the oil, flavour enhancers, leaves, herbs and meats are similar. The accompanying gari, fufu and pounded yam are well loved. The mode of starting with one ingredient and ending with another is near rote." For Aríbisálà, this leads to the passionate yet tautological assertion that food "is not Nigerian if we do not recognise it as Nigerian" (*ibid.,* p.22).

On this basis, in a postgraduate focus group at UNILAG, students highlighted an ability to "handle" African food as an indicator of whether an individual is *òyìnbó*, explaining that an *òyìnbó* would be excused from eating certain foods because they are "not used to our own normative system." The notion of a normative food system illustrates my research participants' perception of the distinction between "our food" and *òyìnbó* foods as being based not only on superficial differences in foodstuffs or ingredients, but on the complexities of preparing food, cooking, eating and on the meanings attached to, and the power and politics involved in, the whole process (Srinivas, 2006; Williams-Forson, 2010; Barthes, 2013). In his ethnography of the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea, Bashkow (2006) documents how Orokaiva view their starch-based staple foods as heavy, hard and strong, in contrast to "whitemen's foods" that are light, wet and weak. My research participants tended to draw similar comparisons. For many of them, a meal was valued when it contained substantial ingredients (starches, meat or fish), was served in abundance, and left them feeling full. *Òyìnbó* food – one interviewee reported that *òyìnbós* like to eat salad, for example – was characterised by being insubstantial, small in portion, and consequently unsatisfying.

Underlying this distinction is an understanding that producing Nigerian food can be extremely labour intensive, costly and highly skilled, and that these elements are central to its symbolic value. For example, as Aríbisálà (2016: 20) warns when making soup: "Using diced meat could be misinterpreted as putting on airs when you should just admit that you cannot afford meat. If you served soup with diced anything to guests, they would immediately begin to wonder whether you were trying to hide something. And even if there was nothing to hide and the soup was just meant to be fashionable, the guest would be convinced it was the worst sort of affectation." The

ability to prepare such dishes in an appropriate way is a highly gendered skill that is valued through its inherent linkage to the idea of an essence of Africanness (Balogun, 2012: 366). By contrast, *òyìnbó* foods are associated with convenience, and although they can be costly to buy in Lagos (especially if imported), their preparation is viewed as comparatively unskilled and their consumption is largely unceremonial. For example:

> Male student: …some of us don't like eating very hard meal, like *eba,* pounded yam, *amala* and all of those stuff. Probably because they, err… there's no time to do all of that. And then we just want to take something […] very fast snacks and everything. And then someone comes to your room and see that your room is covered with… "Ahh! You na *òyìnbó* oo!" That you're a white man, you're *òyìnbó*. You know, he calls you [that] because of the kind of food you're eating.
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

In this way, interpretations of *òyìnbó* foods among my research participants were commonly divorced of any external social context. Even those who had lived abroad and highlighted their knowledge of *òyìnbó* languages and cultures never mentioned any distinctions within the category of *òyìnbó* food. Lack of differentiation at the global level – such as between national or regional cuisines – was also reflected at the local level, such as the influence of seasonality or the use of food to mark particular rites of passage. For many interviewees, this may reflect the type of *òyìnbó* food most commonly available in Lagos (fast food), so that when this food is viewed within the context of a rich local food culture it appears simplistic and pedestrian. By contrast, the fact that local people are steeped within the complexities of their own food system and view this as something to celebrate was illustrated across each of my research sites. In one focus group, secondary students spent some time trying to educate me about local delicacies. In another focus group, one student lamented the influence of *òyìnbó* food culture on the local cuisine:

> Female student: …we Nigerians don't value what we have at all. We feel what we have is like not enough for us, to make use of what we want. Instead we cherish what other countries, like other white people have. Eh… because white people love eating salad and emm… ketchup and chips and chicken every day, morning and night. Here, we now forget our pounded yam and *eba*

[...] We will be eating what... what we don't really like. But because we see others do and we're not contented with what we have...
- SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

The idea that people in Lagos don't really like *òyìnbó* food is not borne out by the growth of international fast food chains (KFC, Domino's, Ocean Basket), Nigerian fast food companies (Mega Chicken, Mr Bigg's), and an increasingly eclectic mix of foreign dining options across the city. Part of the appeal of this type of food lies in its convenience (Balogun, 2012), but its growing availability and strong brand presence attracts consumers from an increasing range of middle- to high-income backgrounds. Certainly, *òyìnbó* food is not the exclusive preserve of the ultra-wealthy. Yet it does retain a certain appeal due to the fact that it is often costly in comparison with local alternatives, and as such eating at restaurants serving *òyìnbó* food can signal social prestige associated with wealth (Yan, 2013). But while *òyìnbó* food has its place in Lagos, in comparison with other local options it is still primarily viewed, in its totality, as a lesser alternative. As Aríbisálà (2016: 12-13) explains:

> The relationship of the nouveau middle-to-upper-income-earning Nigerian and their food is a mixture of love, snobbery, the passion that results from the snobbery, and social repression... Nigerians will sit in restaurants in every part of the world, in Lagos, and in Abuja, and eat sushi, fugu, Peruvian ceviche and piure. They will eat it all with an open mind, a fierce worldliness and a sexy congeniality, and then they will go home and bring out the amala and ewedu and crown the night with sighing, with tears in their eyes, and noses weeping beads of sweat.

A similar sentiment was echoed by an academic at UNILAG:

> Prof D: ...probably because I'm used to African food, I love African food. I don't like white food. I was in Australia for five years, and there was no meal that I took without bread! Nicola, let me tell you, I don't like bread to today! [PD and NH laugh]
>
> NH: You were hungry, huh?
>
> Prof D: No, I liked it... have you seen pounded yam?
>
> NH: Yes.

Prof D: I am the best pounded yam in Nigeria today! [NH laughs] So, I love African food. That is the best. You have a lot of food in your diet. I love the white system of taking a bit of potato, take a bit of bread, take a bit of that and so on. But as an African, as a Nigerian, I want to see the heavy pounded yam…

   - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Dress

In a similar way, the complexity and underlying power dynamics related to *òyìnbó* imaginaries in terms of dress illustrate how these are also connected to predominantly locally-derived social understandings and expectations. Unlike food, however, my research participants did not tend to view dress as such an absolute marker of difference, but perceptions of *òyìnbó* dress nevertheless provide a second example of the ways in which practices associated with *òyìnbós* are widely viewed as inferior in Lagos. While it may be rare for an *òyìnbó* to eat "our food" as a local person would be expected to, *òyìnbós* are thought to more easily wear African dress, although they are often still celebrated for doing so. Nobody suggested to me that an *òyìnbó* could be distinguished solely by what they were wearing. This largely results from the fact that the *òyìnbó*-African binary distinction in dress that, in the past at least, has formed the focus of African nationalist movements (Byfield, 2004) is in actuality far more fluid. Some items of foreign clothing – particularly styles of formal wear originating in Europe – are sometimes still referred to as *òyìnbó* clothes in Lagos, but many items originating outside of Nigeria are not (only) associated with *òyìnbós*. For many people in Lagos – particularly younger generations – jeans and t-shirts, for example, tend to be viewed as part of a sort of global attire, and form a choice of expression that easily fits in local wardrobes alongside *sòkòtò, agbádá* or *bùbá*. At the same time, individual items of clothing can blur easy categorisations, as local fashion experiments with cuts and styles made fashionable elsewhere (Perani & Wolff, 1999), imported cloth has long been finished to suit local aesthetics (Byfield, 2004), and foreign fashion too incorporates African pieces and prints. But throughout my discussions with interviewees about dress, the idea of an African-*òyìnbó* binary in terms of *dress code* remained implicit. In this, it was failure to adhere to an appropriate code that often led research participants to view *òyìnbó* dress as

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inappropriate. This code traversal could be in terms of the ways in which *òyìnbós* – as individuals or as a collective – tend to dress in particular circumstances. At other times, research participants reported that African codes of appropriate dress were breached through the nature or usage of *òyìnbó* clothes as worn by other Lagosians. In both of these ways then, *òyìnbó* dress codes were often viewed as different to African ones, so that although non-African dress clearly has a place in Lagos, the meanings attached to it can be complex.

In Lagos' highly competitive status economy, aesthetic expression through dress carries a particular social significance (Perani & Wolff, 1999). The Yorùbá saying *iri ni si ni isonilojo* encapsulates this, meaning that one's appearance determines the degree of respect one receives (quoted in Byfield, 2004). In a social environment where status is heavily linked to ostentatious visual displays, for middle- and high-income Lagosians in particular, dress is an important way of conveying wealth and power. It is also a key way of expressing and reinforcing social connections (Chiavetta, 2008), and therefore plays a role in maintaining and extending patron-client networks. Cloth type, style and tailoring all feed into the social meanings attached to an outfit, and the expense of all three is an indicator of prestige. As Marion Johnson has described, demand for cloth among the Yorùbá elite "depends partly on fashion, partly on political and religious attitudes, and very little on price; indeed, any attempt to reduce prices might prove self-defeating, since part of the demand depends on the expensiveness of the product" (quoted in Perani & Wolff, 1999: 171). It is in contrast to this, then, that *òyìnbó* dress can appear overly informal and casual:

> Their [*òyìnbó*] dresses is very simple, very, very simple, but very clean. Very, very simple. Some of them comes with white and khaki, white and khaki. It'll be the same type, white and khaki. Nigerians, now, we are flashy. [...] We are mindful of coming to the office. [*Òyìnbós* wear] simple shirt, tie and simple coat. They can wear the same coat over and over, except when we're having special occasion. [...] But we, we will dress fabulously sometimes, or gorgeously to the office.
> - Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

Òyìnbós' lack of understanding of the ornate and elaborate nature of appropriate dress can therefore be interpreted as a form of social slight. Being perceived as dressing down for an occasion diminishes the level of respect given to that event by the wearer, and by extension indicates the esteem in which other attendees and the host or organisers are held. This is particularly the case due to *òyìnbós'* association with money, as outlined above, as their simple or casual dress cannot be explained due to lack of funds. *Òyìnbós'* tendency to informal dress in places and spaces that many local people tend to view as more formal settings – such as wearing shorts and flip-flops in hotels or in shopping centres – reinforces a general perception of *òyìnbós* as commonly being under-dressed. These sorts of social faux pas can extend to cause more serious offence to some observers due to inappropriate coverage of the body, particularly for women. Balogun's (2012: 371-2) work on Nigerian beauty pageants highlights regional, religious and cultural aversion to nudity, which is considered both "un-African" and "abusive to [TV] viewers". On the same basis, Nigerian women have in the past publicly removed items of clothing to make political statements, indicating a loss of respect for authority figures (Byfield, 2004: 49).

Aside from the dress choices made by *òyìnbós* for themselves, my research participants were at times also critical of other Lagosians' use of *òyìnbó* dress. Colloquially in Lagos now, "*òyìnbó* dress" tends to refer to formal shirts, trousers, suit jackets and ties. Historically in early colonial Nigeria, these formal clothes were widely adopted among literate Lagosians, whose occupations – and subsequent social mobility – resulted from a missionary education and a willingness to emulate, to some degree, British dress styles (Wass, 1979). But while foreign dress in Lagos was associated with increasing wealth, education and Christianity in the early 1900s, rising nationalist sentiments across Nigeria after World War II saw growing numbers of educated Lagosians opt instead for indigenous outfits (*ibid.*). In contemporary Lagos, both foreign and indigenous formal dress styles are common in professional environments. Yet the idea that formal *òyìnbó* clothes are not appropriate for Lagos' tropical climate was raised by several interviewees. For example:

> That particular appearance that are associated with *òyìnbós*, and when
> people appear in such a way, they say they are *òyìnbós*. When you are so

cumbersome, always in coat, with your tie on, people say, "Eh come! You always want to appear like an *òyìnbó* man every time. Can't you relax a little bit, put on your traditional dress and feel a little bit free?" So, even the code of dressing, dressing code, is separate for *òyìnbós*.
  - Mr Lawal (Site 1), Mar 2017

Similarly, in a postgraduate focus group, students referred to Fela Kuti's 1973 song *Gentleman* while explaining that *òyìnbó* dress is "not our concept". The track is taken from an album of the same name, the cover artwork of which depicts a monkey wearing a suit, and the second verse of the song includes the lyrics:

Africa hot, I like am so/ I know what to wear, but my friends don't know/ Him put him socks, him put him shoe/ Him put him pant, him put him singlet/ Him put him trouser, him put him shirt/ Him put him tie, him put him coat/ Him come cover all with him hat/ Him be gentleman, him go sweat, all over/ Him go faint right down, him go smell like shit/ Him go piss for body, him no go know/ Me I no be gentleman like that
  - Fela Kuti (1973)

Kuti's political statements regarding dress reflect early Yorùbá nationalist sentiment that viewed Africans wearing European dress as symbolic of "mental bondage" (Byfield, 2004: 35). Indeed, Kuti's mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the feminist political activist, refused to wear European dress in order to illustrate her allegiance to the Yorùbá market women represented by the Abeokuta Women's Union that she helped to found. For this reason, from the late 1940s Ransome-Kuti was only ever photographed in Yorùbá attire (*ibid.*). Given her upper-middle class background and the fact she was educated in Britain, Ransome-Kuti's decision to eschew foreign dress was a political statement that sought to bridge a class divide between herself and those women she sought to mobilise and represent, as much as it resonated with the anti-colonial Yorùbá nationalism of the time. As Allman (2004) argues, even during the colonial period, the European-African dress binary invoked by Yorùbá nationalists was an oversimplification. European dress in Africa was never *only* "evidence of European hegemony over African populations" (*ibid.,* p.6), for the meanings attached to dress are never universal, but always interpreted in relation to local circumstance and power structures. Yet the idea that *òyìnbó* dress is

inappropriate for African climates, or that it represents a form of continuing colonial repression, can still be found in some local narratives today.

Concern about foreign influence on a perceived traditional culture – such as in relation to dress or to food – is illustrative of wider nationalist sentiment that seeks to celebrate and reinforce a particular sense of cultural identity. Lamentations about a loss of culture, or descriptions of *òyìnbó* clothes as polluting local culture, for example, were also raised by my research participants, as here:

> Female student: Nigerians, we don't value our culture, and foreigners appear to value our culture more than we do.
>
> NH: So what does that mean, your culture…?
>
> Female student: …Nigeria as a whole, especially in Lagos state, you see how people dress. They will like to dress like foreigners. And they don't know that those cloth that they're wearing is for the foreigners when they are having refreshments. Maybe at the beach […] But in Nigeria here, you will see them wearing it to party, wearing it all around. They would… half of their body would be naked. Naked. Unlike before, in Nigeria, especially in Yorùbá culture, you see a good woman or a good man. For a woman, put on *iro* and *buba* with *gele*, head gear, a man with a cap, matchable with the *agbada* […] But now, everybody have neglected it, unless they're having party.
> - SS2 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

The invocation of a 'good' person as linked to appropriate dress reinforces the importance of the visual in creating – and policing – a sense of identity and community. However, in this quotation this is also related specifically to *Yorùbá culture*. As such, *òyìnbó* dress should not be seen purely in opposition to African dress as a whole, but rather as part of a more crowded landscape of identity politics and expression. Historically, for example, Yorùbá women's nationalism was questioned for adopting a style of dress, fashionable in the 1930s, that originated in Ghana, known as "going fantee" (Byfield, 2004). In contemporary Lagos too, dress can reflect a wide range of social connections and identities. The choice of expression through dress can be seen to reflect the complexities of contemporary ethnic identity politics, which retains particular significance in the allocation of resources via the Nigerian state (Bayart, 2009). Indeed, the assertion of ethnic identities via modes

of dress illustrates the complexities of local power structures in Lagos, in which *òyìnbó* influence is just one factor of many. It also highlights the ways in which the politics of dress can be appropriated and manipulated, and the ways in which fashions change over the longer term, in service to and response to these changing power dynamics (see Wass, 1979). It is the recognition of this complexity and the underlying power dynamics that illustrates how imaginaries of *òyìnbós* related to dress are connected primarily to predominantly localised status games in Lagos. Evaluations of the appropriateness of *òyìnbó* dress – for individuals or *òyìnbós* as a collective – are related to local value systems in ways that continually reinforce geographically specific social and moral understandings of the world. The consequent disparagement of *òyìnbó* behaviours – such as through food or dress – illustrates again the highly ambivalent responses that the construct of *òyìnbó* can elicit.

CONCLUSIONS

When my research participants portrayed *òyìnbós*, then, they re-created well-worn ideas about otherness and evaluated these in relation to their own social worlds and status economy. This process necessarily centred Africans and Africanness, as imaginaries of *òyìnbós* were primarily related to local understandings, priorities and concerns rather than to any pre-definable characteristics of *òyìnbós* themselves. Any consideration of how racialised constructs are imagined and evaluated, therefore, must start with an understanding of how groups of people tend to structure, interpret and value their own social networks, communities and society; the behaviours that are rewarded and sanctioned; the politics of resource allocation; the social codes that govern individual and community expression, as for example, through food or dress. In short, to understand the geographical and historical specificity of race-making, researchers must first seek to understand the geographical and historical specificity of people and the ways and places in which they live. Race never exists independently of those who produce it, and the challenge for those who study it, is to consider the ways it is differentially produced in different places, and importantly, for what purpose.

In seeking to understand race-making practices in Lagos on their own terms, in this chapter I have sought to link the meanings attached to racialisation to the wider social and cultural context specific to Lagos. By looking at common themes in status games in Lagos, I suggest that understanding race-making within this wider framework allows a deeper understanding of the processes and purposes behind racialisation. Mapping race-making practices to localised status games explains why imaginaries of *òyìnbós* in Lagos are often highly ambivalent. As I have shown, some ideas about *òyìnbós* – particularly related to wealth and the opportunities that this may afford – mean that *òyìnbó*-ness is often ranked highly in local status games. In a competitive status economy, proficiency in foreign languages and knowledge of *òyìnbós* can confer status within these localised status hierarchies, also enhancing social capital more broadly and enabling participation in regional and international labour markets. In other instances, *òyìnbós'* association with selfishness and exploitation tends to evoke wariness, and at times, aspects of *òyìnbó* cultural expression are actively critiqued. As such, any value attributed to ideas about *òyìnbós* is not primarily linked to global monoracisms, originating elsewhere. Rather, race-making practices in Lagos predominantly address local political concerns, and perform important social work within this context. In the next chapter, I look at how these understandings of *òyìnbós* build into a coherent system of knowledge upon which racialised cultural ascriptions tend to be based. And, as I go on to show in subsequent chapters, this investment in race-making has value as a basis for guiding subsequent social interactions.

CHAPTER SIX:
Understanding *òyìnbós,*
understanding Lagosians

Orokaiva [people] are primarily interested in what their shared history with the West can reveal to them about themselves. Thus, it is primarily their own concerns that we find reflected in the stories they tell about whitemen… This book is therefore actually about Orokaiva people, and not about white people. It is about the ideas that Orokaiva have about whites, and the role of these ideas in their culture today.
- Ira Bashkow, *The meaning of whitemen,* 2006, p.5

I know many souls that toss and whirl and pass, but none there are that intrigue me more than the Souls of White Folk. Of them I am singularly clairvoyant. I see in and through them. I view them from unusual points of vantage… I see these souls undressed and from the back and side. I see the working of their entrails… My word is to them mere bitterness and my soul, pessimism. And yet as they preach and strut and shout and threaten, crouching as they clutch at rags of facts and fancies to hide their nakedness, they go twisting, flying by my tired eyes and I see them ever stripped, – ugly, human.
- WEB Du Bois, *Darkwater,* 1999 [1920], p.17

The provincialisation of whiteness is not purely a dream of a future social utopia; it is, for many people around the globe, an existing social reality. It can be hard to even reflect on this possibility within increasingly common academic narratives of a globalised white supremacy, in which, as Christian (2019: 179) asserts, a "deep and malleable global whiteness" transcends "*all* geographies and national racialized social systems" (*ibid.,* p.170). Yet, at a foundational level, the construction of *òyìnbó* as a binary form of otherness provides evidence of race-making practices that predominantly address local – rather than global – political concerns. *Òyìnbó* is by definition a geographically delimited concept; not easily translatable into other languages, reflecting its lack of an exact equivalent in other race-making systems. So

far, by looking further at how *òyìnbós* are imagined, I have argued that people in Lagos tend to be highly ambivalent in their attitudes towards *òyìnbós*, and I explained this ambivalence in relation to how ideas about *òyìnbós* are evaluated in line with local value systems. These ideas do not correlate with arguments premised upon global monoracisms, which posit that, "Whites… throughout the world represent modernity, technological advancement, industry, innovation, economic success, political leadership, and cultural superiority" (Pierre, 2013: 74). The reality is in fact far more complex than such arguments imply. Now, in this and subsequent chapters, I turn attention to the wider utility of race-making practices in Lagos. I seek to make the case that people in Lagos make race *purposefully* in order to advance their own perceived interests within social interactions. In this way, racialisation is often a method of *responding* to local and global inequalities, not simply an imposition and means of perpetuating these. Aspects of this race-making process therefore contribute to the active provincialisation of whiteness, which can be seen in some instances to work to reduce broader social inequality. As such, I suggest that racial justice may be being pursued in some instances through the deployment of divergent race-making practices.

But before moving on to this, it is necessary to take a deeper look at the social worlds from which the concept of *òyìnbó* has itself evolved. As Ira Bashkow suggests in the epigraph above, our analyses should focus as much on the race constructors as on the racialised constructions that they produce. On this basis, I argue that in order to understand the purpose of constructing *òyìnbós*, it is necessary to understand the dominant narratives that reflect how many Lagosians conceive of themselves and their own "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). Following Said (1978), I seek to analyse how many people in Lagos tend to construct their social worlds, and how this contrasts with ideas about the social worlds of their others, as a central tenet of the race-making process. As I outlined in Chapter 2, one of the key lessons from this study is this imperative: social scientists must seek to understand race-making in this way, on its own terms. In this chapter, I therefore seek to start building a picture of Lagosians as active race constructors, and to do so, I first explore the idea of 'normative systems'. I suggest that common racialised meanings in Lagos build into a

coherent system of knowledge regarding otherness, shared by many people in Lagos, which was described to me as being operationalised through a binary distinction between an African and an *òyìnbó* way of doing things. These African and *òyìnbó* 'normative systems' are social constructions rather than empirical realities, but they are tools used to make sense of the social experience, and are deployed in order to pursue wider social benefits. Study of such cultural ascription – whereby behaviours and social values are expected or assumed based upon racialised appearances – is unusual within Euro-American scholarship, particularly when these forms of cultural ascription are applied by, rather than to, non-dominant racialised groups, such as black Africans. However, by exploring *why* such cultural ascription takes place, and the social purposes that it serves, I suggest we will be better able to understand the race-making process itself. In the sections that follow, I outline in more detail the key features within representations of both *òyìnbó* and African normative systems, as reflected in my research participants' narratives. Such analyses invite us to view the social environment in Lagos from the perspectives of those that live amidst this understanding of the world. From this angle, as Du Bois suggests in the second epigraph above, it is not the superior nature but the very human nature of *òyìnbós* that is revealed.

UNDERSTANDING RACE-MAKING PRACTICES ON THEIR OWN TERMS

Cultural ascription based on physical traits is a historically consistent feature of the race-making process across a wide variety of social and historical contexts (Bethencourt, 2013). Among my research participants, I found this operationalised in a widespread belief that *òyìnbós* conceive of and understand their place in the world in a fundamentally different way to the ways in which Africans are perceived to do so. As I outlined in Chapter 2, my respondents often used the concept of 'mentalities' or 'mindset' to frame and explain these perceived differences in world view, as here:

> Female student: I think it's a mindset thing. It's a matter of mindset. Like I used to tell my friends, if they move all of us that are Africans here, if say they want to swap continents and they carry all Africans, go to the European continent and they carry the Europeans, and come here, the same thing

would still happen because it is still the same set of people. So, it's a matter of mindset.

- Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Within the literature, exploration – or even explicit recognition – of concepts such as this one has been controversial in Euro-American scholarship since documentation of the ways in which these ideas are entwined within the colonial and imperial histories of social science disciplines (Livingstone, 1992). More recently, academic analyses of processes of cultural ascription – particularly among non-dominant groups – are no longer merely controversial, but have become "virtually taboo" (Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 129). Within this condemnation, accusations of racism abound (see Moore and Mawowa (2010) and Mkandawire (2015)). Yet a belief – among any group of people – in the existence of racially-based 'mentalities' is a key feature of racialisation processes found across the globe. As such, for scholars of racial and ethnic studies, this should not be actively overlooked but should form the *very object of study.* This is perhaps more easily achieved when studying explicit racisms among racially dominant groups, to which, for example, extensive literatures on the prejudices of right-wing activists attest (e.g., Ganesh & Froio, 2020; Hodge & Hallgrimsdottir, 2020). But as Wacquant (1997: 226) argues, recognising the existence of racialisation practices among "subjugated categories" does not in itself "blunt the critique of racial domination". Our research attention should therefore actively focus on these invocations of race, wherever they are encountered, documenting their nature not as ontological fact, but in order to *understand the social purpose* that they serve (Fields, 1982; Bethencourt, 2013). As I go on to illustrate in Chapter 8, the construction of racial binaries and their associated cultural ascriptions among non-dominant groups can also be seen as a deliberate and politically useful strategy, used to guide social interactions in order to maximise the potential for the accrual of social benefit to those mobilising racial ideologies.

Attempting to understand the social utility of racialisation from the perspective of those actively making race, however, requires caution when interpreting the localised meanings attached to racialised concepts into literatures that have primarily developed in quite different societal contexts. In this, the concept of

'mentalities' is a good example, for its usage and meanings among Lagosians differ in significant ways to the usage and meanings associated with the term historically within Euro-American scholarship. Within this literature, the term is associated with pseudo-scientific biological racisms (Saini, 2019), which, linked to the development of particular racial systems common in colour-line countries, sought to establish racial hierarchies in order to rationalise the exploitation of designated groups (Fields & Fields, 2012). Historical work in this vein, for example, created typologies based on the juxtaposition of "primitive" and "modern" 'mindsets' (Levy-Bruhl, 1985). Yet narratives relating to 'mentalities' among my research participants describe patterns of behaviour that are perceived to result from a series of fundamental – but not necessarily hierarchical – differences in the way groups of people view the world. They do this without asserting the primacy of either system; there is no universal hierarchy, but in a reflection of the underlying binary in which *òyìnbós* are juxtaposed to Africans, the two systems exist side by side. As a result, recognition of the existence of 'mentalities' does not necessarily imply or advocate racially-based political solidarity, nor equally, racially-based animosity. Rather, these narratives reveal a tendency to recognise diverse interests within both groups, but utilise the concept of 'mentalities' in an effort to maximise an individual's own potential advantage wherever opportunities may arise in interactions with either group.

To reflect these differences in usage and meaning, in the sections that follow I refer to the idea that racialised groups mobilise unique ways of viewing the world in terms of contrasting *normative systems.* This is a phrase I have taken from a postgraduate focus group at UNILAG, in which a student explained that *òyìnbós* struggle with Nigerian food because they are not "used to our own normative system". While this terminology has its own complex academic heritage (Horne, 2001), it benefits from being less closely associated with racial hierarchy compared with the notion of 'mentalities' in Euro-American thought. As such, the deployment of understandings of normative systems could be seen as more comparable with the ways in which notions of 'Asian values' were propagated by various governments in East Asia in the 1990s. Bonnett (2002: 92) describes how these values – which included being "conservative, traditionalist, work ethic oriented" – were contrasted with supposedly

'Western values' – "cast as materialist, decadent, individualistic and alienated" – in a similar binary conceptualisation. In this, normative systems are social constructions rather than normative facts, and may be conceived as useful predictors of patterns of behaviour rather than as an absolute indicator or evaluator of any sort of intrinsic characteristics of an individual or group. In the following sections, I outline some of the key features that my research participants commonly attributed to *òyìnbó* and African normative systems, and the resultant patterns of behaviour that they perceived to be promoted as a result.

ÒYÌNBÓ NORMATIVE SYSTEMS: FORMAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Normative systems are not so much about traits in individuals, then, but descriptions of system characteristics which in turn impact how individuals are likely to behave. Within dominant narratives among Lagosians, what primarily distinguishes *òyìnbó* normative systems from African ones is their formality. My research participants revealed a perception of *òyìnbó* systems as being underpinned by individualism, the formalisation of political power and economic flows, and state-sponsored provision of essential services. This system leads *òyìnbós* to expectations about how the world works, based on their own experiences. In the following sub-sections, I look at some of the characteristic behaviours that people in Lagos tend to associate with *òyìnbós*, viewed as a consequence of their normative system. These include straightforwardness, gullibility and inquisitiveness; unhindered ambition; and weakness and delicacy.

