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'They're my Contacts, not my Friends': Reconfiguring Affect and Aspirations Through Mobile Communication in Nigeria
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ABSTRACT
In Calabar, Nigeria, young women envisage their futures to be full of possibilities. By contrast, their present realities often see them stuck in the house enduring long periods of waiting. Restricted by failing institutions, family and church pressures, and the fear of others' jealousy, young women find that there is no clear route to realising their aspirations. As they wait alone in the house, they constantly communicate with others on mobile phones and BlackBerries. This paper examines how young women in Calabar use mobile phones as a way of reconceptualising issues of trust, affect and intimacy. It argues that where they employ methods of concealment to chat with others – revealing neither their true identity nor personal details – mobile communication enables distance, becoming an invaluable means for creating new forms of sociality and future opportunities. Illuminating 'feminine cultures of waiting', this paper furthers recent analyses of youth, time and productivity.

When I first met NK in the summer of 2010, she was studying Accountancy at one of Calabar's two universities and had recently started baking and selling cakes on her compound. By the time I returned to Calabar for doctoral fieldwork a year later, she had finished her studies. Besides some periodic travel to family in Port Harcourt, she had spent the intervening months in her rented room in Calabar. In her late twenties, she was looking to finding a well-paid office job before getting married and settling down. Yet, as I rounded off my doctoral fieldwork at the end of 2012, she was still 'working on' marriage possibilities and, with her university results still not released months after finishing her degree, was happy just to find any odd work to get money. Assuring me that God would be faithful in delivering her aspirations, NK spent time in church strengthening her spiritual life. But, church aside, it was notable that she spent much of her time at home in the company of her mobile phone.

Expected to gain university education in order to be recognised 'adults' by their parents, time spent at home anticipating the future was not unusual for the young women discussed in this paper. Belonging to Calabar's emerging middle class, driven

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by Pentecostal rhetoric of personal success and a more latent Nigerian fervour for materialism, they remained subjected to the economic, social and political insecurities pervading Nigeria. With the city's universities closed during my fieldwork due to student riots and national university strikes, the majority of these young women were left waiting. Even without university strikes, young women were often waiting to get university admission because of 'problems' with JAMB (matriculation) exams. For those successful graduates, there was the inevitable wait after university to be mobilised for National Youth Service Corps (NYSC). While they undoubtedly anticipated marriage and good jobs (preferably their own businesses), their concerns lay with their immediate, quotidian experiences.

How anticipation has become almost a rite of passage for Calabar's youth speaks directly to Honwana's (2012) recent analysis of youth in 'waithood', where young people remain excluded from adulthood as they lack economic or social capital to complete transitional life stages. Developing literature on African youth's 'crisis of becoming' (e.g. Erikson 1968; Abbink & van Kessel 2005; Honwana & de Boeck 2005; Christiansen et al. 2006), Honwana (2012) illustrates how 'waithood' is dynamic in the way that it reconfigures adulthood on the continent and how, during this liminal period, youth are far from idle. This idea that youth take on a wide variety of activities to get by resounds in Calabar. While battling with the education system they deem necessary to become recognised adults, young women want to engage in multiple activities to self-fashion a certain image of urban respectability: doing petty business; learning skills such as make-up artistry, interior designing and sewing; and, most importantly, working on their spirituality, securing both God's blessings and recognition in a Christian community. Undertaking gambles for success and spreading risk of failure, their actions reiterate other analyses of African youth's triumphs and troubles as they attempt to realise aspirations (e.g. Weiss 2009; Cole 2010; Mains 2012).

Yet, in understanding stories such as NK's, it is helpful to develop Honwana's (2012) argument to ask how young women anticipate futures when they are apparently doing nothing. Telling me that her university had been on strike every year of her studies, one friend expressed envy for her classmates staying in Lagos. Unlike in Calabar – a quiet 'university town' in a sleepy 'civil service' state – it was easy to find a job in Lagos' entrepreneurial hustle. Belying her stylish appearance, she admitted that working in a Lagosian factory for a meagre 7000 naira[1] a month was better than staying at home in Calabar. It was a common story: often without money or opportunities to carry out their desired activities, young women spent much of their time at home, as they expressed, 'eating, sleeping and getting fat'. For these unmarried young women, 'home' in Calabar's patriarchal and conservative Christian milieu denoted their parents' households (often large and changeable units with cousins visiting from the village and other cities). Expected to carry out extensive household duties and to look after younger siblings, they were not completely idle at home. Even those who lived alone in self-contained apartments – usually nearer campus and often paid for by parents but also by relatives, men and occasionally girls' own savings – spent much time cooking and cleaning. Yet, young women still regarded this time as 'doing nothing' because, whether carrying out chores or sleeping through power cuts, they were not learning new things believed to open up opportunities for them.

