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Chapter 7

'I Wish, I Wish…': Mobility, immobility and the global 'imaginings' of Nigerian transnational children

Angela Veale & Camilla Andres

Introduction

Transnational migration characterised by temporary or ongoing border-crossings has been hailed as a means by which migrants can creatively sustain the economic life of their families while establishing connections and social networks in different nation-states (Vertovec, 2007). Yet Al-Ali and Koser (2002) caution that transnational mobility is not equally accessible to all migrants; gender relations, household structures, legal status and access to entitlements can all act as barriers to migrant mobility. While the transnational migration literature emphasises connected social networks across bi-national locations, it has insufficiently captured the 'stuckness' experienced by many African transnational migrants once they reach Europe and that of their children back home. The differently-situated position of children with respect to transnational mobility is under-researched in the academic literature. While the children of the global elite can move with relative ease (Nette and Hayden 2007) , the children of middle-class and poor families in the developing world, such as Africa, encounter significant barriers to transnational mobility. In particular, the left-behind children of European-based African migrant parents are part of an increasing population of children whose lives are defined by the opportunities but also the constraints of globalisation.

The international migration of an African parent is often a collective family project in which the mobility of one individual is dependent on other family members remaining behind, including children and those that take on the obligation to care for them (Øien 2006). Decisions to leave children behind are complex. Parents may decide that young children should be raised in their land of origin as they believe they will get a better upbringing by being raised in their own culture (Whitehouse 2009; Bohr and Tse 2009). Migrant mothers' worry about childcare and education (Dreby 2010). Some migrants migrate through irregular routes making it costly or difficult to bring children (Dreby 2010). This is particularly the case when legal routes to migration are very restrictive, as is the case for African and other third Country National (TCN) migrants seeking to enter Europe. This chapter contributes to the themes of this book by focusing attention on the lives of children arguably on the margins of globalization, that is, children in Nigerian transnational families who remain with caregivers in Nigeria when a parent migrates to Ireland. It,focuses in particular on those children and migrant parents who experience their lives as immobile, such as a result of lack of economic means or legal obstacles to travel or for family reunification. It undertakes a child-centred analysis of dialectics of mobility-immobility as parents move and children remain behind, drawing attention to the consequences of irregular migration as children's family lives become structured by global migration regimes. It uses a psychological perspective to explore the 'global imaginings' of Nigerian-living transnational children in a world where their knowledge of the daily life of their parent and foreign-born siblings is mediated by media, technology, imagination and wishfulness.

It embeds children's lives in family networks with their local caregivers and transnational siblings and parents. It focuses on developmental trajectories, drawing attention to Nigerian transnational children growing from childhood to young

adulthood in migratory contexts where they 'age out' from the possibility of family reunification with their parents and foreign-born siblings in Europe.

Finally, it is based on multi-sited, multi-temporal ethnographic fieldwork in which the researcher moved back and forth between Ireland and Nigeria over a two and a half year period. This 'mobile methodology' means family members on both sides of the transnational divide in Ireland and Nigeria are brought into dialogue as the researcher moved between both worlds, creating a form of proxy-communication through the mobility of the researcher for a parent whose movement was restricted for material or legal reasons.

Transnational Children and Global 'Imaginings'

There is debate within the transnational migration research literature regarding the extent to which parent-child separation is a normative (Rae-Espinoza 2011) or stressful experience for left-behind children (Coe 2008; Heymann et al. 2009; Parreñas 2005; Suârez-Orozco,Todorova and Louie 2002). Transnational family research based on circular migration from within historical migratory communities with established child-fosterage practices shape much of what is known about the impact of transnational family life for children. Åkkesson, Carling, and Drotbohm, (2012) found transnational family members regarded separations as painful but normal, and they supported each other with thoughts that the migrant parent would be able to come back for a holiday after two years. In Mexico, Dreby (2010) argues that adult circular migration patterns are changing. Based on extensive fieldwork, she found that while Mexican families had traditionally endured short-term separations while a family member was abroad, separations were becoming long-term as a result of increased Mexico-US border surveillance, with negative psychological and educational consequences for children.

Presently, little is known about mobility within transnational family migration between Africa and Europe. Gonzáles et al. (2012) examined the length of child-parent separations among Senegalese migrants to Europe. They found that approximately 70% of Senegalese migrant parents and their left-behind children were living in different countries ten years after the initial separation. Return migration leading to reunification increased between two and five years after separation and thereafter decreased. However family reunification in Europe was infrequent although the probability of reunification increased after five years of separation and also if the migrant parent was a legal resident. This probably reflects the lengthy legal reunification application process. Compared to other migratory routes, such as from Latin American countries to the US or Asia to the Middle East, migration from Africa to 'Fortress Europe' is challenging. Travel is expensive. For undocumented migrants, a European-wide system of border patrols and detention policies make travelling without legal permits risky. These factors may contribute to different transnational family patterns in Africa compared to those found in Latin America and Asia, possibly characterised by lengthier child-parent separations and less circular migration.