Straightforwardness, gullibility and inquisitiveness

One of the words my respondents frequently used to describe *òyìnbós* was 'straightforward'; they were perceived as generally being honest, principled and transparent. *Òyìnbó* normative systems value public and private accountability, and my research participants relayed this through the perception that *òyìnbós* "follow things strictly". A teacher at the senior secondary school elaborated on what this straightforwardness means:

They [òyìnbós] don't deceive. They speak out their mind. This is what I want to do, this is what I want to do. Take it or leave it. They are principled, yes. They are principled.
- Mr Adekoya (Site 1), March 2017

Òyìnbós are also widely perceived to express straightforwardness in their behaviour in relation to time-keeping and discipline. The difference in how Africans and òyìnbós value time is a well-worn stereotype that is often a source of mirth for people in Lagos, sometimes at òyìnbós' expense. But for one life history participant, òyìnbó time-keeping was linked to a wider sense of discipline at work:

They [òyìnbós] are very disciplined… Indiscipline, they don't tolerate it. Anywhere I was working, I don't know whether they sleep in the office. They will be the last person to leave the office, our boss then… I can't remember his name. He would be the last to leave the office, and we resume by 8 o'clock. Sometimes I try to be in the office between 7.30 and 8. I will meet him in the office. He was always very punctual. And they are very disciplined. Though, as a human being, when I was working there, I observed some things. They could be drunk... But they don't allow lapses, and the shortcomings, as much as possible they minimise it. There is control, much more control… than most of our people.
- Mr Afolayan (Site 3), May 2017

While honesty, principled behaviour and transparency tend to be valued within many Euro-American status games, as I explore in later sections, the value of these traits is highly context-specific within the local status economy in Lagos. As such, while òyìnbós' straightforwardness was sometimes valorised by research participants, as in Mr Afolayan's recollection above, it was just as often derided. Indeed, òyìnbós' straightforwardness is also often recast as gullibility as it makes òyìnbós particularly susceptible to scams. Pierre (2013: 86) notes similar representations of "White gullibility" through her work with Ghanaians. This gullibility is the direct result of òyìnbós' expectation of straightforwardness in social interactions, without making any of the distinctions that many people in Lagos would consider appropriate dependent upon the type of interaction and the necessary prioritisation of one's own social network. Among my research participants, the idea that òyìnbós can be gullible was reiterated both explicitly, as in Ms Alatishe's quotation below, and implicitly, as in the specific warning to me from staff at UNILAG that follows:

Ms A: With the rate of internet fraud and all that, they [school students] see it like…oh, they [òyìnbós] are people we can exploit. They are ready to exploit. They don't see anything special that you should attach to, being friendly, being courteous when you see someone who is a guest, let me put it that way, in your country. They just feel they [òyìnbós] have come here, they have exploited us so let's exploit, half the time.

NH: What does that exploitation look like?

Ms A: Every little thing. Anything they can get from you, they are willing to collect.
            - Ms Alatishe (Site 1), Mar 2017

Similarly:

NH: Anything else you would like to tell me, or anything you would like to ask?

Mrs A: Yes. I would like to say, as in, you should be smart.

NH: I should? How do you mean?

Mrs A: Like, as in your country….as in you relate to people. Here, you don't know many people here… You have to study people. It's not that we want to make you to be scared… If I want to be your friend you have to study me very good to know whether I want to be a true friend or not… Know what is going on in your environment, you understand? And what you are working with. They may be goats, they may be sheep. You know there is a difference between sheep and goats, you understand? Don't just believe people! Think about it… when I say good morning, look very well. Is it morning? [*NH laughs*] That is our country for you. God will help you.
            - Mrs Adebayo (Site 2), Sept 2017

A second behaviour portrayed as resulting from òyìnbó normative systems, which links to straightforwardness and transparency, is inquisitiveness. Several of my research participants mentioned that òyìnbós like to ask questions, and contrasted this to African normative systems which are seen to discourage this behaviour. In Bankole's (2012: 2) *21 Destructive Lessons Blacks Learn,* 'Don't ask questions' is the first lesson on his list. As he explains, "We are trained to follow instructions and comply instead of ask[ing] questions. Questions look like [a] complaint or a revolt to an average African." Aside from representing an inappropriate challenge to authority, some research participants explained that overt questioning should also

be avoided because discretion – particularly in relation to the specifics around the extent of an individual's wealth – is highly prized. On this basis, Pierce (2016: 158) documents that in northern Nigeria, "Common sense… would have it that relations with state officials are intrinsically problematic and that it is wisest to make sure that officials know little about one's affairs." Within the Nigerian diaspora, Imoagene (2017: 14) notes her "respondents' unwillingness to divulge their annual incomes… Nigerians tend to be suspicious of such questions." A similar logic can be seen at work in Thieme's (2013) observations in Nairobi where individuals were discrete, even evasive, about their economic affairs within their personal social networks, not just with officialdom. My research participants revealed a perception that *òyìnbós* commonly fail to understand that the rules of their normative system, such as in relation to inquisitiveness, do not apply universally. They described how, in the context of Lagos, *òyìnbó* questioning is not only socially inappropriate, but that indiscretion can represent a risk in terms of what *òyìnbós* do with the information they find out. Here, in an interview with a life history participant, my initial failure to understand what Mrs Ambode is trying to explain illustrates this point:

> Mrs A: Naturally, *òyìnbós* are friendly, and very inquisitive. Just like you [*Mrs A laughs*]. *Òyìnbós* are very inquisitive. Very inquisitive! So they like to know you, they like to meet you, and ask questions. That is how you know them… But in Yorubaland, when you like to ask questions it's bad. But when *òyìnbós* do it, they don't regard it as a bad thing… because they tell the truth. They feel that's telling things as they are. Are you following me? Now, like that boy who came just now. He can go about saying, "Ah! One *òyìnbó* has entered mama's house-oo!" Now that is what is called telling tales around, telling stories around. But an *òyìnbó* person does not regard it as such. They don't feel that they are telling tales or telling lies… They feel they are reporting something as it is. Are you following what I'm telling you?
>
> NH: But he is also reporting something as it is.
>
> Mrs A: Hmm… Like this woman now, who has just greeted me. We call her storyteller of the area, because she passes stories about you, either right or wrong. Either right or wrong. Are you following me? That is telling tales.
>
> NH: What you mean is that you have to be careful?
>
> Mrs A: That is the thing, you have to be careful with people. But an *òyìnbó* person does not see it as telling lies, or telling tales. They feel they are saying things as they are, and as it should be. Like now, as I'm sitting down now, if an

òyìnbó person is living in that place… [*indicates next door*]. If I'm doing something bad, he or she is watching me. If he feels it is dangerous, he can call the police at any time! [*Mrs A chuckles*] Are you following me? He can call the police, or call anybody, "Ah! Come and see what is happening there!" They don't feel they are doing something bad. They feel they are doing neighbourly, they feel they are doing what should be done. But in Yorubaland, they will tell you, "Storyteller! Who send you come?" That is *òyìnbós*.

- Mrs Ambode (Site 3), May 2017

While *òyìnbós* may represent an opportunity for some people in Lagos, then, their inquisitiveness and failure to understand social conventions around the need for discretion can also pose an inherent risk. As such, many individuals may consider it useful to attempt to ascertain which normative system is most likely in operation in order to gauge the ground rules for their social interactions with *òyìnbós.* Race-making is an important part of this social negotiation, as an indicator of how individuals are likely to understand how the world works, which then informs corresponding expectations about an individual's likely behaviour.

Unhindered ambition and innovation

I summarise a second set of behaviours that my research participants related to *òyìnbó* normative systems under the banner of unhindered ambition and innovation. While my respondents often celebrated the idea that African normative systems are partially defined by their collectivism, they also revealed *òyìnbó* normative systems to be based on an opposing individualism that was often openly derided for its perceived coldness, and yet admired for the supposed social freedom that this allows. Due to these fundamental differences, African normative systems were seen to result in social relationships that, according to Prof Daramola, make Africans "warmer [to each other] than the white people". Similarly, a British-Nigerian respondent in Imoagene's (2017: 2) study reported, for example: "English people are notorious for saying hello, having a chat with you one day, and the next day they don't know you." These perceived distinctions in styles of daily interaction were equally replicated at larger scales, whereby my research participants conveyed an understanding that *òyìnbós'* formal political structures and processes allow them to

be largely removed from wider networks of patron-client relationships and the social obligations that these bring. This then allows *òyìnbós* to realise personal and professional ambitions unhindered by wider social considerations. For many of my respondents, the perception that *òyìnbós* were able to pursue their ambitions unhindered in this way contrasted sharply with their experiences of what some interviewees described as envy within their own communities. For example, during a postgraduate focus group at UNILAG:

> Female student: You have an idea and you tell your supervisor, "Oh, I have this idea." He kills it straight down. Tells you how… he gives you a thousand and one reasons why…
>
> Other students: You shouldn't do it…
>
> Female student: … you can't make it. Because he feels if you should do it, you'd just go above him. But a white man, even if it's not attainable, he would… "okay, let's try." And if you want him to research it, he'll start up. He goes this way, he tries the other way, before you know it you're coming out with things and people are saying you're finding ground-breaking discoveries.
> - Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

The existence of this type of envy has been documented elsewhere in the literature. For example, Dixon (1991: 68-9) explains that, historically for the Yorùbá, "Success is also a matter of self-respect. Yorùbá express shame at being poor or powerless, and they hope that they will not remain in that condition for long… [This] shame also engenders envy and resentment, exacerbated by the tendency of the successful to flout their good fortune". Nigerian journalist Chika Onyeani (2006: 23) is more forthright in his assessment that "We as Black people are known for our PHDs – Pulling Him Down… Except for our sports heroes, Blacks don't want others to succeed… As a Capitalist N*****, you must look into the eyes of your friends and tell them to fuck-off. When you succeed in building a successful company, hire some of them, but keep them at arm's length". Lentz (1998: 51) also documents the existence of a "general 'Pull Him Down' attitude towards any outstanding individual" from her work in northern Ghana. In Lagos, such perceptions may be related to methods of resource distribution that work through complex patron-client networks, each person or group jostling for favour from patrons and redistributing to their own clients, and where there are no formal rules to the politics of redistribution. This

results in intense competition for resources; competition that plays out upon the ever-shifting terrain of personal relationships. Consequently, gains are usually achieved sporadically, and although the manipulation and sustenance of extended patron-client networks is a demanding skill in itself, social and material rewards are commonly recognised as not necessarily being in direct proportion to effort expended. As such, another person's good fortune may widely be interpreted as undeserved. Material and social success in Lagos is therefore often simultaneously celebrated and envied, dependent upon whether another's success is likely to be beneficial to an individual or group's own interests. Where this success is not passed on, envy commonly results in malicious gossip (Smith, 2007: 66), and occasionally in more serious forms of aggressive behaviour.

By way of contrast, my research participants conveyed perceptions of *òyìnbó* normative systems as being based on more formal channels of resource distribution. Consequently, *òyìnbó* systems do not engender the same degree of envy as individuals within them need not be concerned with maintaining personal relationships in the same way. Competition for resources is less intense, freeing individuals from wider social obligations and allowing them to concentrate on realising their own ambitions, and supporting others to do so too. On this basis, students in Lagos described *òyìnbós* as having "clean minds":

> Male student 1: Their [*òyìnbós'*] mind are clean. That's why they're able to do so many things.
>
> NH: What does it mean to have a clean mind?
>
> Male student 1: That means they don't have negative thought. Is not that they don't have any negative, but most of them, let me say like ninety or seventy percent of them.
>
> Male student 2: *Òyìnbós* try to make anything possible.
>
> Male student 1: And they don't give up.
>   - SS1 focus group (Site 1), Mar 2017

It is on this basis that many of my research participants shared a related perception of *òyìnbós* as being scientifically and technologically innovative, and saw differences

in achievements in these areas as part of a fundamental distinction between *òyìnbós* and Africans. Among these research participants, perceptions of differences in technological achievements between Africans and *òyìnbós* were not related to levels of intelligence. As one former teacher explained to me, success in these areas is not related to IQ, but rather it is the nature of the system that channels knowledge, skills and ambition in different ways:

> Sometimes… I sit down and marvel at the works of the *òyìnbós*, thank God for their race. It's not that the Africans don't have anything upstairs, but what we have upstairs we use them negatively. It's so sad, it's so sad… Anytime I enter an aircraft, I just marvel. This machine… do you know Hercules? Hercules is a military plane. The size of a Hercules aircraft is the same size, the same weight as a six-storey building. And the thing will lift up into the air and maintain that thing in the air for hours. It will not come down until it is directed to come down. No storm can disturb Hercules. It will break any storm. How did we come about it? I always marvel at that.
> - Mr Osibote (Site 1), May 2017

UNILAG students also explicitly discussed how freedom from the social obligations that they perceived to underpin African normative systems can result in an increased ability to contribute to the wider social good:

> Female student 1: When you hear *òyìnbó* as a scientist, the first thing that comes to my mind is advancement in all things. Like from their education, to health, down to infrastructure, they're really way advanced than us. So, I just come to a conclusion that these people are really selfless. They've put a lot of effort to attain the peak they are today. So, as an individual from this part of the world, an African lady, I feel that is one thing that we lack. They are willing to put their all to what they believe… Like an average African man thinks of himself and his family first before any other people…
>
> Female student 2: Sorry eh. May I ask a question? So, for the *òyìnbós*, don't they put their family first?
>
> Female student 1: Emm, I am saying that, an *average* [word emphasised] white man is actually selfless. They think of what will come out of whatever they want to do. The positive impact of what…
>
> Male student: What can benefit the society…
>
> Female student 1: Exactly.
>
> Male student: …the society at large other than the…

Female student 1: Compare to the way we think down here.
- Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Steven Pierce (2016) speaks to this issue in his exploration of the *Moral Economies of Corruption* in Nigeria. Through an analysis of an article written by Odia Ofeimun, Pierce argues that greater social benefit will be delivered by accommodating – rather than seeking to eradicate – the existence of patronage in Nigeria, while simultaneously seeking to expand Nigerians' conceptualisations of their social obligations to incorporate the whole population. This recognition of the fact that social networks built around patron-client relationships tend to privilege local resource redistribution, at the expense of the majority of the population, reflects the point made by my research participants above. Dominant narratives I documented in Lagos tended to relate differences in innovation and technological advancement in particular, not to any inherent intellectual abilities, but to the nature of the normative systems that individuals perceived to guide all of our behaviours. It should be noted that Pierce's study is not comparative. But my research participants did make such comparisons. For them, the perception that *òyìnbó* normative systems support and encourage unhindered ambition and innovation is in direct contrast to their own experiences of the behaviours that they reported were promoted by African normative systems.

Delicacy and weakness

Lastly, linked to the idea of *òyìnbó* gullibility discussed above, is the notion that *òyìnbó* normative systems engender delicacy and weakness. This contrasts with the narratives of strength and survival that my research participants tended to attribute to Africans, whereby these traits were viewed as being engendered by, and necessary for survival within their own normative systems. Similar perceptions of Nigerians' strength are reflected in Smith's (2014: 796) documentation of the symbolic "ruggedness of ordinary Nigerians in the face of urban poverty." Imoagene (2017: 106) also notes that within the Nigerian diaspora, parents sometimes arrange for their children to spend extended periods in Nigeria "as a way to toughen them up". Equally, as a point of comparison, my respondents relayed perceptions of *òyìnbó* weakness both in a physical sense and in relation to more restrained social

behaviours. For example, secondary students explained to me that *òyìnbós'* skin burns in the sun, and as discussed in Chapter 5, there is a common perception that *òyìnbós* cannot usually "handle" the spice in African food. Such perceptions of *òyìnbó* delicacy extend to the placement of *òyìnbós* in physical environments in Lagos more generally, as in this quotation where an academic at UNILAG explains how the term can be applied to Africans who demonstrate physical weakness:

> Dr N-R: …*òyìnbó* also refers to somebody who behaves like he doesn't belong to Nigeria in his attitude, in his behaviour, and the person just does things, "I can't touch this, I can't touch that, I can't do this." Oh, really? *Òyìnbó*! Because you are a stranger, you are not used to it, so it has acquired a different, metaphoric meaning. So from what I've said, you understand that *òyìnbó* means that a person doesn't belong to, is not from any state in Nigeria. The person is not an indigene.
>
> NH: When you're saying, the person can't do this, can't do that, does that have a negative connotation?
>
> Dr N-R: Of course! For example, if you were born in Nigeria, in the community people expect that you should be able to do certain things.
> - Dr Ntekim-Rex (Site 2), Sept 2017

The idea that *òyìnbós* are physically delicate manifests in multiple and complex ways in Lagos, as behaviours that may result from a perception of *òyìnbó* weakness are very similar to those that people in Lagos tend to exhibit to indicate respect to wealthy and powerful people. *Òyìnbós* occupy an unusual, seemingly contradictory, space in local imaginaries; at once being weak and delicate, while simultaneously being inextricably associated with wealth, and therefore power. This is enacted in ways that make analysis complex. For example, at my first research site, I observed lessons across the senior secondary school, usually sitting at the back of the classroom. Students sat at desks on wooden seats or benches in various states of disrepair, sometimes with nails or thick splinters of wood threatening to catch their skin. My presence in a classroom always resulted in students being dispatched to a different part of the school to requisition a seat that was considered appropriate for me: larger and better quality than the students' seats, sometimes with arm rests or a cushion. My protestations that I could carry a chair myself were always quietly ignored. When I was offered a desk to work on, the teacher whose classroom it was

in instructed pupils to clean and dust the chair and desk, and the following day she brought in a small table cloth for me. Such behaviours indicate respect, and any wealthy or powerful person visiting the school would likely be treated in the same way.

Yet these behaviours are compounded by understandings of *òyìnbó* weakness that is apparent in the widespread belief that *òyìnbós* are not able to deal with the harsher elements of Lagos' physical environment, in a way that (even) wealthy and powerful Lagosians would be able to, if it were necessary. This belief is revealed through local responses to *òyìnbós* who demonstrate their ability to "struggle" in the same way that many people in Lagos perceive that they have to: an *òyìnbó* riding on the back of an *okada* [motorcycle taxi] in Lagos, for example, generates stares. Pierre (2013: 86) also documents this in Ghana, where an interviewee told her: "At times we find a White man or White woman in a *tro-tro* [minivans used for public transport]; we see a White struggling with people in a queue and we are surprised." Pierre goes on: "The surprise… comes from the fact that *tro-tro* riders are only the working poor, and, given the choice, most people would not willingly ride one. Thus… a White riding a *tro-tro* brings not only stares, but a complex combination of feelings that include surprise, dismay, and even respect."

Beyond Lagos' physical environment, my research participants also commonly described *òyìnbós*' behaviour as more 'gentle' or 'peaceful'. *Òyìnbó* normative systems were conceived as being marked by their formality and reserve in everything from forming orderly queues, to the expectation of stable power provision, to driving conventions that more frequently require drivers to give way. As a result, *òyìnbós* were considered to be less vocally and physically expressive. For example, at UNILAG an administrator described *òyìnbós* as 'peaceful people' because "we never see them fighting." While these descriptions do not challenge the notion of *òyìnbó* weakness, among my research participants such behaviours were evaluated in different ways. When *òyìnbós* were described as 'gentle' this was sometimes considered to be positive. For example, in one secondary school focus group, *òyìnbós* were described as 'caring' in relation to child discipline:

Male student: When you're beating a child to go to school, you're forcing the child. When the child get to school, and the teacher too is beating the child, the child will not able to concentrate with whatever the teacher is teaching him or her. But all those white men, all those white people, they will take care of their child. They would, you know, give them much caring. When they give them much caring, they would get to the school. The teacher don't flog them, they don't beat them. And in the class, they will able to concentrate. But not like this Nigeria. They will beat you if you don't go to school, they are going to… [*Translation from Yorùbá*]: "You didn't go to school? I'll beat you today!"

- SS1 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

But more often, *òyìnbós'* perceived physical weakness was considered a significant disadvantage. Research participants conveyed that both physical and emotional strength are essential for survival within the highly competitive nature of African normative systems, and perhaps particularly within their own city. As Noo Saro-Wiwa (2012: 23) notes:

Belief, especially self-belief, seems a vital ingredient in helping people get through life in Lagos. There's no room for equivocation or weakness. People have to compete for what they want in an environment that punishes the unambitious, the sick and the incapacitated. Street vendors need sharp eyesight in order to catch the lingering stare of a potential customer. And they need fast legs to respond to that interest and sprint alongside the moving traffic to exchange their merchandise for cash… [for] in this twenty-first-century urban jungle, the laws of natural selection still apply.

As such, *òyìnbós' 'caring'* ways of raising children was criticised by another member of the same focus group, who thought that beating children that misbehave was important to ensure they know that what they're doing is wrong. She described the way *òyìnbós* discipline children – which she characterised as incentivising good behaviour – as "very bad". Indeed, the general consensus among my research participants was that delicacy and gentleness are not usually positive behaviours, but instead represent weaknesses that leave you vulnerable to ridicule or exploitation, as here:

Male student: The way you compose yourself is different from us.

NH: How is it?

Male student: Like walking. Walking gentle.

NH: Walking gentle?

Female student: Yeah!

NH: Can you walk that way?

Male student: Nooo! [*All students laugh*]
        - SS1 focus group (Site 1), March 2017

If my research participants' representations of life in Lagos can be summarised as a situation where you have to be smart and strong to survive, 'walking gentle' is not a good strategy, as I explore further in the following sections. Yet the race-making process itself – the binary classification as *òyìnbó* or African, and the cultural ascription imposed onto this classification – is useful for those deploying it. Not only do these ideas about *òyìnbós* help to define and reinforce a sense of Africanness among local people, they also guide material interactions through recourse back to this understanding of contrasting normative systems that underlies the race-making process. In order to better understand this perceived contrast between African and *òyìnbó* understandings of the world, I now turn to look in further detail at how African normative systems were portrayed in dominant narratives among my research participants.

AFRICAN NORMATIVE SYSTEMS: INFORMAL RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

As Said (1978) suggests, in creating and sustaining a discourse about what *òyìnbós* are like, my research participants revealed as much about themselves as they did about their others. Their accounts reveal a collective self-image, often positioned as a point of direct contrast with an image of *òyìnbós*, that it is critical to understand if we are to comprehend the underlying purpose of the race-making process itself. As such, following Bashkow (2006), this thesis is not so much about *òyìnbós* – however conceived – but about those in Lagos who are invested in this social construction. The remainder of this chapter therefore starts the task of painting a picture of Lagosians as race constructors. In the following sections, I outline some of the ways in which my research participants articulated aspects of what they conceived of as

their own normative system, and the behaviours that they reported were promoted as a result of this. This includes representations of African normative systems as defined by communalism and competition; and resultant behaviours including astuteness, audacity and self-entitlement; and physical and emotional strength, adaptability and pragmatism. I explore each of these in the following sections.

Communalism and competition

Broadly speaking, my research participants conceived of African normative systems as being defined simultaneously by the seemingly contradictory foundations of communalism and intense competition. Both of these inter-related elements form the underlying basis of the system, and encourage specific behaviours in those with this understanding of the way the world works. This perception of the basis of African normative systems is in direct contrast to the individualism associated with *òyìnbó* normative systems, which as I have outlined, is perceived to engender less competitive social behaviours. Communalism or collectivism, based on the prioritisation of the needs and maintenance of extended kinship networks over the interests of individuals within them, has been well documented in the African Studies literature, to the point where Taiwo (2016: 95) writes: "I sometimes wonder why Africans think that so-called Westerners are human at all given the near-synonymy that Africans affirm between communal living and being human." As the basis of African normative systems, this communalism fundamentally contrasts with the individualism my research participants ascribed to *òyìnbó* normative systems, as described here:

> NH: What are the three best things about Nigeria?
>
> Prof D: Wow, that is a good question. Number one, I will talk about the African culture of communalism. We are communal in the sense that we care about our relations. We care about our er… about our friends, and our relations er… such that, unlike you, the white people er… that are individualistic, but we are communal. But I want to say that you are not individualistic, except that your government will take care of its citizen. Here in Nigeria the government isn't doing that sufficiently, or far from being sufficient, because I mean, I have to train some relations. If the government

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trains them in school, pays for their fees and I don't have to. So, I love
communalism…
- Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Underlying the system is the complete interdependence of individuals within often
elaborate social webs formed of blood relations, friends, patrons and clients, and
local communities – some of which may be considered "imagined communities" in
Benedict Anderson's (1983) terms, forming part of ethnic, religious, or other groups.
Cameroonian Celestin Monga (2016: 133) explains:

> That is why Kenyan philosopher John Samuel Mbiti says ironically about
> Descartes's *cogito ergo sum:* "I am because we are; and since we are,
> therefore, I am." The body of an individual is thus only a link in a chain that
> must be seen as a whole if one wants to get an exact idea of it.

As Prof Daramola describes in the quotation above, it is through these social
networks – rather than the state – that many resources are distributed. These
networks are constantly evolving, and while some elements may remain stable,
significant parts of a network may continually shift. This may be due to some sort of
misfortune that results in reduced social standing, or due to growth in a social
network that translates to a corresponding increase in social influence. As such,
communalist systems may be seen to engender a more pronounced need to
continually seek and maintain sources of status due to the inherent instability of the
resultant status economy. Monga (2016: 123), in his "rapid sociological profile of the
African nouveau riches", alludes to this dynamic thus: "many of them have gotten to
an enviable social level not by the sweat of their brow, but by the luck of their
schemes. So they're constantly haunted by the fear of falling back into destitution."

It is this need to secure resources for one's own network that leads to perceptions of
intense social competition in Lagos. In contrast to my research participants'
conceptualisations of *òyìnbós'* ability to work for the wider social good, their
portrayal of African normative systems was characterised by direct competition that
actively discouraged these behaviours. Similarly, Smith (2007: 85) describes a
situation whereby, "in the struggle to survive and succeed in contemporary Nigeria,
the immediate interests of assisting family, friends, and other allies usually trump a

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more abstract awareness of what might be in the best interests of the larger society." Nigerian business analyst Arnold Obomanu (2014: 5) also explains that:

> [Nigerians] deviate from social mores and standards to favour themselves; for example, they urinate anywhere they like and drive against traffic... People of affluence and power shove their power down the throats of less powerful Nigerians; military and police officers humiliate average Nigerians, make them kneel or crawl on the streets at the slightest offence, beat them, or mete out other dehumanising treatment that is aimed at putting them in their place in the social order.

Obomanu's characterisation here of favouring oneself as 'deviating from social mores and standards' is interesting in that it seems to reflect an outsider's perspective on the situation. For while many of my respondents lamented inequalities in Nigeria, and specifically their own position within the social order that Obomanu describes, they also celebrated and perpetuated an idea of Lagosians being quick-witted and street savvy. In this way, their narratives did not shy away from competition, but often relished the social status that it can confer. As I explore later in this chapter, the competitive behaviours Obomanu mentions could themselves be considered the social standards of Lagos, rather than deviations from them.

For in Lagos, this sense of competition has become more visible, urgent and entrenched with the relative anonymity of the contemporary city's streets. This anonymity contrasts sharply with the memories of pre-independence Lagos my life history participants shared, where according to Mr Afolayan, Lagosians were all "from the same roots" and "we know [knew] ourselves". Such is the size and pace of life in Lagos now, competitive behaviours are generally the most visible manifestations of the ways in which my research participants conceived of African normative systems. In his novel set in Lagos, Nigerian writer Igoni A. Barrett (2015: 211-2) similarly describes the primacy of competition in the city thus:

> The nerve-grinding roar of individual power generation was as much a consequence of every-man-for-himself government as the lynch mobs that meted out injustice in public spaces. Private provision of public services had turned everyone into judge and executioner and turned everyone's backyards

into industrial wastelands. Every man the king of his house, every house a sovereign nation, and every nation its own provider of security, electricity, water. Lagos was a city of millions of warring nations.

It is this competition that necessitates the behaviours that my research participants perceived themselves to demonstrate as a consequence of their normative system.

