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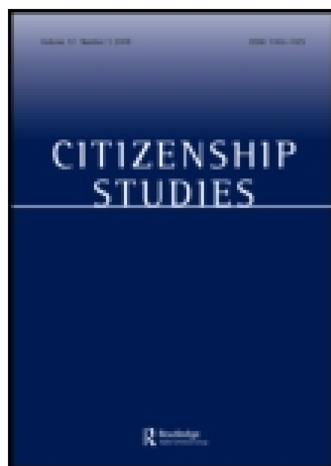

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African international students in Klang Valley: colonial legacies, postcolonial racialization, and sub-citizenship

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African international students in Klang Valley: colonial legacies, postcolonial racialization, and sub-citizenship

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This article examines the experiences of African international students attending universities around the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur. I draw upon participant-observations, interviews, and discussions with international students from several African nations and Malaysian citizens of various ethnicities. Malaysian educational programs are actively marketed in Africa, where many students and their families are motivated to pursue an affordable English-language education in an Asian nation. However, African students face an unfriendly and racist reception in the greater Klang Valley area. Persisting colonial legacies of white supremacy, global flows of negative images of Blacks, and newly emergent meta-cultural circulation of representations of Africans-*cum*-'Nig(g)erians' as predatory males shape their experiences of exclusion from cosmopolitan citizenship. I argue that African international students are cast into a low grade of cultural citizenship that cuts across zones of graduated sovereignty. African students adapt to this urban context, perform acts of citizenship, and attempt to foster cosmopolitan relations among themselves and in the broader society. Moments of critical cosmopolitanism from Malaysians are rare and need to be expanded.

Keywords: international students; racialization of Africans; acts of citizenship; critical cosmopolitanism

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Introduction

Intensified transnational flows of people during the current era of globalization hold many possibilities for hopeful and harmful social relations and productions of identities. Some researchers stress new prospects of inclusive and multicultural or cosmopolitan relations and productions of 'unmoored,' deterritorialized, and hybrid identities (Sassen 1998; Calhoun 2003; Brettell 2005; Gmelch 2010). Other researchers demonstrate migrant experiences of exclusion, being 'fixed in space' by racial and sexual discourses, and productions of stigmatized identities (Low 2003; Gregory 2007; Liu 2011). As we scan the urban geographies of our increasingly urbanized and interconnected world, we can locate a variety of combinations of such relations and identities. The outcomes and contours of international migrant experiences of incorporation and/or rejection are shaped by the social and cultural context of the destination city. This 'city as context' approach considers each city as a particular sociohistoric and economic field molded by local, regional, national, and global forces (Brettel 2003; Brettell and Kemper 2010, 355). It provides a framework for understanding how migrants' agency and urban constraints contribute to processes of adaptation, institution-building, and cultural citizenship. Defining cultural citizenship as 'a dual process of self-making and being made within webs of power linked to the nation-state and civil society' Ong (1999, 264), also points us toward the ways both

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social actors and influential institutions create feelings of belonging and community. Modes of governmentality of the state, civil society institutions, and the capitalist market constrain cultural citizenship in a variety of ways in the contemporary global capitalist order (Ong 2002).

In this article, I adopt a 'city as context' approach to examine the experiences of African international students attending universities in Klang Valley, in and around the Malaysian capital, Kuala Lumpur. I draw upon participant observations, interviews, and discussions with international students from Tanzania, Kenya, Chad, Sudan, Tunisia, Nigeria, Senegal, Botswana, and Lesotho, and Malaysian citizens of various ethnicities during 2011, 2012, and earlier periods of research. Some of my African interlocutors in the Klang Valley were referred to me by my African contacts in Melaka from a previous research project, and others I approached in public sites both on and off university campuses. Based on these varied forms of data, I attempt to combine insider and outsider perspectives to understand the position of the growing population of Africans in greater Kuala Lumpur. I argue that African international students, despite their attempts at incorporation, are cast into a low grade of cultural citizenship – a 'racialized sub-citizenship' – in an urban context characterized historically and currently by racial divisions and hierarchies.[1] Their reception as desired foreign customers of Malaysia's bustling education industry has been perverted by an already available pattern of racial categorizing, stereotyping, and conceiving of dark-skinned people, Tamil Indians, 'Negritos,' and Africans, as lesser than the lighter complexioned. In addition, their experiences in Kuala Lumpur are shaped by global flows of negative images of African descendants and a newly emergent meta-cultural circulation of representations of Africans-*cum*-'Nig(g)erians' as criminals and predatory males. A major contribution of this article is the interpretation that this racialized sub-citizenship cuts across and fragments zones of graduated sovereignty, producing a low grade of cultural citizenship for Africans in education, tourist, low-wage, and high-skilled worker zones (cf. Ong 2006; Bunnell and Coe 2005). First, I will discuss the marketing of Malaysian educational programs in Africa and some of the motives for African students to pursue education in Malaysia. Second, I will present the reception and everyday experiences of African international students in the Klang Valley. Third, I will describe the racialization and stigmatization of African-*cum*-'Nig(g)erians.' Finally, I will examine how African students adapt to this urban context and create a sense of belonging, and reflect on the implications of this study for theoretical attempts to construe graded forms of citizenship.