Time apart creates its own dynamics in transnational families. Carling (2008) describes how non-migrants have difficulty understanding the daily lives of their migrant relatives as they can't see for themselves the places in which they live and work. Dreby (2010) noted that lengthy parent-child separations result in 'time dislocations' whereby parents have a mental image of their children as they were years before and they lose touch with their children's development. Both Dreby (2010) and Carling (2008) mention the centrality of the life of the imagination in transnational relating as parents, children and caregivers imagine the life of the other and miscommunication, tension, and hurt can enter relationships. Children grow up such that 'Ideas of the north pervade children's imaginations' (Dreby 2010: 19). Coe

(2011) notes children had imaginings of ‘abroad’ which they described as urban, modern, and with beautiful buildings in contrast with their own village life. Falicov (2005) asks what happens to the children of transnational migration and whether transnationalism creates ‘real’ connections or connections based on memory and imagination. In Mexican migrant communities, circular migration supports relatedness and intimacy (see Carpena-Mendez, this volume) as children experience their ‘real’ parent beyond the world of their imagination. This ‘real-time’ relationship results in shared experiences and social practices that support children’s ability to engage in relating with their parent in the in-between time of their absence. Davis (2012) undertook an analysis of children’s views of what they see as important in family practices. Children emphasised the face-to face, sensory aspects of relating, routine contact and shared everyday experiences as important to ‘knowing’ the other. Children used ‘seeing’ as a colloquial term to capture what they regarded as an integral part of close relationships; being able to ‘look at their face’, interpret ‘facial effects’, see ‘what they look like, assess ‘how they act’ and their overall ‘personality’. Children noted that routine contact and every-day shared experiences gave substance to co-living sibling relationships that non-resident relationships did not possess. In transnational families, Coe (2011) notes that children in particular felt the ‘scattering’ of the family and sadness if they were separated from siblings.

In transnational relating then, it is clear that children engage in what we term ‘global imaginings’ whereby they imagine the other life of their migrant family members based on what they are told about it, the consumerist objects that come back from that other world and the media. Within the developmental psychological literature, there is an argument as to whether the world of the imagination is a ‘gap-filling’ process whereby “imagination is a process of resolving and connecting the fragmented, poorly coordinated experience of the world so as to bring about a stable image of the world” (Pelaprat and Cole 2011, p. 399) in the same way we view the

frames of a comic book and “fill the gap” between the fragmented images; or whether it is a creative, (not reproductive), enrichment or expansion of experience and understanding (Zittoun, 2013). The former would seem to require some ongoing experience of the world that is then reproduced in the world of the imagination while the latter view goes beyond a more information processing view of the world to draw on what is known but from there is created, expanded, to allow radically new perspectives. In the words of Zittoun (2013) “..imagination is not limited by the borders of the demand of socially shared or materially constrained reality, it allows an *as-if* mode –which can be fictional, playful, hypothetical, counterfactual, retrospective or prospective mode–to create, on a mental plane, alternative realities, recomposing the given or enriching it..” (Zittoun, 2013, p 322). In real-world relating, joint participation in shared activities supports inter-subjectivity and the ability of relating partners to engage in position-exchange. Position-exchange is the ability to take the perspective of another, to exchange social positions, to move out of one’s own position to reflect on the situation of the other (Gillespie 2012). In the absence of direct experience of the physical or social position of the other, dialogue, narrative and other symbolic resources (photos, stories, images) allows one person to patch together an impression of the experience of the other (Gillespie 2012). This is a constructivist act where one partner shifts from the here-and-now real world of ‘*as-is’* to an ‘*as-if*’ position to imagine the world of the other (Zittoun 2007; Josephs 1998). This symbolic space is populated by content from the real relationship but is also infused with content that may also inform this ‘as-if’ world; for transnational children in Africa, this includes information, images and expectations gained from TV, movies, and the consumption patterns of other returned international migrants. The question this chapter asks is: how do Nigerian transnational children in Nigeria and Ireland negotiate relating in this complex global transnational space over extended periods of time, in contexts where there are significant constraints on child and/or migrant parent mobility?