Examining how young women's engagement with mobile phone technology is a means to escape present boredom and maintain hope for the future, this paper

builds upon recent literature of youth, time and productivity (Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013). Detailing how educated young men in India (Jeffrey 2010) and Niger (Masquelier 2013) overlook jobs for which they are over-qualified in favour of doing nothing, the authors illustrate how doing nothing can be fertile time. For instance, Jeffrey's (2010) concept of 'timepass' outlines how hanging out with other youth until favourable jobs arise is a form of social mobilisation for Indian young men. While it may be debatable whether young women in Calabar do choose to wait, such analyses raise questions as to how urban young women living amid uncertainty conceptualise distant and imminent prospects, experience waiting and quell anxieties through carrying out small mundane activities. For instance, just as Masquelier's (2013) young Nigériens drinking tea in *fadas* (conversation groups) find accomplishment in fulfilling small tasks and self-fashion through particular activities not associated with elders (such as drinking tea), the following discussion examines how mobile phones allow young women to claim time and space for themselves.

Central to these studies of young men anticipating the future is the concept of sociality: being with others may not radically overturn livelihoods but is productive in the way it alters feelings about self and circumstance. As Masquelier argues, being inclusive in *fadas* – coming together to talk about realities and aspirations, mixing laughter with pity – helps young unemployed Nigériens to overcome 'loneliness, boredom and despair' (2013: 479), allowing them to indulge in an 'economy of affect' (Richard & Rudnyckyj 2009). Yet, contrary to the analyses of young men coming together in public, my female informants spoke only of enduring tedium and solitude in the house. Following Jeffrey's (2010) brief mention of Indian young women, who must spend their time waiting in the private sphere away from the public gaze, my informants' experiences undoubtedly spoke to ideas of female respectability. Besides purposeful trips to the market, church and to learn skills, young women were expected to stay at home – even those living alone remained under the watchful eye of church communities. Of course, young women undoubtedly managed to sneak out, but amid Calabar's limited leisure spaces, the general consensus was that a young woman could not be seen 'just anywhere'.

In asking what a 'feminine culture of waiting' may look like in urban Africa, young women's feelings of solitude at home are intriguing: sharing bedrooms and parlours with family members, privacy is difficult to attain. As only the richest can afford private compounds, the commonality of sharing land with other unrelated households also heightens the difficulty of escaping people and social obligations. Yet, surrounded by others, young women repeatedly confessed to feeling 'depressed' and alone at home. In their will to seek opportunities outside the house for self-development, young women's feelings of solitude owed much to their experiences and conceptions of friendships with one another. Female friendships were often tainted with acrimony, jealousy and backstabbing behaviour. The often-said phrase 'A person may laugh with you but inside their heart is black' encapsulated their stories, illuminating the inability to know another's true intentions. As the first section of this article details, young women often professed to 'keeping to themselves', not only to maintain respectability but also to protect themselves from others' malice.

In view of young women's wariness of social intimacy, this paper focuses on mobile communication to rethink youth's 'sites of conviviality' (Masquelier 2013: 479) in their time of waiting. Recent analyses depict how mobile phones have impacted on livelihoods in Africa (e.g. Smith 2006; Archambault 2009, 2011, 2013; de Bruijn *et al.*

2009; McIntosh 2010; Pype 2013), as elsewhere (e.g. Katz & Aakhus 2002; Horst & Miller 2006). Following de Bruijn *et al.* (2009), as African realities become increasingly characterised by high mobility and globalisation, mobile phones allow people to overcome distance. While this article agrees that mobile phones allow young women to stay connected while apart, to come together in their solitary time waiting, it examines how mobile communication allows young women to cope with the fears of social proximity by *maintaining* distance. As this article explores, new styles of communication associated with mobile phones conceal young women's reality under a veneer of sociality, allowing them to enjoy affect and escape fears of others.

Underpinning this discussion of mobile communications is the question of how young women can manage social relationships. Being wary of close friendships is not symptomatic of this one social group but speaks to more general understandings of the comforts and traumas of social proximity in (West) Africa. Developing his analysis of witchcraft accusations in present-day Cameroon, Geschiere (2013) argues that being close to others breeds fear as well as trust, vulnerability as well as solidarity. Geschiere (2013) also states that, despite the potential horrors of intimacy, there is a need to remain close to others – while the following discussion examines how young women create distance, it also highlights how this group does need others for affect and aid. While Geschiere (2013) stresses the inescapable fears of intimacy, we may look to broader anthropological discussions of how people are able to retreat from social relationships, rules and demands. For example, anthropological discussions of dissociation focus on how individuals engaging in certain forms of action, such as spirit possession, break with social norms in order to open up new social spaces in which they can experience different social roles (Lambek 1981; Ong 1987; Boddy 1989). Just as possession in the *Zar* cult allows women to explore themselves outside their normal patriarchal Muslim dictates (Boddy 1989), or spirit possession allows young Malaysian women to claim a space in the capitalist factory (Ong 1987), we may see how engaging in mobile technology carves out a new social arena in which, through new forms of communication, young women in Calabar can explore both themselves and their connections with others in their time of waiting.