The market and other motives

The Malaysian government has been promoting the marketing of public and private universities throughout Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Over the last two decades, the number of foreign students attending Malaysian universities has increased dramatically and the government continues the drive to increase their market share through competing with other universities in the region. The Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education aims to attract 200,000 international students by 2020 (Chong and Amli 2013, 298). According to government figures, there were 86,923 international students in Malaysian institutions of higher education in 2010, and 24.24% or 21,070 were from Africa (Ministry of Higher Education, n.d.). They aim to make Malaysia a center for education in Asia and beyond, especially for students from lower range to mid-range countries. Chief executive officers and administrators for Malaysian universities have appealed to the government to 'simplify' visa arrangements and 'relax' immigration procedures to facilitate the flow of

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international students into Malaysia from places like formerly colonized and globally marginalized African countries (Salleh 2007). After enduring several centuries of the Atlantic slave trade, colonialism, and neo-colonialism, scores of nations across the African continent are grappling with the technopolitics of globalization (Cosby 2005). Indeed, nations worldwide are struggling to keep up with the rapid pace of change in telecommunications and other technologies of the information age; those left behind are relegated to the lower rungs of the global capitalist order. Malaysia, a mid-range country, has been successful in marketing its education industry brand as quality English-medium education in a high-tech multimedia-oriented and harmonious multicultural environment to students in low-range and developing countries. Many African nations and students are attracted by these and other advertised features of Malaysian higher education that have contributed to new circuits of foreign students flowing into Malaysia. Whereas in the past, there were established circuits of students traveling from elite classes in colonies and neo-colonies to developed metropolitan centers, nowadays there are more frequent flows of middle classes from lower range nations to multiple competing centers among developing nations. While elite and well-subsidized Malaysians still seek education in the USA, the UK, and Australia, African international students join the movement of students from Indonesia, Vietnam, Dubai, Iran, and China into public and private universities in Malaysia. Indeed, many of the African students I interviewed were attracted by the prospect of obtaining an English-medium education for a lower cost than that offered in the USA and the UK.

These calculations of affordability are major motives for African student-customers to opt for a Malaysian institution of higher education. Wong (2004, 27) found that affordability was the most important factor favoring education in Malaysia, especially for those funded by their families. Similarly, Zainurin and Muhamad (2011) found that price was second only to program of study as a determining factor influencing international students' choice of studying at a university in Malaysia. Some of my African interlocutors pointed out that the private colleges and universities where they study in Malaysia are branches of institutions based in the UK or some other economically developed nation. From their perspective, it made more sense to pay less for what appeared to be the same education in Malaysia. Marilyn, a Zimbabwean education marketing agent, told me that African students in Malaysia are now in decline because they are looking for other more affordable options such as English-medium education in Hungary and Cyprus.[2]

Although these market-oriented motives were important, there were several other factors that figured prominently in my discussions with African international students. Lateefa and Ted, two Nigerian students, told me that they sought education in Malaysia because there are lots of strikes and corruption in college campuses in Nigeria, which makes it difficult to complete a program of study. Rashid, a student from Chad, said his father suggested that he studies in Malaysia after hearing about the prominence of Islam in this country. Similarly, Umar, a Nigerian, met a friendly Malay student while they were both studying in Damascus, Syria. After he returned home, he mentioned this experience to his father who decided to send him to Malaysia. Several students mentioned being motivated to study in 'Asia,' which they consider a technologically advanced region. Some students, from diverse cultural backgrounds, also said they wanted to study in Malaysia because they had friends and relatives already studying there.

My African interlocutors reported being informed about the Malaysian university they were attending from friends, relatives, television ads, and Internet sites, and through agents marketing the institution in their countries. Several of the Kenyan, Tanzanian, and Nigerian students told me that they were misled and lied to by the marketing agents.

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Kenneth, a Nigerian, said the private university agent told him that he could live on RM5000 per year in Malaysia, but his living expenses were actually twice that amount. Likewise, Beatrice, a Tanzanian, holding back her tears, informed me that her tuition was more than what the agent told her it would be, and after three years in the university she is not sure whether her family can afford to pay for her to finish. Many students reported unexpected rising costs of their educational programs. While some students were informed that they could not work in Malaysia while on a student visa, except with permission and in limited positions, others were misled into thinking that they would be able to work a wide range of jobs. Mariam stated that the agent in Kenya told her that she could work while studying in Malaysia, but when she went to apply for a position with a help-wanted sign she was rejected. She felt it was because she was African. Robert, a Nigerian student, said they are only allowed to work at gas kiosks and other low-level service jobs. However, Binata, a Senegalese student, said, 'It is dangerous for Africans on student visas. My roommate from Guinea worked for a restaurant in KLCC [Kuala Lumpur Convention Centre] and the immigrations people came and arrested her.' Mariam and Alice, Kenyan roommates, complained about their Malaysian lecturers' lack of competence in English. On one occasion, Mariam's instructor forgot his English lecture notes, so he resorted to giving his lecture in Malay. She felt it was useless for her to be in attendance because she could not understand the lecture. Furthermore, they were disappointed to find that they often did not receive quality education from lecturers competent enough in English to answer their questions. In addition, contrary to the stable harmonious multicultural or moderate Islamic picture they had been painted, they found the receiving Malaysian society to be highly divided and unwelcoming to Africans.