Nigerian Transnational Families in Ireland

Nigerian migrants formed the largest population of African migrants to Ireland during its economic boom years 1996 – 2008, including significant numbers of women. The Nigerian population in Ireland is composed of proportionately more female migrants, their average age is 38 years old and there is noticeably more children in the 10 - 13 year old group when compared to other migrant groups (CSO 2011). Interestingly, 77 percent of households are categorised as mixed Irish-Nigerian households with a child identified as the Irish person in a large number of cases (CSO 2012). A number of entry routes were utilised by Nigerian migrants to enter the country including work permits and student visas. In addition a common strategy in the period 1996-2008 was for Nigerians to enter the country through informal routes and claim asylum (White et al. 2013; Carling 2006). Many Nigerian migrants who entered the country through this route have since regularised their legal status through different mechanisms although only 0.6 percent have been successful in gaining refugee status (Mberu and Pongou 2010). One way in which Nigerians have regularized their legal status is through an administrative procedure known as ICB/05, that is, that they had their residency application granted on the basis of having an Irish born child. A 2004 referendum changed Irish citizenship laws so that children born after 1 January 2005 were no longer entitled to citizenship based on birth. Iroh (2010) argues that:

> the very nature of the processes leading to such regularisation defined Nigerian migratory and transnational formations. That is to say, since the most common route to such legalisation of residence was through becoming the parent of an Irish-born child, a regime akin to the interesting idea 'feminisation of survival' (Sassen 2002: 504) through a

> strategic deployment and practice of motherhood emerged. The 'feminisation of survival' situated the family – not only mothers and their Irish-born children but also their spouses and other children - at the centre of Nigerian strategies of survival (quoted in White et al, 2013: 19).

When ICB/05 was granted, migrant parents had to sign a clause that accepted the applicant had no legitimate expectation to family reunification. In addition, from 2003 - 2011, it was the position of the Irish courts that 'a foreign national parent of an Irish-born child did not have an automatic entitlement to remain in the state with the child', and nearly 12,000 deportation orders were issued, some deported parents including Nigerians chose to take their Irish-citizen child with them. In the Zambrano judgement (2011), the Court of Justice of the European Union ruled that Third Country National parents should be granted residence and the right to work in order to take care of their dependent EU-citizen children, in this case, their Irish-citizen children in Ireland. In Ireland, this has not extended to rights to family reunification and applications for family reunification with spouses and dependent children may be made to the Minister and granted at his discretion.

An evolving strategy for family reunification is one where many Nigerian migrants have reached eligibility for citizenship, obtained citizenship, and as naturalised citizens, have applied for long stay visas for spouses and minor children. Such applications are also at the discretion of the Minister. For minor children that have aged beyond 18 years of age, applications for visas on their behalf are unlikely to be successful. Ireland does not have provisions that allow family reunification of adult children except again in very exceptional cases. The Immigrant Council of Ireland notes that family reunification application procedures in Ireland take one of the longest times in Europe to process : 'Due to this system, a delay can imply that

during the application process children lose their eligibility to reunite, as they have come of age in the meantime' (2013: 36). The Immigrant Council of Ireland:

> Many individual respondents described the period that they had to wait for admittance of the family member as a period that their lives were on hold, void of sense, and paralyzing. It is difficult to make plans for the future (buying a house, starting an education) if one is not sure whether it will be possible to be together and build a life together. These effects are stronger as the procedure takes longer. Especially if the long procedure separated parents and children, this caused a lot of stress and anxiety. (2013: 102-3)

Transnational Nigerian parents in Ireland may not wish to seek family reunification with their children. However if they do, they have to demonstrate stable, regular work, a relatively high monthly income requirement compared to other EU countries and the legal framework means parent-child separations are likely to be over the long-term. As can be seen, the migration regime in Ireland has influenced Nigerian transnational family formations so that many migrant parents in Ireland and their children in Nigeria remain separated over many years, with uncertainty as to how family life may be structured in the future.

Method

The material presented in this chapter is based on multi-sited, multi-temporal ethnographic fieldwork with 18 Nigerian transnational families in both Ireland and Nigeria. The 18 families were participants in a broader survey of 309 Nigerian migrant parents in Ireland, purposively sampled so that half of parents had children in

Nigeria and therefore were living in transnational families and of these, half had children in both Nigeria and Ireland. All survey respondents who were living in transnational families were invited to participate in the ethnographic study. A condition of participation was that the migrant parent consented for the researcher to visit their child and the child's caregiver in Nigeria. Furthermore the child and caregiver also had to give their informed consent. A total of 18 families in the migrant parent survey met these conditions and so all families who consented were included in the ethnographic study. Families therefore 'self-selected' to participate. We do not assume that their experiences are representative of transnational Nigerian families in Ireland but the particularities of their lives offer situated case-studies that draw attention to diverse and under-researched dynamics within some transnational families.