This is not to say that mobile communication is directly akin to spirit possession, but such comparisons draw attention to how phones can be used as tools to break with quotidian social norms and roles. As Strathern (1996) wrote in response to social science's preoccupation with continuous hybrids and networks in the 1980s and 1990s, sometimes, there is a need to 'cut' social connections in order to manage the self and others. Networks 'are measured by people's indebtedness to one another through the flow of objects … ' (Strathern 1996: 529), and individuals do find ways of curtailing connections and turning networks back on themselves. For instance – to use Strathern's (1996) own example – in brideprice transactions, a non-returnable sum of money cuts familial connections, de-linking the bride from her kin and connecting her to the kinship network of her husband. Just as money diverts the flow of familial rights and responsibilities, this article explores mobile communication as an external factor that 'cuts' young women's networks, opening up new spaces in which they can claim space for themselves and manage others in their time waiting in the house. Doing so, it expands upon the argument made by Vokes and Pype in the introduction to this issue that mobile communication plays an important role in the making of persons and time. Illustrating how mobiles and BlackBerry become a process of

autobiographical transformation for young women, this paper complements Pype's analysis of how certain generations give meaning to mobile communication. While others in this issue illustrate mobile communication as a means to transform citizen participation (Brisset-Foucault) or social practices in a community (Vokes), this paper highlights mobile communication's capacity to mobilise the individual.

This article draws on 15 months of ethnographic fieldwork undertaken between August 2011 and December 2012 in Calabar, southeastern Nigeria. The start of my fieldwork coincided with an extensive period of inactivity for Calabar's youth due to university closures, and the data in this article come primarily from participant observation and over 60 in-depth interviews primarily taken with young women in their homes. Where I speak of my own experiences using mobile phones in this article, these data have been corroborated through in-depth interviews with young women. While living in Nigeria is always a steep learning curve, I was constantly confused by girls' almost paradoxical attitudes towards friendship: their preferences for solitude and extensive contact lists on their mobiles. The paper begins by examining the problems encountered in young women's friendships with each other, before moving on to discuss how mobile communication creates social distance, and finally how BlackBerry has become an important tool for creating new forms of sociality that help manage present struggles without jeopardising future aspirations.

'I don't keep friends'

NK whiled away hours in her small 'self-contained' room watching cheap Nollywood and pirated Hollywood DVDs, or chatting on her mobile when there was 'light' (electricity); and simply sleeping when both electricity and her mobile battery failed her. Although living on a shared compound, NK claimed to prefer staying on her own and not letting people 'know her place' (visit her home). It was a sentiment shared by many young women I met professing not to 'keep friends'. I was somewhat confused by this assertion, especially as I was introduced to people girls knew around Calabar, heard stories of their 'sisters' or 'brothers' from church and cousins from the village, and was not oblivious to the inordinate number of contacts collected on their mobile phones. While young women were not completely removed from the spheres of sociality and exchange that appear so integral to African livelihoods (e.g. Bohannan 1955; Piot 1991; Durham 1995), they still professed that such acquaintances were not true friends.

As one informant explained, young women's claims of solitude were reflections of what they learned in church. Indeed, as I spent more time in (Pentecostal) churches, I repeatedly heard the same line: 'Show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are'. Pentecostal rhetoric is steeped in ideas of renewing one's mind and body in Christ, and breaking with local deities and past ancestral curses (e.g. Marshall 1991, 2009; Meyer 1998), illuminating the idea that identification with others is integral to notions of agency, emotion, creativity and the self (Bell & Coleman 1999: 2). Friends help constitute the (Christian) person (Aguilar 1999; Carrier 1999; Course 2010), raising questions not only of personal character but, where the Pentecostal movement is highly image-conscious, of class formation associated with success and respectability. Yet, this rhetoric that young women imbibe does not only refer to their present image but also to their future reputation and possibilities. As Killick and Desai argue, 'Friendship is … as much about potentiality as it is about being, as oriented to the future as it is to the past' (2010: 11).

Recent anthropological analyses detailing young women's relationships with men across sub-Saharan Africa notably touch on this idea of respectability and fortune through their exploration of intimacy and exchange (e.g. Cole 2009, 2010; Hunter 2009; Smith 2009; Honwana 2012). While Honwana's (2012) analysis of youth in 'wait-hood' describes the extent to which young women (and men) across Africa engage in intimate relationships with older, wealthier people as a means to 'get by', Cole and Thomas' (2009) edited volume *Love in Africa* highlights how such relationships are neither new nor divorced from emic conceptions of materiality and morality. For instance, Cole's (2009) analysis illustrates how the Malagasy word *fitiavina*, traditionally denoting a relationship where gift exchange and labour distribution were reciprocal, has been transposed under capitalist economies so that young Madagascan women now seek intimate relationships with wealthy, foreign men in order to receive gifts without needing to show care. Such relationships undoubtedly exist in Calabar. By giving themselves (or even just the promise of themselves) to men, it is easy for young women to receive gifts – phones, laptops, clothes, school fees and phone credit. Intimate relationships with men allow young women to flaunt their urban respectability and success through materiality, simultaneously raising their street-cred and others' suspicions of their immoral behaviour.

Yet, in understanding the intersections of friendship and future fortune, far less attention has been paid to young women's relationships with one another. As I continually found out throughout my time in Calabar, young women often claimed to stay on their own because they had had a close friendship with another girl come to an end. While young women described their friendships with men in terms of pragmatism and transparency, perceiving male moral advice and financial aid to be free from malign intent, friendships with other women were the source of intense emotion. Explaining how she was avoiding her church and friend because, in their joint venture of becoming members of their church media crew, her friend had received more equipment training from a male church member, one friend described the feelings of betrayal and jealousy that often surface in female friendships. Occasionally, new marriages strained close female friendships: newfound responsibilities towards a house and husband often meant that friendships could not maintain the same intensity as before, especially when the married friend moved away. Feeling betrayed, girls fell out and cut ties with another girl with whom they had been extremely close – an experience often causing much pain and anger.