Astuteness, audacity and self-entitlement

As a form of response to intense social competition, my respondents accorded significant value to behaviours portrayed as exhibiting astuteness, audacity and self-entitlement. Understanding these celebrated social imperatives, and their role within my research participants' self-perceptions, is therefore key to creating a picture of Lagosians as race constructors. These behaviours in particular represent a major distinction between local conceptions of stereotypical African behaviours, and those associated with *òyìnbós*, and can be seen as directly opposed to my respondents' portrayals of *òyìnbós'* association with straightforwardness and gullibility discussed earlier. Against a backdrop of competition for resources and associated prestige within the local status economy, the ability to out-wit competitors in any area of life – on the roads, in education, and especially in financial transactions – was considered an important social skill. As social networks are constantly in flux, the decision to trust others, even – and sometimes especially – blood relatives, can increase a sense of social vulnerability (Smith, 2007). This leads to portrayals of a wider social environment that may be considered "combative" (Eze, 2009). As Obomanu (2014: 4) explains: "being fast and smart is a national virtue while demonstrating trust is the worst social crime a Nigerian can commit." This may especially be the case in a mega-city such as Lagos. Here, at the entrance to the city, the inscription on a statue of *Agba Meta* (Three Elders) constitutes what may be considered an appropriate creed for the city's inhabitants. Cited in the epigraph to Barrett's (2015) novel, it reads:

> *O gbodo ridin* (don't be stupid)
> *O gbodo suegbe* (don't be slow)
> *O gbodo ya mugun l'Eko* (don't allow yourself to be taken for a fool)

Astuteness in turning situations to one's advantage, combined with the audacity and self-belief sometimes required to do so, were therefore skills and behaviours widely celebrated among my respondents. For example, the following incident from my field notes illustrates the pride Mrs Ambode conveyed in her ability to outsmart others:

> On the way to see Mrs Ambode, we are stopped by a police officer – with a firearm – for making an illegal U-turn. Following negotiations, I pay the officer a ₦5000 [£13] fine to avoid being taken to the police station. The officer's eagerness to accept the payment makes me think that it is too high a price, but I am already late for an interview. When I tell Mrs Ambode what happened, she is incredulous. At the ₦5000 fine, she kisses her teeth and tells me most police officers are not fit to carry a firearm. She tells me a story of when she was dropping her children to school. At that time, number plates ending in odd/ even numbers were banned on major roads on certain days to try to reduce congestion. On this particular day, she forgot that her car was not permitted to drive during peak hours. A police officer stopped her, but she told him she didn't have time to discuss it, and that he should get into the vehicle to talk as she drove. Once inside, she continued driving until she was out of the area where her car was banned. Then she abruptly stopped and told the man to leave her car. When he protested, she pointed out she was not violating any regulations, and shouted at him to get out immediately. Apparently, he was so shaken, he complied. She tells me most Nigerian officers are fools; this guy didn't know what hit him. She laughs loudly at the memory.
> - Field notes, 18 May 2017

After this event, several other people told me that a ₦5000 fine was too high; the implication being that I had been outsmarted. But no one seemed surprised that this had happened, for my failure to negotiate my way out of a steep fine fed into and confirmed dominant narratives of *òyìnbós* as wealthy and gullible. Mrs Ambode's counter to this with her own story of astuteness and audacity can be viewed as an indication of what a more successful outcome would have looked like. As such, the competitiveness that frames interactions between Lagosians also shapes local understandings of interactions with *òyìnbós*. As interactions with *òyìnbós* are perceived to potentially have significantly higher stakes, however, the ability to create and work such situations to one's own advantage can be inherently risky but can have significant rewards. Smith (2007: 222) argues that Nigerians have come to view their own astuteness and audacity in international contexts, even where it blurs or crosses the boundaries of legality, as "contemporary skill[s] in which Nigerians can

match and indeed surpass people from the West." He cites (*ibid.,* p.84) as an example a joke about Nigerians' reputation internationally, which has been widely circulated online. I include it here in full:

> A Nigerian man living in Sweden decided to marry a Swedish lady in order to be legally certified via resident status… but the lady was not aware of this. She felt he really loved her. Anyway, seeing that Nigerian men had a bad rap in their particular part of Sweden, our chap decided to lie to the lady. He told her he was from Uganda.
>
> Upon marriage, the lady came home one day and informed our man that she had just met another Swedish lady who had married a Ugandan and they must all have dinner together.
>
> The Naija man was somewhat perplexed, although not perceptibly, and wondered how he'd get out of this spot. He postponed and postponed until he could do so no more.
>
> Finally the day came when they were to have dinner. The other Swede came in with her Ugandan husband and they all sat at the table. Our Naija chap was very quiet. "My own don spoil today" was all he could think.
>
> The two Swedish ladies, wanting their husbands to mingle, being from the same homeland, asked them to speak to each other. "Hey! It's not every day you meet people from home," they admonished.
>
> Our Naija man, being a man of great savvy, decided that he would just speak Yorùbá, and the guy would probably just assume that he was from some part of Uganda where they spoke a different language. So looking across the table he said: *"Egbon Eko ni me se. Ni bo lo ti ja wa?"* In Yorùbá, this loosely translates to: "I'm a Lagos man. Where did you come from?"
>
> The fellow looked up at our friend. His eyes lit up as he said: *"Ah, bobo gan! Omo Eko ni mi se! Omo Eko gan gan!"* In Yorùbá, this loosely translates to, "Hey buddy! I'm a Lagos child. A real Lagos child!"

Smith (*ibid.,* p.84) recognises that Nigerians commonly exhibit "a mixture of lament about the extent to which [they] have refined the arts of fraud and a certain degree of admiration for the skill it requires." Yet among my research participants such behaviours were rarely lamented. Rather, the celebrated skills of astuteness and audacity, in the wider context of the legitimate pursuit of benefits – financial or otherwise – for one's own social network, were prioritised over abstract obligations to the state or the law. Indeed, in the binary cultural ascription underlying the local race-making process, such highly competitive social skills were considered a fundamental feature of Africanness, in stark contrast to the straightforwardness and gullibility associated with *òyìnbós*.

Underlying this framework is the third trait associated with African normative systems that I discuss in this section, which I refer to as an ethics of entitlement based upon communal understandings of wealth redistribution. This sense of entitlement is informed and validated by the perception that African normative systems place emphasis on the informal redistribution of resources. As I explored in Chapter 5, my research participants described how powerful people are obligated to share their wealth in order to obtain social legitimacy. As Dixon (1991: 71) writes, "Yorùbá behavioural tenets are quite clear. In order to retain a good name (to be of *iwa* or good character) a big man must be generous." Failure to redistribute wealth appropriately, or rather, the perception of such a failure, therefore represents a breakdown of the social contract. In such a situation, dissatisfied clients may consider that they have a legitimate entitlement to some of the wealth that has been held from them. Again, Dixon (1991: 69-70) summarises this situation well:

> Thus a big man must extract as much "surplus" as possible from his diverse fields of operation so that it can be redistributed among supporters and spent on prestige-making ventures for his own aggrandisement. Thus every institution, whether traditional estate, title, school, university, trading corporation, or government apparatus, may come to be seen as a source to be tapped for other ventures. At the same time any such "estate" is viewed by those who work in it as being as much for their benefit as for the benefit of those who "own" or head it. They too have a right to "eat" from it, and if the owner will not freely give them what they think they should receive, they will cheat him anyway.

It is on the basis of this wider sense of entitlement, therefore, that internationally recognised laws and regulations regarding fraud, for example, may be excusably circumvented. Thieme (2013: 397) documents similar reasoning from her work in Nairobi, where among her research participants, in "the carefully calculated process of assessing the risks and odds of any income-generating prospect… [w]hether it was legal or illegal, considered licit or illicit, was not the point."

Thus, astute and audacious behaviours, underscored by a sense of self-entitlement, were celebrated among my research participants and contrasted with a perception of *òyìnbós*' comparative lack of skill in this area. As such, Dixon's labelling of such behaviours as 'cheating' – with the negative connotations that the term commonly

implies – highlights the difficulty in translating and evaluating actions outside of – and between – different moral economies. Indeed, this contestation of meanings has perhaps nowhere been more intense in the Nigerian context than in the labelling of astute and sometimes audacious and self-entitled behaviours as 'corrupt'. So strong is the stereotypical association of corruption with Nigerians, and so ethnocentrically misplaced, that in order to be clear that my reference to corruption in this context is fundamentally different to what the term commonly implies in the political science literature, I use an alternative term. Here again, I refer to PJ Dixon's work, which suggests that the Yorùbá term *abẹtẹ lẹ,* commonly translated into English as 'bribe' (Fakinlede, 2003), is intricately linked to the operation of redistributive social networks and on this basis more accurately means "begging in advance, …a tip given prior to the service about to be rendered" (Dixon, 1991: 69). While *abẹtẹ lẹ* as a term is clearly far more restrictive in its meaning than common contemporary usage of the term 'corruption' in various contexts, the fact that *abẹtẹ lẹ* is itself an imperfect translation may also serve as a useful reminder of the difficulties of anchoring meanings across different discursive terrains.

The complexity, nuance and shifting nature of *abẹtẹ lẹ,* as an integral part of continual redistributive political negotiations between individuals and groups, is completely subsumed by crude, yet common, conceptualisations of the Nigerian state as "a state that criminally preys on its own people" (Mayer, 2016: 23). Such a conceptualisation is well-rehearsed in much of the political science and economics literature. For example, according to Adebanwi and Obadare (2011: 187):

> the gravest threats to anti-corruption campaigns often emanate from a combination of intra-elite rancour and political intrigue, based on *corrupt practices which are reflections of deeper social-political pathologies* of a 'normal' post-colonial state. Those pathologies, we argue, are manifestations of the structures of patrimonial domination [emphasis added].

The idea that 'corruption', and by extension patrimonialism, are pathological, works to simultaneously uphold the myth that 'corrupt' practices are (easily) definable and measurable, while at the same time implicitly recentring non-patrimonial, non-post-colonial states as presumably non-corrupt and the standard against which others

should be measured (Bratsis, 2003). Similarly, even those who reject the theoretical basis of neopatrimonialism in Africa have also argued that the real problem is not social relationships, but the corruption of these (Mkandawire, 2015). Such narratives are commonly used to justify policy interventions by donor states, international lenders, business and civil society groups in attempts to reduce the incidence of 'corrupt' practices (Pierce, 2016). In doing so, they operationalise an understanding of the world that is largely oblivious to that which my research participants conveyed; one that is entrenched in an understanding of African normative systems.

For dominant narratives among local people, rooted in self-conceived African normative systems, portray *abẹtẹ lẹ* not as a pathology or a criminal act, but rather as a legitimate and necessary part of the reciprocal politics of resource distribution. Pitcher *et al.* (2009) claim that to view neopatrimonial systems as inherently 'corrupt' is to overlook Weber's acknowledgement that neopatrimonialism is dependent upon such reciprocities, and that these form the bedrock of the system's legitimate authority. They argue (*ibid.,* p.127) that:

> Such reciprocities – personal, densely interwoven, often lopsided, and based on intangible and symbolic dynamics of status, loyalty and deference as much as on material exchange – became the means by which the rulers sought obedience from the ruled. Even if those reciprocities did not rest upon contemporary distinctions between the public and the private, or employ formal mechanisms of accountability and transparency, where they were sustained through voluntary compliance they constituted a system of legitimate authority.

The same system of intense social competition to accumulate wealth, display wealth and create prestige, and redistribute both remains the basis of reciprocal, socially legitimate political relationships in Lagos today.

Labelling behaviours that demonstrate astuteness, audacity and self-entitlement as greed or moral bankruptcy, then, is to misinterpret the behavioural impact of representations of African normative systems, which not only absolve such behaviours but actively require them. As such, the dominant narratives that I documented in Lagos reveal a perception of entitlement to wealth or other resources

as a legitimate negotiation, based on the understanding that not accumulating as much wealth as possible is to the detriment of social networks, the sustenance of which remains a primary obligation. Therefore, as Bankole (2012: 73) describes: "when one is in government and is not mega-rich, he is seen as a failure or a cursed person." Similarly, in her *Travels in Nigeria*, Noo Saro-Wiwa (2012: 283) writes:

> In the upper echelons of government, it isn't easy to keep one's head down and do a good job. Having principles is considered a weakness by many politicians, who will punish those who try to uphold any morals. If a governor or senator doesn't help his or her friends and kinsmen, not only do they face the wrath of their nearest and dearest, but their political enemies will see feebleness in their honesty and start sharpening the knives. In a system like this, politicians of a dishonest bent will gladly swim with the corrupt tide rather than get washed up alone on the penniless banks of virtue.

Such observations lead Apter (2005: 30) to argue that, in Nigeria, "What successive civilian and military regimes have decried as the moral failings of corruption and bad leadership has actually been the modus operandi of politics itself." Indeed, the authors of Nigeria's 1976 draft constitution explicitly defined political power as "the opportunity to acquire riches and prestige, to be in a position to hand out benefits in the form of jobs, contracts, gifts of money etc. to relations and political allies" (Bayart, 2009: xxxiv). But due to the reciprocities inherent in these relationships, the system is not without checks and balances.

It is because of these significant differences in how the world is understood to function, filtered through perceptions of contrasting normative systems, that cultural ascription of such understandings through the race-making process is therefore useful in Lagos. The celebration of highly competitive social behaviours among my research participants reflects local status games that uphold highly volatile, but closely entwined, social networks based on communalism. Understanding the basis for these is to attempt to view the world through the lens of African normative systems, where astuteness, audacity and the political negotiation of *abẹtẹ lẹ* are not symptoms of criminality, but just the way the world works and the actions necessary to try to get ahead. These behaviours, however, contrast sharply with local perceptions of *òyìnbó* normative systems that are less socially competitive,

engendering a social environment that celebrates individual achievement for the wider social good, and results in more straightforward but less astute and audacious behaviours. That the behaviours resulting from African and *òyìnbó* normative systems are in many ways direct opposites fits the binary classifications underlying local race-making processes. It is by attempting to view race-making from this local perspective that we come closest to being able to analyse it on its own terms. In the following section, I outline a final set of features that my respondents portrayed as common to African normative systems. I summarise these as strength, adaptability and pragmatism.

Strength, adaptability and pragmatism

From the combination of factors attributed to African normative systems, then, the resultant picture that emerges from my research participants' accounts is one in which social advancement requires strength, adaptability and a pragmatic engagement within the local social milieu. These traits directly contrast once again with the association of *òyìnbós* with weakness and, at times, gullibility. My research participants' portrayals of their social world reveal a perception of a situation defined by competition, where the informal nature of resource distribution requires the continual renegotiation of social legitimacy through status striving. As such, groups and individuals engage in the political process at all times; within each social situation, there are always potential opportunities for enrichment or prestige enhancement. Everything is always in play in what Apter (2005: 39) calls a "highly volatile prestige economy". This fundamentally contrasts with my respondents' perceptions of *òyìnbó* normative systems as being structured around formal relationships between individuals and governments, with clear designation between these private and public spheres. In these systems, accountability and transparency are (theoretically, at least) built in to the system via formal democratic channels. Successful engagement within African normative systems, on the other hand, is based upon the informal negotiation and evaluation of individual and group actions and incidents, which results in a constant positioning and re-positioning of oneself and others within a kaleidoscope of power, prestige and access to resources. To

retain one's social standing in such a system requires significant emotional and at times physical strength, adaptability and political pragmatism.

This perception of the social environment in Lagos is echoed in Nigerian writer Arnold Obomanu's (2014: 3) assessment that:

> Most Nigerians do not believe anyone is seriously working to ensure that they get their fair share of whatever is due them. This makes most of us believe that we are on our own. This belief, in turn, drives a survival-of-the-fittest, every-man-for-himself mindset which pervades every activity, dictates the rules of engagement between citizens, and fashions the pattern of everyday life in Nigeria.

Among the diaspora too, Imoagene (2017: 119) documents a Nigerian-American respondent's assertion that "Nigerians are very highly motivated, are a very intelligent people" who "quickly take advantage of whatever opportunity they can because they have no one to fall back on." On the basis of these perceptions, dominant narratives among my research participants portrayed African normative systems as encouraging – or necessitating – a pragmatic, realist reading of social power relations, in which brute and emotional strength and adaptability are required in order to thrive. As the legitimate authority to enforce rules is continually negotiated, people are encouraged to act in rational self-interest, whereby the ultimate goal is power to ensure self-preservation. Monga (2016) characterises life in contemporary Cameroon in a similar fashion. One of my research participants described this social environment in Lagos simply as "dog-eat-dog." Such representations provide context for my respondents' assertions of Nigerian pre-eminence in the face of challenging social circumstances, as I explore in Chapter 7.

In the face of such perceptions of the harsh realities of life, my research participants widely celebrated self-sufficient and adaptable behaviours that could be used in an attempt to get ahead of the game. The adaptable nature of the Yorùbá as a people has been noted elsewhere. For example, according to Perani and Wolff (1999: 171):

> Compared to many other African peoples, the Yoruba are unusually open to innovations introduced from within and from outside their society while at

the same time being tenacious about retaining a strong sense of cultural identity... *Asha*, the Yoruba word for 'tradition' or 'cultural heritage,' encapsulates the dynamic nature of the culture; it has a core meaning of 'selection' [from a range of options]... *Asha* is a wellspring which reflects the flexibility of Yoruba culture... The Yoruba live in a world where 'nothing is constant except change'.

So too, Dixon (1991: 69) argues:

> Historically, Yorùbá have been quick to exploit any new resource that becomes available in [the] struggle for success. Thus war, the slave trade, cocoa production, education, government service, and government office, have been used as means of acquiring wealth, supporters and prestige. When one avenue for the acquisition of these has ceased to be profitable, Yorùbá have rapidly switched to another.

In contemporary Lagos too, my research participants took pride in describing

Nigerians generally as adaptable and innovative, as here:

> Male student 1: You're doing your [research] data now, don't let a Nigerian man see it, cos before you know, he would analyse this data before you do [*students laugh*]...
>
> Female student: And publish your work... [*more laughter*]
>
> Male student 2: And publish before you know... [*more laughter*]
>
> Male student 1: ...that's the truth.
>   - Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Similarly:

> Male student: One thing I can say that is peculiar to Nigeria in terms of character, is that natural instinct for survival is everywhere irrespective of the, you know, tribe... And you can actually get that in what politicians say. They say when you push a Nigerian to the wall, instead of turning back, they [Nigerians] look for a way of breaking the wall, and that defines him.
>   - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

It is here that the racialised *òyìnbó*-African binary starts to become subsumed as one

among various other oppositional groupings, as research respondents drew on a

wider range of signifiers – such as Nigerianness – in order to advance particular

political arguments. At the broadest level, as I explored in Chapter 4, within the conceptualisation of opposing normative systems, *òyìnbós* act as a single counterpoint to Africanness. But, as evidenced in the quotations above, African normative systems are perceived to also incorporate *within* them other oppositional groups – by citizenship or ethnic group, for example – that are similarly competing. Delineation of these competing groups is a continually negotiated process, dependent upon the status games being played and the resources on offer. But among my research participants, this multiple group play did not affect perceptions of the nature of African normative systems themselves. Dominant narratives among my respondents, and more widely (Imoagene, 2017), mobilise an understanding of African normative systems as fostering this highly competitive social status play, which requires physical and emotional strength and tenacity from its players, and encourages rapid adaptability to changing circumstances. As such, these behaviours are widely celebrated in Lagos, in contrast to the less competitive, perhaps more complacent behaviours perceived to be engendered by *òyìnbó* normative systems.

CONCLUSIONS

By looking more closely at the social worlds from which racial concepts such as *òyìnbó* evolve, I suggest social scientists will come closer to being able to understand such concepts on their own terms. My analysis in this chapter illustrates the social and political work that representations of *òyìnbó* do for those invested in perpetuating them on this basis. I suggest that common racialised meanings in Lagos build into a coherent system of knowledge about otherness. This system was operationalised by my respondents through a binary distinction between an African and an *òyìnbó* way of doing things, described to me in terms of contrasting normative systems. While normative systems are social constructions rather than normative facts, exploring the nature of these systems shows their social utility in both helping individuals to make sense of the social environment, and in assisting them to navigate their position within this. As such, I argue that people in Lagos make race *purposefully* in order to advance their own perceived interests within social interactions. They do this by mobilising racialised ideas about otherness as a

form of contrast to their representations of the perceived distinctiveness of their own world view. I argue that while the *impacts* of these local racialisation processes in Lagos are clearly less significant globally than forms of racism originating in other places, the race-making *process* itself is in some ways similar. I suggest that the local utility of these racialisation processes is that, by assisting people in Lagos to seek social benefit from their interactions, it is through the deployment of these very processes that individuals could in some instances be considered to be pursuing wider social justice.

In this way, I argue that racialisation is often a method of *responding* to local and global inequalities, not simply an imposition and means of perpetuating these. In this chapter, by exploring the social and political work that ideas about normative systems perform for my research participants, I have illustrated the ways in which understandings of *òyìnbó* could indeed be considered examples of whiteness provincialised. These understandings of *òyìnbós* reveal not a blind reverence for whiteness but rather the mobilisation of racial stereotypes that are intricately embedded in the local social environment. Here, astuteness is brought into focus by evidence of the others' gullibility; physical and emotional strength contrasted with the others' delicacy and weakness. Race-making in Lagos is – as everywhere – part of the politics of power; the power to categorise, the power to include and exclude, and of course, the power to influence and control. As such, the race-making process in Lagos does not primarily, unthinkingly or unwittingly, enact and reproduce global racial power structures in which local people are commonly disadvantaged. Rather, through a framework of how different groups of people are supposed to view the world in fundamentally different ways, the deployment of normative systems may be considered useful by many people in Lagos in that it can indicate expected patterns of behaviour among differentially racialised groups. Before I go on to give examples of how these racialised understandings can be mobilised to inform social interactions, in the next chapter, I consider a second important aspect of Lagosians as race constructors. Here I consider common collective self-perceptions in Lagos, and how these relate to ideas about social hierarchy and the nature of racialised power itself. On this basis, I examine how my research participants tended to portray

their historical and contemporary relationships with *òyìnbós*, and look at how these framings differ to common portrayals in the literature based upon the idea of global monoracisms.

CHAPTER SEVEN:
Òyìnbós and Lagosians

A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.
- Wole Soyinka, speaking at the British Library in London, 2016

The more powerful we become, the more our power begins to be framed as not only cultural but natural. We portray our enemies as ugly foreigners and our subordinates as inferior. We invent hierarchies, give meaning to our own categories. One day, a thousand years forward, in another museum, in another nation, these could be European bones encased in glass, what was once considered an advanced society replaced by a new one. A hundred years is nothing; everything can change within a millennium. No region or people has a claim on superiority.
- Angela Saini, *Superior – The return of race science,* 2019 p.6-7

Speaking at the British Library in 2016, the Nobel Prize winning playwright and activist, Wole Soyinka discussed the concept of *tigritude* he first introduced in 1962. A concept imbued with action and intent, *tigritude* provides an apt introduction to the collective self-perceptions that I documented in Lagos. This chapter discusses these perceptions in more detail, as a starting point to exploring a range of ways in which relationships with *òyìnbós* can be understood. In building this understanding, and seeking to view the racialised social landscape from the local perspective of those who construct it, my analyses reveal a quite different picture to that which underscores arguments based upon global monoracisms. Indeed, exploring and centring common collective self-perceptions in this way reveals a framework for, and speaks to the utility of, local race-making practices that tend to be overlooked in the literature at present. Instead of conceiving of Lagosians as a largely monolithic racially dominated group, primarily engaged in resisting the hegemonic power structures imposed upon them by their others, such a conceptualisation invites us to foreground the ways in which many people in Lagos are actively and continually engaging with global and local power structures within their own frames of

reference. This understanding reveals the political practice of race-making to be based upon fundamentally different notions of both the nature of social hierarchy, and the operational basis of racialised power to those widely found in literature focused on colour-line contexts.

In exploring local collective self-perceptions, my research participants' narratives most commonly referenced notions of Nigerian pre-eminence, and in this chapter I start by considering these in more detail. I then go on to suggest that these frames of reference incorporate a far more fluid understanding of social hierarchy, in contrast to the largely static nature of racialised inequality commonly portrayed in many colour-line contexts. In this, as suggested in the second epigraph above, a notable theme within local narratives of *òyìnbó* power is its portrayal as transient and limited in particular ways. While *òyìnbó* power is widely acknowledged in these narratives, this is equally balanced with an understanding that social status and the power that this brings is rarely, if ever, permanent. Rather, in line with the frequent fluctuations in social, economic and political power that characterise Lagosian society (see Chapter 6), dominant narratives around power and social hierarchy in Lagos reveal relationships with *òyìnbós* to be considered through a similar lens of pragmatism, negotiation and change. It is in this way that the local narratives that speak to self-perceptions, *òyìnbós*, and the racialised social landscape that these groups inhabit can be viewed as actively provincialising, rather than seeking or celebrating, whiteness. This leads me to argue that race-making practices in Lagos can and should be seen as a strategic method to address inequality, rather than the unwitting adoption of framings and behaviours that actively perpetuate racial injustice.

An important but contentious implication of this argument is that it necessarily highlights the ways in which race politics in Lagos is distinctive to and divergent from the framings of these issues commonly found in colour-line contexts. In this chapter, I outline some of the ways in which dominant narratives among my research participants contrast with portrayals of racialised relationships that are common in the existing literature. I argue that it is in viewing race politics in Lagos from this local perspective – rather than through a pre-supposed lens based upon the idea of global

monoracisms – that we see precisely how the global politics of race is neither uniform nor universal. Understanding the particular histories, social geographies, and resultant localised perspectives of a people is imperative if we are to understand the purpose of their race-making practices. Social scientists should not therefore assume that race politics globally will be solely reflective of the experiences of colour-line contexts, and indeed, in making this assumption, I suggest that progressive politics in the diaspora may actively impede our understandings of racialisation processes in African contexts. Rather, by asking how and why constructions of race work in Lagos, for local people, I seek to outline how divergent understandings of the nature of racialised power itself in turn necessitate different forms of political action.

In this chapter, I build on the portrait of Lagosians as race constructors begun in previous chapters, to that end. I identify two important themes, which I suggest are important for understanding the racialisation process from a local perspective. The first of these is to be found in narratives of Nigerian pre-eminence, which I suggest form a subtle challenge to the framings of race politics widely found in colour-line contexts. The second relates to the nature of social hierarchy, which I suggest is conceived as more fluid than arguments based upon global monoracisms commonly allow. This in turn has important implications for perceptions of racialised power, as one of a range of factors affecting local status hierarchies. On the basis of these themes, I consider how dominant framings of social interactions with *òyìnbós* differ to those widely found in literature based upon colour-line contexts. I illustrate this through a consideration of two key periods of history commonly emphasised as the source of contemporary global monoracisms – the transatlantic slave trade, and the colonial period.

TIGRITUDE: PERCEPTIONS OF NIGERIAN PRE-EMINENCE

I return first to Soyinka's concept of *tigritude*, which resonates with my research participants' narratives regarding Nigerian pre-eminence. I suggest that these narratives represent a subtle but important challenge to theorisations of the power and prevalence of global whiteness that tend to underpin arguments based upon

global monoracisms. It is through this very emphasis on whiteness as strength that such conceptualisations tend to – largely unintentionally – lead to converse portrayals of blackness as weakness. John McWhorter (2021: xii) has recently made this argument in the US context, in which he speaks of "black people who have innocently fallen under the misimpression that for us only, cries of weakness constitute a kind of strength, and that for us only, what makes us interesting, what makes us matter, is a curated persona as eternally victimized souls…" In African contexts also, the application of ideas based upon global monoracisms tends to result in similar representations of Africans as continually victimised and oppressed. As such, in Ayling's (2019: 5) study of Nigerian parents' engagement with the international education market, she suggests that even among Nigeria's elite, a supposedly global whiteness results in a situation where "perceptions, thoughts, actions and dispositions are a reflection of embodied class and racial histories both of which are mediated through and shaped by colonialism and coloniality." Drawing on both Fanon and Bourdieu, and in contrast to my own analysis in Chapter 5, Ayling suggests that this process largely "operates below consciousness", whereby "internal racism" results from "the internalisation of the 'Whiteworld' along with the hegemonic discourses such as the notion of 'West is best' that it contains" (*ibid.,* p.5). Ayling's framing implies an understanding of racialised power relations among Africans that is unwitting and almost helpless. If Africans continually, subconsciously and powerlessly internalise the racist frameworks of their colonial oppressors – entirely without the agency to challenge or attempt to counteract these – then what, after all, can be done? Yet as Guyer (2017: 338) notes in a discussion of the relative marginality of the 'African experience', "African populations express little of the discouraged passivity attributed to European peasantries in the past." And so as McWhorter (2021) suggests, through such portrayals, arguments built on this premise can act as a barrier not only to our understanding of racialisation processes in diverse social contexts, but also to the aspiration of racial equality.

This barrier to understanding results in part from the fact that studies based upon the existence of global monoracisms do not easily account for the celebratory narratives of pre-eminence or exceptionalism that can be found across a wide range

of peoples at various points throughout history (Saini, 2019; Storr, 2021). For despite the political science literature and economic indicators that may suggest otherwise, dominant narratives among my respondents did not portray themselves as belonging to a people relegated to the global periphery, dominated in many aspects of their lives by a foreign, oppressive whiteness. Rather, these narratives tended more to reflect Dikötter's (2015: 4) assertion that, "Every civilisation has an ethnocentric world image". As such, my research participants revealed perceptions of the world, and themselves within it, in which Nigerians in general, and Lagosians in particular, are a pre-eminent people. It is a notion that is also reflected in literature on the Yorùbá more broadly (Matory, 1999). Indeed, among my research participants I found more evidence of Wole Soyinka's conceptualisation of *tigritude* – incorporating celebration of their own perceived agency through astuteness, audacity and physical and emotional strength – than I recorded narratives of oppression and victimisation. Within the context of representations of a highly competitive social environment, as discussed in Chapter 6, *tigritude* is about beating – or playing – the system, not dismantling it, and this was reflected in a commonly held collective perception among my respondents of Nigerians' status as world-class competitors. Remi Adekoya (2021: 21) was brought up in Lagos to understand this perception – which he refers to as "Nigerian exceptionalism" – first hand. When he later faced racist abuse as a teenager on the streets of Warsaw, he explains his response:

> Nigerians firmly believe they are a special people, endowed with a unique intelligence, resilience and creativity that predestines them for greatness. This is the gospel I was raised in, and I was a firm believer. So the idea my blackness, which I equated to my Nigerianness, somehow made me worse than those Polish kids was never one I could truly take seriously. If anything, quite the opposite. My Nigerianness shielded me from those boys' attempts to assert their superiority over me in my own head.

Such a narrative may be considered particularly apt in relation to life in Lagos. In *Blackass,* his satirical novel set in the city, Igoni A. Barrett (2015: 165) introduces us to a character, Tekena, described as "a Lagos pikin [child]", who "could give as good as she got. Brinkmanship, oneupmanship, fuck-that-man-up-ship – these were acquired skills in a city where even beggars cursed you out at the drop of a coin."

This discourse of Nigerian pre-eminence can be found among Nigerians regardless of ethnic background. Among politicians, Nigeria's first president, Nnamdi Azikiwe spoke of "the historic and manifest destiny of Nigeria on the African continent" (cited in Adebajo, 2010: 422). So too former justice minister Bola Ige declared: "I want this country to be the first black superpower" (*ibid.* p.422). Similarly, former external affairs minister Bolaji Akinyemi (2016) has spoken of Nigerian exceptionalism as "the quest for world leadership." From her study of Nigerian diasporas in the US and UK, Imoagene (2017: 5) argues that "Nigeria's social, cultural, political, and economic progress or lack thereof has a profound impact on the rest of the continent. Africans pay close attention to what is going on in Nigeria and with Nigerians in the diaspora. Nigerians, often, blaze a trail that other Africans copy." In a similar vein, Chigumadzi (2019: 15) reports that the influential Nigerian artist and curator Okwui Enwezor, when asked to explain his many accomplishments, simply stated, "It's because Nigerians are fearless." So too, Matory (1999: 86) records comparable assertions of "Yoruba superiority" in relation to other Africans from during the pre-colonial period. It is a self-perception – sometimes contested – that other Africans also recognise in Nigerians, as here from South African Pumza Fihlani (2010): "You have to admire Nigerians, who tend to stand out in a crowd with their big flashy cars, bold dress and lively speech, for their ability to keep their heads up in the midst of great and often undue condemnation." Such perceptions of Nigerian pre-eminence provide important context for common framings of relationships with *òyìnbós* in Lagos, and so I explore some of the ideas that underpin these representations in more detail.