For the ethnographic study, participant observation, life histories and interviews were conducted with 18 migrant parents living in Ireland, with 23 children in Nigeria and with 18 Nigeria-based child's caregiver. Further follow up conversations by phone were carried out with research participants in Nigeria. In a number of families, interviews were also conducted with siblings (10) living in Ireland. Fieldwork involved movement back and forth between Ireland and Nigeria. The first contact with the field was made in Ireland in 2011 and was ended in July 2013. Fieldwork in Nigeria was conducted over two three months periods – June-August 2011 and February-May 2012 and fieldwork continued in the intervening periods in Ireland until mid 2013. The researcher became a point of contact between migrant parents, children and their caregivers, a tool of 'connection' between the disparate geographic locations. For the purposes of this chapter, the analysis focuses on the theme of immobility which emerged as a central theme in the ethnographic work.

Survey results of the 309 migrant parents showed that, of the children in Ireland, 74 percent were born in Ireland, 17 percent migrated with their parent, seven

percent joined their parent in Ireland, and two percent came to Ireland and were later joined by their parent. Of the 309 migrant parent participants, over four fifths had neither residency nor work permits on arrival in Ireland and 81 percent claimed asylum. Nearly one fifth (17 percent) were asylum seekers at the time of the survey. Of those no longer in the asylum system, many have gained work and residency permits as a result of their parentage of a child in Ireland under the ICB/2005 directive (see White et al. 2013). Also reflecting the profile of the Nigerian population in Ireland, a greater proportion of migrant parents surveyed were mothers. In mother-migrant cases, the father was the caregiver in 36 percent of cases. When fathers migrated, 69 percent of child caregiver's were mothers. In total, half of families had a parent as main caregiver; non-parental carers were maternal relatives in most instances (31 percent), paternal relatives (eight percent) and other (seven percent).

Of the 18 families that participated in the ethnographic study, eight parents were registered as asylum seekers and were living in accommodation centres known as Direct Provision centres, seven of whom are migrant mothers. Of the others, six parents have leave to remain; two are undocumented; one is an EU citizen and one parent choose not to disclose his legal status. Caregivers of their children in Nigeria were a grandparent (11), Mother (1), Father (2), Aunt (1), Uncle (1) and other relatives (2).

The Migratory Route: Parent migration, child mobility

Migrant parents arrived in Ireland for many reasons including socioeconomic reasons, fear for their lives or fears for the safety of their children. Carling (2006), detailing emigration from Nigeria to Europe, noted that structural obstacles, in particular tough European immigration legislation, have over time created a market for people and groups who use illegal means to facilitate migration (Carling 2006).

Perceptions of Europe as a place of opportunity and wealth lead people to take great risks for an opportunity to migrate. Some research participants put their trust in people they did not know, and travelled to unknown destinations. The irregularity of the migration could be one reason why the process of migrating is shrouded in secrecy and silence in several families. A result of the secrecy is that the migration trajectory as told by the migrant parent and the child and his or her caregiver may not necessarily be the same story. The family members have diverging information about the migration, and in particular children tended to have little information about why their parent(s) left. In some cases information is purposively held back for one reason or the other. This is how it was experienced by Doris[2] - an elderly grandmother and the two granddaughters in her care: 'They left without informing us and they just sent their address to us later...The children were staying with their grandmother on their father side. They were later brought here'.

This patterns emerges again in another family. Faridah, the migrant mother, explains why she didn't inform her children and family about her migration until a few days before she left.

> When I got... when they got me the visa... the reason I didn't tell them [the family] from the beginning is that they don't need to contribute anything, since someone will finance me so I don't need to, you know, I just kept everything within me.

And just like the children, the researcher is told little about the migration trajectory, and is left with questions of 'who organized the travel and the visas, and why'? Faridah came to Ireland in 2001 and was granted leave to remain when she had a child born in Ireland. She also met her current husband in Ireland. At the time of the research she had twin daughters born in 1997, living in Nigeria, and five younger children who were living with her and her new husband in Ireland. Faridah's life in

Nigeria had been difficult from a very young age. The family struggled with poverty and violence. When Faridah migrated she thought this would be the end of her difficulties. She was only able to arrange for her own migration and it was decided right before she left that the children were to stay with her only living sister. Faridah recollects the day she told her sister and mother about her migration and the care of the children was negotiated:

> 'Look I don't want it to be a shock to you, it happens that I will be leaving within the next 2-3 days.' They said: 'Where are you going to? Abuja? You are always on the road.' This and that. I said that this is real. And my sister said: 'How do you do it? Where did you get it?'. They were just imagining. Then I said: 'This is God's work, it's not by my power or by my mind'. But it was a shock to them. And they said: 'Are you going with your kids?'. I said: 'No, they only got it [visa] for me only. As soon as I settle down I come for my kids.' I was thinking something that would happen the next day, you know. But next day took years.