Reception in a divided city: rejection, racialization, and stigmatization

Kuala Lumpur and the greater Klang Valley agglomeration have a long history of ethnic divisions and conflict between Malays, Chinese, and Indians, categories and groups popularly conceived of as different 'races' (Abraham 1997; Willford 2003; King 2008). Sociospatial, economic, and political divisions abound in contemporary Klang Valley, considered on a macro-level, encompassing Kuala Lumpur and several surrounding municipalities. Many racially segregated neighborhoods persist together with multiracial and ethnic class-based housing estates, which are internally divided in a fashion similar to what I described in Melaka (Daniels 2010). Moreover, the urban built environment emplaces representations associated with each of these racial groups, a Chinatown, Little India, and many temples and churches, while also emplacing Malay and Muslim hegemony in grand architectural structures (King 2008). A Malay-dominated federal government with an overwhelmingly Malay corps of civil servants fills these administrative structures, while Chinese-owned businesses fill much of the urban landscape. Over the course of postcolonial history, living together and reproducing these sociopolitical divisions, Malaysia's racial groups have constructed stereotypes of each other. Although there are urban spaces of intergroup interaction and cosmopolitan efforts to transcend stereotypes and intergroup hostilities, these socially and culturally constructed divisions persist. Furthermore, over the last two decades sociopolitical struggles have intensified with political parties, nongovernmental organizations, and the state battling over approaches to race, religion, and nation.

These constructed and contested social divisions, though partially reworked in postcolonial Malaysia, are rooted in the racism of the European colonial period. Abraham (1997, 6), pointing out the foundation of the Malaysian plural society, states, 'Since

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colonialism here involved domination by a numerically insignificant number of "Whites" over masses of "non-whites," there was always an emphasis on the "superiority" of the former over the latter.' In European racial schemas, dark-skinned indigenous peoples in the region, labeled as 'Blacks,' 'Negros,' and 'Niggers' in New Guinea and Australia and 'Negritos' in Malaya, were conceived of as the 'savage' antithesis of 'civilized' Whites (see Rambo, Gillogly, and Hutterer 1988; Hart, Pilling, and Goodale 2001).[3] Colonial racial hierarchies, based on white supremacist ideologies, continue to influence and reenergize postcolonial patterns of racial inequality that mold the uneven experiences of global flows of people moving into Malaysia. As Thomas and Clarke (2006, 8) note:

> This is because global political, economic, and cultural processes and local experiences have constituted each other within the contexts of particular histories and hierarchies of power and knowledge. These hierarchies change over time but are always influenced by legacies of earlier periods.

Since political independence in 1957, Malay-led multiracial ruling coalition government has replaced 'white' British colonial administrators. Malays, gaining more access to material and symbolic resources, have been able to raise their position in transformations of racial hierarchies. While Malays continue to be devalued, given their relatively darker skin color vis-à-vis Chinese, they gained standing in terms of postcolonial value placed on their presumed indigenousness and Muslim identities (Daniels 2005, 58). On the other hand, 'Indians are the smallest of the major communities, with neither the economic power of the Chinese nor the political power of the Malays' (King 2008, 26). Malaysian Indians prototypically conceived of as dark-skinned Tamils continue to be placed on the lower strata of racial hierarchies and experience institutionalized racism. Thus, even in the absence of 'white' colonial elites, white supremacist ideologies have persisted at the expense of the life chances of Malaysian Indians. This legacy of racist devaluations of blackness has shaped the racialization of African international students.

African international students, part of new global circuits, flow into this urban context as newcomers without a historical presence in the city. Most of the over 20,000 African students in Malaysia are attracted to greater Kuala Lumpur assuming that opportunities and resources are concentrated in the Malaysian capital city like they are in capitals back in their home countries. However, their experiences both on and off campus indicate that locals have negative preconceptions of them. Students reported nonverbal and verbal experiences of racism. Oleya, a Tunisian studying Islamic finance in a Malaysian government-funded program with Muslims from around the world, said, 'Malays are not welcoming and do not mix with other nationalities.' She said Malays form study groups among themselves excluding foreign students. Mariam and Alice, Kenyan students at a private university, said they are always the last to be picked for group projects in their classes. Nyeki, a Botswanan, likes the way instructors at her private university try to motivate students to form diverse groups for team projects. However, she felt excluded when the Chinese girls on her team only spoke Chinese during their meetings. Outside of class projects, very few African international students reported engaging in friendly interactions with local Malaysians. Although Lateefa felt that most locals were racist toward Africans and do not want to help them in classes, she told me that she has become friends with one Malay student. This young Malay woman has invited her to have dinner with her parents on a few occasions and she felt it was a 'nice experience.' Similarly, Rashid said, 'Malays have problems relating to Blacks,' but he has a good Malay friend who treats him 'like a brother.' Kenneth, who told me he relates well with Indians, took me to an Indian barbershop to get my haircut where I witnessed their friendly social relations.

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These experiences, though uncommon, indicate that there are moments of cosmopolitan relations in which Malaysians engage in a form of 'border thinking' extending the idiom of friendly social relations the government and many civil society organizations promote among citizen-members of Malaysia's diverse society to African students (Mignolo 2002, 179, 181; Daniels 2005, 81). These acts of friendship may also be considered 'acts of citizenship,' defined as 'collective or individual deeds that rupture sociohistorical patterns' (Isin and Nielsen 2008, 2). There is potential in these moments and acts for the growth of a *critical cosmopolitanism*, a form of cosmopolitanism capable of dismantling colonial legacies of white supremacy and producing new understandings of racial difference (Mignolo 2002, 161, 180). On the other hand, some African students told me about instances in which local students sat apart from them in classrooms and cases they perceived to be unfair grading by the instructors. They also felt that campus and student apartment building security guards singled them for more identity checks and imposed harsher restrictions on them than other students.