Among my repondents, ideas about Nigerian pre-eminence were commonly linked to two things: the country's natural resources, and to hyper-competitive social behaviours. Firstly, the significant nature of Nigeria's natural wealth was a theme across all of my research sites, but particularly at the secondary school. Here, pupils repeatedly emphasised Nigeria's natural resources, such as in this example, where the student is explaining why *òyìnbós* come to Nigeria:

> Male student: In Nigeria here, there are many things in this country that they didn't have in that place [*òyìnbó* countries].

NH: What do they [*òyìnbós*] come for?

Male student: Some they come for emm… like cocoa. They use it to do Bonvita [chocolate powder]. Em… you know in our country here, there are many things. We have gold, we have petrol, we have everything. Everything is in our country.
      - Photo project interview 5 (Site 1), March 2017

Many people in Lagos identify oil as the key to their economic fortunes, and the discovery of Nigeria's oil did indeed result in a dramatic shift in the country's economy (Watts, 1994; Apter, 2005). Narratives of excessive wealth stemming from oil are common, as Smith (2007: 8) also observes in southeastern Nigeria:

> many people's perceptions of the magnitude of oil wealth far exceed the reality. Even at my tennis club, where members are obviously educated and elite, some people spoke as if individual Nigerians would all be wealthy if only the government gave each citizen an equal share of the annual oil revenue – a fantasy belied by the numbers.

And yet, if the scale of oil wealth is commonly exaggerated, these narratives are not based purely on fantasy. In 2020, oil remained central to Nigeria's economy, accounting for only ten percent of GDP, but for eighty percent of exports and fifty percent of fiscal reserves (World Bank, 2021). Knock-on effects of growth in the oil and gas sectors in particular led to Nigeria becoming Africa's largest economy in 2014, a position it retained in 2020 (World Bank, 2022). The impact of global oil prices on Nigerians' day to day lives is thus felt through job creation in related sectors, and throughout the wider economy through income effects, and many people remain very aware of this. Indeed, the political power derived from oil wealth was also intricately linked to the perceptions of Nigerian pre-eminence that I documented.

Arguing against the idea of Nigeria's exceptionalism, Akpome (2015: 71) nevertheless recognises, "This narrative of extraordinary national wealth is at the centre of what can be called Nigeria's self-exceptionalism regarding its presumed status as the "giant of Africa"". He cites a range of examples of Nigeria's political leadership, from the country's role in the formation of the Economic Community of West African

States, to its peacekeeping efforts in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and particularly its role in ending apartheid in South Africa, as widely cited evidence of the roots of Nigerians' self-perceived pre-eminence. Adebajo (2010: 429) notes Nigeria's later interventions in Sao Tome and Principe, Togo and Sudan's Darfur region as evidence of Nigeria "continu[ing] its historical 'big brother' role on the continent." In these ways, national oil wealth is translated into regional or global political power in the same way that individual wealth commonly equates to political influence in Lagos (see Chapter 5). These narratives are common among people in Lagos from a variety of backgrounds, and are a source of pride for Nigerians more broadly. For example, in 1984 Chinua Achebe (cited in Akpome, 2015: 71) wrote of Nigeria that the "vast human and material wealth with which she is endowed bestows on her a role in Africa and the world which no one else can assume or fulfil".

Secondly, combined with natural resources, my research participants revealed a perception of Nigerian pre-eminence as resulting from an underlying "survival mindset" (Obomanu, 2014), which encourages and rewards the adoption of hyper-competitive social behaviours. Although this 'mindset' is common within representations of African normative systems (see Chapter 6), these framings portayed Nigerians in particular as excelling at these skills in ways that outperform citizens of other countries. This sense of national superiority was a key theme among my respondents, such as here, where the link between wealth and power is also explicit:

> Nigerians are very proud people… And then Nigerians are very arrogant people. I've met Ghanaians in Ghana, I've met Ghanaians abroad… the Ghanaians are not as arrogant as Nigerians. And I met a Tanzanian friend, I won't mention his name, who said he hated Nigerians because we are very arrogant. Okay, let me give you a classical example, when I asked him why… He said a rich politician from Nigeria came to Amsterdam, and the entire shop, big departmental shop, had to be closed down because a Nigerian wanted to shop, to buy things for two hours. And they announced that everybody should please leave because a Nigerian wanted to buy something, because he will buy millions. After a Nigerian must have bought something in your shop then you can close down for two weeks because you will have got enough money [*NH laughs*]. So, Nigerians are very arrogant people, we are very proud, but we are highly intelligent people too. Now, we succeed

anywhere we go.
- Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

Here the confluence of wealth, power and influence and how its enactment can perversely affect Nigeria's reputation is evident, but far from lamenting this, Prof Daramola views the ability of a wealthy Nigerian to close a shop for private browsing as a sign of Nigerians 'succeeding anywhere we go.' Other research participants similarly emphasised Nigeria's national superiority, while recognising that the hyper-competitive behaviours that this is seen to rest on can also be evaluated negatively:

Male student 1: [Nigerians] are hardworking people. Focus[ed] people. They are people who care less about what the government in quote "does." Every human being is an independent person who try to make certain things to work, in his own way. That's why when you hear [about Nigerians], the good ones are very silent but when you hear of the bad ones, Nigerians in China, Nigerians in Korea, Nigerians in India…

Female student: In Malaysia…

Male student 1: …they are drug this, they're doing that, they're doing this. But the good ones they are doing there are never mentioned. But before they do a bad thing, you may have done a good thing somewhere. Because if you ask me, right from east Africa to the west, I don't see any country that Nigeria has not played a part in. Including South Africa that said they are the world powers in Africa today. If not [for] Nigeria, the apartheid would have finished South Africa. The blacks there were powerless. They knew nothing! Okay, it took the forces of Nigeria to rescue them from the people who have put them under the tables already…

Male student 2: The *òyìnbós*.

Male student 3: Yes, they are! [*Laughing*]

Male student 1: And it's not far-fetched… [If not for Nigeria] the white would still be [in power] in South Africa. But whether they're doing it good or not, the black people are in power right now. Will I mention Ivory Coast, will I mention Kenya, will I mention our neighbours Cameroon? All these other people are people who belong to different regions in Africa. Nigeria has played a part in either feeding them, or securing them, or helping them to become who they are today.
- Science postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Sept 2017

Similar sentiments have been expressed by others outside Nigeria. Zimbabwean Panashe Chigumadzi's (2019) essay, *Why I'm no longer talking to Nigerians about race,* provides such an example. Chigumadzi (*ibid.,* p.14) explicitly upbraids Nigerians for their "sense of superiority" and what she claims is their resultant inability to empathise with racial injustice, and she appeals for their support. Yet she ends her piece not with a celebration of the potential of pan-African 'Negritude' in facing down racial injustice, but a recognition of the power of Nigerian 'arrogance'. In doing so, it is the hyper-competitive nature of *tigritude* that Chigumadzi both laments and, albeit reluctantly, celebrates:

> Within the Johannesburg consulate [of Nigeria, a]… low-grade international diplomacy war between South Africa and Nigeria plays out… As I sat waiting for my turn for my visa to be processed, a white man turned up. He demanded to speak to the manager. With the arrogance typical of white South Africans in their dealings with black South African civil servants, the white man rolled out his best "Where is your manager routine?" [causing] The Nigerian civil servant he was shouting at to look up from his desk and reply calmly, "I am the man". The white man continued to shout. The Nigerian manager rose to his full height. He reprimanded the white man like he was his schoolboy. As a headmaster does, he finished his dress down of the white man by instructing him to sit down. He would serve him when he was ready. The white man did as he was told and thanked the manager for his time…
>
> I will never repeat these words anywhere else, but let it be said here: sometimes it is only Nigerian arrogance that can successfully stare down white racial arrogance.

I expect that within all socieities it is possible to uncover comparable narratives of pre-eminence, as well as of self-doubt. But while the psychological impacts of colonial histories are significant and ongoing, I suggest that arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms would benefit from further engagement with such narratives of pre-eminence among formerly colonised peoples. Recognising, and not diminishing, narratives such as these that may be seen to challenge dominant academic conceptualisations of racialised relationships at various scales reveals a framework for, and suggests the utility of, localised race-making practices. These narratives work to contest the assumptions underpinning the existence of global monoracisms in important ways. Instead of conceiving of Lagosians as part of a racial group primarily defined by its subordination by other

groups, such a conceptualisation invites us to foreground the ways in which people in Lagos are actively and continually engaging with global and local power structures within their own frames of reference. It is an understanding that not only asserts African agency in local racialisation processes, but by extension, underlines African agency in practices that have the potential to work to provincialise whiteness at wider scales also, as I illustrate in Chapter 8.

THE FLUIDITY OF SOCIAL HIERARCHY AND PERCEPTIONS OF RACIALISED POWER

A second key theme that it is necessary to explore in order to better understand local framings of relationships with *òyìnbós* in Lagos relates to perceptions of social hierachies and the related nature of racialised power itself. Within dominant framings of global monoracisms, writers tend to evoke a global colour-line that results in the conceptualisation of globalised 'race relations' as a kind of zero-sum game. Often, within this theorisation, the oppressive nature of global whiteness is portrayed as so omnipresent and omnipotent that anything short of wholesale rebellion is considered ineffective. Kehinde Andrews (2021: 206) provides an example of this rationale in his explicit call for a race-based revolution:

> The bulk of my work is about developing the politics of Black radicalism, which centres on uniting Africa and the African diaspora to create a true revolution... It was revolutions across the Third World that forced the West to abandon the brutally violent forms of colonial domination. This book is a reminder of the stakes, to not accept edits to the status quo as some kind of progress. Revolution is not only possible but it is absolutely essential if we truly want freedom.

Such a framing is based on the diametric opposition of blackness and whiteness, such that, in a deliberate reversal of colonial logics, blackness is equated with virtue and justice, while whiteness equates to oppression and injustice. Driven by, I would argue, a justifiable anger at racial inequality, Andrews (*ibid.,* p.84) proceeds to draw out the battle lines for a globalised race war, in which his revolutionary solution to "the problem of racism" is the annihilation of whiteness, which he suggests equates to the wholesale destruction of 'the West':

every part of the West's society and economy... has impoverished the Black world to a degree that cannot be overestimated... Reparations are due, and tearing down Western capitalism is an utter necessity if we are serious about ending racism. But to realize the revolutionary politics necessary for this transformation we first need to recognize that the West can never pay full reparations for slavery without destroying itself.

While the explicit nature of Andrews' call for a race-based revolution goes further than most, the logic underlying his argument is common to much writing based upon the idea of global monoracisms (see, for example, Pierre (2013); Ayling (2019); Ochonu (2019); Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre (2020); Smalls, Spears & Rosa (2021)).

However, while I do not wish to diminish the power and potential of interconnected global activisms that are working towards racial equity, I suggest that through consideration of various and divergent racialisation processes – and particularly those found outside of colour-line contexts – social scientists will be better able to understand the divergent purposes for deploying race-making practices. In this regard, to return to one of the key lessons drawn from this thesis, it is the local nature of racialisation processes that leads to correspondingly locally-based responses – as well as ideas sharing and interconnected political actions at wider scales. And my ethnographic data from Lagos suggest that this localised response to racialised power is what we already see, if we choose to look for it. For here, dominant framings of local relationships and interactions with *òyìnbós* in Lagos contrast in important ways with the premises underpinning scholarship on global monoracisms more broadly. This framing differs in terms of how it conceives of the nature of social hierarchies, and consequently, how it perceives racialised power to operate – and therefore how it might best be challenged.

I suggest that a central feature of these frames of reference is their incorporation of a more fluid and dynamic understanding of the nature of social hierarchy. This directly contrasts with the largely static nature of racialised inequality commonly portrayed in theorisations of global monoracisms, which tend to be heavily based upon the Euro-American experience of a four-hundred-year history of transatlantic slavery and its aftermath, alongside European imperialism and colonisation, but

applied to wider geographical scales (e.g., López, 2005; Mills, 2015; Gibbons, 2018; Razack, 2022). Within the specifics of the North American context, both the binary juxtaposition of whiteness as antithetical to blackness and the significant duration of legalised racial segregation and inequality (Bethencourt, 2013), perhaps translate more readily to calls for the overthrow of the entire system, rather than attempts to reform parts of it. As I have explored in previous chapters, however, a more common theme within narratives of *òyìnbó* power in Lagos is its portrayal as limited in particular ways, and as a result, I suggest it can be considered more transient. While aspects of *òyìnbó* power are acknowledged in these narratives, this is equally balanced with a broader understanding that social status and the power that this brings is rarely, if ever, permanent. Rather, in line with the more frequent fluctuations in social, economic and political power that characterise Lagosian society (see Chapter 6), I suggest that local understandings of power and social hierarchy reveal relationships with *òyìnbós* to be considered through a similar lens of pragmatism, negotiation and change.

Such conceptualisations of the dynamism of social hierarchy can be found within the literature more widely, particulary in relation to the Yorùbá. JDY Peel's (1984) study of the Yorùbá city of Ilesha, Osun state, for example, illustrates this perception of the dynamic nature of power and the inevitability of change. During the late nineteenth century, most of Yorùbáland was affected by what Peel (*ibid.,* p.121) terms "near-continuous warfare and social upheaval" – many local people were sold into slavery, Yorùbá cities were repeatedly ransacked, and the area was eventually colonised by the British. Peel's analysis of later memories and representations of this period among the Ijesha people revealed that, far from remembering events as the calamitous end of their freedom, "Ijesha perceived they were entering a new age – *aiye Òyìnbó,* 'the age of the European'. At the same time, despite the unprecedented and irreversible changes which were going on, they were strongly inclined to represent it as a restoration, the completion of a cycle" (*ibid.,* p.122). Dixon's (1991: 78) study of Yorùbá belief also documents that "the theme of leadership failure [and replacement] is a recurrent one"; a finding echoed in Chabal and Daloz's (1999) characterisation of patron-client systems across Africa as often being subject to

wholesale change. Dixon (*ibid.,* p.80) goes on to explain these perceptions as being underpinned by a "Yoruba reality [that] consists of a complex of ideas concerning destiny, success [and] supernatural power". In this, he claims (*ibid.,* p.80; emphasis added):

> Yoruba experience is of living in intense human contact with considerable competition for resources and personal success. Power in the universe is dragged in to aid each individual and group in its struggle... *Whether [the powerful] are thought of as good or bad is not intrinsic but is dependent upon whether they have good or bad consequences for those involved.*

Sandra Barnes (cited in Ogunnaike (2018: 110)) similarly summarises this dynamic thus: "In West Africa, positive and negative power is not separate. Power is singular, and therefore what we in the West see as dual and capable of being divided into two mystical notions cannot be divided in African thought. For the latter, power exists in a single supernatural representation." Outside of academia, Nigerian life coach Jerry K. Bankole (2012: 18), reiterates a similar logic in his blunt recognition that, "Wealth is not static. It could come and it could depart... we've seen people who were rich in the past but today live from hands [*sic*] to mouth."

From this perspective, where status, power and related social hierarches are inherently unstable and actions within these are evaluated on the basis of their specific implications, we are invited to view racialised relationships not as a zero-sum-game between blackness and whiteness, but through a much more complex web of social relationships between localised networks of various affinities. These could, for example, be based upon notions of kinship or descent, allegiance to political parties, religion, ethnicity, gender, regional or other affiliations, the bases of which continually, but mostly subtly, shift and realign in line with localised political rationales. Within this framework, racialised relationships are one of many competing group affinities, but for much of the time, they are not necessarily the *primary* one. Within Nigeria's competitive status economy, for example, social competition is for the most part more likely to take place, according to Imoagene (2017: 7), along the "principal organizing lines" of ethnicity, religion or social class, rather than between groups defined by differential racialisation. The same web of

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social complexity is, of course, also to be found in colour-line contexts, where individuals similarly align with a wide array of different social groupings. In these instances, however, social relationships between differentially racialised groups are likely to have a much more significant impact upon an individual's relative access to resources, and consequently, on an individual's social experience.

This dissonance between the racialised experiences of many continential Africans and those in the diaspora is sometimes revealed through what Chigumadzi (2019: 8) derides as, "a certain type of African immigrant essay. It usually begins with, or includes the assertion that, "the first time I knew I was black was when I arrived in [insert Western country]"" [parentheses in original]. Studies have repeatedly highlighted the differing social experiences between minority groups in the US (Ogbu and Simons, 1998) and the UK (Imoagene, 2017), for example. As a result, both Gilroy (2000) and McWhorter (2021) describe diasporic African identities as being formed in contexts of opposition in relation to other racialised groups. It is for this reason that arguments premised upon global monoracisms, which tend to originate amidst colour-line contexts, most commonly angle academic attention away from webs of wider social complexity, and actively *encourage* a more simplistic framing of blackness versus whiteness. This framing presupposes that the racialisation process is not only binary and oppositional, but also – in contrast to understandings of social hierarchy in Lagos – inherently and inflexibly hierarchical. As Kendi (2019: 62) argues, "racializing serves the core mandate of race: to create hierarchies of value. Across history, racist power has produced racist ideas about the racialized ethnic groups in its colonial sphere and ranked them – across the globe and within their own nations." Within many colour-line contexts, and perhaps in the US and South Africa in particular, this history and the contemporary social geographies of racialised power relationships make foregrounding such a framing understandable, and perhaps to some degree, necessary. But because of the differential experiences, perspectives and the resultant politics of varying social alliances that can be found around the globe, this framing does not readily translate to the global scale. Racialisation processes in Lagos do not speak to a strict racial hierarchy that needs to be overthrown, but rather reflect a much more flexible social dynamic where

competing interests among multiple groups continually engage in a kaleidoscope of power relationships.

Some of the implications of this differing perspective on the nature of social hierarchies and racialised power were evident among my research participants. In marked contrast to Kehinde Andrews' (2021) calls for social revolution, for example, my respondents were far from radical in their ambition for, and predictions of, the possibility of political reform, race-based or otherwise. Indeed, I documented a widespread consensus in support of the current system, whereby the main focus for individuals appeared to be on *beating* the system – that is, raising their own social position within it – rather than looking to *break* the system. One respondent recognised this as a general disinclination to challenge systemic injustice, which she suggested was a result of a lack of education. A related argument holds that those who are struggling for survival necessarily prioritise their immediate needs over political abstractions. But even among highly educated respondents, the idea of political revolution in Nigeria provoked derision rather than support:

> Male student: What led to the Arab Spring in Tunisia is… He's just a young graduate. He graduated, there's no job and he was selling apple, fruits. And upon that he was still being oppressed, over tasked by the government. So, what he did was to just… he got gasoline and burnt himself. Before he know it, the whole of Arab world are in revolution today. Revolt against injustice. But in Nigeria, it can't even happen. In Nigeria, that young man will be called a fool [*some students laugh*].
> - Arts postgraduate focus group (Site 2), Aug 2017

Evidence of this focus on increasing social standing within the current system, rather than seeking its radical overhaul, is also reflected in the wider literature's documentation of the sometimes divergent political priorities found among continental Africans (or recent emigrants) compared with longer-standing diasporic groups. Byfield (2004), for example, argues that even during the colonial period, the Nigerian elite largely rejected African American claims to race leadership, preferring instead to prioritise local political issues, and by extension, increasing their own social status in championing these causes. Schramm (2009) has also documented differing perspectives and consequently conflicting political priorities among African

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American migrants to Ghana and local Ghanaian communities. Within the US context too, Kendi (2019: 66) documents multiple examples of the "double standard in ethnic racism: loving one's position on the ladder above other ethnic groups and hating one's position below that of other ethnic groups." Chigumadzi (2019: 10) asks of recent immigrants to the US from Africa: "Why are so many of these writers seemingly so apolitical around race politics and deliberately refuse to understand these basic ethics of solidarity [but]… instead bask in the glory of individuated reward of model minority?" Similarly, in her study of second-generation Nigerian migrants in the US and the UK, Imoagene (2017: 13) describes how respondents' "narratives, especially when describing their ethnic differences from their proximal hosts [other communities racialised as black], were often unsettling because often they were a regurgitation of views held by the dominant group (whites) and other non-blacks in both British and American society." In each case, all groups – and individuals within them – are seeking to increase their relative social status. Within colour-line countries, advocating a race-based revolution may help to do just that for its most prominent proponents. But for the most part, this type of status play speaks to specific audiences within colour-line contexts, and based on my ethnographic data from Lagos, I suggest it does not carry equally significant social meaning beyond these.

LAGOSIANS AND *ÒYÌNBÓS*: LOCAL PERCEPTIONS OF *ÒYÌNBÓS* IN AFRICA'S HISTORY

Moving on to consider how dominant narratives tend to frame racialised relationships with *òyìnbós* in Lagos, I suggest that it is necessary to do so in the context of local perceptions of both Nigerian pre-eminence, and the fluidity of social hierarchies and the nature of racialised power explored so far. In this section, on the basis of these key themes underpinning local race-making practices, I explore how these narratives also tend to portray the historical roles that *òyìnbós* have played in the area now known as Nigeria, and in Africa more broadly. This exploration of historical interactions between Africans and *òyìnbós* is necessary because of the key role that portrayals of this history play in arguments premised upon global monoracisms. Kehinde Andrews (2021: xiii), for example, introduces his book with

the assertion:

> We urgently need to destroy the myth that the West was founded on the three great revolutions of science, industry and politics. Instead we need to trace how genocide, slavery and colonialism are the key foundation stones upon which the West was built. The legacies of each of these remain present today, shaping both wealth and inequality in the hierarchy of White supremacy… [and through] the universal application of colonial logic.

Similarly, Jemima Pierre (2013: 3) seeks:

> [a greater] appreciation of the *long duree* of European empire making, whereby conquest, the commerce in Africans, slavery (both in Africa and the "New World"), and the colonization of the Western hemisphere, the African continent, and Asia are all seen as an interlocking set of practices that have cemented the commonality of our modern experience. What is significant here is the *racial* dimension of this international system of power and the attendant global White supremacy through which it is enacted and experienced.

In this section, I demonstrate how these foundational underpinnings of notions of global monoracisms stem from the particular experiences of many colour-line contexts, and show how they are therefore less reflective of local race politics in Lagos. In this, it is not my intention to document or appraise the impacts of past interactions between *òyìnbós* and Africans. What is pertinent to understanding local race-making practices in Lagos, however, is how many people tend to frame and perceive these historical experiences. Here, the most common reaction to this history that I documented among contemporary people was a kind of matter-of-fact acceptance, accompanied by little of the anger or blame that I expected such a history to elicit. Indeed, I suggest that when viewing the history of *òyìnbós* in Africa through the lens of representations of this specific African normative system, filtered through notions of Nigerian pre-eminence and the fluid nature of social hierarchies, these narratives do not speak to the existence of an oppressive global white supremacy in need of overthrow. This is not to suggest that people in Lagos do not comprehend the atrocities committed against their ancestors in the past; nor has the psychological impact of colonialism resulted in a forced or unwitting forgiveness of *òyìnbó* violence and exploitation. Rather, as I outline in this section, I argue that

many individuals seem to consider this history from a far more pragmatic perspective than proponents of global monoracism arguments tend to suppose; that is to say that *òyìnbós* did what they did simply because they could. Just as in contemporary Lagosian society, those who have power choose how they wish to exercise it to their own perceived advantage – and *òyìnbós* are no different. In contrast to advocates of global monoracism arguments therefore, the focus for many people in Lagos becomes not the historical injustices perpetuated by *òyìnbós*, but the opportunities that *òyìnbós*, and others, may present now or in the future. In the following subsections, I outline this argument in relation to *òyìnbó*-African interactions in the two periods of history widely emphasised in the existing literature – firstly, the transatlantic slave trade, and secondly, the colonial period.

Transatlantic slavery

The transatlantic slave trade induced fear, trauma and loss among both African communities and especially in the African diasporas that resulted. But given the dramatically different experiences of the slave trade among these two groups, dominant narratives that speak to perceptions of transatlantic slavery in contemporary Lagos radically differ from those widely found among diasporic Africans. In her portrayal of global white supremacy, Pierre (2013: 126) acknowledges "the normally ambivalent place of the transatlantic slave trade in continental African imagination and historiography." As Mbembe (2002: 260) also argues:

> between African Americans' memory of slavery and that of continental Africans, there is a shadowy zone that conceals a deep silence – the silence of guilt and the refusal of Africans to face up to the troubling aspect of the crime that directly engages their own responsibility. For the fate of black slaves in modernity is not solely the result of the tyrannical will and cruelty of the Other, however well established the latter's culpability may be... The ablation here is significant, because it enables the functioning of the illusion that the temporalities of servitude and misery were the same on both sides of the Atlantic. This is not true. And it is this distance that prevents the trauma, the absence, the loss from ever being the same on the two sides of the Atlantic.

As Mbembe identifies, central to the different experiences of continental Africans

and the diaspora is the nature of African involvement in the slave trade itself. Virtually all West African coastal states were involved in slave trading – for both domestic and foreign markets (Lovejoy, 1989) – at some point between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and according to McGowan (1990: 5), the involvement and support of Africans in the transatlantic trade was "indispensable to [its] development and perpetuation". From sourcing enslaved persons from the interior, managing their embarkation, to granting trading concessions and replenishing supplies, African involvement in the slave trade was largely driven and framed by local objectives and understandings of the terms and ethics of trade (Ojo, 2013). Cities were created as a result of the slave trade – including Lagos (Mann, 2007) – and African opposition to the trade where it did occur was largely due to practical rather than moral considerations (McGowan, 1990). By the early 1800s, African rulers actively campaigned against the abolition of the trade, such was its importance to the local economy, their personal finances and "social identities" (Fagbule & Fawehinmi, 2021: 35). In her study of *African voices in the Atlantic slave trade,* Bailey (2005: 58) describes the extent and complexity of African involvement as a situation where, "It is also often unclear through much of this period who are the "good guys" and who are the "bad guys."" While she stresses that dual African and European involvement in the slave trade should not "imply *equal* partnership" (*ibid.,* p.58 – italics in original), she goes so far as to call for an apology for the trade from African nations as well as from European and American states (*ibid.,* p.227).

While recognition of African participation in the transatlantic trade does not imply that African slave traders had no misgivings about their involvement (McGowan, 1990), what it does illustrate is the complexity of interactions between *òyìnbós* and Africans during this period. Combined with the fact that the transatlantic trade formally ended two hundred years ago, Bailey (2005: 15) suggests that contemporary African perceptions of it are influenced by both the complexity of the trade and the fact that African communities have encountered "more pressing concerns" since. Among my research participants, the horrors and complexity of the slave trade were both recognised, but in a pragmatic way:

The harm, a lot of wrongdoing that they [òyìnbós] brought to the country. Even our own people too either because of lack of knowledge or anything, they sold themselves, they sold their family, not only people that they see on the street. They sold member of their families! So these people look onto err… buy the slaves to use on their own plantation and they [òyìnbós] give them small money… So, they gain some and lose some. So I think their [òyìnbós] coming to Nigeria, Nigeria gained something and lost a lot of people, especially through the slave trade. And it gives a lot of mental, how can I call it? Lot of mental disorder, mental something to our people. Even now if you go to Badagry where we have some relics there that are kept in the museum there. If you go to Badagry and you see this relics, you want to curse Europeans because they brought a lot of pain to our people. I was there once and you see [inaudible] make holes here and here, and padlock human beings [mouths shut] so they will not steal sugar cane from the plantation. You still see the big wires that they use to tie them down after the day's work… You see the way our people were treated then, but thank God, we that are left, we learn the stories and we try to forget. There was a time they said even Britain was trying to give something in return to these states, just to ermm…make amends to what has happened then.

- Mrs Ambode (Site 3), June 2017

Similarly:

NH: If students learn about the slave trade, how is it that they – and not just students, but Nigerians – still love òyìnbós?

Mr A: Really, it's just like, you know we have some dark age [pause]… But in those period, maybe we just take that history as a period of… I don't know… ah… Slavery really, we don't have option at that time as blacks, and when you look at it, that was why some of our own leaders they were agitating for compensation because of what the whites has done to the blacks. Enslaving our people, taking our people to America… But we cannot hang on that, and say we have to hate them… So I think that thing does not, really when you look at it, it's a bitter experience, and it was you know, it's a very bitter experience. But along the line we don't have option and we just forget about it… There is always bad past experiences that is very, very bad. But we cannot say because of that then the whole world will end in one day. So we must also forget the past, and then think of the present.

Mr Ampitan (Site 1), March 2017

Such matter-of-fact representations of the slave trade also link to the concept of *tigritude*. That *òyìnbós* were able to engage in mass slave trading would have had significant cultural meaning among African populations during the slave trade, when ownership of slaves was understood as a means of both accumulating capital and

attaining honour for slave-owners and traders (Green, 2019: 269). In their reconsideration of the history of Nigeria, Fagbule and Fawehinmi (2021: 80) describe Efunroye Tinubu, the largest indigenous trade dealer on the west African coast, as "easily the most important woman figure in Victorian era Nigeria" on this basis, due to her "omnipresence in matters of state and trade up and down the coast and deep into the hinterland". Conversely, to be enslaved was a source of great shame (Richardson, 2001), which can still lead to lasting social stigma in African communities (Schramm, 2009). Thus, from research in contemporary Ghana, Bailey (2005: 68) finds that it is more socially permissible to confess to a connection with slave traders than to the shame of slave ancestry. In south-eastern Nigeria too, Nwaubani (2018a) has documented her own unease at discovering her great-grandfather's involvement in slave trading, in contrast to her father's pride in this family history: ""Not everyone could summon the courage to be a slave trader," he said. "You had to have some boldness in you.""