Not even her mother or her sister are let in on the details of Faridah's migration, and are only told about the migration a few days before she is leaving without her children. Faridah thought she would be able to reunite with her children in Ireland within a short period of time. Faridah has leave to remain in Ireland and thus has the legal status dreamt about by the migrant parents in direct provision centres. This is the status that is imagined by both children in Nigeria and parents in Ireland as the legal status that will solve their problems of separation. But as is the case of Faridah shows, poverty is also a very real restriction to achieving family reunification as she does not meet the income and job stability threshold. As family reunification fails to materialise the care arrangement is renegotiated again and again over 11 years.

In the case of some families in our ethnographic study, the decision of a parent to migrate internationally was sudden. The migrant parent lacked information about the realities of life in Europe, in particular about the difficulties of family reunification. As a result, caregiver arrangements were often put in place hastily and for the short-term. Parental international migration sparked child mobility between house-holds as care-giving arrangements had to be reorganised over time.

We see this in the case of Akono and Bejide who migrated together three years previously leaving behind three daughters in Nigeria. They have since had a new baby in Ireland. Until the parents migrated the children lived with their parents near their parental grandparents. On migration, the oldest child was sent to live with her maternal aunt and the other two children went to live with a pastor friend. He was unable to take care of them and therefore they were sent to live with the paternal grant-parents, before being moved to the home of their maternal grandparents.

Yet while looking at the caregiving arrangements over time is should be kept in mind that the migration of one or two parents may not be the biggest change in the caregiving arrangement for a child. In another family, the two boys born in 1990 and 1992 agree that the biggest change in their caregiving situation was not in 2007 when their mother migrated, but back in 1999 when their parents separated. The two boys and their younger sister were sent to live with their paternal grandmother. In 2001, the parents divorced and their two sons went to live with their father. Their younger sister went to their maternal aunt. Right before the fieldwork in 2011, she was sent to live with her paternal uncle as she had become to unruly for her aunt. Parental divorce, compounded by parental migration, possibly introduced greater mobility into children's lives than either event alone.

To contextualize these findings, the survey of 309 migrant parents showed that in mother-migrant households following maternal migration, a third of children

changed caregivers twice or more and in father-migrant households, 17 percent of children changed caregivers. Ethnographic findings suggest that divorce or family breakdown seems to result in greater mobility in children's lives post-migration. In a number of instances, the migration of a parent was one form of mobility in children's lives; children changed caregivers, sometimes siblings were separated, new families started, and multiple family members moved in different directions. The decision of a parent to migrate internationally was often poorly communicated and understood by children; they know their parent is in Europe, many know that their parent is in Ireland but 'Ireland' is a vague concept synonymous with 'abroad' or 'Europe'.

Stuck in Mobility

Seven migrant parents in the ethnographic fieldwork were in the asylum process and so were 'stuck' in mobility for multiple years. The environment at the direct provision centres visited by the researcher does not allow for a sense of safety or a feeling of "home". Parents are not allowed to have visitors to their rooms, and the common rooms are cold and have old, worn and unclean furniture. The centre has an atmosphere of temporariness. It is a place designed for ushering people through. But as a residence for families for seven or more years it is a depressing place that does not facilitate a good family life. This reality of life for the migrant parents and their children in Ireland is lost on the children back in Nigeria, and does not feature in the imaginings of their own potential life in Europe with their migrant parent, as portrayed in popular culture, on TV and in commercials.

Titalayo lives in Nigeria with her two sisters and is cared for by her maternal grandmother and aunt. Her father is a migrant with a new family in the UK, and has travelled between the UK and Nigeria for as long as she can remember. Her mother is an asylum seeker living in a Direct Provision centre in Ireland since 2005. Shortly

after arriving in Ireland, her mother gave birth to twins, who at the time of the research were six years old. Titalayo, the second daughter, born in 1996, says:

> My life where I live is fun but at the same time...how I wish my parents were also here. You feel they enjoy at that place and wish you were with them…Ah the way (my mother) talks on the phone she too also misses us and it makes her feel somehow sad that for so many years she cannot see her children, how they look.

Titalayo is satisfied with her life in Nigeria but imagines the life of her mother 'at that place', imagines the life she is enjoying with the twins and 'you wish you were with them'. In reality, her mother is finding life 'harder and harder' in the Direct Provision Centre and feels she cannot return to Nigeria as she has nothing to bring back. This is a very painful situation for the migrant mother, a situation she cannot talk about without crying. For Titalayo, 'the tough part is when my mother doesn't send our provision money fast and there is nothing with my grandparents. It looks weird'. She compares her situation to other children, for example, 'when they come to school and say my mummy bought this for me'. She keeps in touch with her mother on the phone and on Facebook. She calls the other children to come and see her mum on Facebook. One of the things making her sad is that 'they all know her on Facebook and greeted her on her birthday. Now we are in final year, I don't think they will get to meet her'. She has a sense of having a privileged life in Nigeria where she is well taken care of, eats good food, lives in good accommodation that is paid for by her parents in Europe and her maternal Uncles. She feels loved and wanted by her Grandmother and Aunt. Yet she feels time moving on without any evidence that her mother is coming back or that she will go to stay with her mother in Ireland any time soon. In spite of a good life in Nigeria, still she clings to the hope of an imagined future in Europe. She wants to go to University 'Not in Nigeria, but abroad' where she imagines her future life with her mother: 'Everything is just like I wish, I wish. I wish

there is a way that I can see my mum. And I know my wishes will come true one day'.