Although the religions of most of the students, Islam and Christianity, claim universality and inclusive imagined religious communities, most African students told me that their experiences of friendly social relations in mosques and churches were short-lived. These moments of togetherness were primarily during religious rituals and observances. For instance, Muhammad, a Nigerian student at a public university, told me that he feels alone in the mosques except during Ramadan, the fasting month. He feels that Malays are not open to the ideas of Muslim international students about Islam, because they give all their talks and programs in the mosques in Malay. Similarly, Mathew, a student from Lesotho, attends Christian churches fellowshipping with ethnic Chinese and Indian locals and feels that 'there is not much relationship there … people just stick to themselves … The togetherness is momentary and after the service the differences come back to the fore.' On the other hand, a Botswanan Christian student and a Nigerian Muslim student, both of whom spent considerable amounts of time in religious institutions, reported developing friendly relations with some local Malaysians in their religious communities after exerting persistent efforts to overcome negative stereotypes and the tendency to exclude them from cosmopolitan social relations. These African students performed acts of citizenship through actively rewriting the dominant scripts and creating new scenes (see Isin 2008, 38).

My African student interlocutors described more intense rejection off rather than on campus. Although these students move through a variety of spaces on a meso-level – such as the high-tech office parks of Cyberjaya, lower class housing neighborhoods in Ampang, and middle-class condominiums of Petaling Jaya – there are patterns of rejection and denigration students share. Many of them reported that locals cover their noses when Africans enter elevators and move away from them on trains and buses. Ted and Obiajulu, Nigerian and Botswanan students, said they were forced to pay more for taxis and other services. Several students also told me that locals often move in front of them in lines and generally get served before them in stores and offices even when Africans had been waiting longer. African students also encounter difficulties when trying to rent apartments off campus. Mariam stated that when they make calls searching for available apartments, 'Chinese [landlords] tell us they don't want to rent to any Black people, Africans or Indians.' Beatrice, the Tanzanian student who had problems paying the rising cost of private education, told me that she was evicted from her apartment because the Chinese landlord found a group of men willing to pay higher rent. Likewise, Muhammad said it is difficult for international students to rent apartments off campus because the costs are high and most people are not willing to rent to them. In addition, Jamil, a Kenyan student who

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just finished his master's degree, said he and a fellow Nigerian employee were mistreated in their place of employment. He tried not to take that particular experience to heart. However, at another job where he worked for six months, he said he was *really affected* by the way a Malay employee treated him. Jamil stated, 'Not one time did the Malay man offer me a ride to the masjid (mosque) to pray although he knew we were going to the same place.' Despite being desired student-customers of the Malaysian education industry, African international students experienced exclusion and rejection in the receiving society of Kuala Lumpur. They are marginalized and treated more harshly and with less pastoral care than other students in public and private institutions of higher education and other workers in low-skilled and high-skilled professional zones. Moreover, they are insulted, denigrated, and disciplined in public spaces of the broader society that mediate and impinge upon zones which articulate in varied ways with global production and financial circuits (cf. Ong 2006, 78).

These experiences are not only shaped by white supremacist legacies but also by mental representations local Malaysians have of 'Africans.' My student interlocutors reported instances both inside and outside campus spaces in which Malaysians have used the word 'Negro' to refer to them. Umar told me that he and his friends received a bill in a restaurant with 'Negros' written on the top of the order. They asked who wrote it and requested the correct bill because they are not 'Negros.' Several students were so offended by the term that they referred to it as the 'N-word' in my discussions with them. Mariam told me that one of her lecturers used the 'N-word' in class, and a friend was called this pejorative term when he complained about having to leave his passport at the guard station to visit them in their apartment building. Agnes, another Kenyan student, said she experienced a young Malay boy approaching her in a public place, calling her the 'N-word' and then running away. She felt that his behavior indicated that he knew that it was a racial slur. A racial schema acquired through processes of socialization underlay this verbal behavior, like nonverbal behaviors discussed earlier.

Malays inherited the category Negro and many conceptions associated with it from the British during the colonial period. The English, in the early seventeenth century, followed the Spanish example of labeling people of African descent 'negroes' (Hine, Hine, and Harrold 2003, 50). In the contemporary Malay–English dictionary, *Kamus Perwira* (1998), *Negro* (*Négro*) appears as an independent entry defined as 'a person with black skin in Africa.' However, in *Kamus Lengkap* (1990) and *Kamus Dewan* (1998), *Negro* does not appear as an independent entry but only as part of the definition for the Indonesian Malay term *Neger* (or *Négér*). A *Neger* is defined as a 'black skinned person (in Africa), Negro.' In Malay language newspapers, I have only noticed the term *Negro* being used and never *Neger*. For instance, an article with the headline 'Dicekup bersama pasangan Negro' (Caught with her Negro mate) appeared in *Sinar Harian* (October 10, 2010, S11), which used the word *Negro* several times. The article describes a young Malay woman and her African Muslim boyfriend being arrested by the Selangor Department of Religion (JAIS) officials for *khalwat* (inappropriate close proximity of a man and woman outside of marriage).