That some contemporary Africans could find historical links to slave traders a source of pride, then, is more understandable when viewed through the lens of representations of an African normative system that celebrates astuteness, audacity, pragmatic adaptability and any resultant financial accumulation, rather than through theorisations that tend to view Africans as victims of an oppressive global white supremacy. And due to their central role in driving the transatlantic trade and accruing the majority of the profits, it also explains why some people in Lagos might view *òyìnbós* with respect for their role in the trade, rather than with anger or blame. As Nigerian journalist and publisher Chika Onyeani (2006: 21) writes:

> You have to admire the Caucasian as well. He has done a lot of good in this world as well as a lot of bad. I admire his tenacity. Though it resulted in millions of my people being taken as slaves to the New World, America… you also have to admire the courage of the small group of diabolical individuals who set out to invade Africa and take our people as slaves.

Such narratives reflect the ways in which some of my research participants rationalised that *òyìnbós* did what they did because they figured out how to, and so they could. An academic at the University of Lagos succinctly summarised this

perspective:

> They might have forced us into slavery, definitely, but you don't blame them.
> They came all over from England to discover other parts of the world because
> of the development of science and technology. And so, they came to Africa
> [because] they thought they should, and they contributed to our growth…
> And if you know the status of English in the world today, then someone like
> me won't regret to be part of the *òyìnbó*…
> - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017

These radically different representations of the slave trade – and of *òyìnbós'* role within it – between continental Africans and the wider diaspora are also reflected in the narratives of more recent African migrants. Onoso Imoagene's study of second-generation Nigerian migrants in the US, for example, provides evidence not just of these differing perceptions of the slave trade, but also of how these are framed and operationalised within the context of Nigerian pre-eminence. Imoagene (2017: 114) writes: "Most [Nigerian-American] respondents felt that African-Americans are too consumed with the injustices done to them in the past and in society today and have allowed the social relationships of race to constrain their ambitions and provide excuses for why they have not achieved more." This difference between the perceptions of Nigerian- and African Americans is summarised by one Nigerian-American as a situation whereby, "those chains that are weighing them down don't weigh me down" (*ibid.,* p.115). It is by overlooking such narratives of ambition and tenacity – which I heard repeatedly in Lagos – and which celebrate these behaviours within a social environment characterised by intense, and not necessarily fair, social competition, that arguments premised upon global monoracisms fail to reflect local race politics in Lagos. Asserting that the globe is structured entirely by a singular, hierarchical power construction of racial logics, built upon the specific history of transatlantic slavery, supposes not only that the entire globe was impacted by that singular process, but also that everybody that was impacted will conceive of that process *in the same way*. As I have shown here, this is not the case.

The colonial period

Neither is it the case in relation to the European colonisation of Nigeria, the second

period of history that arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms tend to emphasise. To put my argument here into its explicit context, I do not propose to offer any sort of evaluation of the wrongs of colonialism, which of course are well documented. For the record, I am also not a subscriber to the relative merits of colonialism arguments put forward recently by Bruce Gilley (2018). My argument relates not to the injustices of colonialism itself, but rather to the different ways of framing and therefore responding to them. Herein, I suggest, there is once again a significant divergence between the framings put forward by advocates of global monoracism arguments, and those I encountered most often in Lagos. It is these differences in framing that lead to divergent forms of political action. Proponents of global monoracism arguments often point specifically to European colonialism as a second foundational pillar, alongside transatlantic slavery, of a set of empire-building practices that initiated the global spread of white supremacy (Mills, 2015; Christian, 2019; Allweis, 2021; Andrews, 2021; Selod, 2022). Pierre (2013: 3-4), for example, explicitly critiques the argument that, "racial thinking is associated with the history of slavery, and slavery and race are designated issues of concern only for diaspora Blacks" on the basis that the "subtext of this understanding is the silence on colonialism – both its direct connection to the slave trade *and* its racial legacy." Within this understanding, European colonialism is the second strand of a cohesive empire-building project, the impacts of which began to emanate out from Europe four hundred years ago, and continue to "[make] the world 'white'" (Ahmed, 2007: 153). Such a framing encourages contemporary racialisation processes to be viewed as universally comparable because they purportedly result from this singular driving force. This reinforces the idea of a global battleground between blackness and whiteness, and allows any challenge to this orthodoxy to be branded either as inherently racist, or in the case of those racialised as black making such a point, for the author to be derided for not being, in McWhorter's (2021: xi) words, "black enough to write this".

Yet the vast majority of my ethnographic data from Lagos do not support such an argument. Here, dominant narratives about Nigeria's colonial past tended to downplay colonialism's psychological violence and physical brutality, while often

highlighting supposedly positive aspects of this history. At each of my research sites, including among school students, respondents were very aware of what the colonial period entailed, if not the detail of its atrocities, and yet most still spoke about it without any sense of animosity. When asked about colonial history, for example, a humanities teacher focused not on the brutality of colonialism but on what he perceived to be a positive consequence of an ongoing relationship with the British:

> The whites they were the ones that colonised us, and a long time we have been interacting… but I don't think there is anything there that is special to me. The only thing that we regarded, as I've told you, there were missionaries, they have a mission which they want to convince. And that mission is to assist us, are you getting me? You know why they came to us, to promote Christianity, they interacted with us, through that they are able to know our problems, and they equally assisted us. Just like in my state now, there is one hospital there… [where] they celebrated one hundred years [in] 2008. So we celebrated one hundred years of assistance at that hospital, and it was established by the British.
> - Mr Ampitan (Site 1), March 2017

Similarly, an academic at the University of Lagos recognised that some Nigerians hold negative perceptions of the British, but was keen to emphasise that he did not agree with these views:

> Those who are educated er… they may see *òyìnbó* as a negative entity in terms of education. That is, in terms of colonisation, because some of us who are educated – *I'm not one* – do not like the white people, the way they colonised us, the way they enslaved us, er… taking us from here to America, taking us from here to Britain, to Brazil, to all over the world.
> - Prof Daramola (Site 2), Sept 2017 [emphasis added]

Underscored by notions of Nigerian pre-eminence and filtered through an understanding of the inherent fluidity of social hierarchies, I suggest that these narratives reflect the social dynamics of contemporary Lagos, whereby individuals tend to oppose narratives of colonialism that might suggest their own victimhood, eschewing opportunities to apportion historical blame in order to avoid the possibility of appearing vulnerable. Rather – as is the case with contemporary representations of the transatlantic slave trade – I suggest that these narratives reveal a perception of colonial history as a further example of the manifestation of

dynamic cycles of power that continue to fluctuate. In this, I documented a widespread acceptance of the realities of British colonialism, including its injustices, inherent violence and exploitative nature, but this history elicited little contemporary animosity. As Nigerian historian Max Siollun (2021: 1) also observes:

> Many Nigerians have a rose-tinted memory of colonialism. Although many former colonies have negative feelings towards the country that colonised them, some Nigerians have a nostalgic reverence for British rule… Nigerians' fondness for the country that colonised them is almost bizarre given the extreme cruelty and violence that Britain used in furtherance of its colonial project.

While the majority of my data, as Siollun also suggests, supported the supposition that colonialism was not to blame for many contemporary problems in Nigeria, a small, relatively vocal minority of Lagosians did not. I suggest there is a link between how an individual perceives and portrays the impacts of colonialism – or indeed other aspects of history or contemporary geopolitics – and the status games that they are involved in playing. Nearly all the Lagosians I interacted with were primarily invested in playing local status games in which the characteristic behaviours that they associated with representations of African normative systems – astuteness, audacity, strength, adaptability and pragmatism – are celebrated, and in order to preserve or increase one's social status any indication of vulnerability or weakness must be avoided. It is playing these particular, largely localised, status games that results in a tendency to downplay the impacts of the colonial period. On the other hand, the few who did not share this perspective had specific reasons for doing so. One example of this was a PhD student at the University of Lagos who I will call Richard. Richard helped me to set up two postgraduate focus groups there, one with humanities students and one with science students. Because he helped to organise the groups, Richard attended both. He was involved in research projects with academics abroad, and in line with his own research interests, Richard repeatedly referenced work by Frantz Fanon and Edward Said in his contributions to the groups. As such, Richard was highly critical of the ongoing impacts of colonialism. When other group participants voiced perspectives that deviated from his own, particularly in the focus group with science students, he actively challenged these. Richard's

perspective – as with all those I documented – was of course not more or less genuine than others' in the focus groups. But I argue that each of these framings needs to be understood in relation to the status games that individuals are involved in playing. The primary audience for Richard's work was an international academic community in which, as I have argued, the dominant paradigm places significant emphasis on the ongoing impacts of European colonialism. Therefore Richard himself, for his own professional credentials, was heavily invested in this orthodoxy. So the distinction between those with a highly critical view and those with a more pragmatic view of the impacts of colonialism cannot be directly correlated to any particular social variables, but should be viewed in terms of the social utility of their political position. As in the case of Richard, I suggest that an individual's perspective heavily depends upon the nature of their own particular status games, and the behaviours that are rewarded by these.

So it is significant that the vast majority of people that I interacted with chose to frame their colonial past in ways that downplay the impacts of this history, as this indicates that within the status games they are playing, it is most beneficial for them to do so. Indeed, this is a framing of the colonial experience that is relatively common in the literature. In the context of Ghana, for example, Appiah (1992: 7) writes:

> It will seem to most European and American outsiders that nothing could be a more obvious basis for resentment than the experience of a colonized people forced to accept the swaggering presence of the colonizer. It will seem obvious, because a comparison will be assumed with the situation of New World blacks... But the fact is that most of us who were raised during and for some time after the colonial era are sharply aware of the ways in which the colonizers were never as fully in control as our elders allowed them to appear. We all experienced the persistent power of our own cognitive and moral traditions... [such that] the colonizers overrate the extent of their cultural penetration.

Often these narratives among those formerly colonised are explained away either as part of the psychological impact of colonialism itself, or as a lack of understanding of the true nature of the colonial dynamic. Memmi (1990: 187), writing during the 1950s when the Tunisian nationalist movement sought independence from France,

tends towards the first explanation when he explains that, "Love of the colonizer is subtended by a complex of feelings ranging from shame to self-hate." Siollun (2021: 2) tends towards the second explanation when he suggests that the reason for "rose-tinted" perceptions of colonialism among Nigerians is because much colonial history has been written by non-Nigerians, and as such he diagnoses "a classic case of a country suffering from a bout of winner's history syndrome." Similarly, historian Moses Ochonu (2019: 7) suggests that contemporary Africans often have "few personal connections to their countries' histories of colonial racial oppression" resulting in "a shabby appreciation for the racist horrors of colonisation on the part of postcolonial Africans." In both cases, such views documented among the formerly colonised tend to be either minimised or dismissed; the common argument being that these perceptions are somehow *mistaken*, reflecting either psychological trauma or misinformation caused by the impact of white supremacy itself. As such, they are often taken as being supportive of arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms.

But by centring local race-making practices, and the understandings that underscore these, I suggest that a more complex picture of global polyracisms (Law, 2014), or multiracism (Bonnett, 2022), emerges. As such, I propose an alternative framework for understanding such 'rose-tinted' narratives, which takes their validity as its starting point. This is *not the same* as arguing that the colonial experience itself was – anywhere or ever – rose-tinted, or that it should be understood as such. I do not claim that the psychological – or any other – impacts of colonisation were not severe. Rather, I propose that it is significant that many formerly colonised peoples seem to make a considerable investment in depicting them as such. I therefore ask, *what is the purpose* of portraying this period of history as rose-tinted, among those who, by and large, have inherited its negative impacts? I suggest the answer to this question can be found not in the idea that entire peoples have been subjected to a ceaseless form of – psychological or educational – colonial brainwashing, but that such a framing actively works to provincialise whiteness in important ways.

This is because the same narratives that downplay colonialism's impacts can, in fact,

be viewed as methods to increase the social standing of those formerly colonised in their playing of a range of different status games. Firstly, linked to notions of Nigerian pre-eminence vis-à-vis other formerly colonised peoples in Africa, among local people these narratives work to modulate portrayals of the extent to which the British were able to subjugate Nigerians during the colonial period. This argument then allows contemporary Lagosians to re-assert their own pre-eminence over other Africans who experienced supposedly 'worse' forms of colonial rule, asserting a higher social status within a regional context. Secondly, the minimisation of the impacts of colonialism echoes widespread social survival strategies used in Lagos, in that it deflects any potential labelling of vulnerability. In doing so, this feeds into a wider narrative about the individual or collective mastery of celebrated behaviours such as astuteness, audacity and strength, which can be used to shore up the basis of status-striving assertions within multiple games at all scales. Lastly, narratives that emphasise any supposedly positive aspects of the colonial relationship over its significant detrimental impacts implicitly recognise that the British were indeed relatively more powerful than African nations during this period. Just as some of that residual power remains, people in Lagos may strategically seek opportunities to politically align themselves with those with authority and influence (see Chapter 5) for their own benefit. As such, these narratives collectively reveal a significant difference between the understandings put forward by my research participants, and the arguments for racial justice upon which understandings of global monoracisms are based. Underscoring them is a fundamentally different view of not just the nature of racialised power, but as I argue below, these differential framings result in divergent forms of political activism. I look at the three ways these narratives work to provincialise whiteness in more detail below.

Firstly then, I found the idea that colonialism in Nigeria was 'not as bad' as elsewhere to be a relatively common framing of the colonial experience in Lagos. Certainly, experiences of colonialism across Africa showed marked variation, combining the differing effects of direct and indirect rule, the differing approaches of colonising countries, and the varying methods of African resistance (Boahen, 1987). That colonialism was not a uniform process is borne out within Nigeria itself, as

Yorùbáland did not experience the same levels of military violence that were inflicted upon other parts of the south (Siollun, 2021). Such differences have led to radically different accounts of childhoods spent under colonial rule in different places. Chigumadzi (2019: 6), for example, contrasts the relatively benign experiences of Wole Soyinka in colonial Nigeria with those Es'kia Mphalele endured amidst the violence of apartheid South Africa. It is a contrast that Mphalele (2013: 235) himself notes while later writing his autobiography during exile in Nigeria in the 1950s: "There is a complacency here… The secondary school boys I'm handling [in Lagos] and the South African high schoolboy are worlds apart. In the south the boys and I were caught up in a violent situation… Here, the situation is placid. In a sense there is a vacuum." This tendency among people in Lagos to publicly temper assessments of the impacts of colonisation, then, is partially based on a factual analysis of variations in colonial penetration. But importantly too, these portrayals are underscored by a pride in the idea that Nigeria did not experience direct colonial rule, and are therefore often used to favourably compare Nigeria's colonial history with that of South Africa in particular. The implication that indirect rule represents a less complete conquest of a territory, and is therefore a relative victory for those colonised by this method, is an attractive narrative for those who self-define as the giants of Africa. When operationalised in this context, it works to re-assert Nigerian pre-eminence within various status games at the regional scale.

Secondly, and linked to this point, is the idea that, in Adaobi Tricia Nwaubani's (2018b) words: "Complaining about colonialism makes us the victims." This argument reflects one of the key themes that underpins multiple status games in Lagos (see Chapter 5), where displaying weakness or vulnerability is a serious error amidst the hyper-competitive social dynamic of the city. Nwaubani makes this argument in her critique of the outraged response to a tweet by French President Emmanuel Macron after his visit to Africa in July 2018, in which he appears to diminish the effects of colonialism. She (*ibid.*) writes:

> I am one of a new generation of Africans who believe more in the power of dreams than in the power of memories; who are convinced that even though we may not be able to change yesterday, we can do something today that can

change tomorrow. Mr Macron may have got a bit carried away with his grand words, but constantly reacting and creating a hullaballoo over every perceived slight simply reinforces the impression that Africans are the small fry in the relationship, the third-class citizens of the world.

Imoagene (2017: 167) documents a similar logic among recent Nigerian migrants to the US, where, "The consensus among respondents was that taking notice of racial discrimination, and of workplace discrimination in particular, was not to one's advantage. It was self-defeating and only made one bitter." It is a tendency also noted by Smith (2018) in his work on corruption, in which he observes that blaming the colonial past for Nigeria's contemporary problems is rare among 'ordinary' Nigerians. He (*ibid.,* p.S90) writes:

> To a fault, Nigerians are mostly unwilling, or perhaps unequipped, to blame either the colonial past or contemporary geopolitics for corruption. Of course, one occasionally hears such arguments, but they tend to be proffered by Nigerian academics or by Nigerians who have lived in the diaspora. Most ordinary Nigerians see the country's problems as primarily homegrown and locally made.

Such an argument actively eschews narratives of victimhood due to the underlying perception of a social environment described by Onyeani (2006: 14) as one in which, "This world is nothing but a jungle... It is survival of the fittest".

The third and final point to make with regard to the perceptions of colonialism I found in dominant narratives in Lagos, then, is that this framing reflects a divergence in understandings of the nature of racialised power itself. It is this that translates into the active pursuance of quite different forms of political action by many people in Lagos to those advanced, or even recognised, by those whose argument is premised upon the existence of global monoracisms, as I explore in Chapter 8. Notions of a singular global monoracism, as I have discussed, tend to pit blackness against whiteness in a largely static conceptualisation of racialised power that authors often implicitly – and sometimes explicitly (Andrews, 2021) – argue requires large-scale social revolution in order to achieve racial justice. Arguably, within the context of colour-line countries, this may indeed be the case. Arguments for racial justice, within this context, tend to be made on an ethical basis, whereby the racial injustices

of the past – exemplified by the histories of European colonialism and transatlantic slavery – should be rectifed because they were *morally wrong*. As I have argued, however, dominant narratives in Lagos reveal perceptions of a social environment characterised by intense competition, which demands astute, audacious and pragmatic behaviours in order to survive and thrive. In contrast to the framing of colonial power as inherently unjust that is common to arguments premised upon global monoracisms, therefore, many of my research participants appeared to have a lingering respect for the power that *òyìnbós* were able to exercise during the colonial period – and subsequently. For example:

> Mr F: We started with the radio. It was a…there was no designing, it was just like a small box in a corner. And you just… hearing something talking! Very, very strange and in those days they call it radiovision. Our parents bought one, and put it, hang it so during an interesting programme, everybody will come and gather to listen.

> NH: So people used to come by just to hear the radio?

> Mr F: Yes, yes. And then later, the television came. So those things that are advanced, everybody admired it… Just like ah-ah! How can somebody come…? It looked like an adventure to our people here. Because somebody was talking in a wooden box, we didn't see him, and he's talking to you! You know what it means? So you know, ah-ah! It was then they say, all this *òyìnbó* people, because it is not African mind…or sense….ah! How can somebody…? He just put wire. You know now, there is no need of wire now, but in those days he put wire to the house, to the radio station, so when you apply for a box, like this electricity people, they will run a wire to your house and hang this thing. So they broadcast in their station, and you hear, so it was very surprising.

> NH: And you knew it was not an African invention?

> Mr F: No, no, no no. No, it was not.

> NH: How did you know that?

> Mr F: Ah-ah! It was beyond the African something back then, that is our thinking. It was beyond… Because we young ones, we actually tended ah-ah! These *òyìnbó* people, they are wonderful.

> NH: Because of the inventions?

Mr F: Yes.
- Mr Faleti (Site 3), May 2017

I suggest that this type of pragmatic engagement with the power dynamics of the colonial period may be considered a form of political realism, whereby the explicit exercise of economic and political power is both recognised and accepted as generally legitimate. From this perspective, the use of force and political calculation adopted by the British during the colonial period can be rationalised within the same framework. As I have shown through discussion of representations of African normative systems as being partially defined by competition, and discussion of notions of Nigerian pre-eminence, my research participants' narratives regarding the nature of their social environment most commonly revealed a perception that they themselves operate within such a framework, and as such, most were primarily focused not on challenging the ethical basis of this, but on increasing their relative social status within it. Nigerian life coach Jerry K. Bankole (2012: xiii) explicitly rationalises the pragmatic basis of *òyìnbó* power, and rejects an ethical critique of this, when he writes:

> The black man believes the white man caused his whole problem. We claim our whole problem started when the white man came, bought us into slavery and colonized our nations. Actually, I have no contentions with the fact that slavery really did destroy a lot of good things about us. It truly ruined us much. The only problem I have with such claims is that we often fail to find out what the Black person was doing when the white person came to enslave him. For example, what was he doing when the white guys were manufacturing the perfumes, mirrors, fabrics, guns and other such baits that caught him? What has the Black man to exchange for these materials other than the worthless lives of his kinsmen?... I wonder if he was forced into slavery. Did his own kinsmen; his king and fathers not *trade* him? Were there no terms of trade? Was the white man created wiser? Why then won't the black man first think of engaging the white in the trade before the white did? Or was he so 'righteous' to know that enslaving his fellowmen was a moral aberration? Obviously no!

In *Provincializing Europe,* Chakrabarty (2008) makes a similar assertion about the nature of power in contemporary South Asian contexts. Citing the work of Ranajit Guha, Chakrabarty argues that political modernity there "brings together two noncommensurable logics of power, both modern. One is the logic of the quasi-

liberal legal and institutional frameworks that European rule introduced into the country... Braided with this, however, is the logic of another set of relationships in which both the elites and the subalterns are also involved. These are relations that articulate hierarchy through practices of direct and explicit subordination of the less powerful by the more powerful" (*ibid.,* p.14). For Chakrabarty, this form of political realism diverges from the liberal secularism that he attributes to European "logics of power" to incorporate supernatural forces within "the domain of the political" (*ibid.,* p.14). We find a parallel conceptualisation of power within Dixon's (1991: 68) study of belief among the Yorùbá, about which he writes:

> [The Yorùbá believe] The ability to succeed in life depends upon the possession of a good destiny (*ipin ori*); a good character (*iwa*); a good head (*ori rere*), that is, skill, acumen and responsibility; energy (*ẹsẹ,* "leg") to run about getting things done; and upon power and authority (*aṣẹ*), the ability to get others to do your bidding... Because successful individuals have *aṣẹ* and may, either through natural or supernatural means, cause trouble for those who offend them, they are treated with some circumspection by the less successful. *Aṣẹ* engenders respect through fear.

So too Smith (2007: 214) notes the "widespread belief [among Nigerians] that powerful people use potent supernatural magic to attain and maintain their positions at the top of the political, economic, and social hierarchy." Within this framework, then, the basis of power – stemming as it does from both the secular and the supernatural – cannot be challenged outright. Nigerian life coach Jerry K. Bankole (2012: 18) speaks to this when he notes that "the Afro child" is taught that "the rich... are demigods who have the final say; you don't challenge them, even when they are wrong". But within this same framework, through astute engagement with the powerful, the skillful can influence the status quo by working to increase their own social status and relative power within the system.

As such, narratives that de-emphasise the negative impacts of colonialism represent an implicit recognition of the relative power of *òyìnbós* during the colonial period within this realist framework, and often reflect an individual's consequent desire to align themselves – and find favour – with *òyìnbós* in order to take advantage of any potential opportunties that may arise from this. As with all powerful people –

however racialised – in Lagos, *òyìnbós* tend to be looked upon with both wariness due to their power and how they may choose to execute it, but also with respect for achieving it in the first place. Lentz (1998: 51) similarly notes from her work in Ghana that, "Power and affluence are looked upon with a peculiar mixture of admiration and suspicion". And I propose that it is at this foundational level that conceptualisations of racialised power fundamentally differ between the dominant understandings that I documented in Lagos, compared with those premised upon the existence of global monoracisms. For many proponents of monoracism arguments, and in colour-line contexts, whiteness is usually considered *oppositional* to blackness in a set of racial logics based upon a largely static zero-sum game. But for many people in Lagos, I suggest, *òyìnbós* are one element of a much more dynamic kaleidoscope of social groupings and political interests, within which they are not primarily viewed as an enemy, but for the most skilfull, represent an *opportunity* for advancement. Wass (1979) and Siollun (2021) document the ways in which this dynamic occurred during the colonial period itself, during which some Africans were able to profit from the colonial system. It is on this basis that Mbembe (2002: 262) goes so far as to claim that, "In many ways, colonization was a co-invention. It was the result of Western violence as well as the work of a swarm of African auxillaries seeking profit." We see the same logic reflected in dominant narratives in contemporary Lagos, which recognise that in order for Britain to achieve its colonial objectives, it was ultimately more powerful than the African nations that it sought to subjugate. As in Lagos today, the colonial encounter can also be framed as survival of the fittest, both at the international and national levels – for if some Africans were able to benefit from colonialism, *òyìnbós* clearly benefitted more.

CONCLUSIONS

Jemima Pierre (2013: 4) reminds us that "issues of race are always already about power." But as I have shown, understandings of the nature of power are themselves contested. In this chapter, I have explored how differing self-perceptions and diverse understandings of social hierachy result in significant variation in how racialised power can be framed and therefore experienced. On this basis, the interpretations of

òyìnbós' roles in African history that I documented in dominant narratives in Lagos are quite different to those commonly found in academic literature premised upon monoracism arguments. In this, local perceptions of relationships with *òyìnbós* in Lagos tend to be primarily viewed in terms of a pragmatic political realism, rather than shaped by global ideologies of anti-black racism. From this vantage point, historical *òyìnbó* power is not usually evaluated as justified or unjustified, but rather accepted as a fact. However, just as economic fortunes, social status and power fluctuate within Lagosian society, these narratives also recognise that *òyìnbó* power too is not immutable. Important aspects of this challenge to *òyìnbó* power are the downplaying of its extent, and a focus on the future. Narratives that seek to minimise the impacts of British colonialism in Nigeria, and those that work to create distance from discussions of the transatlantic slave trade, feed into a wider concern with upholding notions of Nigerian pre-eminence. It is in these ways that narratives that speak to collective self-perceptions in Lagos, *òyìnbós*, and the racialised social landscape that these groups inhabit can be viewed as actively provincialising – rather than celebrating, imitating or seeking – whiteness. In the next chapter, I outline the different ways in which this perspective can be seen to inform local interactions with *òyìnbós*, and in the process, look at how these interactions are shaping the world beyond Lagos.

CHAPTER EIGHT:
Òyìnbós enacted

> As for the outlying areas of Lagos… a good number of the inhabitants of these neighbourhoods have never held a conversation with an oyibo, never considered white people anything more or less than historical opportunists or gullible victims…
> - A. Igoni Barrett, *Blackass. A novel,* 2015 p.10

> [I]n writing about corruption, the ethics of representation inevitably collide with the political uses of corruption and corruption allegations in creating, navigating, and explaining inequality.
> - Daniel Jordan Smith, *Corruption and "culture" in anthropology and in Nigeria,* 2018 p.S86

In this final empirical chapter, I turn to consider how race is enacted; that is, how it comes to exist in the material world, beyond purely discourse, attitudes or ideas (Saldanha, 2007). It is in moments of enactment, I suggest, that the racialisation process is revealed not in differentially racialised bodies as such, but through social interactions between people (M'charek, 2013). As such, these enactments in themselves constitute an important part of the production of race, whereby in Fields and Fields' (2012: 147) words, it is through: "small, innocuous, and constantly repeated rituals…[that] race [is] reborn every day." In charting some of these moments of enactment, I look to interpret these as part of the local race-making system in which they occurred, or in other words, to attempt to view them from the perspective of Lagosians as race constructors, on their own terms. In this, I suggest it is necessary to base this analysis on understandings of the nature of social hierarchy and racialised power that I outlined in Chapter 7. To adopt this perspective, as I have outlined in previous chapters, is to view social life in Lagos generally – and contemporary relationships with *òyìnbós* within that – as being primarily based upon a realist framework of power. I use this term to refer to political realism, premised upon understandings of the social environment as being characterised by competition, where individuals and groups therefore seek power (and social status) to ensure their own preservation. Using this framework in turn invites us to view

race-making practices not as the external imposition of power structures upon the racially oppressed. Rather, I suggest that race-making practices are a means for individuals in Lagos to actively engage with global and local power structures, and as such, these practices can at times be viewed as working to actively provincialise forms of whiteness.

In doing so, I draw together the foci of previous chapters to suggest that race-making may be considered useful by many people in Lagos because it informs the manner of incorporation of *òyìnbós* into the local, highly competitive, social system. Within this system, designating a person as *òyìnbó* – or not – brings to bear a set of assumptions, based on an individual's physical appearance, about which normative system is likely to be in operation. On this basis, individuals can assess how to approach the particular situation with a view to gaining a social, economic or other advantage. Race-making therefore guides the parameters of social interactions, bringing differences between normative systems to the fore, and giving an indication of, to use Smith's (2007: 71) turn of phrase, the likely "rules of the game". As I outlined in Chapter 7, framings of historical *òyìnbó* power feed into this process, but they do not dictate the outcome entirely. The residues of transatlantic slavery and British colonialism in Lagos, while highly signficant aspects of Nigerian history, do not alone explain the basis for contemporary race-making practices in Lagos. To better understand local race-making processes, it is necessary to understand how people tend to perceive their relationships with their others, which involves stepping away from the notion that, prima facie, Lagosians remain subservient to *òyìnbós* within a singular global racial hierarchy. In analytical terms, this also negates the framing of Lagosian agency primarily as resistance to a de facto greater *òyìnbó* power. Due to their historical power, dominant narratives among my research participants revealed that *òyìnbós* are often considered worthy – and potentially lucrative – possible partners or adversaries. But as Nigerian novellist A. Igoni Barrett submits in the first epigraph above, *òyìnbós* do not tend to loom as large in the local collective imagination as those outside Lagos might be inclined to think they do.