In these families, the children imagine the life of the migrant parent and siblings in Europe, and the life they could have together. But the way in which this is imagined is influenced by the age of the child, the care arrangement and the economic situation of the child in Nigeria as well as the general perceptions of life in Europe.

Asa's mother, Alice, is also a migrant in Ireland and lives in a direct provision centre. And like the mother of Titilayo and Ife, Alice came to Ireland in 2005 and had a child the same year. Asa was born in 2002 and was only 3 years when her mother migrated. Asa struggled with feeling the loss of her parent but also the loss of being separated from the opportunities afforded by the West. Cultural globalization, the meaning and significance of the West, infuses relating and the juxtaposition of the hardship of life in Nigeria and ideas about this place far away complicates family life. And in the case of Asa and Alice it is further complicated by the dire poverty of the family in Nigeria. Asa's grandmother and aunt (mother's mother and mother's sister) cannot afford regular meals for the 9 children living with them and themselves. School fees are often paid late, and they all share one small room. The little room is crowded and damp with both insects and mice visibly crawling around.

Alice migrated to seek asylum because she feared for the life of her unborn child. With the help of relatives and friends, she was able to come to Europe and claim asylum. At the time of the research, she and Obi were living in a Direct Provision centre for seven years, awaiting the outcome of her asylum application. Now ten years old, Asa has no recollection of her mother. Both the migrant mother and the caregiver thought the child would be able to reunite with the mother before

now. Alice and Obi are provided with food and accommodation and a small stipend as she does not have a right to work.

As the researcher moves between Ireland and Nigeria, it is clear that Asa and her maternal grandmother share a notion of Europe as a place where one goes to work, get money, come back to Nigeria as a wealthy woman and that this has affected their expectations of the support the migrant mother should contribute. Asa and her grandmother gain their understanding of the global North from television, films and the gifts of clothes, toys, phones and electronics that they see other children of international migrants enjoy. This complete lack of knowledge about the realities of life in Ireland for those that enter the asylum system gave them no opportunity to foresee or to now imagine the difficulties the migrant faces.

This has made it difficult for the family to believe what she is telling them. This has led to verbal confrontations between the care-giver and the migrant mother, ending with the mother crying and the caregiver then saying that she believes her. In Nigeria, Asa's grandmother tells how 'I thought that immediately when [daughter] left, she would get a job and would be sending money to me easily. It is not like that. She never knew it would be like that… I didn't expect that when she travelled abroad, we would continue suffering'.

Alice tells how Asa expects her to send money and gifts;

> Yeah, and she wants everything. But she wants to be with me! If she's sad and I tell her 'don't worry I'm coming for you', she will shout and scream and tell her friends that 'my mum says she is coming to take me!!', you know. And inside of me I just…shh…I feel bad because I know I'm lying to her.

Asa has at times refused to talk to her mother because she does not know her. She has told her grandmother that she does not know this woman who calls, but never let lets her see her. Yet Asa holds alive the idea of being reunited with her mother.

Camilla: Where is your mother staying now?

Asa: Europe

Camilla: And how long has she stayed there?

Asa: Since when I was small…

Camilla: Since she left for that place, did she come back to see you again?

Asa: No.

Camilla: When you talk with your mum, what are the things you would talk about?

Asa: About the food I eat, school. I tell her that she should come and take me away.

Camilla: You tell her to come and take you. And what does she say?

Asa: She says that she will come and bring me there

It is difficult for Asa to know how the lives of those in the asylum system is constrained by laws that restrict the right to work. Within her lived experience, she expects a parent to be agentive, volitional, self-directed as in Nigeria, one cannot be 'stopped' from work should they wish to do so. It is difficult to understand the passivity of her mother, her inability to meet her material obligations and the immobility that keeps them separate. This makes her angry and sad at different

times. The pressures of global consumption ('she wants everything') cause tensions that lead to a breakdown of trust in the parent-child-caregiver relationship. But also 'she wants to be with me'; Asa imagines an idealised reunion where her mother will bring her 'over there' so that 'together-over-there' is a symbolic resource to deal with the pain of separation in the here-and-now; 'as-is' is transformed into an idealised 'as-it-could-be'. Yet for her mother, as long as she is in a Direct Provision center, she is uncertain how long she will stay there, if she will be granted leave to remain in Ireland or if she and her twins will be deported back to Nigeria.