The categories *Negro* and *Neger* do not appear to *only* signify the negative associations and stigma perceived by my African interlocutors. For instance, in 2009, when I attended an event in Kedah at an Islamic school affiliated with the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS), a PAS activist told me not to be offended if someone there called me a *Negro*. He told me they would not mean anything negative. Similarly, two of my Malay interlocutors, Nadiah, a 22-year-old Malay university student, and Hanitah, a 33-year-old Malay UMNO (United Malays National Organization) activist, told me that the terms *Negro*, *Nigger* (or

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Niger), and *Awang Hitam* (lit. Black eldest son; Black lads; Black clouds) are not bad terms. They said *Negro* and *Nigger* are used to refer to Black people from Africa or outside Malaysia and *Awang Hitam* is a popular nickname for African males in Malaysia. Nadiah stated:

> As far as I know the term Negro in Malaysia refers to *Orang Kulit Hitam* [black skinned people]. We do have different type of skins in Malaysia such as Chinese, Malays, and Indian. But, we do not call an Indian as a Negro. As much as I'm concerned, a Negro is an ethnic from somewhere else from [outside] Malaysia probably.

In this sense, these terms are a way for them to fit dark-skinned Africans into their racial schema, a mental representation of groups conceived as biologically different and organized in a hierarchical format. Nadiah apologized for the harsh sound of these terms and noted that the hierarchical relations between 'Whites' and 'Blacks' during colonial times are a 'fundamental of racism in history.' This indicates that she has knowledge of white supremacist racial hierarchies and negative associations, rooted in a history of racism, also linked to these terms. When I asked Hanitah what term she would use for Africans who commit criminal acts in Malaysia, she responded by telling me that any of these terms would suffice because they would 'symbolize' them. *Awang hitam* is a gendered racial category that evokes for many of my Malay interlocutors images and fears of predatory Black men. *Gagak hitam* (Black crow) is a more explicitly derogatory term used for Africans, which one can find in some mainstream Malay newspapers. I told Hanitah I was shocked to find this term used in newspapers and asked her why such terms are used for people of African descent. She responded, '*Gagak hitam* is commonly used for nigger ... There are many around especially in KL [Kuala Lumpur]. They cheat local girls.' 'But *gagak* is a crow, why use this term for people,' I continued. 'It's just a name,' she said. This use of referentialist linguistic ideology, stressing that these words properly refer to people in the world, avoids having to acknowledge the racist meanings they entail (Hill 2008, 64). In summary, these terms can be used to pigeonhole Africans as a racial type of humanity and also to signify negative associations and stigmas, thereby expressing a racial slur. During the colonial period, *Negro* and *Neger* were linked to white supremacist ideologies, and my ethnographic research in the late 1990s indicated that Malaysians still more positively evaluated lighter complexioned 'Whites' and Chinese than the darker 'Brown'- and 'Black'-skinned Malays and Indians (Daniels 2005, 61). 'Whites' and other light-skinned foreigners, often perceived to be tourist-customers and investors, are the most highly regarded noncitizens. These zones – tourism, financial investment, and education – are internally fragmented according to the logic of white supremacy that shapes the differential treatment of people within them.

In contrast to the multifunctionality of racial terms in the USA and Latin America, such as the reifying, pejorative, and intimate usages of 'Nigga' and 'Negro/a' (Hill 2008, 58; Roland 2011, 34), in Malaysia these lexical items for dark-complexioned Africans only reify and disparage. Malaysians primarily use them to denigrate Africans who, in turn, perceive them as racial slurs and have no interest in reshaping them as terms of endearment. Furthermore, lumping diverse Africans into these essentialized racial categories and devaluing their blackness serves to relegate them to a low and stigmatized form of membership in Malaysian society, a racialized sub-citizenship that traverses and fragments zones of sovereignty.

In the Kuala Lumpur urban context, local Malaysians include negative representations of African newcomers alongside stereotypes they continue to reproduce of each other. For instance, Mohamad Zaini, a middle-aged Malay taxi driver, during a ride to the LRT

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station told me that 'Indians here are gangsters and you have to be careful of them ... and Chinese are tricky and cunning ... but the Indians are the worst of all, criminals and troublemakers, always starting chaos and problems.' I asked about the foreign groups coming to Kuala Lumpur nowadays, and he said there are lots of different groups, Iranians, Arabs, and Africans. Mohamad Zaini went on to say,

> The Africans are mostly students ... they come with cons like black money and trick people ... they are crude and disrespectful and criminals. Like us Malays, we speak with respect to people, speak gracefully and kind, but these Africans ... are crude, rough speaking and disrespectful.

Local ethnic Chinese and Indian interlocutors also expressed these negative stereotypes of Africans within their respective constructions of local and foreign others.

Global forces also contribute to negative stereotypes of Africans in the local context. Representations of Africans and peoples of the African diaspora in North America, Europe, and the Caribbean flow into Kuala Lumpur via global popular culture, such as Hollywood films, western TV series, and MTV music videos. Negative images of people of African descent portraying gangsters, drug dealers, and violent gun-wielding thugs proliferate in global popular culture. While there are also positive representations of African politicians, musicians, and athletes circulating in global media, the negative images are taken as prototypical thereby reinforcing the widely distributed racist schema. Nowadays, these representations also appear in video media over the Internet. In addition, print and electronic media distribute stories about social, political, and economic turmoil on the African continent. These global forces provide new meanings, behavioral expectations, and fear to the already available devaluation of dark-skinned others.