A second key argument that I illustrate through this chapter relates to the local

specificity of race-making and its links to local competition for social status. In this, because race-making in the moment is a social negotiation, there are distinctions to be made between Lagosians themselves. While Lagosians as a population generally share and perpetuate an understanding of the meanings attached to imaginaries of *òyìnbós*, the social stratification of Lagosians affects how these narratives are enacted. Importantly therefore, the most significant factors in how an *òyìnbó* is likely to be incorporated into Lagos' social environment in any given situation is not only related to the particular *òyìnbó* in question, but also the social position – and personal disposition – of the Lagosian(s) involved. In other words, race-making is in the eye of the beholder as much as it is in the physical embodiment of the racialised other. There are of course a range of different factors that contribute to an individual's social position, and I explore some of these in more detail in the following sections. As I outlined in Chapter 5, however, the most significant of these within Lagos is economic status. Due to the lauding of wealth accumulation in Lagos, an individual's own self-perceived economic status is likely to have the greatest influence on how an *òyìnbó* might be incorporated into their social realm. It is in this way that economic factors – rather than racial ideology alone – ultimately shape race-making practices in Lagos.

In this penultimate chapter, then, I develop these arguments through analyses of a series of ethnographic encounters to show how ideas about race are reflected in the enactment of *òyìnbó*. My attempt to situate these encounters within a localised, realist framework of power, and to interpret them from this perspective, brings to the fore questions about the ethics of representation, as Daniel Jordan Smith recognises in the second epigraph above. I address some of the ethical considerations raised by my choices as to how to represent people and events in Lagos, and explain my rationale for doing so, in the first two sections below. Following this, I choose a series of ethnographic moments to illustrate how responses to *òyìnbós* in Lagos form part of a wider, in the moment social negotiation. To illustrate the range of social factors that can affect these negotiations, I start by looking at an incident with an umbrella on Lekki Bridge. Then, to draw out the significance of relative wealth to these interactions, I organise subsequent sections

by economic status, starting with a focus on how lower status Lagosians – usually those who are least financially secure – are most likely to conceive of interactions with *òyìnbós* as offering an opportunity. This could be in the form of a financial opportunity, or offering other forms of social prestige. As most Lagosians remain in this economic category, the perception of *òyìnbós* as offering opportunity characterises the majority of such interactions. The nature of the interaction itself may differ, however, and I provide two ethnographic examples to illustrate common types of opportunity-interaction, based firstly on Lagosian deference to *òyìnbós*, and secondly on *òyìnbó* gullibility. In these sections, I link localised ethnographic examples to larger-scale social phenomena driven by the same principles. Following this, I outline the social utility of the race-making process itself to people in Lagos, in relation to both opportunity-seeking, and the corresponding management of risk. Finally, I consider an example of the power that wealthy Lagosians can exert by reacting to *òyìnbós* with indifference. Through each of these ethnographic moments, in which *òyìnbós* are enacted, I draw out the ways in which local race-making practices can be seen to be actively provincialising whitenesses – and indeed, how some responses to *òyìnbós* may offer a glimpse of whiteness provincialised.

GLOBAL MONORACISMS AND THE NORMATIVE ETHICS OF REPRESENTATION

A significant issue with arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms is their tendency to focus on global racialised oppression at the expense of recognising significant forms of agency among those designated oppressed. These scholars tend to overlook the potential of this agency partly because the forms of political action that result from a pragmatic, realist framework of power diverge from those most commonly envisaged and endorsed by their own work (see Mills, 1997 and 2015; Kendi, 2019; Beliso-De Jesús & Pierre, 2020; Smalls, Spears & Rosa, 2021). I consider political action in this context in a broad sense, as a challenge to authority, elite or other group interests, or as a disruption to common cultural codes. In making this claim, I suggest that advocates of monoracism arguments often implicitly base their analyses upon what may be considered a liberal framework of power, whereby established institutions of legal and political

governance exist with the aim of delivering some measure of fairness. From this perspective, a belief in individual rights (including human rights and civil rights), liberty and equality often leads to the assumption that these ideas should be replicated universally. Within this framework, demands for social justice are therefore based upon a perceived need for the moral and ethical rectification of actions that caused – and are still causing – racial inequality. Within a realist framework, on the other hand, actors are compelled not to tip the balance on the basis of redress, but to find ways to actively seize the power to sanction this for themselves as individuals or kinship networks, rather than as a racialised collective. Later in this chapter I explore examples of local forms of political action in Lagos, which I analyse as being based upon such political realism, including the generation of foreign aid, the advancement of particular framings of 'corruption' for political purposes, and the implementation of various confidence tricks. The difficulty for analyses based upon monoracism arguments is that these resultant forms of what may be considered realist political action can be, and in fact often are, antithetical to the moral and ethical framework that forms the liberal basis of these scholars' own demands for social justice. As a result, proponents of arguments based upon global monoracisms not only fail to recognise these actions as forms of *valid political action* in their own right, but also tend to object to any academic exploration of these on the basis that they do not conform to the ethical principles that these scholars seek to uphold. As John McWhorter (2021) argues, in this context it is increasingly difficult even to query, let alone challenge, the prevailing orthodoxy upon which monoracism arguments rest.

This issue brings to the fore once again the inherent tension between accepting and exploring local race-making practices in Lagos on their own terms, and much left-leaning scholarship's desire for the universal application of progressive values. For many, if not most, proponents of arguments premised upon global monoracisms (e.g., Gibbons, 2018; Allweis, 2021; Smalls, Spears & Rosa, 2021; Christian & Namaganda, 2022), it is unpalatable – many would probably say unethical – to argue that African agency might be channelled in pragmatic ways to addressing social inequality within localised frames of reference that do not adhere to these scholars'

own moral and ethical framework (Jean-Klein, 2001). This issue surfaces often in issues of representation, where academics tend to guard against portrayals of the 'oppressed' as acting in ways that they consider to be unethical based upon their own imposed terms. Smith (2007: 10) notes that, among anthropologists in particular, there is a "disinclination to attach a seemingly derogatory Western label like corruption to the behavior of non-Western peoples." He argues that this is due to anthropologists' focus on "local rationalities and cultural logics" which produces a "largely sympathetic sensibility…regarding their subjects" (*ibid.,* p.10). The difficulty with arguments premised upon global monoracisms, however, is that this approach is *not* usually based upon an understanding of local rationalities and cultural logics. Rather than seeking to understand how local race-making systems operate, and for what purpose, these writers instead tend to envelope the multiplicity of diverse race-making practices found across the globe within their own framing of a moral battleground between blackness and whiteness. For this framing to be effective, only whiteness can be ethically suspect. To suggest that the racially oppressed may also act immorally on occasion – except perhaps in scenarios that can be viewed as being caused by their oppressors – is to threaten the foundations of the entire argument (Wacquant, 1997).

It is on this basis that I aim to productively challenge arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms, for their underlying rationale has a tendency to limit both the empirical scope of our research questions and our analytical rigour. Of course, academics should be mindful of the inherent power of the researcher's gaze and pen (Rose, 1997), and the underlying politics of the production of knowledge (Horowitz, 1993; Robinson, 2003; Mama, 2007). But we should also equally work to avoid (self-) censorship of academic arguments that productively challenge normative theory. I have been challenged by friends and colleagues around the ethical implications of bringing Lagosians into representation in situations whereby they are actively seeking to take the upper hand over their *òyìnbós*. I choose to do so later in this chapter because precluding these instances from my analyses diminishes my ability to understand my research participants, and consequently detrimentally impacts the depth of my analyses and ultimately limits the conclusions I am able to

draw. In this, I am reminded of a segment of Mphahlele's (1993: 33) 1965 speech in which he outlined his critique of negritude, and where he made the case for recognising and representing Africa in all its utterly human complexity:

> What I do not accept is the way in which too much of the poetry inspired by it [negritude] romanticizes Africa – as a symbol of innocence, purity and artless primitiveness. I feel insulted when some people imply that Africa is not also a violent continent. I am a violent person, and proud of it because it is often a healthy human state of mind; someday I'm going to plunder, rape, set things on fire… I'm going to become a capitalist, and woe to all who cross my path or who want to be my servants or chauffeurs and so on; I'm going to lead a breakaway church – there is money in it; I'm going to attack the black bourgeoisie while I cultivate a garden, rear dogs and parrots; listen to jazz and classics, read "culture" and so on… This is only a dramatisation of what Africa can do and is doing. The image of Africa consists of all these and others.

I argue, then, that scholars should be seeking to portray a fuller image of Africa than those who make arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms might wish to allow. This is not to suggest that I have no concerns about misrepresenting my research participants or the places I carried out my research (see Chapter 3). Nor do I wish to argue that the representations I make here are *more valid* than any others. I have chosen to incorporate specific ethnographic moments in this chapter in support of my overall argument. As such, they were chosen on a selective basis, which I address in the next section. But I would also submit that this does not make them any *less valid* than other representations either.

ETHNOGRAPHIC MOMENTS: ON STATUS HIERARCHIES AND SOCIAL CALCULATION IN LAGOS

My argument that race-making practices in Lagos can – and should – be viewed as a means of actively engaging with global and local power structures is therefore necessarily supported by ethnographic moments in which people in Lagos seek to *gain an advantage* in their interactions with *òyìnbós*. Within a pragmatic, realist framework of power, seeking to gain such a social, economic or other advantage is the basic objective for individuals operating within such a system. This is not to suggest that I conceive of this type of social system as entirely anarchic, without any

rules of engagement. Based on my ethnographic fieldwork and from dominant narratives among my research participants as to how they conceive of their social system, I suggest that such a realist framework of power is defined by a high level of social competition, but that it also incorporates social imperatives around allegiance to one's extended networks, whereby individuals tend to view themselves as acting on behalf of a wider collective. In this, however, individuals often seek to gain status within their network without reference to the same liberal ethical and moral framework to that which monoracism arguments tend to be based. This often results in an explicit calculation of the costs and benefits of any particular action, behaviour or relationship.

References to such social calculations can be found in scholarship on a wide range of social interactions across African contexts, and not just those involving processes of racialisation. Smith (2007: 81), for example, documents the ways in which both men and women in Nigeria "describe…[social] manipulations of the opposite sex." Dixon (1991: 69) also speaks of "the manipulation of the multiple links one has with benefactors and recipients in order to build up those relations of patronage" among the Yorùbá. Monga (2016: 41) too, in his exploration of *Nihilism and Negritude,* refers to the fact that in African communities both sexes "are focused above all on the cost-benefit analysis of a possible relationship." In the Kenyan context, Thieme (2013: 397) also notes, "the carefully calculated process of assessing the risks and odds of any income-generating prospect", and speaks to a framework of morality that diverges from liberal frameworks of power in that, "Whether [such a prospect] was legal or illegal, considered licit or illicit, was not the point" (*ibid.,* p.397). As I have suggested in previous chapters, rather than acting 'unethically', these actions and social calculations should be viewed as being rational within frameworks that are internally coherent and have their own ethical and moral codes. The foundations of these codes are neatly summarised by Smith's (2007: 72) observation that, in Nigeria, "Helping one's people often supersedes obedience to the abstract rules of the state".

In recognition of this, my incorporation of ethnographic data that illustrates the ways in which people in Lagos may seek to gain social advantage is not to suggest that

Lagosians are unique in this. Rather, I would argue that seeking to gain advantage is part of the human condition itself. What varies between groups of people is the social behaviours that allow us to do this, and relatedly, the behaviours that are sanctioned as a result. To focus on the ways in which individuals may seek competitive advantages over their racialised others in Lagos, then, is not to suggest that Lagosians only or uniquely pursue such objectives, or display such behaviours. Rather, I incorporate these representations in support of my argument, but I also give them prominence because such examples are often neglected or de-emphasised by contemporary scholars of Africa (Chabal, 2009). It is on this basis that I now turn to consider the ways in which *òyìnbós* may be enacted in Lagos, and to the first ethnographic encounter, which took place in a relatively wealthy area near to the centre of the city. Through this encounter, I illustrate both the range of social factors that can influence the negotiation of racialised interactions, and highlight how such interactions can themselves be considered forms of valid political action.

WEALTH, SOCIAL STATUS AND THE ENACTMENT OF *ÒYÌNBÓS* IN LAGOS

Two òyìnbós and an umbrella

One morning in late July, my son, our driver and I are queuing in traffic to get onto Lekki Bridge. We have moved barely one hundred metres in half an hour, and my son – aged two years – is getting more and more frustrated with the confines of his car seat. So he and I get out of the car to investigate; him tugging at my hand, leading the way. We walk only a few minutes to the turning onto Lekki Bridge before it starts to rain. Within another thirty seconds, it has turned into a downpour. I pick up my son and look for a place to shelter, but there is nowhere nearby. The water is not cold but our clothes are quickly becoming soaked. I search for our car in the queuing traffic behind us, inching forward towards the bridge, but it is not yet in sight. First, a young security guard approaches, asking if we are okay and if he can help. He offers to get us an umbrella from his compound. But before he goes, another umbrella is proffered towards us from the window of a car in the queuing traffic. A young man inside the car calls out to me to take it. The sound of the rain is deafening. As I move

towards the car, I shout out to him: "How should I return the umbrella to you? Will you not need it?" He waves his hand as the security guard accepts the umbrella on my behalf. "Don't worry," he tells me. "Just leave it at the toll gate for the bridge. I will collect it later." My son and I walk back in search of our car with the security guard holding open the umbrella for us as if to guide our way. The rain is torrential now, so I go to take the umbrella from the security guard so he can return to shelter in his compound. But he is insistent, trying his best to cover us with the umbrella while he remains out in the open. And so it is that we return to the car. Two *òyìnbós* under the umbrella; the security guard soaked to the skin.

On the surface, the offer of an umbrella to an *òyìnbó* caught in the rain might be taken as just another example of those designated *òyìnbó* receiving preferential treatment in Lagos. While everyone hurried to take cover from the ensuing downpour that day, as far as I could see my son and I were the only *òyìnbós* stranded in the rain, and no one appeared to offer anyone else an umbrella. The young security guard racing off to find an umbrella may bring to mind the dispatching of servants to perform similar tasks during the colonial – and in some cases, the post-colonial – era. The optics support such an interpretation: that two *òyìnbós* were sheltered by an umbrella while a young security guard got drenched in the rain would seem to give credence to an interpretation of racially-based exploitation. And of course, there is an inherent inequality in the fact that the *òyìnbós* in question were able to drive around Lagos in a Land Rover, while the security guard would be lucky to earn more than ₦20,000 [£52] per month. Yet if we look more closely, the Lekki Bridge incident reveals the interplay of a wider range of factors, among which *òyìnbó*-ness is clearly significant, but it is not the only social consideration guiding events on the bridge that day. It may not even be the most important factor shaping the behaviour of those involved. While as Lim (2008) points out, it is not possible to ever validate data from ethnographic encounters such as this one, it is useful to consider how the material might be linked to the representational in order to better understand the implications of race-making, and importantly, to scrutinise the body of knowledge that those representations have come to inform.

Undoubtedly my son and I were physically marked out as *òyìnbó* on the bridge that day: our clothes, our skin tones, and the texture of my hair stood out amidst the people surrounding us. Our appearance spoke to the trope of *òyìnbó*-as-wealthy – my son wore open-toed Nikes, and my dress was from a foreign department store. But in relaying the story to Nigerian friends afterwards, it was not only our *òyìnbó*-ness that was signficant to them. An unaccompanied woman in apparent need of help, who in addition was carrying a child, introduced a gender dynamic that invited – or for some men, seemed to compel – them to provide assistance. For the men involved, it provided an opportunity to take on the role of male protector, which both reinforced their own status as man-of-action against the combined tropes of woman-as-fragile and *òyìnbó*-as-weakness. As a result, it was likely a combination of racialisation processes, gender dynamics and ideas about motherhood that prompted the offer of multiple umbrellas on Lekki Bridge that day. The Lagosians I spoke to about the incident afterwards stressed that each of these three social elements was important in provoking the actions of those present, and in this case, each factor encouraged the same response – the offer of assistance.

However, the social positions of the men who offered the umbrellas also affected our encounter. The security guard, of lower economic status, was likely most influenced by the opportunity to earn a financial reward for his service. He walked with us back to our car and remained out in the open throughout. Once he had helped us inside, and while I strapped my son into his car seat, he waited patiently by my window. He took the umbrella from me to return to its owner, but did not raise it over his own head. Now dripping wet, his actions were an almost exaggerated performance of subservience – not seeking shelter from the rain even when possible – perhaps as a strategy to secure a bigger tip. The possibility of asserting himself as a man-of-action was seemingly secondary to this economic focus; assisting a woman and child was a financial opportunity as much as an opportunity to perform his masculinity. Seeing him soaked through, I responded with a generous tip, which likely reinforced his understanding of *òyìnbó*-as-wealthy and possibly, of *òyìnbó*-as-gullible. Our driver, tutting under his breath while watching from the front seat, seemed incredulous at the security guard's payment. On the other hand, the man

who offered the umbrella from the car seemingly had no expectation of payment for his kindness. In rush hour traffic headed into central Lagos, his economic status was likely higher than that of the security guard, yet his car was a saloon without the branding or personalised number plates that would indicate extreme wealth. The man was seated in the rear of the car along with other passengers, so it may be that his actions were for their benefit as much as for mine. Quick to loan an umbrella in weather where it is most needed, and casual about its return, the man's actions that day were a performance of generosity and resourcefulness, rather than subservience. It was a response based on the same ideas about race, gender and motherhood, but differentiated from the security guard's response by economic status, and the social status that the man in the car sought to convey both to me, and to those who accompanied him.

I use this example to illustrate both the potential range and complexity of factors linked to racialisation processes, as well as the political nature of racialised interactions, which leads me to argue that such incidents should in themselves be viewed as forms of political action. By this I mean that on a highly localised scale, the actions of both the security guard and the man in the car represent an engagement with the underlying politics of the local status economy, by seeking to attain – albeit at a miniscule scale – social or economic benefit from a racialised interaction. That this occurs, in this instance, on a micro-scale does not mean that such examples should be dismissed, or that similar processes are not operating on larger scales, as I outline later in the chapter. For proponents of monoracism arguments, commonly based upon a liberal ethical framework that upholds equality and social justice as universal principles, such incidences would most likely be overlooked, even as possible "edits to the status quo" (Andrews, 2021: 206). This is understandable when viewed in direct comparison to the massive collective effort and hard-won achievements of civil rights movements across the world over the past century, including anti-colonial movements in Africa. Of course, mass political action also takes place in contemporary Lagos, as after the annulment of the presidential election in June 1993, in the fuel protests of January 2012 and the more recent End SARS protests in October 2020. Yet these kinds of mass protest are relatively rare in

Lagos. I suggest that this is because within understandings of a pragmatic, realist framework of power, people tend to be encouraged to seize individual, if small-scale, opportunities to affect their own position within the existing social hierachy, rather than to attempt the mass reform of the hierarchy itself.

The incident with the umbrella provides an example of this. Here, the security guard was *never instructed nor coerced* to seek an umbrella on our behalf, or to remain out in the open until he was soaked to the skin. I suggest that *he chose* to do so, not simply because he had internalised the racialised logics of colonialism against his own interests, but rather because he saw in the situation an opportunity to advance those interests: generously but perhaps exaggeratedly performing the provision of assitance allowed him to supplement his own income. As my driver commented afterwards, the tip I gave the security guard that day was probably more than he could usually expect to earn from a full day's work. This is not to suggest that the economic disparity between myself and the security guard was in any way fair, or that the incident with the umbrella did much to materially change this. Rather, my point is that from a realist perspective, the inherent fairness of the situation is not necessarily emphasised as it tends to be in analyses based upon a liberal perspective. I suggest that the security guard's actions were based upon an inherent acceptance of the inequality of the situation, but that from a pragmatic, realist perspective, he sought to take advantage of an opportunity embedded within the very inequality of the situation. In the same way, the man in the car did not appear to be unknowingly or unwittingly re-enacting a global white supremacy to his own disadvantage. Rather than being driven by a psychological trauma rooted in colonial history, I suggest that once again, the man *chose* to loan his umbrella in that torrential downpour as an act of kindness to me, but one that likely also allowed him to gain social status among those who accompanied him. By looking more closely at these underlying politics, we are able to better understand why racialisation occurs in particular circumstances. In doing so, the racialisation process, when deployed across a wide range of social and geographical contexts, can be seen to inform small scale but nonetheless *valid political actions* in their own right: supplementing incomes, or providing the opportunity for an individual to gain an incremental increase in social status among

peers. In this way, racialisation does not simply represent the imposition and perpetuation of local and global inequalities, but can be seen as a method of actively responding to these.

The incident with the umbrella on Lekki Bridge also highlights again the importance of economic status in the particular context of Lagos, relevant here both to ideas about òyìnbós and to local people's differential responses to racialised interactions. In the following sections, I outline how it is these manifestations of global and local economic processes for individual Lagosians that primarily impact how òyìnbós are enacted. For those with lower social status in Lagos, usually those that are less financially secure, òyìnbós are primarily imagined as an opportunity for advancement. Whether as a means of direct financial investment, job opportunities, sponsorship of visas or company endorsements, òyìnbós can potentially open up a range of prospects for ordinary Lagosians. In Lagos today, this group incorporates most of the population, for middle-class Lagosians too are inclined to seek potential avenues for progression through association with òyìnbós. In the next section, I outline two different ethnographic examples illustrating how people in Lagos may view and interact with òyìnbós on this basis – firstly, interactions based on Lagosian deference, and secondly, interactions based on òyìnbó gullibility. I choose these examples to show how race-making practices in Lagos can result in varied social interactions, yet remain based on the same underlying understanding of òyìnbó normative systems and how best to take advantage of them. This is not to suggest that these are the only ways in which these interactions can take place, nor to imply that these different scenarios operate in isolation. Of course, the spectrum and variation in detail among these possible relationships is infinite, and include relationships based upon interaction as equals in professional and personal capacities. Yet the following examples illustrate an understanding that such mutually beneficial relationships are not always possible, and so individuals are at times inclined to seek opportunities from òyìnbós in other ways where the opportunity arises.

ÒYÌNBÓS AS AN OPPORTUNITY

Mr Adekoya: Lagosians and the politics of deference

The headteacher at the secondary school where I carried out my research, who I will call Mr Adekoya, welcomed me from the first time I met him. I met two other headteachers on the same day, and both seemed reluctant for me to carry out research within their schools, despite my letter from the Department of Education giving permission for me to do so. But for Mr Adekoya, nothing was too much trouble. Every morning, when I greeted him in his office, he made time to talk to me, and asked if there was anything I needed. He introduced me to his senior leadership team and to the students in assembly and told them all to make me feel welcome. He arranged for me to have my own desk and a quiet place to work in a school in which both were in short supply. He agreed to some students completing a photo project about *òyìnbós* to assist with my data collection, and when I needed to get film for the cameras, he arranged for transport and offered to accompany me to the market. He introduced me to his family and told me about his life and career; and I introduced him to my husband and son. When I think back now to my time carrying out research in Lagos, he is one of the people that stands out most in my mind.

Mr Adekoya was never anything but kind and helpful to me, and this was quite deliberate. He sought to build a relationship with me based on kindness, but also on his own strategic deference. I noticed early on that he would tactfully decline to criticise anything that I did. Some of his office staff tutted and laughed when they saw a photo of my two-year-old son in a swimming nappy, and they started to reproach me about it. Most Nigerian toddlers are already toilet trained by this age. But upon hearing this, Mr Akekoya came in from his office and instructed them – in Yorùbá – not to say anything further. They fell silent immediately, and Mr Adekoya came himself to admire the photos of my son, smothering me in compliments. But his office staff's reaction to my son in nappies was based on genuine surprise, and I could sense that the incident would continue to be a topic of conversation in the office after I had gone. Similarly, Mr Adekoya avoided making any kind of negative

comment about *òyìnbós* more generally. While other interviewees talked about *òyìnbós* wearing inappropriate clothes or not appreciating good food, Mr Akekoya was steadfast in his admiration of *òyìnbós*. In an interview he told me that *òyìnbós* were always sincere, and that as long as you were straight with them, then they would help and assist you. In that interview, Mr Adekoya outlined his own approach. He actively sought to incorporate me into his own social network through flattery and by providing assistance. In doing so, he created a social contract between us that meant it was incumbent upon me to return the favour; he effectively tutored me into understanding his own perspective on how relationships should work. I indeed attempted to honour that contract by helping him and his family where I could. He set up opportunities for this to happen with that expectation, and it was assistance that I was happy to provide.

Mr Adekoya's approach to his relationship with me was – from my perspective at least – subtle but highly effective. When Lagosians take such a deferential approach to *òyìnbós*, however, it does not indicate that they are blind to *òyìnbós*' faults, and nor is their apparent admiration always sincere. I do not know what Mr Adekoya really thought about my approach to toilet training my son, but I suspect he broadly shared the view of his office staff. The point is that Mr Adekoya worked hard to frame our relationship as one in which I could consider myself superior to him if I so wished. By establishing this dynamic, however, Mr Adekoya was able to meet his own objectives from our relationship – indeed, it was his effectiveness at establishing this dynamic that allowed him to do so. Such a strategy mirrors what Chabal and Daloz (1999: 117) call the "politics of dependence" at the international level, whereby African leaders address "the foreign 'other'… in the language that is most congenial and, crucially, most easily reinforces the belief that they (outsiders) understand what Africa needs." Thus, African leaders have variously agreed to adopt everything from democratic reforms, to structural adjustment, scientific socialism and the proposals of a range of development projects in order to meet their own objective of securing foreign aid. It is a strategy that Chabal and Daloz (*ibid.,* p. 118) evaluate as follows: "the ability to exploit successfully the condition of dependence

for the purpose of generating foreign aid must be seen as an unalloyed diplomatic achievement on the part of African politicians."

Similarly, Tignor (1993) shows that during the colonial period, Nigerian elites of all political persuasions deferred to British administrators' narratives and framing of 'corruption', making allegations of malfeasance in an attempt to sabotage political adversaries and advance their own agendas. Tignor argues that throughout the early twentieth century, such allegations of corruption against Nigerian officials were never "simply an objective reality… [Corruption] became a symbol and a metaphor, constructed in the midst of political competition" (*ibid.* p. 176). Revealingly, however, Nigerian elites never attempted to challenge that what the British condemned as 'corruption' also served useful functions within Nigerian society, choosing instead to publicly affirm the British perspective that such behaviours "stemmed from the personal failings and inordinate greed of individuals" (*ibid.,* p.200). This utilisation of the politics of deference remains common among Nigerians today. For example, Apter (2005: 235) argues that contemporary confidence tricks designed to take in *òyìnbós* continue to invoke colonial-era notions of deference by means of "playing of the fool against the fool. The[se] con[s] combine elements of bourgeois respectability with bungling slapstick, playing ever so delicately upon third world "mimicry" and mimesis of the West to reinforce the [*òyìnbó*] mark's sense of confidence and superiority."

Sunday: Lagosians and the exploitation of òyìnbó gullibility

At the other end of the spectrum, it is only the *òyìnbó* cast in the role of the fool. This characterisation was the basis of the relationship that I grew to have with a man I will call Sunday, who I employed as my driver. Sunday was a man in his thirties, married with young children, who had worked in driving jobs all over west Africa. Like many people in Lagos, he and his wife were often in and out of work and they lived from hand to mouth. A few weeks after starting to work for me, after lunch one day Sunday felt unwell. He was sweating, feverish, he complained that his head ached. But he insisted that he could still work, and was clearly worried that his illness would

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mean he would lose his job. He managed to drive us home that day, and I asked him to stop at a government health clinic on the way. Sunday protested that he didn't have any money to pay for the clinic. When I told him that I would pay, tears welled up in his eyes – a combination, I suspected, of gratitude and the effects of his illness – and he wiped them away quickly in embarrassment. Sunday and his family lived in the suburbs across the city, and his journey to our home each morning could take several hours on public transport. After a couple of months, I discovered that instead of travelling home each day Sunday had started to stay in our neighbourhood, sleeping outside in the open, in order to save money and time on his commute. He was a good driver, but was often tired and became distracted during the day because he wasn't able to sleep well at night. I didn't want to lose Sunday as a driver, but I was worried about him sleeping outside, so I arranged to rent a small room for him locally. Drivers employed by large companies in Lagos are commonly provided accommodation, I reasoned. When I told Sunday I would do so too, he was so delighted he started talking about moving his family down to our neighbourhood to join him.

My Nigerian friends and family told me that I was being foolish with the way that I was 'spoiling' Sunday. A Nigerian would not pay for a health clinic for their driver, they told me. A sick employee would be replaced immediately – if you cannot work, you don't get paid. My husband refused to tell his family that I had paid for accommodation for Sunday; he said he would be humiliated if his family even knew that he had allowed his wife to do so. The patriarchal nature of gender relations in Lagos meant that I agreed to keep quiet about it too. But for me, ensuring that Sunday was healthy and well-rested was not an act of kindness, for it was in my interest that he should be able to drive well. The cost of the health clinic (£4) and the accommodation (£30 a month), although astronomical for Sunday, were to my mind very reasonable. But of course, Sunday did not share my perspective. My rational investment in the health and welfare of an employee was, to Sunday, confirmation of the significant scale of both my surplus wealth and of my *òyìnbó* gullibility. As time went on – and as my Nigerian family predicted – Sunday's requests for financial assistance became more frequent and more bold: he needed money for lunch; could

I buy books for his daughter; he needed a new phone, ideally a smartphone. At the same time, Sunday would attempt to trick me out of money whenever the opportunity arose. Drivers in Lagos commonly make deals with fuel pump attendants, filling the tank with less than requested and splitting the profits between themselves. As time went on, I discovered that Sunday would routinely short change me at the fuel station – or indeed elsewhere – whenever he got the chance.