While I heard many stories in Calabar of friendships gone sour, Kosi's story was particularly shocking. Telling of her current illness, Kosi's story went back a couple of years earlier to her time as an undergraduate in a neighbouring state. She described how she had allowed her best friend to live with her in her student digs. At the end of one vacation, on returning to university after visiting family in Calabar, Kosi found her 'self-contained' room empty and friend gone. She confronted her friend, who, without remorse, admitted to having packed all Kosi's possessions and taken them to her parents' place in Port Harcourt. While she did not know why her friend would steal all her clothes without asking, Kosi forgave her friend and welcomed her back into her house.

Over the following months, Kosi began to get sick with stomach aches, which worsened until she started coughing up blood and had to be admitted to hospital. While she was seriously ill, a revelation came out. Another girl had been looking through the

mobile phone of Kosi's roommate and had come across a video the girl had taken of herself holding up some rat poison. Speaking to the camera, the girl apparently explained that she had poisoned Kosi: she was going to catch Kosi unaware; Kosi would no longer be around. Kosi could not understand why her friend had harboured these sentiments – it was so painful, she wanted to forget the story for the rest of her life – but she speculated, 'Maybe she thought that I was going to scandalise her, like other girls on campus used to do. That she's a thief, so she needed to wipe me out of the equation.' As Kosi furthered, she had no more to do with the girl and was naturally wary of close friendship.

Initially, I was unable to believe Kosi's story. Rather nonchalantly, others would tell me that these things happened – especially if a man was involved. Yet, it does present some interesting, if horrific, ideas about young women's experiences and expectations of close friendships in Calabar, both how they are formed and maintained. For instance, while girls revealed the pain caused by past friendships, they longed for one very close friend, a 'bestie' or a 'BFF', whom they could give freely to, share problems with and entrust with their secrets. As one friend said of another girl with whom she had been very close, they were like 'kindred spirits'. Creating a likeness in each other and an enduring bond, true friendship for young women appeared to echo the Aristotelian idea that 'friendship is a single soul dwelling in two bodies'.

Young women's pain over past friendships was undoubtedly explained by feelings of misplaced affection towards someone – a term more associated with 'western' friendships (cf. Carrier 1999). Yet, paying attention to how African personhood is understood as partible and mutable (e.g. Werbner 2011), it is interesting to consider how notions of closeness between two individuals produce forms of (anti-)sociality. Accompanying young women's desire for a close friendship based on mutual trust and support comes the acknowledgement that such relationships are fragile and able to cause harm. The emic belief of the pre-eminence of the spiritual realm further underpins this: in Christian Calabar, a person's soul can be just as easily manipulated by local deities or witchcraft, as it can be blessed by God. Hence, opening the self up to others not only brings comfort but also renders an individual vulnerable. As NK explained, there is a higher danger of being (spiritually) attacked by people who know things about you than by those kept at a distance:

> Like there's this saying in our dialect, 'It's only the rats inside a house that will go outside and tell the rats outside, "Come in, there is fish."' You get? The one outside will never know there is fish in this house but it's the one inside that will say, 'Come! Come and party!'

The idea that proximity to others can generate jealousy and fears of treacherous acts is not specific to Calabar but speaks to Geschiere's (1997) analysis of witchcraft accusations acting as a social and political levelling mechanism in present-day Cameroon. More recently, Geschiere (2013) has argued that by entrusting ourselves in intimate relationships, we do not only create solidarity (cf. Giddens 1992) but also create potential for sabotage. Stating that 'seeds of destruction are hidden inside social relations … even though these are vital for human undertaking', Geschiere (2013: xv) helps us to understand how young women in Calabar must negotiate the ever-present conflicts of safety and danger. Young women need friendships; yet, the more they sow into them, the more these friendships reap social rewards or are blighted by treachery. Hence, revisiting the idea of sociality in youth's time of waiting (cf. Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013), it is understandable why young women in Calabar profess to not letting

others 'know their place' – to build upon Strathern's (1996) argument, how they wish to 'cut' social connections in order to manage flows of obligations to others, personal secrets and property. As the following discusses, mobile communication has allowed young women to renegotiate sociality.

Managing contacts

By the start of my doctoral fieldwork in 2011, most young people in Calabar owned a mobile phone. It had become such a part of everyday life, the most savvy youth would stay connected by owning two handsets (one basic Nokia, one with more 'street-cred') on different service providers (e.g. MTN, Etisalat, Glo and Airtel) in the hope of over-coming the electricity and network difficulties characterising Nigeria. While people still stayed connected via voice calls and text messages, the progression of technology and introduction of data tariffs encouraged social network platforms such as 2go, WatsApp and Facebook Chat to gain popularity as a means for communicating with others in Calabar and elsewhere. The mobile phone was undoubtedly revolutionising young people's social worlds, helping them not only to cope with distance (de Bruijn *et al.* 2009) but also to reconfigure expectations of friendship, such as exchange and trust, while *maintaining* distance from others.