Meta-cultural circulation of representations and disciplining Africans

These stereotypes of newcomer Africans, especially Nigerians, are widely circulated through print and electronic media. Particular instances of an African person or group allegedly committing a crime are used to stigmatize the entire group of newcomers to Malaysian diversity. For instance, a article titled 'Auditor Loses RM5m to African scam' (*The Malay Mail*, May 24, 2012, http://www.mmail.com.my [accessed May 25, 2012]) tells the story of a 63-year-old auditor falling prey to an online scam operated by a group of Africans. It states that 'a total of 15 Nigerians, aged 25–30 years, who were private college students here and a local woman' were arrested, and that they 'portrayed themselves as good-looking and charming, and sweet-talk their victims.' Numerous articles represent Africans as con artists and drug smugglers who use local women as drug dealers, transporters, and criminal associates ('New Year RM1.5m Drug Haul', *The Malay Mail*, January 29, 2012, http://www.mmail.com.my [accessed May 25, 2012]; 'Nigerian Students and Local Women Busted for Drug Trafficking', *The Malay Mail*, February 22, 2012, http://www.mmail.com.my [accessed May 25, 2012]). One Internet website has an article titled 'African conmen in Malaysia,' a *YouTube* video 'Nigerians in Malaysia and Singapore,' and links to other articles (http://www.themalaysianlife.blogspot.com). The video portrays a dark-skinned African, a Nigerian, posing as a student to recruit a local woman to serve as a 'drug mule' transporting drugs across international borders. One of the links is to an article titled '200 cheated of RM10mil by Africans claiming to be college boys' (*The Star Online* 2010). It states that they are 'Africans who entered the country on student visas, but never once stepped into a classroom ... these so-called "students" are enrolled in top colleges under fake scholarships, they are more often spotted cruising in flashy cars and frequenting nightspots.' The constant barrage of these media

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representations lumps dark-skinned Africans into the 'Nig(g)erian' category, which is stigmatized as criminals. Many of my student interlocutors told me that local Malaysians assume that all dark-skinned Africans are Nigerians. They also expressed regret that some Nigerians commit criminal acts giving 'Africans a bad name.' Muhammad said, 'Once they are fixed in their minds, you can't change it.' Indeed, a hyper-repetition of these images occur in the media, depicting Africans-*cum*-Nig(g)erians as roguish elements preying on innocent Malaysians. Such images play a 'meta-cultural' role 'putting certain kinds of talk and text into general circulation' (Hill 2008, 43). Furthermore, the moral panic expressed in these articles about 'African criminals posing as students' widely distributes racist stereotypes, evokes suspicion of all African student-customers, and calls on the state and civil society to discipline this group of dangerous noncitizens.

These and many other articles also cast African-*cum*-Nig(g)erians as males embodying a form of predatory masculinity. For instance, the article above on 'Africans posing as students' says that 'these Africans' target women in their thirties and forties who 'freely give up their money after being swept off their feet by Africans who lured them with sweet talk and promises.' Moreover, the main article on the site relates the story of a 58-year-old executive who continued to give an 'unattractive' Nigerian man large sums of money although she knew he was involved in shady activities with other women. It goes on to report that she 'now believes that the Nigerian had used "black magic" to put her under a charm, and she is currently seeking treatment to remedy this.' The repetition of the idea that these local women continue to fall prey to these men, who are capable of extraordinary guile, charm, and magic, expresses another moral panic in need of prophylactic measures to harshly regulate these predatory criminals.

Not surprisingly, African students report a lack of security against acts of violence perpetrated against them by citizen-members of an uncivil society and officers of the state. When theft, burglary, and violent crimes are committed against them, they do not find any law enforcement or justice system operating to protect their persons and interests. In addition, they inform me of heavy-handed treatment from Malaysian police. Reports of police operations focusing on Africans also hyper-circulate negative representations. For instance, one such operation in Melaka, called 'Ops Gagak Hitam,' was reported on television and in *Utusan*, a major Malay newspaper. One student told me that her friend's husband who is a successful Nigerian businessman with an expensive car is often pulled over and subjected to searches. Obiajulu, a student in a private university in the 'cybercorridor zone,' told me that Malaysian police seized and strip searched him and his friends and took all the money they were carrying after seeing them bust a bottle in the street on their way home from a nightclub.

Several students informed me of African students being murdered in the Klang Valley. One well-known case is that of a 22-year-old student from Chad, Abdel Aziz Hassan Abdraman, who was beaten to death by a mob of local youth wielding metal rods, sticks, and knives. The mob reportedly hurled racial slurs at Abdel Aziz and his friends, calling them 'Negros,' and demanding money before attacking them (*MyJoyOnline* 2008). The Sentul district police chief assistant commissioner, Zakaria Pagan, told *The Malay Mail* that the local residents were uncomfortable with the presence of Africans and that 'the youths who attacked the Africans wanted to teach them a lesson to behave themselves in public' (*MyJoyOnline* 2008).

Umar's story indicates another form of regulating African newcomers. He was very popular on a campus with a large population of Nigerian students. Both Nigerian and Arab students wanted him to lead an international student union they were working to organize. During his campaign to be elected president of the student union, Umar began to go around

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talking and agitating the students in an idiom of popular organizing in Nigeria. On the day of the student barbecue he helped organize, the university administrators, under the pretense of taking him to purchase supplies for the barbecue, transported him to a mental hospital where he was admitted and sedated for eight days. Campus administrators interpreted his intense student activism as abnormal behavior, a sign that he was having a mental breakdown. After being released, Umar wanted to sue the university administrators for what they did to him, but his father disagreed and eventually had him transfer to another university where he was to focus on his studies and stay out of student organizing. Abdel Aziz's and Umar's stories, and the experiences of many other African students with police, security guards, teachers, administrators, and Malaysians-at-large speak to the violent and dehumanizing mode of governmentality deployed to discipline racialized sub-citizens. They appear at times to be nearly reduced to 'bare life' or, at least, stripped of personhood from the perspective of the sovereign power holders in Malaysian society (Goffman 1961; Agamben 1998). Perceived in terms of devalued blackness, as *Negros*, *Negers*, black lads, and crows, their bodies are not accorded rights and are often the targets of unbridled violence.