Methodologically, the consequences of the back and forth movement of the researcher between the family members in Ireland and Nigeria is that she is able to tell the family in Nigeria that their daughter/mother really is in a centre for people who seek asylum and that she is given food and shelter, but she is not allowed to work, and therefore cannot make money. As such, through her mobility, she enters into the realm of the 'real' in their relating. Asa and her grandmother said that they did not believe her until the researcher came and confirmed what the migrant mother told them; the migrant mother is relieved that they no longer think she is telling lies.

'They've Only Seen My Artificial Self'

Across transnational spaces, Nigerian children and their Irish-born siblings in our research were often aware of the existence of the other but had little or no direct experience of each other. They have spoken on the phone, seen each other on Facebook, viewed photographs of the other and in this way, incorporated each other into their emotional and imaginative lives. In general, children in Nigeria were older children while their siblings in Ireland were still young. Titilayo has not met her twin brother and sister born in Ireland nor the siblings (on her father's side) in the UK. When asked to imagine how the life of the twins in Ireland, she says:

> This year 2012 is going to be seven years. I think about oh gosh, these children. They are born in Ireland, they have not even been to Nigeria, they've not even seen their grandma and grandpa before, and they have not even set their eyes on me before. They've only seen my artificial self (picture) and vice versa... The relationship is over the phone, so they don't even know if I am their sister. The relationship is not that close… I am sad because I don't even know that much about them. I think it has to do with the government and only the government can make it change'.

Photographs and the mobile phone bring the siblings into relationship with each other but it feels artificial rather than real. As noted by Davis (2012), Ife, Titilayo's youngest sister laments that she has never had a face-to-face, sensory experience of relating. She attributes responsibility for this to 'the government', thus generating a distancing effect from holding her mother responsible. From her position in Nigeria, she reflects on their lives:

> The advantages there are they will know more about Ireland, and some other places. They will have access to technology and if they're old enough to get a job, they can make use of it. They will also know what their mum can do and not do. Those are the two advantages I know. The disadvantages are, they won't know their grandparents, sisters and brothers.

Unlike her, they will be able to travel, they will have access to technology and the global work opportunities that will afford them. 'Technology' symbolises their potential future as global citizens. They also have real knowledge of their mother's situation rather than having an imaginary experience of her Irish life, as is her experience.

Timothy is the eldest child of his parents and he has three siblings in Ireland, two of whom moved to Ireland and one who was born in Ireland. Although his mother is in a direct provision centre and is unable to send any money to support him and his grandmother, he says ‘I believe they are living a good life there’ and by this he says ‘I mean they are able to do what they should be doing at their age’.

Across different interviews, it is clear that children have an image of life in Ireland and that it is a good life. This view is maintained in spite of the negatives that they hear from their parents, about the realities of life in a direct provision centre, with little privacy, little money and a lot of worries. Their ‘knowledge’ of Ireland is mediated by media and stories of Europe. Meanwhile for siblings who have only known life in Ireland, Africa is a vague construct. Timothy’s eldest brother David is living with his grandmother in Nigeria.

Timothy: David is our brother.

Camilla: Where does David live?

Timothy: David, ehmm, Africa.

Camilla: Where in Africa?

Timothy: He’s in Africa!! He lives there!

Camilla: Africa is big...

Timothy: yeah!! But he lives there!

Camilla: Which country?

Timothy: South Africa. I don’t know.

‘David’ is a concrete presence for Timothy but his inability to imagine David in Africa conveys the challenge for young children of developing a relationship with their sibling far away. For children both in Ireland and in Nigeria, a wish to know and a sadness of being separate from siblings was very prevalent in interviews.

Developmental Trajectories and Political Constraints

Interviews with grandparent caregivers and their grandchildren highlighted inter-generational differences in relation to mobility. The grandfather of Titilayo moved from the village to Lagos when he was 23 years old. He attended evening classes and became a mechanical engineer. His life expectation was ‘whatever I want to do, I do’. He is happy with his life in Nigeria; he has a small pension, his grandchildren are living with him and he is thankful for developments such as electricity that have made life more comfortable than when he was a child. His grand-daughter, on the other hand, does not want to stay in Nigeria and has her sights set on going to University abroad. This has been her dream and intentions since she was young. She feels this is important because of the course she wants to study:

Camilla: And what course is that?

Titilayo: Mass. com.

Camilla: Is it ‘mass communication’ like reporting in TV?