Amid the uncertain urban environs, where one does not know another's true intentions, the mobile allows one to conceal actions. Writing about young Mozambicans' engagement with mobile technology, Archambault (2013; cf. 2009, 2011) argues that concealment eases social relations, making the potential consequences of illicit actions easier to navigate. This certainly resonates in Calabar: young women can discreetly connect to those who may tarnish their reputation, such as men. Yet, more than just their actions, mobiles conceal young women's identities, allowing them to enjoy affect, feel good about themselves, whilst quelling anxieties associated with social proximity. Mobile communication – discrete and discreet – implies physical distance and creates a different style of communication that negates needing to disclose private information. For instance, it is common for people just to call briefly to check up on others. While I initially found this custom annoying – the callers often did not have anything to say! – I came to realise its benefits. While a caring caller must ask the right questions – 'Have you eaten?', 'Is there "light"?' or 'How was service?' for instance – the receiver should always thank the person profusely for the call. Furthermore, 'flashing' someone by drop-calling them when low on credit so that they hopefully call back (Smith 2006: 501–502), is also a way of reminding others you are thinking of them. The often abrupt ending to these short phone conversations, ignoring a need for a long and sincere 'goodbye', highlights how mobile phones are used to maintain continuous contact and show care, without asking about or revealing too much.

Sending text messages wishing good fortune is another way the mobile phone can be used to keep in touch, while keeping a certain distance. As with the more universal tendency to wish others well at New Year in order to renew friendships for the coming year, the first day of every month is particularly important for sending a 'new month message'. As the need for social relations is particularly high amid the insecurities of the postcolony – both for affect and aid – it was not uncommon for young women to use other calendrical markers to reinstate social bonds. For instance, opportunities

to send messages to others were Christian and Muslim festivals, Monday mornings for a successful new week, Sunday mornings to wish extra blessings at church – indeed, any mornings to ensure God's protection that day. As God is considered ultimate giver and protector in Calabar, these text messages were littered with biblical references. Just as Kirsch (2008) describes how church clergy speak in parables to conceal themselves and identify with God in a Zambian community, text messages containing biblical verses or prayers also showed one's sincere good intentions by identifying with a Christian community. The following text messages I received from friends indicate such offerings of comfort for the present and confidence in what will come, providing friendship without revealing oneself:

> DECEMBER 4U: D = Dominion, E = Extraordinary, C = Celebrity, E = Excelent, M = Miraculus, B = Blessed, E = Elivated, R = Remembered by God. U've Dominion ova evrytin dz mont,Hapy Dec.

> Gud morning dear & how r u. Ur enemy shall fall into their own traps. Their heads shall go 4 u to stay alive. Feasting shall be ur name. Do have a nice day.

> In d year 2012,u shall b a quintessence of possibilities, nd extraordinary advantages … ur reloaded 4 God's glory … welcome 2 2012.

> He workd 2 many miracle 4 jst nails 2 hold him up, he did it jst 4 u. Hapi easter

Of course, sending text messages is not particular to Calabar, but it is notable that young women put a lot of effort into renewing social contacts in such a way. Biblical references aside, the creative spelling and grammar is also striking – words are often abbreviated or spelled phonetically. This can partly be accrued to youth's desire to conform to an urban cool in Calabar, where the use of the ever-mutable Pidgin indicates, as McIntosh (2010) writes about young Kenyan's 'medialect', freedom and irreverence. Yet, as with abrupt phone calls, it also signals the financial constraints young women are under, and their desire to send eloquent sentiments without being charged for longer messages. Indeed, young women also put a lot of thought into sending these messages. As one friend who often sent elaborate 'new month messages' told me, it was important for her to take time on her BlackBerry browsing the Internet sites that provide templates for such messages, before sending them to her family and closest friends. She added that she also sent such messages to new acquaintances to show them that she wanted them to be special to her.

Anthropological analyses have shown how giving creates and renews relationships across sub-Saharan Africa (Bohannan 1955; Piot 1991; Durham 1995; Hunter 2009), and we may view how these seemingly impersonal calls and text messages are exchanges to both symbolise and produce relationships. Writing about teenagers' texting habits in a 'western' context, Taylor and Harper (2003) argue that text messages are gifts: teenagers find value in the digitalised messages that they exchange in a ceremonial performance to negotiate social relationships. More than just words, texts show commitment to friendship (Taylor and Harper 2003: 275). These ideas are useful when considering young women's financial constraints – texts are a relatively cheap gift. These ideas are also useful for considering what happens when people do not reciprocate the text message gifts. While earlier discussions highlight young women's pain and anger at failed friendships, the lack of reciprocal messages does not generate the same social anxieties (particularly when everyone understands the limitations of electricity, credit

and signal). For my friend and her 'new month messages', it would take a few failed attempts at receiving a similar message back from someone before she would strike them off her list for the next month. Interestingly, when someone eventually bumps into another who has not responded to calls or messages, it is custom to mention the lack of response in order to remind the other of their debt.