The treatment of African international students, and Africans in general, differs from that of marginalized Malaysian citizens such as ethnic Indians and Chinese. Unlike Malays, who receive pastoral care from the state as the racialized 'hosts,' Indians and Chinese are marginalized as racialized 'guests' who are subject to greater state control and regulation. The treatment of racialized African 'guests' is most akin to that of ethnic Indians who are also devalued and denigrated as darker skinned inhabitants of Malaysia. Indians, many of whom have 'remained plantation proletarians' (Ong 2006, 80), do not enjoy the nurturing and special care Chinese receive in many private corporations. However, Indians are not subject to the global flows and hyper-circulation of negative images that constrain the cultural citizenship of Africans. In addition, Africans are not privy to the sociospatial discourses of Malaysian citizenship and the long history of acts of citizenship of ethnic Indian social and political organizations. Even though Indians experience intense state regulation and discipline, they are buffered, to an extent, by their inclusion in conventional discourses of Malaysian nationality and citizenship and their relative organizational strength from the harsher treatment of racialized 'Nig(g)erian' sub-citizens.

Adaptation and belonging

African international students psychologically adjust to the rejection, exclusion, and racism they experience through accepting it as a fact of life in Malaysia. Since they do not expect the tenor of social relations to change over the short term, they adjust by avoiding certain interactions with locals, anticipating hostile reactions, and focusing on the particular task at hand. For instance, Robert said when they go to stores to shop they look for the things they want to buy without asking anyone questions because they do not expect a friendly response or even to be able to communicate. Salim and Ahmad, two Nigerians who have lived in Klang Valley for several years, stated that they realize that it is no use to argue and complain about being cut in line and served after locals. Ahmad said, 'We are not going to change them ... it will take too much time for them to change.'

They adapt socially through maintaining transnational family ties and developing social networks with other Africans, from their country of origin and other nations, and with international students more broadly. The emotional support they receive from regular communications with family and friends back in their home countries is important for

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them living in a rather unfriendly environment in greater Kuala Lumpur. Family members also provide financial support. All the students I interviewed paid for all or part of their programs, except for Botswanan students who were supported by their government. Muhammad received a partial scholarship from the Nigerian government but with the rising costs of tuition, his family had to provide additional assistance for him to stay in school. African students are generally not eligible for Malaysian scholarships. For Umar and Beatrice, who experienced emotional and financial trauma, transnational support from their families was highly significant.

They were also both supported by their friends from other African nations. After being evicted from her apartment, Beatrice was able to move in with two of her girlfriends from Kenya. Nigerians, Christians and Muslims, and Kenyans, Ugandans, and North African and Middle Eastern Arabs assisted Umar in his recovery. Indeed, African students create social networks that include students from groups with whom inside their own countries they would not normally develop social relationships. I observed many Nigerian Christians and Muslims engaging in friendly social relations at public and private universities in Malaysia, whereas back home there are still ongoing sociopolitical conflicts between the primarily Christian southern region and Muslim northern region. Mariam told me that at the end of the day they often spend time with friends who speak their language, whether Muslim or Christian. One of her good friends on campus is a Christian Nigerian who also speaks Hausa, the main language in the northern region. Africans also form a sense of community beyond their national identities. Students told me that they have no choice but to do this because they are excluded by a society that tends to lump them together into the stigmatized category 'Nigerians.' Moreover, I noticed, and students described to me, the friendly ties they form with international students in general. I observed Palestinian and Nigerian Christian and Muslim students socializing together and speaking English in their groups. At other times, I observed Arabs from Middle Eastern nations, North African Arabs, and Muslim Nigerians interacting by speaking Arabic or English. Although lighter skinned ethnic-Arab Africans do not experience the same racialization and stigmatization as darker skinned Africans, they share in a general sense of exclusion from cosmopolitan relations in the broader urban context. Muhammad said, 'Really international students in general consider themselves one family because the Malays and Chinese only know their brothers.' The broad social networks and inclusive senses of national identity and of being Africans and international students indicate unmoored and cosmopolitan identities. They are actively making their own sense of graded citizenship and performing acts of citizenship that break with the historical patterns of racial divisions in Malaysia and ethnic and religious divisions in their home countries (Isin and Nielsen 2008).

Their cosmopolitan identities and inclusive senses of community are also expressed and embodied in their efforts to organize student associations and international student unions. Nigerian students, the largest population of African students in many universities, often organize student associations that include Nigerians from all backgrounds. They are also active in staging cultural performances on campus introducing their culture to locals. Africans from various national backgrounds often participate in their performances as well. The Nigerian associations usually plan large events for their national independence day, and some of them have mentioned trying to organize these events in conjunction with Botswanans who celebrate their independence around the same time. On many campuses, there are no student organizations based on national origins, but only a general international student association. Umar and his cohorts preferred to organize such a broad association despite the fact that Nigerians were the overwhelming majority of international

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students on his campus. African students also informed me of their activities of going out for fun and leisure activities in the nightclubs that dot the Kuala Lumpur landscape. Most of them prefer to go to nightclubs that play Nigerian and/or Kenyan music, which they say is popular with most African students. Some have told me that Middle Eastern Arabs often join Africans in partying at nightclubs.