On a much smaller scale, the dynamics of my relationship with Sunday mirror those inherent to the confidence tricks for which Nigerians in particular have become known internationally. Central to these scams is the delicate combination of relationship-building, deception and victim gullibility. Known as 419 scams, initially they commonly involved online advance fee fraud, in the form of everything from impersonation of officials and career opportunity fraud to romance scams and fraud recovery fraud. Although the scale of these scams is global and the financial costs difficult to accurately assess (Glickman, 2005), repeat victims of fraud in the UK alone reported losses of £373 million in 2019/20 (Action Fraud, 2021), and the UK was the source of the largest number of cyber crime victim reports globally outside of the US (FBI, 2020). US citizens reported losing more than £433 million to romance scams alone in 2020 (FBI, 2020), and in Australia, the equivalent loss was over £45 million in 2019 (Cross, 2020). A significant proportion of these scams is believed to originate in Nigeria, allowing Apter (2005: 226) to suggest that even during the 1990s, when internet usage was far less widespread, the 419 industry was already Nigeria's second biggest foreign currency earner after oil. Today, the best 419 scammers in Nigeria are able to make an enviable living (Eichelberger, 2014). The industry itself is constantly evolving (Newman, 2018), developing from the speculative emails from 'Nigerian princes' and the wives of military dictators that were common in the early 2000s, to more elaborate multi-level marketing pyramid scams, complete with playbooks (Dellinger, 2019) and cyber fraud training schools in major Nigerian cities (Nwaubani, 2019).

This increasing professionalisation of the 419 scam underscores the perception I found among many of my research participants that the industry is not only

legitimate, but an enviable way of making a living – or even a fortune. While older Lagosians that I interviewed were more likely to condemn the dishonesty of the 419 industry, this perspective was very much in the minority. Undergraduates who took part in a focus group at the University of Lagos were unanimous in their admiration for the most successful scammers. No longer the reserve of uneducated criminals, successful 419 enterprises are today built by strategic, innovative and ambitious young people (Newman, 2018) who view successful scammers as "role models" (Nwaubani, 2019). At the same time, the increasing skill level required to achieve such success reflects the premium that people in Lagos tend to place on the ability to outwit opponents. As I discussed in Chapter 6, Nigerians generally revel in their own ability to outsmart others, whether *òyìnbó* or otherwise. Stories of the most outlandish 419 scams are therefore peppered with minor details to highlight the humiliation of the victim. Smith (2007: 3) relays the story of a Texas oil executive duped by fraudsters pretending to be from the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, in which "friends who were listening to the story laughed uproariously because the supposed deputy manager's name, Ibu Onye Biribe, translates into "you are a fool" in the Igbo language." In a further indication of the particularities of local moral and ethical frameworks, proceeds from 419 scams are not considered stealing (Eichelberger, 2014), but rather the legitimate earnings of the most skilful entrepreneurs. Indeed, fraudulent funds obtained via this method are often used to establish legitimate businesses, and scammers can go on to become respected philanthropists or politicians (Nwaubani, 2019).

On this basis, Apter's (2005: 230) suggestion that Nigerians view the 419 scam as a form of "righteous third-world banditry" or "reparations for colonialism and the slave trade" echoes many arguments premised upon global monoracisms in its over-emphasis on these historical periods, and its consequent overstatement of the need among Nigerians to justify participation in the 419 industry. Among my research participants, 419 scams commonly needed no such justification. As Smith (2007: 37) reports, those working on 419 scams often feel ambivalent about their involvement in the process, as "anyone who would fall for the 419 scams was both greedy and rich enough so that there was no need to feel sorry [for them]". Even among older

research participants, who did not readily endorse the legitimacy of scammers, there was a recognition that a lack of other employment opportunities was responsible for the growth of the 419 industry.

As the success of scams is dependent upon the gullibility of victims, *òyìnbós* are attractive targets for 419 scammers as they are routinely imagined – as Sunday viewed in me – to have the necessary combination of significant wealth and inadequate 'street smarts.' But as scams are strategically designed to self-select the most vulnerable victims, and successful scammers invest in researching the dupes most likely to pay dividends (Eichelberger, 2014), *òyìnbós* are only targetted where they fit these criteria. As Herley's (2016: 11) analysis of the most likely targets for online Nigerian scammers shows:

> Since the scam is entirely one of manipulation, [the scammer] would like to enter into correspondence with only those who are most gullible… Since gullibility is unobservable, the best strategy is to get those who possess this quality to self-identify. An email with tales of fabulous amounts of money and West African corruption will strike all but the most gullible as bizarre. It will be recognized and ignored by anyone who has been using the Internet long enough to have seen it several times… Those who remain are the scammers' ideal targets.

As awareness of scams and law enforcement efforts have increased, therefore, 419 outfits have correspondingly adapted their tactics (Newman, 2018), including in some cases eschewing *òyìnbós* to focus on duping fellow Nigerians (Eichelberger, 2014). *Òyìnbós* are not targeted for 419 scams then, due to a desire to seek reparations for past injustices; rather, they feature as part of wider contemporary business models. In these scenarios, scammers interact with *òyìnbós* according to whether their behaviours exemplify those necessary for 419 scams to be successful, the most important criteria being gullibility. Not all *òyìnbós* exhibit this behaviour, of course, but 419 entrepreneurs in Lagos, and elsewhere, are ready to exploit the opportunity when they do.

In these ways then, whether through the performance of deference or the exploitation of *òyìnbó* gullibility, conceiving of *òyìnbós* as offering an opportunity for

advancement leads again to responses to the racialisation process that can be viewed as forms of strategic political action at a variety of geographical scales. In the particular context of Lagos, economic status underpins this process due to the significance of wealth both to the local status economy, and because of its strong association with *òyìnbós*-as-trope. As Said (1978: 5) argues of "the West" in his *Orientalism* thesis, within the race-making system in Lagos, these ideas about *òyìnbós* should not be considered "an airy…fantasy" about others, "but a created body of theory and practice in which, for many generations, there has been a considerable material investment." This investment in perpetuating ideas about *òyìnbós* – and consequently in the race-making process itself – is therefore not primarily the result of a globalised anti-blackness that largely originates elsewhere and has been transmitted to Lagos via histories of colonialism and imperialism. As the examples above illustrate, ideas about *òyìnbós* and responses to racialised encounters come together to *actively assist* people in Lagos in their attempts to *gain a social or economic advantage* from these interactions. Within this framework, the prospects for social change are not premised on the need for mass revolution that commonly underscores liberal demands for social justice, although this is not to say that such a revolution would necessarily be viewed unfavourably if it were to occur. In Lagos – and I suspect, in other places too – the provincialisation of whiteness is already an iterative, incremental, yet highly active process, occurring in the here and now.

THE SOCIAL UTILITY OF RACE-MAKING: NORMATIVE SYSTEMS, OPPORTUNITY AND RISK

The strategic nature and social and political utility of the racialisation process, based upon cultural ascription, is apparent when looking more closely at the role that normative systems play in this process and how they assist in its management. Underscoring the social utility of race-making is its usefulness in informing the manner of incorporation of *òyìnbós* into the local social system and related status economy in Lagos. Once an individual is categorised as *òyìnbó* – or not – cultural ascription guides subsequent social interactions by giving an indication of which

normative system is likely to be in operation. On this basis, individuals can assess how to approach the particular situation with a view to gaining a social, economic or other advantage. Lagosian agency in this process is highlighted through the fact that, while *òyìnbós* can represent significant opportunities, my research participants' narratives also revealed an understanding that as outsiders to African normative systems, interaction with *òyìnbós* can bring with it particular risks. This element of risk is evident in both of the examples outlined above. In the first, Mr Adekoya attempted to minimise these risks by tutoring me in how I was expected to repay the assistance that he provided with my research. With Sunday, as with 419 scammers, the framework for interaction with *òyìnbós* was similarly designed, as far as possible, so that he retained control of key aspects of that interaction.

Underlying this wariness is the perception that *òyìnbós* cannot be relied upon to fulfil social obligations in the way that is expected when people in Lagos interact with others designated as 'Africans'. As several of my research participants reported, becoming too close to *òyìnbós* can also be problematic due to their inquisitive nature, which means that they can be quick to report things to authorities, and can therefore uncover things that are best left alone (see Chapter 6). Approaches from *òyìnbós*, particularly when *òyìnbós* actively seek assistance, tend therefore to be initially treated with suspicion, as I found when I started out with my fieldwork (see Chapter 3). Smith (2007) describes a similar situation where his brother-in-law asks for his assistance in helping to secure a secondary school place for his niece, even though she did not achieve the necessary grade on the admissions test. Smith, who had been carrying out research in education locally, tried to use this influence to lobby the principal of the school. He (*ibid.,* p.71) reports:

> In any event, my effort failed. The principal told me that only those students with sufficient scores could be admitted, and no amount of cajoling on my part moved her. I believe my intervention failed precisely because I was not, in the eyes of the principal, part of a trusted social network. To her, I was an outsider, with no roots in the community, no permanent identity, and no place in a web of social relations that she had a stake in perpetuating. Further, as a foreigner, I also represented a risk. To operate with me based on the informal rules of the game [school admissions through a system of

patronage] when I was potentially associated with formal rules of the game posed unknown consequences…

The risk posed by *òyìnbós* can come from either an inability to understand the rules of the game within representations of African normative systems, or equally, a perception of *òyìnbós*' propensity to switch between normative systems, complicating the rules of engagement. My approach to my fieldwork may be considered an attempt to traverse normative systems. While being clear that I was working as an academic researcher, I found that dropping into conversation that I am also a 'Niger Wife' (my official immigration status), generally shifted people's perceptions of me. My being married to a Nigerian seemed to lead them to conclude that I may have more of a vested interest in the country and people, and that I had chosen to be in Nigeria for reasons beyond the pragmatic necessity of business or employment. This understanding was often tested by one of several common follow-up questions: do you eat *amala*, do you have children, and what are their (Yorùbá) names? Once I had established my credentials as a Yorùbá wife, I seemed to become less of a threat, I supposed because if my behaviour was inappropriate it would be possible for people to negotiate whatever the issue was with my husband. At the same time, by qualifying as an in-law, I seemed to somehow place myself within the social network that my respondents commonly associated with representations of African normative systems. On this basis, I found many local people seemed more willing to assist me with my endeavours, particularly if they were Yorùbá like my husband. Although I experienced this in a highly gendered way – for example, male spouses of Nigerians are simply given 'Special Immigrant Status' without reference to being a 'Niger Husband' – Smith (2007) also describes, from a male perspective, being credited with in-law status in a similar way. Yet even with my in-law credentials, many people in Lagos continued to interact with me based on an understanding of *òyìnbó* normative systems. I too remained aware that my ability to truly step outside of myself and consider an alternative way of thinking about the world had its limits. Understanding representations of a normative system is not the same as thinking through it and living by it, as the following short ethnographic encounter illustrates.

The headteacher and the bottle of water: Òyìnbós and risk

I commonly sought to convey deference to those who participated in my research, highlighting that they were the experts and I was the learner. I attempted to enact this within my understanding of local customs that show respect – bowing my head and curtsying in greeting, and referring to participants as Sir or Madam. And yet, I was sometimes caught off guard. At an event where I was conducting research at the secondary school, I bowed low to greet all those I was introduced to at the high table. I greeted in Yorùbá, and used formal language appropriate for greeting those senior to myself. But when one headteacher at the high table reached out to give me a bottle of water as a gift, my immediate instinct was not to accept it. In that moment, I rationalised that it would not be appropriate to take any resources from an environment in which resources were so scarce. I attempted to wave my hands to decline the gift; her hands still outstretched, we fumbled between us and she was left holding the bottle. The expression on the headteacher's face told me that I had made the wrong decision, but it was too late. I had already passed her by and was being introduced to the next dignitary.

I understood later that the headteacher likely interpreted my action as rudeness because I seemed to be attempting to position myself as the patron, with the wherewithal and impertinence to decline gifts. Not only did my refusal of the bottle of water deny her the opportunity to be a patron to me, the fact that I appeared to reject her as a patron in front of others on the high table would have caused added embarassment. Her attempt to increase her own social status, by publicly making me her beneficiary in line with my own deferential behaviour, therefore possibly resulted in a reduction of status through my rejection. I realised that, despite my low bows and best efforts, by declining her gift I had given away the fact that I did not truly understand how to behave appropriately in such circumstances. Or perhaps the headteacher did not realise that, and instead just thought that I was plain rude. Either way, that *òyìnbós* can act in unpredictable and inappropriate ways must have appeared self-evident to the headteacher and others watching. On this basis, the risks of interacting with *òyìnbós* then – even Niger Wives who have spent some time

in Nigeria – are not insignificant. Cultural ascription based upon the notion of normative systems, then, serves a socially useful purpose in helping to reduce this element of risk, and increase the likelihood of gaining a social advantage.

ÒYÌNBÓS AND LAGOSIAN INDIFFERENCE

The final response to *òyìnbós* that I consider is that of indifference. By indifference, I do not wish to suggest that in these scenarios the racialisation process itself no longer occurs, for in the ethnographic moment that I outline below, I was still ostensibly categorised as an *òyìnbó*. Rather, the significance of such scenarios results from the *divergent meanings* attached to *òyìnbó*-ness by those involved. Unlike in the preceding sections, where Lagosians primarily viewed *òyìnbós* as a potential opportunity due to their association with wealth, in this instance the wealthiest people present were Lagosians. It was this fundamental change in the social dynamic – the relative distribution of wealth as the cornerstone of the local status economy – that prompted quite different responses to my *òyìnbó*-ness, characterised by indifference. The removal of the linkage between *òyìnbó*-ness and wealth resulted in a negotiated social hierarchy in which how an individual was racialised was not the most significant factor in their relative status ranking. This echoes Adekoya's (2021: 98) assertion, based upon the specific context of Lagos, that, "The basis of the respect my Nigerian peers felt for the West was not in the white skin colour of its inhabitants, but in the wealth and development they associated with it". As such, when people in Lagos respond to *òyìnbós* with indifference then, it is an indication of the fact that they feel they can *afford* to, due to their own financial or social-status security – or both, as the two are commonly linked. Therefore, as I outline below, this very indifference can also be considered a form of political action when it is used to further increase social status by outwardly demonstrating this security, as this response also seeks to directly impact an individual's relative position within the local status economy. Due to the relative distribution of wealth among Lagosians, indifference to *òyìnbós* is not a widespread response to racialised interactions at present, but in particular circumstances, it does occur. I outline an ethnographic moment that illustrates this dynamic below.

Olu and the nursery school pool party: Whiteness provincialised

My son, then aged two years, attended nursery school in a wealthy suburb of Lagos while I carried out my fieldwork. There, he made his first ever best friend, a little boy that I will call Olu. I guessed from the different cars that took Olu to and from nursery – some with covered or with police number plates – that his family were very wealthy. But it was only when my son was invited to Olu's birthday party that I realised the extent of that wealth. We received the invitation only the day before, inviting my son to attend a pool party at the family's home. That night, I packed my son's swimming trunks, my shorts, flip-flops and towels in preparation. When we arrived at the compound for the party, some cars parked outside had police escorts. As we queued up to enter, I realised that we were dramatically underdressed compared with the outfits that other adults and children wore. Each name was carefully marked off a guest list by guards at the security gate. Inside, the compound featured three different swimming pools arranged around a central garden. There was a giant bouncy castle, fairground rides and games, entertainers, face painters, attendants handing out drinks, and two enormous birthday cakes. My son didn't know where to look! It took us a while to find Olu, but delighted to see his best friend, my son then joined him in various activities, while three nannies shared the role of keeping an eye on the birthday boy. I joined in too in my flip-flops and shorts, a rucksack filled with towels and sun cream on my back. Other guests continued to arrive, women in the highest of heels and men wearing formal suits. Olu too wore a suit, and changed his outfit several times during the course of the party. The champagne flowed. Nobody entered the swimming pools, but admired their decoration with multi-coloured balloons and lights from the side. Later, when Olu's mother came to introduce herself, she offered me champagne and made polite conversation. When she learned that I was British she told me she had just returned from their apartment in west London. Having been out in the sun for a couple of hours by this point, my sweat-smudged make-up, shorts and flip-flops must have contrasted even more sharply with her manicured appearance and outfit of premium brands.

The social distance between our family and Olu's family – as well as between me and many of the other guests – was so significant that, even if I had not misinterpreted what to expect at a toddler's pool party, our differential rankings in Lagos' highly competitive status economy would still have been obvious. Many other families – a few *òyìnbós* but mostly not – attended along with their children's nannies. That my son did not even have a nanny underscored these dramatic differences in both wealth and outlook further still, as while I lifted my son in and out of fairground rides and played chase with him and his friends around the pools, most other parents chatted over drinks at tables in the shade. So while I expect that if I had surveyed attendees at Olu's party that day, they would have reported that I – and possibly my son – were *òyìnbós*, their highly indifferent responses to me underscored the reduced significance that such a designation held, on its own, in that environment. While we experienced what can be viewed as a form of privilege linked to wealth that meant that my son received an invitation to the party in the first place, this was not enough to bridge other social divides at the event itself. I knew few other parents at the party, and so aside from a brief conversation with Olu's mother, I spoke mostly to the domestic staff who were charged with looking after Olu. In retrospect, even the staff must have wondered what type of person thinks it appropriate to attend a birthday party in beach wear, and must have found it strange to watch me trying to aim for my son in the ball pit, while they remained more sedately at the sidelines unless Olu needed them.

While the sun reddening my skin must have highlighted my *òyìnbó*-ness, this designation marked me as an outsider rather than in any way superior. Of course, nobody at that party sought me out as the source of a potential opportunity, for I expect they assessed – quite accurately – that interaction with me would *reduce* their social status among those present. If my *òyìnbó*-ness was what allowed my social indiscretions and class-based out-of-placeness to pass unremarked, the social sidelining that I experienced at the party was a form of rebuke in itself. Indeed, it was not only economic factors that marked me as an outsider; my failure to conform to a wider spectrum of social and behavioural expectations, from dress codes to appropriate forms of childcare in such an environment, highlighted my difference on

multiple levels. This correspondingly shaped social interactions, for where many of the other guests seemed to already be acquainted or were happy to make new social connections among themselves, most barely made eye contact with me. It was this very indifference therefore, that underlined and maintained other guests' superior social status ranking over mine. That the usual social dynamic between local people and *òyìnbós* was reversed in this way was further confirmed when I told my husband about the party later. He asked lots of questions about Olu's family and the other guests, and then said he was sorry not to have been able to attend himself: "There were plenty of opportunities to meet important people at that event," he told me. "I can't believe you spent your time playing with the children and the domestic staff!"

If the ambivalence of many people in Lagos towards *òyìnbós* drives opportunity-seeking political actions that can be viewed as actively provincialising global whitenesses, then the indifference of Lagos' elite to less wealthy *òyìnbós* illustrates what those political actions might look like when whiteness is provincialised. Economic status, as a central feature in Lagos' status economy, is key in this particular context, but may play a less significant role in other places. As such, while the events of Olu's birthday party highlight this point due to the significant difference between his family's wealth and my own, it does not necessarily follow that extreme wealth is a prerequisite for the provincialisation of whiteness to occur. Indeed, as the social utility of indifference is primarily aimed at impacting an individual's position within the local status economy, rather than being focused on influencing social hierarchies at wider scales, there is considerable scope for the adoption of such behaviours. There is also the possibility that their occurrence is already widespread across diverse social contexts, but either way, I suggest that they should be recognised as forms of valid political action in their own right. As such, I maintain that *the underlying purpose of race-making practices in Lagos is primarily to impact an individual's position within the local status economy*, rather than seeking to influence social hierarchies at wider geographical scales. This may be antithetical to arguments for racial justice based upon liberal understandings of equality and universal human rights, but this does not mean that such actions should be overlooked, nor that they are socially ineffective. Such an analysis, which demands a

focus on the ways in which whiteness is not hegemonic in addition to recognising the ways in which it is, reflects a number of key points that I want to draw out from this study.

Firstly, recognising the ways in which people in Lagos are active race constructors – and taking seriously these constructions as our primary focus of study – is imperative if scholars are to really understand the local basis and purpose of race-making. While recognising racial prejudice among groups themselves considered racially oppressed goes against the grain of the prevailing academic orthodoxy, through the example above, the value of doing so highlights the potential of such a focus. Such analyses highlight the fact that there is not a singular monoracism, albeit with local manifestations. Rather, while the features of the race-making process remain largely comparable across time and space, the social utility of this varies by geography and throughout history as the process itself is deployed by different groups to serve their differing interests. To recognise this, scholarship must be open to recognising and understanding the ways and places in which the racialised power of dominant groups is also negotiated, challenged, denigrated – and indeed, provincialised – as well as the ways in which it is valorised. Such an understanding also needs to be based upon an emic view of the nature of the social environment more broadly. As in the case of Lagos, such a perspective invites academics to engage with divergent conceptions of the nature of social hierarchy and racialised power, and consequently, to consider how these may lead to similarly divergent forms of political action. These forms of political action are not lesser because they do not conform to dominant conceptions of what appropriate and effective activism looks like. Indeed, by failing to recognise such racialised interactions as valid engagements that are intended to influence social, political and economic environments on their own terms, it is not possible to even begin to assess their implications or relative effectiveness.

Sustaining a focus on global monoracisms also impacts academic understanding of local perspectives on racialisation outside of colour-line contexts generally, and the ways in which these are intertwined with the wider political economy. In the case of Nigeria, this is likely to be particularly detrimental to wider scholarship given the

radical changes projected to take place in the country over the coming decades. This chapter has looked at framings of relationships with òyìnbós in terms of deference, dominance and indifference. Relating these relationship dynamics to wider phenomena that operate with parallel rationales, I have briefly touched upon overseas aid flows, framings of 'corruption', and the 419 industry as just three examples of the many ways in which Lagosians, and Nigerians generally, are shaping the world within and beyond their city and country. In doing so, I have suggested that local framings of these phenomena, rooted in and driven by a particular understanding of racialisation processes, can be quite different to how they are commonly framed and interpreted by policy makers, the media and in the literature. Yet Nigeria's influence, along with that of African countries generally, will likely grow significantly over the next thirty years. Nigeria already has the largest population in Africa, the seventh largest globally, and is also growing most rapidly. According to UN (2017) estimates, by 2050 Nigeria will have the third largest population in the world, surpassing that of the United States. Africa as a whole will have a youthful, increasingly urbanised and digitally connected population, which for the first time in modern history will be three times larger than that of Europe. At the same time, European countries, along with many other non-African countries including China, are expected to have ageing, declining populations. Whether these forecasts are viewed as a problem for non-African countries (Smith, 2019) or not (Brachet, 2020), or whether combined with predicted economic growth, they represent an opportunity for African countries (Devarajan & Fengler, 2013) or not (Meagher, 2016), they will have significant local and global implications regardless. What these implications are likely to be is not my focus here. But whatever happens, understanding local conceptualisations of the social worlds that people inhabit, and by extension, interpreting how these understandings frame and drive responses to future demographic, economic and other social changes can only be advantageous to those tasked with adapting to how diverse peoples are increasingly likely to seek to re-make the world in their own image.

Secondly, my analyses of the enactment of òyìnbós also have implications for wider race theory. The events of Olu's birthday party lead me to support Arun Saldanha's

(2007) conclusion that effective activism should seek not the eradication, but the proliferation of the meanings attached to the racialisation process. In the particular context of Lagos, due to the significance of wealth within the local status economy, this will necessarily relate to the de-linking of imaginaries of *òyìnbós* with excess wealth; or in Adekoya's (2021: 99) words, "The road to the end of white supremacy lies in economics, not sociology, history or semantics." Many other writers have of course looked at the intersections between racism and capitalism (Bethencourt, 2013; Kendi, 2019). Yet while many, such as Bashkow (2006: 287), advocate that social justice action should focus on "working to improve the livelihoods and status of disadvantaged people", I believe that insights generated by this project lead to a parallel, but nevertheless, slightly different conclusion. Being productively attentive to the ways in which whiteness is *already being* actively provincialised brings with it a particular message of hope. Through the astuteness, audacity, sense of entitlement, strength and pragmatism displayed daily across a city like Lagos, we see how ideas about *òyìnbós* are utilised primarily to influence the contours of the local status economy. This is not to invite complacency, for far more work on the nature and impacts of such local racialisation processes is needed, particularly outside of colour-line contexts. Yet this finding leads me to conclude that the provincialisation of whiteness is nevertheless likely to already be occurring within various corridors of – localised, vernacular, and sometimes alternative forms of – power, across the world, and particularly beyond our academic focus on racialisation in colour-line contexts. It is incumbent upon scholars to further investigate and explore such occurrences. This everyday provincialisation of whiteness, where it does occur, highlights that alternative forms of political action, that do not subscribe to the same moral and ethical framework of dominant liberal frameworks of power found within the literature, are not only possible but are already occurring. In the continual political activism of millions of Lagos' inhabitants, through their everyday race-making, status-striving and opportunity-seeking, we should recognise not only the potential for incremental yet still significant change to racialised landscapes and social relationships, but that such changes are already in progress.

CONCLUSIONS

Understanding the local, emic basis for ideas about race is vital to inform relevant social theory. In this chapter, by outlining how these ideas are materialised through the negotiated enactment of *òyìnbó*, I have demonstrated how race-making practices in Lagos are primarily linked not to global ideologies of race, but to local power structures that interconnect with wider processes and inequalities. In this, the social utility of race-making becomes apparent when viewed as a strategic enactment of the continual practice of politics. People in Lagos use racialised ideas to incorporate *òyìnbós* into locally-based framings of the world, largely on their own terms. They continue to enact *òyìnbó*, in the context of racial inequality and social injustice, not as the passive recipients of a historicised racism originating elsewhere. Rather, local race-making is a response to social and economic conditions, filtered through local understandings of the nature of the social environment, and the best ways to engage with this. Perpetually striving, determined, audacious and innovative, the range of responses to local people's interactions with *òyìnbós* – from subservience, to dominance, to indifference – are purposeful, complex and primarily dependent upon material circumstances rather than racial ideology. Recognising them as such brings with it a message of hope, not just because these responses suggest that whitenesses could be provincialised as part of a future ideal, but because examples of this provincialisation reveal themselves to be part of an iterative, incremental, yet long-established process that is already occurring, in Lagos, right now.

CHAPTER NINE:
Conclusions

> [I]t is almost certainly the case that the most effective answers to the challenge of racial discourse [in the Sahel region] will be found within the intellectual framework of Mali and the larger Sahel, not outside of it.
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> - Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa, 1600-1960,* 2011 p.326

On 25 May 2020, the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in the US state of Minnesota precipitated some of the largest public protests seen in recent decades. In the US, over seven thousand demonstrations took place across all fifty states during the summer of 2020. Across the globe too, anti-racist activists demanded change, with journalists at the time reporting that up to 26 million people had joined demonstrations in sixty countries in response to Floyd's death at the hands of police (Jones, 2020). Online activism also increased exponentially following Floyd's murder. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag – first used in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for Trayvon Martin's murder in Florida – generated 3.4 million original posts with 60 billion engagements in the seven days after Floyd's death, representing approximately thirteen percent of all posts and over fifteen percent of all engagements on Twitter during that period (Wirtschafter, 2021). Over the course of the following year, over 150 statues, street names and other tributes to the Confederacy were removed or renamed in the US (Douglas *et al.*, 2021), with demonstrators prompting similar actions in multiple other cities across the globe. The political momentum and global reach of subsequent protests and anti-racist activism led the Center for Strategic and International Studies, based in Washington, DC, to note that, "The United States has emerged in 2020 as the global epicenter of mass political protests" – even against the backdrop of a global pandemic (Ahmed *et al.,* 2020). Two years later, and US President Joe Biden, when signing a police reform bill at the White House, echoed Floyd's daughter Gianna's own words back to her when he said that her father had "changed the world."

The international dimensions of the response to Floyd's murder underline its far-reaching impact. Yet, despite being prompted by a single event, this global response was – and is – in fact interwoven with important local strands. Mass protests were prompted by Floyd's murder, but in many places, these also sought to address local manifestations of racism, specific policing or security grievances, and related but often largely domestic iterations of wider political issues. In France, for example, Floyd's murder coincided with protests prompted by the publication of a report clearing police officers of any wrongdoing following the death of Adama Traoré in custody in July 2016. Black Lives Matter protests in Paris and other French cities, held on 2 June 2020, were organised by the Justice for Adama campaign, led by Traoré's sister. So too in Colombia, Black Lives Matter protests prompted by Floyd's murder simultaneously called for justice for Anderson Arboleda, who died near Cali three days before Floyd was killed. Arboleda died from injuries sustained after being stopped by police for breaking a local quarantine curfew. In Syria, Aziz Asmar produced an anti-racist mural depicting Floyd on the ruins of a bombed building as, he explained, "the violence felt close to home" because it resurfaced memories of Syrian civilians facing sarin gas attacks: "victims [in Eastern Ghouta] were crying and they were asking to breathe," he said. "I saw George Floyd pleading with the officer to let him breathe and it reminded me of the way they were killed" (quoted in Hincks, 2020). Black Lives Matter protests in the UK similarly enmeshed a response to Floyd's murder with political grievances closer to home. Demonstrators in London initially encircled the US Embassy, before moving to Grenfell Tower, the site of a fire in 2017 that killed seventy-two people. Eighty-five percent of those killed by the fire were from "ethnic minorities" (Townsend, 2020), and at the time of the protests, frustration was building at the designated scope and initial outcomes of continuing public inquiries, which had yet to result in any charges being brought against those responsible for the tragedy.