Such ideas of exchange and concealment are also apparent in styles of conversing. Young people often 'gist' when they chat on their phones, making jokes so that the conversation continues through entertainment rather than dwelling on the revelation of personal information. For instance, I remember one time at NK's when she received a phone call from a friend she had not spoken to in a while. Her friend was Muslim and it happened that it was Sallah, the Muslim festival of Eid al-Fitr.[2] After asking how he was, NK quickly asked, 'Where is my ram?' Claiming that he must be eating something as she could hear his jaws move independently from his speech, NK continued to ask for her share of the feast. 'Where is my ram? Bluetooth my ram now! My Bluetooth is on – Bluetooth it now!' NK continued to joke. While her friend, who was, rather ambiguously, 'somewhere at the end of Nigeria', maintained that sending food via Bluetooth would not work, it appeared that 'gisting' allowed people to ask for gifts, to extend friendship, without running the risk of feeling let down by others when requests did not materialise. It is these forms of affect and entertainment, and the social rule of never giving exact information about oneself, which are central to understanding how young women not only alleviate boredom in the house but also manage contacts discreetly. Furthermore, just as these styles of mobile communication generate affect free from fear between young women, they also enable young women to chat with men, allowing them to work on social relations in Calabar and beyond that may bring rewards, such as airtime.

Where contacts indicate people's relatedness (Horst & Miller 2006; de Bruijn et al. 2009), young women take particular care to manage stored phone numbers. In a society that runs on 'who you know', collecting people's numbers is as much about entertainment and affect in the present as maximising connections and possibilities for the future. Numbers are rarely listed under the contact's real name. Sometimes, where people meet in the street and exchange numbers in order just to chat once in a while, this may be because the real name is not known – NK would store acquaintances' numbers by their first name and where she had met them, such as in a taxi or at a certain junction in town. She had a number of people who would call to ask how she was. Not minding that they remained practically strangers, she was comforted by how they showed care for her. Other times, names for other girls and men were changed to show endearment, such as an abbreviated name or nickname being combined with the suffix of 'babe'. However, most of the time, numbers were stored under pseudonyms in order to protect the contact's identity: young women may store family members or boyfriends as 'dearest' or 'my love', although some names appeared even better disguised.

As one friend explained, you should always store important numbers under a different name to guard against others' wicked intentions. Stories circulated about people receiving calls telling them that a loved one had been in a fatal road accident. It would turn out that the supposed deceased's mobile had been stolen, with stored numbers of those likely to be close relations being called as pranks. Yet, young women's biggest concern was that losing a number meant potentially losing fortune.

Young women, aware of others' abilities to steal numbers and spread slander, stored bosses' numbers under different names in order to safeguard incomes. More importantly, the names of rich fathers, uncles and 'uncles' were often disguised. Girls are not only admired for their material wealth but also the numbers that bring such wealth, and other girls are willing to fish through another's phone and lift numbers in order to capitalise on opportunities. Hence, as not even the handset is private, girls must use it with discretion, rigorously managing their contacts, in order to 'get by' in the present and maximise future opportunities.

Just as coming together is argued as integral to young men's experiences of waiting (Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013), we see how mobile phone communication has allowed young women to retain some sociality in their time at home. 'Gisting' and text messages are cheap and pragmatic ways of extending friendship, creating entertainment and overcoming boredom. Interestingly, mobile communication reconfigures ideas of social proximity: strangers can show constant care and loved ones appear unimportant on contact lists. Revisiting Geschiere's (2013) notion of the potential horrors of intimacy, mobile communication appears to allow young women to enjoy affect free from the fear of others' malice. Mobile technology allows young women to 'cut' social ties (cf. Strathern 1996), transforming social connections into a different type of 'mobile sociality' that enables them to keep much-needed relations ticking over from a distance.

'BlackBerry is best'

By summer 2011, BlackBerry had transcended Nigeria's wealthiest Big Men: 'BB' symbolised Calabar's elite youth. Prestige lay in owning the latest and dearest model, and in the financial capability to subscribe to BlackBerry Internet Service ('BIS'). In early 2012, while 'Bold 5' (selling at 100,000 naira) was the most coveted item amongst my female friends, BlackBerry had become increasingly accessible: the cheapest handset ('Curve 2') sold for around 30,000 naira, 'fairly used' models went for under 20,000 naira, and service providers had introduced cheaper 'BIS' packages with shorter validity periods (daily and weekly, instead of monthly) and reduced services (Internet only, for instance). Despite the still relative expense for young women, most I knew owned a BlackBerry by the end of my fieldwork in late 2012 – for most, it went unsaid as to which man bought it for them. *The* status symbol for urban youth (cf. Pype 2013), young women also assured me that BlackBerry was actually a highly practical tool for communication, enabling them to reach new levels of sociality.

Besides the ability to browse the Internet, aiding young women to keep up with fashion and schoolwork, BlackBerry allowed them to socialise via BBM (BlackBerry Messenger Service). A social network platform akin to 2go and WatsApp, BBM is regarded as more exclusive because one can only connect with others fortunate to both own a handset and subscribe to a service package. While my friends complained how texts and calls ate credit quickly, BBM was practical in that they could chat to others for free as long as their 'BIS' had not expired. Yet, while the handset allowed young women to fashion themselves as successful urbanites flaunting material wealth, BBM was also integral to how they fashioned an image of themselves to others. Of course, BlackBerry is not exclusive to Nigeria – in Europe, for instance, it has become synonymous with businessmen's efficiency – yet Nigerian young women

have appropriated BlackBerry functions for their own means. With 'display names', 'DPs' ('display pictures') and 'PMs' ('personal messages'), BBM allowed young women confined to the house a space in which to become whoever they wanted to be and a forum of interaction negating the need to reveal one's true identity.