At events in which Malaysia's diverse society is represented and celebrated are prime occasions for 'transversal enablers' (Wise 2009) to act and for critical cosmopolitanism to be enacted and embodied (Mignolo 2002; Calhoun 2002, 2003). I witnessed one such event, the Youth MaD Fest 2010, which took place at a municipal civic center in Petaling Jaya. The three largest Malaysian racial groups, Indians, Chinese, and Malays, were represented on stage with cultural performances associated with their respective cultural backgrounds, which is common for events celebrating Malaysian diversity (see Daniels 2005). However, at this youth festival, a Nigerian troupe sang the Nigerian national anthem and performed dances and drumming in colorful outfits. After each dancer performed their solo routine in front of the row of drummers, they received thunderous applause from the racially and ethnically diverse audience. In addition, a youth band comprising Indian, Chinese, Arab, and Malay youth led the final performance, which was a spectacular kaleidoscopic array of all the performers of the night featuring the Nigerian cultural troupe. Some Nigerian dancers came in front of the stage and asked the audience to join in with them. Most of the remaining audience, including an elderly Sikh man, enthusiastically stood up clapping their hands and dancing to the potent African rhythms. This representation of Malaysian diversity included Africans in the mix. These sorts of moments of critical cosmopolitanism (Mignolo 2002), which challenge colonial legacies and create new understandings of racial difference, need to be fostered and expanded to make Malaysia a more welcoming place for Africans.

Notwithstanding some African international students who find jobs and choose to stay on for work after graduating from undergraduate or graduate studies in Malaysia, most plan to return home or to pursue additional studies in some other country. They feel that they are on the bottom rungs of the hierarchy of foreigners in Malaysia, placed and constrained within a racialized sub-citizenship. They perceive other noncitizens, especially 'Whites' and other light-complexioned foreigners to be more highly valued in the broader society, which includes education, tourist, and high-tech zones. Most want to simply finish their studies and return home, while others said they would tell people back home not to come to Malaysia for higher education.

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Conclusions

African international students are, like many other students in lower and middle range countries, much sought after by the developing education industry in Malaysia. Malaysian educational programs are actively marketed in African societies and African countries, and students have been attracted to the affordability of pursuing English-medium higher education in Malaysia. However, despite these market calculations, they experience rejection, harsh regulation, and stigmatization. Ong (2006, 79) states:

> In Asian states, preexisting ethnoracializing schemes (installed under colonial rule) are reinforced and crosscut by new ways of governing that differentially value populations according to market calculations. Thus, while low-skilled workers are disciplined, elite workers and members of dominant ethnic groups enjoy affirmative action and pastoral care.

How are we then to theorize the devaluing and disciplining of African international students? Are they lowly valued, like low-skilled workers, based on market calculations?

However, as we have noted, based on market calculations they are desired as student-customers of the education industry. Prominent figures in the industry have even argued for 'relaxing' regulations to make their flow into Malaysia less restricted. The government has also provided subsidies and incentives for many Malaysian institutions to seek more international students. Could it be that African students are viewed as lacking any better options than education in a mid-range country with relatively affordable living and educational expenses? To the contrary, the Zimbabwean marketing agent told me that she was in Malaysia attending forums on how to improve conditions for, and thus marketing to, desirable African student-customers.

Therefore, it is not their devaluation as a function of market calculations, but rather the social and cultural context of greater Kuala Lumpur – its white supremacist colonial heritage, postcolonial racial hierarchy, and global flows and hyper-circulation of negative representations of 'Black' Africans – that explains the lowly ranked sub-citizenship of African international students. The devalued position of African international students according to 'preexisting ethnoracializing schemes' inherited from the colonial period contradicts the valued position they hold based on neoliberal logic. Therefore, the sub-citizenship of African international students is not only an 'exception to neoliberalism' but also an example of the persistence of white supremacist ideologies in global capitalist urban contexts.

Moreover, there is a need to reconceptualize 'zones of graduated sovereignty' as more internally fragmented than previously understood. Bunnell and Coe (2005) and Ong (2006) tend to conceive of these 'zones' as political spaces characterized by distinct governmental technologies that produce different forms of graded citizenship. Thus, low-skilled workers in Export Processing Zones and high-skilled professionals in the cybercorridor zones are represented as receiving different degrees of pastoral care, regulation, discipline, and experiencing contrasting forms of graded citizenship. However, this study demonstrates that there is differential treatment of students *within* the higher education 'zone,' with Africans, especially the darker complexioned, accorded a lowly graded form of racialized sub-citizenship. This racialized sub-citizenship traverses education, tourism, low-skilled and high-skilled zones, and coheres in the mediating public zone. Thus, in order to better comprehend fragmented forms of citizenship within and across these zones, there needs to be a fuller examination of the sociospatial discourses and practices, along with market values, that constitute these spaces.

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Notes

1. By 'race' and 'racial' I am referring to social and cultural constructions of biological/cultural difference rather than scientific biological categories and natural divisions.
2. I use pseudonyms for all of my African and Malaysian interlocutors in this article.
3. According to Pilling, Tiwi indigenous people of Australia did not resent the terms 'Blacks' and 'Blackies,' and in the 1950s Tiwi Mission schoolgirls used the latter term for themselves (Hart, Pilling, and Goodale 2001, 112).

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