Titilayo: Yes

A number of left-behind children, though not all, imagine their future to lie in Europe. Fatima, the daughter of Faridah is attending a good school in Nigeria. Her migrant mother and her caregiver Aunt prioritise education as important. Although her mother has leave to remain, she is unemployed in Ireland and life is not easy for

her. Fatima however says ‘I’m tired of this [Nigeria] country. Everything is not smooth... I think being with my mummy is the best’. ‘Mother’ and the place mother is living are fused together as an idealised and positive ‘other’ place where she could live future. Again, ‘as-is’ (this country) is found wanting compared to ‘as-it-could-be’ (Josephs 1998) an imagined, desirable (being with my mummy) but unlikely future.

Some participants showed their awareness of the structural constraints that concretely mediated this gap between real life now and an ‘as-it-could-be’ life in Europe. Two brothers in Nigeria were hopeful that their mother, who had acquired EU citizenship, would shortly be able to send for them and bring them to Ireland as she wants them to have ‘a sound education’. However the eldest son, who was twenty years of age, was worried he would be ineligible once he turned twenty-one years. He was very aware that he is getting older, moving towards young adulthood and was likely to ‘age-out’ of the chance to be formally reunified with their migrant parent.

> **Benjamin**: Can I ask you something? I don’t know if it’s part of the interview… Do you know if since now she [mother] has her Irish citizenship, she can get us visa?
>
> **Camilla**: I think so… She may be able to get you tourist visa for maybe 10 weeks because immediately you turn 18, they believe you are an adult.
>
> **Benjamin**: So she can take my brother?
>
> **Camilla**: Yes, but it also depend on how much you [mother] earn.

Benjiman: She told me if you're below 21, they still consider you a dependant, sort of… They can give the visa but make it difficult to get the papers? Does it take time?

Camilla: Yes. It takes lots of time.

Benjamin: Does it takes days or months? If it takes longer, by that time I will be above 21 because by June I will be 21 and it will become even more difficult… I went online to read about it and I saw that it takes time.

For participants such as Benjamin, their 'self' project is organised and constructed towards an imagined migrant future including studying hard, researching about and waiting for the time of reunification with their migrant parent; this future 'as-it-could-be' organises here-and-now development, a pre-adaptation for future mobility - but this goal is simultaneously becoming more out of reach.

Conclusion

The findings reported here relate to a particular context, that of children in Nigerian transnational families in Ireland who participated in a multi-sited, multi-temporal ethnographic study. Due to structural factors of moving through the asylum process and lengthy processes of family reunification applications, migrant parents and their children were separated for lengthy time periods–and in cases of those still in the asylum process, of an uncontrollable duration. For left behindchildren, relating occurred in the technologically-mediated world of phones and Facebook, in the material world of gifts and remittances and in the symbolic world. Over time, it seemed that the symbolic world gained in importance in the absence of physical relating. A core analytic theme was relating in a virtual and imaginative space, and

how the ‘global’ entered the mind, emotional and relational world of the developing child in ways that had tangible consequences for development and social relationships. Children were engaged in making meaning of the content of their migrant parent’s communications in the absence of direct experience of the context of their lives in Ireland. This is a fundamentally challenging developmental task. Children and their caregivers in Nigeria struggled to understand the migrant parents’ perspective as their exposure to media and television gave a perspective on life in Europe that made it difficult to understand the perspective of the migrant parent and to engage in position-exchange (Gillespie 2012). The chapter drew attention to an under-researched form of mobility, that of imaginative mobility. This served a function both in ‘filling a gap’ (Pelaprat and Cole 2011) in transnational social relating and– following Zittoun (2013)–in creating an expansive sense of an imagined future, globally-mobile ‘self’. We saw that the left-behind child felt the loss of the parent but also the loss of being separated from the opportunities afforded by the West. Migrant parents in turn struggled to meet the expectations that they have free access to the material goods of a global consumerist culture. Children experienced their economic and social position as being at the margins of globalization while wishing to be active participants.

The chapter embedded the migrant parent-children relationship in the context of other developmentally important relationships such as children’s relationships with caregivers and siblings. Siblings play an important role in children’s development. A sibling is an individual growing up and going through similar stages just before or after you and sibling affection can be a source of support during stressful life events in a child’s life (Dunn 2005). Child peer relationships are often overlooked in childhood and migration literature yet this chapter showed how keenly children felt their separation from brothers and sisters living elsewhere. Finally, this chapter was based on an innovative methodology that involved researching with members of the

same families living apart as a result of migration; the migrant parent, their child, the child's caregiver and siblings in Ireland and Nigeria. A possible reason migrant parents self-selected to be a part of this study was the opportunity that the mobility of the researcher gave them to maintain connection with their children in the face of their own current immobility. In this way, the chapter draws attention to dynamics of immobility within migration.

Notes

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2. The names of all research participants have been exchanged with pseudonyms.

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