This is perhaps best illustrated through my own experiences of grappling with BBM. Arriving in Calabar with the most basic Nokia torchlight, I was perpetually told to buy a BlackBerry to keep in touch with others more easily. I finally gave in and allowed my friend, Ema, to help me buy a handset from a reputable shop in town – buying the cheapest handset, Ema ensured that I remained cool with a white rather than the standard black casing. Watching Ema set up the phone, I learned that I could not possibly just have my own name as my 'display name' on BBM – too boring – I needed a pseudonym reflecting something unique about myself. I deflected Ema's attempts to use embarrassing names, before settling on my nickname. I watched as Ema started to embellish it with emoticons. When I protested, she showed me her contact list. All 60 of her contacts' names – she said some girls had over 150 contacts – were embellished with BlackBerry emoticons and symbols taken from the Internet. The uniqueness of the 'user name' allows easy identification on BBM, for others to know one's persona – for instance, my friends often commented on what the anonymous 'Diva' had recently posted on BBM. Having decided on my name, Ema added some contacts she considered to have good BBM-chat to my contact list and told me, 'Ping people! Go have fun!'

It was such that I learned how young women view BBM as a space to connect with others without actually having to know them. While you can send messages, pictures and 'broadcasts' (usually jokes or biblical references sent to multiple contacts for them to forward on), you can also get others' attention by 'pinging' them – the word 'PING!!!' shows in red letters, while the handset buzzes as an alert. It took me some time to get to understand how 'pinging' people actually worked – I was never sure what people wanted to chat about. However, as I acquired more contacts, I came to discover that BBM was the perfect way to keep in contact with multiple others. As one friend said, she did not mind having friends of friends or even strangers add her as a contact, but if she started chatting and found out that they were boring, she would delete them. By 'boring', she meant those on her contact list who never spoke to her or whose conversation would peter out after an initial 'Hi how r u?' Generally, young women did not want people to simply ask after them or their business, they wanted to comment on, laugh and speculate about a kaleidoscopic world beyond their confining walls.

One intriguing feature of BBM is how it enabled young women to reveal things about the self and relate with others in a certain way. For instance, while people did not generally change their pseudonym, they frequently changed their 'DP' ('display picture') and 'PM' ('personal message') throughout the day. These could be viewed on a constantly changing list of recent updates. My female friends' PMs were usually related to how they currently felt or referred to something that had happened to them. PMs were often moralistic or testimonies for God's work:

Tough Times never last. But. Tough. People. Do

Isn't all dat dance wit u r ur friendz, some r waiting 4 ur dwnfall.

Even in my hard times n sad moment, there is 1 who ♥s me.. Jesus

Outstanding success is my birthright!!! [Dancing icon] Happy new month …

Generally vague, PMs facilitated equally abstract conversations, encouraging sympathy and attention from others rather than thorough counsel or celebration. Friends on BBM appreciated succinct and endearing comments to their PMs such as 'Sorry dearie', 'Praying 4 u swthrt' or 'Congrats darling', and generally did not want to detail their precise dilemmas and successes. As one recent graduate stated, PMs were also things 'worth sharing', meaning they should 'elicit comments' and create interesting conversations based on all parties' views on the topic. Often inspired by lines from books and movies, funny childhood memories or others' PMs, she added: 'Rarely [I use] stuff going on in my life. I prefer to keep that to the barest minimum.' Just as NK explained how only rats 'on the inside' can plot others' downfalls, PMs facilitated a means of interaction that allowed caring sentiments to be asked for, given and received graciously without fears of others knowing too much. Where a need for others remains, PMs maintained distance and discretion, eased social relations and kept future possibilities open.

Likewise, DPs were used to fashion an abstract image of the self and to spark conversation. As Boyd and Heer write about people changing their online profiles on the social networking site Friendster, 'By altering their Profiles to engage with others, participants are setting the stage for conversation' (2006: 5). One of the easiest ways of creating conversation was to use a 'screenshot' of a particularly funny BBM conversation currently being had. While this encourages others to 'gist' and carry on the joke in other private conversations, this type of DP also showcases one's mastery of conjuring another realm of quips and entertainment. More commonly, young women eluded current tedium by using pictures from Internet and BBM forums to fashion a certain image or urban (Pentecostal) success for themselves. Pictures often contained biblical, moralistic or self-affirming images and messages, or depicted luxury commodities and high-end fashion. The impetus was to remain unique, and kudos was given to those with the most original DPs – inevitability, pictures circulated, raising concerns of 'DP theft'. Young women also used their own photo to illustrate moments of success. A 'selfie' taken in the passenger seat of a private car was a popular illustration of social mobility, particularly as most travelled in public taxis. Portraits showing striking poses and fashionable outfits also invited others to celebrate the self. It was often in their most bored moments that young women would frantically update photos from past outings not only for entertainment but also, deceiving realities of limited finances and opportunities, as means for demonstrating success.