These local strands give vital context to race-making practices all over the globe, but they are too often misconstrued or simply overlooked. McWhorter (2021: 37), for example, arguing against the idea that US society is "in some kind of denial" about the existence of racism, cites as evidence that "Black Lives Matter protests in

solidarity with the ones here are taking place in countries where many of the protestors don't speak much English and have never known a black American" (*ibid.,* p.38). In seeking to highlight the influence of anti-racist activism that originates in the US, he overlooks the possibility that international protests may not *only* be focused on showing solidarity with African Americans. Events in the US often serve as a prompt and provide important context to global events, but each individual demonstration is also part of a highly localised political milieu, and it is in overlooking the specifics of these situations that our analyses register only part of the picture.

This is apparent in the case of Nigeria, where it was not the murder of George Floyd that prompted mass protests, but domestic incidences of police brutality by the Federal Special Anti-Robbery Squad (known as SARS) that sparked online protests initially, followed by major demonstrations in Nigerian cities in October 2020. These were also supported by the wider Nigerian diaspora, amidst calls to recognise the #EndSARS protests as "another iteration of the Black Lives Matter movement" (Onuzo, 2020). But the relationship between the Black Lives Matter movement globally, and related localised activisms, is likely more complex than simply designating each incidence of the latter as "another iteration" of a global driving force. It is also dangerous not to examine the inherent politics of doing so. As I outlined in Chapter 2, increasingly widespread academic framings of these phenomena – heavily based on US race politics – value recruitment to a global anti-racist cause largely built in their own image. We see this in Onuzo's (*ibid.*) plea for "international outrage" in the face of the documented brutality of SARS' police units in Nigeria, through which she sought to explicitly link #EndSARS with wider activisms in this vein: "When one of us hurts, we all hurt. When one of us wins, we all win", she wrote at the time. Such a contextualisation is itself a political manoeuvre that demands analysis as part of both the *local* as well as the global picture.

In foregrounding the geographically specific, emic nature of racialisation processes, the argument of this thesis is not against the power and potential of global anti-racist alliances. Rather, I suggest that it is necessary for scholars to acknowledge and better understand some of the localised nuances to be found within race politics across the

globe, and to recognise that divergent framings of race-making practices are likely to lead to divergent forms of political action that do not necessarily fit with widespread academic conceptualisations of what appropriate social and political activism might look like. The overarching aim of this project speaks to this agenda by seeking to understand race-making practices in Lagos on their own terms. From this perspective, I argued in Chapter 4 that at a foundational level, race-making in Lagos commonly operates as a binary, exclusionary form of classification that constitutes a form of racialisation comparable in terms of the ways it operates – but not in terms of global impact – to those found in many other places around the world. This process, as reflected in the specific context surrounding usage of the term *òyìnbó*, has a particularly localised timbre, however, in that it primarily speaks to localised political objectives. These are apparent both in negotiations as to how particular individuals should be racially classified in Lagos, and in the wider social and political work that racialised concepts perform in constructing understandings of an African 'us' that can be contrasted with an *òyìnbó* 'other.' Building upon this foundational process of categorisation, in Chapter 5 I illustrated how common imaginaries of *òyìnbós* are evaluated not in line with pre-existing and untethered notions of a global white supremacy premised upon monoracism arguments, but according to the principles of the local moral economy. It is this localised evaluative register that results in highly ambivalent attitudes to *òyìnbós* as individuals and to *òyìnbó* as trope, whereby imaginaries of *òyìnbós* comprise some aspects that tend to be celebrated in Lagos, alongside others that tend to be denigrated. In Chapter 6 I looked at how these racialised meanings build into a coherent system of knowledge regarding otherness, shared by many people in Lagos, and described to me as being operationalised through an understanding of racially distinctive normative systems. I argued that the key to understanding the meanings attached to racialisation in Lagos, then, is to situate constructions of *òyìnbós* within local conceptualisations of the social environment, and through local representations of normative systems, to look at how this is contrasted with the social worlds of imagined others. By centring representations of local, collective self-perceptions in this way, I have suggested that the political practice of race-making in Lagos is a means of actively engaging with global and local power structures within local frames of reference. In contrast to

arguments premised upon the existence of global monoracisms, I have argued that race is enacted in Lagos largely in service of local people's own interests.

RACIAL AND ETHNIC STUDIES: LESSONS FROM LAGOS

In Chapter 2, I outlined the implications of this study in terms of two lessons from Lagos. Here, I revisit these lessons in order to situate them more broadly in line with the contribution that this project seeks to make to the wider field of racial and ethnic studies.

1. *It is necessary to understand race-making practices on their own terms*

A major theme throughout this research has been the tension, found in much contemporary scholarship in critical race studies, between promoting and respecting the viewpoints of under-represented communities while at the same time seeking to incorporate these within a framework of progressive values with a basis in European Enlightenment thought. One of the contributions that this project makes to this literature, then, is in highlighting this tension, and suggesting that there are *lessons to be learnt* from race-making practices across African contexts that may add insight and nuance to academic understandings. I have argued that in the literature, calls for racial justice tend to be based upon the particular race politics of colour-line contexts. Premised upon what I refer to as a liberal framework of power – which inherently values individual and human rights, equality and democracy – scholars and activists who adopt this perspective tend to portray global racisms as a zero-sum game between blackness and whiteness. Threads of this orthodoxy have long asserted that Africa is not in need of 'saving,' yet as I have argued in preceding chapters, proponents of monoracism arguments often implicitly assume that the moral and ethical basis of liberal frameworks of power can and should be applied universally. As such, the global application of monoracism arguments therefore extends a particular political aim in seeking global recruitment to what is styled as an international anti-racist cause. Successes measured in numbers – the reach of Black Lives Matter protests, for example – portray an understanding that it is through mass

collective action against inherently racist structures that will lead to social or political change. Within colour-line contexts, although work remains to be done, such actions have indeed led to significant moves towards racial equality, as in the achievements of the twentieth-century civil rights movement in the US, and the ending of the apartheid system in South Africa.

This project, however, tells a slightly different story. It centres narratives from Lagos that do not support the idea of a singular, global monoracism. Rather, these narratives reveal an underlying understanding of the world as being based upon what I refer to as a realist framework of power, in which the social environment is conceived of as being characterised by intense competition that does not necessarily take place on a level playing field. Within this understanding, political action is not based upon an inherent belief in fairness or equality; rather, individuals seek power, through competition, in order to ensure self-preservation for themselves and their social networks. Based upon similarly divergent understandings of the relative fluidity of social hierarchies, and consequently of the nature of racialised power itself, this differing perspective leads to correspondingly divergent forms of political action in response to racialised – and other – inequalities. On this basis, this research highlights the ways in which the political objectives shared by many people in Lagos do not readily conform to the dominant framework in the literature for what appropriate and effective political and social action looks like. I argue, however, that through this local approach – one which prioritises emic perspectives rather than an assumption of the universal applicability of any theory or framework – the responses to racialised relationships that I documented in Lagos are internally logically consistent. I have explored examples of these forms of political action based upon local people's deference, dominance and indifference – and there are potentially many other ways of framing such relationships and responses. In this, I argue that such responses to racialised relationships should be recognised as valid forms of political action in their own right, and that further academic study is needed to better understand these and related social phenomena in a wide range of locations, particularly outside of colour-line contexts, across the world.

2. *There is a need to recognise the importance of geographical specificity amidst global racialisation processes – and anti-racisms*

A second, related theme running through this project is its focus on the geographical specificity of both racialisation processes and the racialised power constructs that result. As I outlined in Chapter 2, arguments for the geographical contextualisation of race politics are neither novel, nor for the most part, especially controversial. Yet the idea of multiple global racisms becomes contentious in the face of a tendency among proponents of monoracism arguments to emphasise the singular power and predominance of whiteness at the expense of recognising the necessarily geographical rootedness of all racialised constructs. So, this study aims to serve as a reminder of the central role of geography in these debates. Dikötter (2008: 1482) recognises this geographical imperative in his call for further research into "local understandings of racism" on the basis of "detailed in-depth studies based on local languages". More recently, Bonnett's (2022: 95) work on *Multiracism* likewise argues, "it is necessary to acknowledge that there is not one, global, debate on racism but many, each connected to but also rooted in particular circumstances." Bonnett suggests that these multiracisms are produced by multiple modernities. This project has taken a slightly different approach in suggesting that the meanings attached to racialisation are primarily related to localised competition for social status. This approach centres the underlying purposes of racialisation by explicitly linking the political nature of race-making to wider social dynamics. In doing so, I propose it has the potential to embed an awareness of geographical scale within academic analyses by highlighting the many, divergent ways in which social status can be gained in varying social environments, and linking these to the operationalisation of racialised social constructs that seek, in part, to influence these status contests.

With a focus on Lagos specifically, this research has outlined some of the key features of the status economy in Lagos, and sought to relate these to local race-making practices. But the point of a focus on the geographical specificity of race-making is not to blindly insist upon the uniqueness of any location, nor to argue

against regional, national, international or global influences on race politics in any particular locality. Rather, it is to invite closer academic attention be paid to the ways in which global articulations of race are geographically rooted, as well as to the ways in which they interplay with other narratives, arguments, and political alignments at multiple scales. It is on the basis of this more nuanced understanding of global race-making practices that we may build more effective anti-racisms. Bonnett (2022: 95) speaks to this aim in his assertion that, "Rather than seeking some kind of international 'normal', we should admit that definitions [of racism] are ongoing and that different, even incommensurable, anti-racist activisms may co-exist." I suggest it is this recognition that has the potential to help build upon existing scholarship and related activisms in important ways, and to take it in new and exciting directions. Acceptance of the idea that there may be different understandings of the meanings attached to race leads to an appreciation of the possibility of different forms of political action. These forms of political action are not lesser because they may not conform to widespread expectations in the literature, largely based on work in colour-line contexts, around what appropriate and effective activism looks like. Instead, a focus on the local dynamics of status games, and the geographical specificity of the race politics to which these are linked, has the potential to offer insights into the making of more effective, dynamic and responsive anti-racist actions, potentially rooted in a wide variety of different social contexts across the world. It is on the basis of such diverse actions that whiteness will be further provincialised.

THE PROVINCIALISATION OF WHITENESS AND OPTIMISM FOR THE FUTURE

Understanding diverse race-making practices and racial systems on their own terms requires a willingness to consider the social world and its related politics from different perspectives. This study has attempted to do just this, by analysing the racial system in Lagos, which as a location remains dramatically underrepresented within critical race scholarship to date. I argue that considering the underlying purposes of race-making in diverse contexts such as this one requires similarly expanding our theoretical horizons to understand that race-making can be a source

of status-striving for all social groups, not only for the most powerful. This raises the possibility that racial justice might actually be being pursued through the deployment of under-studied and divergent forms of the racialisation process itself. For perhaps the most important implication of this study is that it shows that race-making, as part of wider status games, can be deployed by different interest groups in an attempt to increase their own relative social status, which in turn has the potential to *reduce* broader social inequality. The provincialisation of whiteness is a key element of this process. Arguing that the process of provincialising whiteness is already underway, however, is not to invite complacency, nor to deny the ongoing existence of racial injustice at multiple scales and in multiple places across the world. Rather, this study seeks to add nuance to academic understanding on the basis that while racialised power may display some similar trends globally, the geographically rooted nature of race as a power construct means that in seeking racial justice, one size is not likely to fit all.

For what I have referred to as the everyday provincialisation of whiteness, in those many and various locations where it is occurring, reminds us that power and privilege are always being asserted and contested in different ways, in every place and at every time. To understand racialised constructs, including the power of whitenesses, it is encumbent upon academics to more fully explore those contexts and those ways in which whiteness is not dominant, as well as the ways in which it is. Those with an awareness of the vulnerabilities, as well as a recognition of the strengths of racialised constructs, can usefully deploy this knowledge as a way of engaging with the political process at multiple scales. It is on this basis that being productively attentive to the ways in which whiteness is *already being* actively provincialised brings with it a particular message of hope. Within this conceptualisation, whiteness is not a form of insurmountable oppression, which may only be defeated by widespread social revolution. Instead, we are reminded that racialised power is negotiated and remade for all of us in the everyday. A renewed focus on the political purposes of racialisation, among all peoples and at multiple scales, will likely shed new light on more subtle, but perhaps just as effective, challenges to racial inequalities. From this perspective, academics should recognise not only the potential for incremental yet

still significant change to racialised landscapes and social relationships, but that, in some places, right now, such changes are already in progress.

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APPENDICES

UNDER 18

You will be given a copy of this information 🏛 UCL
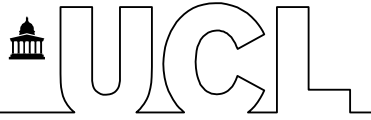
Invitation to take part in research study
Oyinbos in Lagos

My name is Nicola and I would like to invite you to take part in my research study. At the University where I study, we are trying to learn more about how different people are viewed in different places. I would like to know more about how white people, or oyinbos, are viewed in Lagos. Before you decide whether to take part it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what participation will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Thank you for reading this.

Why is this study being done?
We hope that this research will help us to understand more about the effects of differences between people. I would like to talk to a range of different people in Lagos to better understand their perspectives, and I will be conducting this research over the course of one year from October 2016. Overall, around sixty people will be asked to take part in the research, across three different age groups: senior secondary school students, working people, and older people aged over 60 years.

What will happen if I take part?
If you agree to be in this study, you will spend about one hour with me in school to talk about your thoughts and experiences with a group of other students. I will ask you some questions about yourself so that I can get to know you, about your experiences of living in Lagos, and about oyinbos in Lagos. There are no right or wrong answers. The most important thing is for me to understand your point of view. Later, I might invite you to attend a feedback discussion session.

I would like to record our conversations, and if you are happy for me to do this, all the information that you tell me will be kept in the strictest confidence. Recordings will be kept securely for up to two years, after which time they will be destroyed. I will not give this information to anyone else, unless you tell me something that I believe puts you at risk of serious danger. In this instance, I will have to report it to someone who will be able to help you.

Do I have to take part in this study?
No. Being in this study is up to you. Even if your parents give their permission for you to participate in this study, you still can decide for yourself if you want to take part. You don't have to be in this study if you don't want to! Have a chat with your family or with others about taking part in the study to see if you want to participate.

If you do wish to participate please sign the assent form attached. I will talk to your teachers so that you do not miss any important lessons at school. It is important for you to know that even if you take part in the study and you sign the consent form you can still stop at any time without giving a reason.

Will information about me be available to anyone?
The information that I collect from you is confidential and anonymous and will remain so unless required by Nigerian or UK law. Your school or your parents will not have access to the information I collect. In the findings I will discuss the results from many different people – I will not single out or name any one participant. Data will be collected and stored in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act 1998. <u>This project has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee</u>.

What if I want to make a complaint?
If you are unhappy with any aspect of your involvement in this study, you can contact the following people to make a complaint.

Project Supervisor:
XXX
Email: <u>xxx</u>
Telephone: XXX

If you remain dissatisfied with the way your complaint has been handled, you can contact the Chair of the UCL Research Ethics Committee:
XXX
Email: <u>ethics@ucl.ac.uk</u>
Address: Chair of Research Ethics Committee, Academic Services, UCL, Gower Street, London WC1E 6BT (UK)

What will happen to the results of this research project?
The results of this research will be used to write a PhD thesis, and may also be shared at professional conferences or in academic journals. You can request a copy of the final thesis using the contact details below.

Who is funding this research?
This project is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK, through UCL's Doctoral Training Centre.

Contact information
You can ask any questions that you have about the study at any time. If you have a question that you didn't think of now, you can ask it later using these details:

Lead Researcher: Nicola Horne Anwoju
Email: <u>xxx</u>
Telephone: XXX

ASSENT FORM – PARTICIPANTS UNDER 18 YEARS

Please tick (√) appropriate box:

Yes, I would like to participate in this study. ☐

No, I do not want to participate in this study. ☐

If Yes, please complete the following:

☐ I have read the Information Sheet.

☐ I understand that I do not have to take part in this study if I do not want to.

☐ I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a
☐ reason.

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask any questions I wish to ask.

I have the names and telephone numbers of the research team in case I have any queries in the future.

Please indicate your preference for recording your participation:

☐ I give my permission for our conversation to be recorded, and I understand that this recording will be stored securely for up to two years before being destroyed.
☐ I do not give my permission for our conversation to be recorded.

Name: _____   Date: _____

Signature: _____

APPENDIX 1.1 – SITE 1 APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

LAGOS STATE GOVERNMENT

EDUCATION DISTRICT III

EPE, ETI-OSA, IBEJU/LEKKI & LAGOS ISLAND LGAs.

123, Awolowo Road,
Falomo, Ikoyi,
Lagos, Nigeria.

Telephone: 01-8428450
E-mail: edu_district3@yahoo.com
P.M.B:...............................

Ref No.: EDIII/SCH.ADM/G.A/VOL.16/175

1ˢᵗ November, 2016.

Nicola Horne Anwoju

_____ad

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT PH.D. RESEARCH WITH SENIOR
SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS AND STAFF.
LETTER OF APPROVAL.**

Your correspondence dated 27th October, 2016 on the above subject is acknowledged.

I am directed by the Tutor-General/Permanent Secretary to inform you that your request to conduct a research on "What it means to be a White Person" is hereby approved.

You are to see the Principals of the following Schools to carry out the research i.e.
1. _____ School
2. _____ School
3. _____ ol

I wish you the best.

For Tutor-General/Permanent Secretary

VISION: TO INCREASE PRODUCTIVITY IN SCHOOLS BY PROMOTING PROFICIENCY, DEDICATION AND QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY
MISSION: TO DEVELOP AND SUSTAIN EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION.

APPENDIX 1.2 – TEACHING STAFF INTERVIEW OUTLINE

1. BUILDING RAPPORT
- Can you tell me a bit about your career so far?
- How long have you worked here?
- What did you do before you started in this role?
- What is your favourite thing about this role?

2. ABOUT THIS SCHOOL
- What is it like working at this school?
- How would you describe the students here?
- How is success measured?
- What is working well?
- What are the priorities for improvement?

3. OYINBOS IN LAGOS
- What does 'oyinbo' mean?
- Do you know any/ many oyinbos?
- Are there many oyinbos in Lagos?
- What makes someone an oyinbo?

4. EDUCATION AND OYINBOS
- How familiar are the students with oyinbos?
- How do the students view oyinbos?
- What are their main sources of information about oyinbos?
- Does your subject syllabus mention anything relating to oyinbos, directly or indirectly?
- Are there any other ways that students learn about oyinbos in the school environment?

5. CLOSING
- Anything else that you'd like to tell me?
- Any questions you'd like to ask?

APPENDIX 1.3 – FOCUS GROUP PLAN – SCHOOL STUDENTS

	Time allowed	Content	Materials	Start/ finish
Welcome and introductions	5 mins	Introduce each other Explain purpose of session Timing and feedback Confidentiality, being open and honest	Name badges	S 0:00 F 5:00
Ground rules	5 mins	Respect	Flipchart	S 5:00 F 10:00
Aspirations and social structure	15 mins	What are your ambitions when you leave school? Who are your role models and why? What do you understand by giving respect? How do you show respect to people? What type of people deserve respect from others? If you met a group of adults for the first time, how would you know who is most senior/ most deserving respect/ most important in the group?		S 10:00 F 25:00
Local vs. international	15 mins	Have you travelled outside of Nigeria? If so, what was it like? Have you any friends or family outside Nigeria? What do they tell you about other countries? What are the differences between Nigeria and other countries? How else do you know what other countries are like?	World map	S 25:00 F 40:00
Oyinbos in Lagos	15 mins	What does 'oyinbo' mean? Do you know any/ many oyinbos? Are there many oyinbos in Lagos? How can you tell if someone is an oyinbo? Where do oyinbos come from? Did you see many oyinbos when you were younger? What did you think about them then?		S 40:00 F 55:00

		What do you think about oyinbos now? Where do you mostly see oyinbos in Lagos?		
Thanks and farewell	5 mins	Anything else that you'd like to tell me? Any questions you'd like to ask?		S 55:00 F 60:00

APPENDIX 1.4 – STUDENT PHOTO PROJECT BRIEFING

<u>Instructions</u>
Use this camera to take photos of things, people or places that are linked with oyinbos.
There are no right or wrong answers in this project – you are free to take any photos that you think are linked with oyinbos, but please ask for permission to take photos of other people or their property before doing so.
If you like, make notes as you take the photos to remind yourself what you have snapped.
Please bring the camera back to school on _____ for the photos to be developed.

<u>Important</u>
Make sure you have returned your consent form before starting on the project.
Please be careful when taking the photos so as not to put yourself at risk of accidents. Do not travel alone to anywhere new, and make sure you let someone know where you are going and what you are doing before you leave.
Do not open the back of the camera, as letting light inside the camera will ruin any photos you have taken.
You can take around 36 photos before the film inside the camera finishes. When the film is full, you will hear the camera rewind the film. Do not take any more photos when this happens or you might damage those you took earlier.

<u>Reviewing the photos</u>
If you are happy to do so, I would like to meet with you during break time one day after the photos are developed so we can look at your pictures and you can tell me a bit about what you have snapped.

<u>Questions</u>
If you have any questions, please just ask me.

Thank you for taking part in this project! Remember that the project is not mandatory, and you can change your mind about taking part at any time.

Nicola Horne Anwoju

APPENDIX 2.1 – SITE 2 APPROVAL FOR RESEARCH

The Registrar
Senate House
University of Lagos

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
REGISTRAR'S OFFICE
2497
3 0 JUN 2017
TIME......11:09 am
RECEIVED

30 June 2017

Dear Madam

Request to conduct PhD research with academic and non-academic Unilag staff

I am a PhD student at University College London in the UK, carrying out research into what it means to be a 'white person' in Lagos. Most of this type of research has previously been carried out in Europe, North America and South Africa, so I hope to add to this literature by understanding how the idea of a 'white person' is created in Nigeria by exploring the meaning of the Yoruba word 'oyinbo'.

I would like to request your permission to conduct participant observation and interviews with a range of academic and non-academic staff across the University. Staff could include senior and junior academics, administrators and support staff working in restaurants or providing other student services. I will also be requesting permission from academic departments to carry out similar work with postgraduate students. In total, I would like to interview 30 people, and carry out participant observation over the course of four months from August until November 2017.

This study has been approved by the UCL Research Ethics Committee (Project Number 9651/001). Participants will be able to choose whether they want to take part, and will be able to stop participation at any time without explanation. All participants receive an information sheet and will be asked to sign a consent form (please see attached).

I plan to make recordings of all research interviews if participants are happy for me to do so. The information that I collect will be confidential and will remain so unless required by Nigerian or UK law. Recordings will be kept securely for up to two years, after which time they will be destroyed.

The results of this research will be used to write a PhD thesis, and may also be shared at professional conferences or in academic journals. Copies of the final thesis will be available upon request.

I would very much appreciate your help and support with this project. Please let me know if you should require any further information.

Many thanks for your time.

Yours sincerely

Approved
DR-P
30/6/17

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APPENDIX 2.2 – UNILAG INTERVIEW & FOCUS GROUP OUTLINE

A. INTRODUCTION
- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- What is your role at UNILAG?
- How long have you worked/studied here?

B. OYINBOS IN LAGOS
- What does the word 'oyinbo' mean? / Is there an equivalent word in your own language? (if not Yoruba)
- What makes someone an oyinbo, or not? How can you tell?
- Do you know any/ many oyinbos?
- What are your experiences of working with/ interacting with oyinbos?
- Can an oyinbo ever be a Nigerian? Can a Nigerian ever be an oyinbo?
- Can you tell me anything about the history of oyinbos in Nigeria?

C. NIGERIA AND LAGOS
- What are the three best things about Nigeria?
- What are the three biggest challenges facing Nigeria today?
- How is success measured in Nigeria? How can you tell if someone is successful?
- How would you describe Lagos to someone who has never been here?

D. CLOSING
- Anything else that you'd like to tell me?
- Any questions you'd like to ask?

APPENDIX 3.1 – LIFE HISTORY QUESTION OUTLINES

Q1. OYINBOS IN LAGOS

- What does the word 'oyinbo' mean?

- Do you know any/ many oyinbos?

- Are there many oyinbos in Lagos?

- How have the number of oyinbos in Lagos changed over time?

- What makes someone an oyinbo? How can you tell if someone is oyinbo, or not?

- Please tell me a bit about yourself.

Q2. CHILDHOOD

- What is the meaning of your name, and does it have any significance?

- What is your earliest memory of your childhood?

- Where did you grow up? How would you describe the neighbourhood?

- Tell me about your parents – what were/ are they like? What memories do you have of them from your childhood?

- What were you like as a child? What did you like to do for fun?

- What memories do you have of your siblings?

- Did you have any heroes or role models when you were a child? What did you want to be when you grew up?

- What big world events do you remember from the time you were growing up?

- What new inventions do you most remember?

- When did you first learn about oyinbos? What did children think about oyinbos at that time?

- What's different about growing up today from when you were growing up?

Q3. CHARACTER

- Have you ever had any nicknames? Where did they come from?

- How are you similar to your parents? How are you different from them?

- How are your children similar to you?

- What are your two best and two worst qualities?

- What is the highest honour or award you've ever received?

- What is the biggest compliment you've ever received?

- What is most important to you now?

- What frightens you?

- Who are the two people in history you admire most, and why?

- What have been the two biggest news events during your lifetime, and why?

- If you could have three wishes, what would they be?

Q4. NIGERIA AND LAGOS

- If Nigeria has a national character, how would you describe it?

- What are the three best things about Nigeria?

- What are the three biggest challenges facing Nigeria today?

- How would you describe Nigeria's reputation abroad? What do you think about this?

- How is success measured in Nigerian communities? How can you tell if someone is successful?

- What did you learn about Nigerian history in school?

- How has Nigeria's history shaped the country and Nigeria's people today?

- How would you describe Lagos to someone who has never been here? What is the place like?

- How has Lagos changed over the time you've known the city?

- What are the best things about Lagos?

- What are the biggest challenges facing Lagos?

Q5. RELIGIOUS FAITH

- How have your religious beliefs developed over your lifetime? Have you always been a Christian?

- How did you come to attend your church?

- What is unique about your church compared to other Christian denominations?

- What is the most important aspect of your religion?

- What makes you a strong believer in your faith?

- What are your most significant religious traditions?

- What are the most important symbols of your faith, and what do they represent?

- How does your religious community provide support to its members?

- What do you believe about God?

- What do you think happens after we die?

- How do you feel about other religions?

- What impact does religion have in Nigerian societies?

APPENDIX 4.1 – DATA ANALYSIS THEMES AND CODES

<u>Themes and codes</u>

A. Òyìnbós imagined
1. Sources of info
   - P – parents
   - R – relatives
   - M – media
   - S – school
   - N – news
2. Direct experiences
   - T – teachers
   - E – employment
   - O – observations
   - R – relatives/ friends
   - I – int. travel
   - C – childhood/ hist.
   - N – none
3. Òyìnbó places
   - P – positive
   - N – negative
   - H – historical
   - D – delicacy
   - L – Lagos like London
   - M – mixed
4. Òyìnbó character
   - D – discipline
   - T – time
   - E – exploitation
   - I – individual charact.
   - F – friendly
   - Q – inquisitive
   - L – leisure + exercise
   - R – respectful
   - U – understanding
   - P – peaceful/ gentle
   - V – innov/ knowledg.
   - S – straightforward/ principled
   - C – cold
   - A – ambitious/ anything possible/ without envy
   - G – godly
   - N – unsuperstitious
5. Racism

B. Òyìnbós as Others
1. Skin colour
2. Features
3. Hair
4. My son:
   - N – not òyìnbó
   - P – partially
   - O – Òyìnbó
   - C – check app.
5. African Americans
6. Teasing
7. Other words
8. Albinos
9. Mixed colour/ blood
10. Passports

C. Òyìnbós and status
1. Òyìnbó wealth
2. Travel
3. Types of òyìnbós
4. Accent and language
5. Quality
6. Òyìnbó influence
7. Taking photos
8. Innov and tech.
9. Giving gifts

D. Òyìnbós as inferior
1. Street smarts
2. Weakness and delicacy
3. Food
4. Dress
5. Dance/ music

E. Òyìnbós and Lagosians
1. Nigerian history
   - I – Independence
   - B – Biafra
   - J – June 12th
2. Slave trade
3. Contemporary relationship

F. Questions to me
1. Pronunciation
2. Unprompted resp.

G. Nigeria
1. Regional dis/unity
2. Reputation of Nigeria
3. Leadership
4. Education system
5. Success
   - E – employment
   - A – old age
   - O – oba
   - W – wealth
   - C – community contribution
   - Ed – education
   - P – power/ influence
   - N – name + integrity
6. Struggle
   - R – robbery/ theft
   - P – poverty/ not comf/ feeding/ suffering
7. Unemployment
8. Nigerians and wealth
9. Corruption
10. Social contribution
11. Indigenes/ heritage
12. Children/ fam. size
13. Nig. exceptionalism
14. Polygamy
15. Traditions
   - G – greeting
   - M – masquerade
   - V – giving gifts
   - R – marriage
   - N – names/ addressing/ family honour
16. Social connections
17. Protest
18. Justice
19. Role models
20. Colonial mentality
21. Child discipline
22. Natural resources
23. African mindset

H. Gender
1. Domestic labour
2. Niger Wife
3. Etiquette
4. Gender roles
5. Religious rules

J. Lagos
1. Diversity
2. Accomm.
3. Opportunity
4. History
5. Growth

K. Senior Secondary School
1. Students
2. Lagos Island
3. Moving furniture
4. Class phys. desc.
5. Student interaction

L. Religion
1. Negative impacts
2. Syncretism
3. Outside influence
4. Traditional religion
5. Religious dis/unity
6. Church competition
7. White garment churches
8. Belief egs.