Yet, central to how young women used DPs to fashion an image of the self was how they used them to build social relations. Young people in Calabar often saved other people's DP 'selfies' and photos on their BlackBerry handsets. Admittedly, I found it a little unnerving to find out others had saved photos of me without my permission, yet young women did this in order to identify with others. For instance, it is common to publically honour someone on their birthday by using their photo as a DP. Marriages are also the perfect time to recognise others by using photos from their wedding ceremonies (usually updated as they happen) as DPs, and changing PMs to 'HML' ('Happy Married Life'). Others' photos also illustrate sentimentality: to show someone is missed, or to mark deaths. As one friend said, she could easily just send someone a text message to wish them happy birthday but using their photo showed them (and others) that they were special and that they had a 'connection'. Others corroborated: showcasing another in their DPs publically demonstrated the

individual as 'my person', denoting a relationship of loyalty, obligation and expectation. Hence, DPs reaffirmed social connections and honoured patrons who, in the Nigerian context, could reward in future financial handouts. Yet, DPs' aesthetics also pragmatically encouraged fortune in other ways: often, advertising competitions, such as beauty pageants, those connected to BBM networks were more likely to find out from others about potentially life-changing opportunities.

Just as Nollywood films allow viewers to 'mimetically travel' to more glamorous places (Larkin 1998; Meyer 2002), and storytelling allows young men to live out more exciting adventures (Archambault 2012), BBM enabled young women to be transported into a fantasy world of creativity, sociality and possibility. For young women professing to solitude in the house, BBM became a tool for dissociation. BBM created a different social world, allowing them a personal sphere in the communal household. Through new styles of communication associated with Black-Berry (from 'pinging' to allowing others to 'rock your DP'), young women could explore relationships with others not easily open to them in normal life due to fears of sabotaging their reputation or being sabotaged by embittered friends. Returning to ideas of youth's productivity in times of waiting (Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013), BBM not only allowed young women to overcome tedium through entertaining conversations but actively created a new space for them away from reality which redefined their present conditions and hopes for realising the future.

Conclusion

Drawing on a time in Calabar when many young women were 'stuck' waiting – their attempts realising aspirations restricted by the haphazard education system, family and church pressures of respectability – this paper argues that mobile communication, as a tool of sociality, has become a strategy for young women to manage their time spent in the house. Illuminating the fear of female friendships, the 'feminine culture of waiting' delineated in this article appears rather different from analyses of young men's time waiting characterised by inclusion, solidarity and affect (cf. Jeffrey 2010; Masquelier 2013). Yet, the discussions of failed friendships highlight, rather perversely, that young women do see the need to be close to others. Informed by Geschiere's (2013) ideas that intimacy breeds fear as well as trust, this article illustrates how mobile communication allows individuals to overcome fears of social proximity. Just as mobiles help Africans to cope with distance (de Bruijn et al. 2009), they also allow individuals to maintain distance.

Mobile contacts may not be classed as true friends, but they allow young women to enjoy affect and sociality while alone. Indeed, new styles of chatting, expressive text messages and imaginative realms of BBM highlight how mobile communication allows young women to carry on the same conceptions of self, creativity, agency and emotion that Bell and Coleman (1999: 2) remind us are so central to friendship. The above explores how mobiles can help young women truncate the types of social ties that produce anxiety, yet, in doing so, it raises questions as to what sort of new networks are created. Social networks appear to transpose in and out of mobile networks. It appears that, while individuals can 'cut' networks (Strathern 1996), they do not tend to 'cut out' networks completely. Of course, mobile communications do not negate

the need for real social presence at certain times – either for solidarity in times of celebration or commiseration, or in being recognised for financial opportunities such as jobs. Yet, by allowing social relations to tick over at a distance, providing affect free from fear, mobile communication enables young women to enhance aspects of the human condition such as the need for others.

Just as mobile communication reconceptualises space and distance, it also interrogates the concept of time. Central to youth's time of waiting is that of productivity, and young women engage with mobile communication to capitalise on time otherwise lost. How young women while away hours sending texts, chatting and 'gisting' on the mobile and BlackBerry speaks to ideas of overcoming boredom and youth claiming time for themselves. Yet, more than just a pragmatic means for time management, mobile communications change how young women experience the house. The 'waiting space' is transformed into another realm characterised by alternative social rules: mobile relations are ongoing, yet never marked by carrying out obligations or failure of others to do so; different identities are inventively forged on BBM without the need for realisation or the disappointment when they cannot be; even the affirming promises of the 'new month messages' renew hope, ignoring the existence of recipients' daily struggles. Focusing on the small quotidian experiences of young women's engagement with mobile technology, this paper raises much larger issues for how youth in Africa (and beyond) cope by not necessarily challenging the systems that create their time of waiting but by creating new spaces in which they can feel good about themselves and retain hope for the future.

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Notes

1. In 2011–2012, 250 naira exchanged for roughly £1.
2. Sallah is the Hausa name for Eid al-Fitr, and is the common name for the Muslim festival across Nigeria.

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