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Nomadic subjects: young black women in Britain

Abstract

This paper reads the fragmented life stories of four young black women in the UK, at a transitional point of their lives, when they are making decisions about their post-compulsory education. We argue that the notion of nomadism is a useful, albeit not unproblematic, tool to theorise the multifarious ways that these black young women negotiate subject positions, make choices and shape their lives. We further trace, how these women are struggling against fixity and unity and attempting to speak and act outside or beyond the positions available within the collectivities to which they belong. Finally, we point out that in travelling around unstable and contradictory subject positions they are sometimes caught up within fears of distortion, and ultimately choose to remain 'at home'. This 'home', however, is rather formless and uncentred and far from being easily localizable and defined, interrogates ideas and perceptions about territories and borders. It is through this 'new image', that we can perhaps start thinking about 'being at home' in different ways, beyond restrictions and limitations of families, classes, gender groups, races or nations.

Nomadic subjects: young black women in Britain

The nomadic subject is a myth, that is to say a political fiction, that allows you to think through and move across established categories and levels of experience: blurring boundaries without burning bridges. Implicit in [the choice of this figuration] is the belief in the potency and relevance of the imagination, of myth-making, as a way to step out of the political and intellectual stasis of these postmodern times. Political fictions may be more effective, here and now, than theoretical systems.

(Braidotti, 1994, from the cover)

Being a nomad, living in transition, does not mean that one cannot or is unwilling to create those necessarily stable and reassuring bases for identity that allow one to function in a community ... Rather, nomadic consciousness consists in not taking any kind of identity as permanent. The nomad is only passing through; s/he makes those necessarily situated connections that can help her/him to survive, but s/he never takes on fully the limits of one national, fixed identity. The nomad has no passport-or has too many of them.

(Braidotti, 1994, p.33)

The nomadic subject is amoeba-like, struggling to win some space for itself in its local context. While its shape is always determined by its nomadic articulations, it always has a shape which is itself effective.

(Grossberg in Wolff, 1995, p.119)

This paper reads the fragmented life stories of four young black women - Amma, Delisha, Kaliagh and Rena - living in London, at a transitional point of their lives, when they are making decisions about their post compulsory education¹

We think that one of the striking themes of the interviews with these young women is their various attempts to take control of and re-make their identities; to resist and escape from 'pre-formed' racial, local and gendered identities with which they were confronted and in which they were positioned within schools, colleges and neighbourhoods. While they are not in any crude sense rejecting their ethnicity, they are rejecting essentialism and seem in some ways 'subjects in transit' (Braidotti, 1994 p.10). As Britzman (1995) argues they experience a complex and shifting spectrum of feelings, thoughts, desires and commitments towards social structures within which they must operate, an amalgam of thought and emotion. We will therefore argue that the concept of the nomad, which was first elaborated in the collective texts of Deleuze and Guattari (1983, 1988) is a useful tool to theorise the multifarious ways that these black young women try out places for themselves in the post compulsory educational terrain and ultimately negotiate subject positions and make life investments. Nomadism, we suggest is a trail we can follow to explore how these black young women are attempting to 'find the words, concepts and ideas, with which to say who they are' (Davies, 1990, p. 345).

In using nomadism we are moving along trails that have been sketched out by relatively recent feminist experiments with Deleuze and Guattari's analytical tools (Braidotti, 1991, 1994; Probyn, 1993; Kaplan, 1996; St.Pierre, 1997; Buchanan and Colebrook, 2000). These theoretical trajectories within feminist thought have highlighted the assets as well as the difficulties emerging from feminists risking to problematize the subject. 'To do

away with the subject is to do away with any ground or home for thought; thought becomes nomadic' (Colebrook, 2000, p.11). If we take this seriously then 'doing away with home', means 'doing away' with a confining territory that has kept women prisoners of action and thought. Or as Claire Colebrook asks, 'can feminism be a subject or identity when these concepts have for so long acted to ground or subordinate thought?' (2000, p.11). If we can agree with Colebrook that feminist thought is a becoming (2000, p.11) the question that this paper addresses is not how 'correct or faithful' the concept of nomadism is, but rather how it 'can be made to work' (Colebrook, 2000, p.8).

In such a project of 'appraising concepts as possibilities of future thinking' (Colebrook, 2000, p.5), the role of the data is both illustrative and as raw material for working upon and thinking about nomadism. Nomadism provides one way of thinking about these stories and we are not suggesting a perfect 'fit' at each point in the discussion between the stories and the concepts in play. We do not use nomadism as a closely defined framework in which to locate these four black young women. What we are attempting to do is to draw a map of connections rather than of localizing points, since in the Deleuzian project, to connect is to work with other possibilities, 'making visible problems for which there exists no programme, no plan, no "collective agency"' (Rajchman, 2000, p.8). Furthermore, we do not want to individualise the individuals. We want to try and move beyond the impulse to represent their actuality. As John Rajchman has suggested, we should make the 'passing from a representational to an experimental role, freeing the social imagination from the representation of anything given, prior, original (2000, p.101). Rather we take these young women to be 'tellers of experience', whose telling is 'constrained, partial and determined' (Britzman, 1995, p.232), but prefigurative of discourses and histories.

As it has been argued, 'invention is a creative process in which one of a myriad possible constructions is made out of the stuff available' (Thomas, 1998, p.146). In this vein, exploring nomadic aspects of subjectivity in the interviews of the young black women is one of a number of possible constructions that can be made of the data of the interviews with them. What the young black women said and did in the interviews, is no more and no less than what they said and did (Thomas, 1998, p.145). The interviews called upon them to give accounts of themselves as moral subjects and called up ideas of themselves that they were cumulatively taking up. The interviews were spaced over a four year period but remain snapshots of a process of self-making. Moreover, the interviews have invited answers to certain questions which can only make certain configurations in the myriad of possible connections, that can emerge from what these young black women think and do about themselves. In employing nomadism to explore the construction of the self of young black women we do not want to make any claim to totality, neither do we have any intention to excavate hidden layers of truth or track down any psychological drives of nomadism. As it has been suggested, 'what is important about nomadism is its ability to stand as a figuration of an *other* mode of thought, not its content as such' (Buchanan, 2000, p.117). In this light while we will trace nomadic lines in the lives of these young black women, we will not attempt to label them as 'nomads'. Neither do we want to suggest that being a nomad is perhaps an alternative mode of being in postmodernity. We do not intend to replace one kind of essence with another. Far from being advocates of a nomadic existence, we will argue that the notion of nomadic subjectivities is a useful interpretational device - a lens through which the experiences of

these young women can be viewed. In looking at fragments of their life trajectories, we move beyond existing analytical frameworks to gain a different view of the unpredictable decisions these young black women make and of the unforeseen directions they seem to take. Having rejected the quest of how 'correct' or 'faithful' nomadism is as a concept, we are exploring instead how it can be used to work out some of the difficulties that arise when dealing with these lives, both in living them, but also in thinking about and 'representing' them. We therefore attempt to map the events of their thinking, speaking and acting on a different 'plateau' of thought, which while keeping its connections to existing modes of thought, follows at the same time 'lines of flight' towards other unknown or yet 'unthought' planes. Nomadism we suggest, enables such 'flights' generating questions beyond determinations of identity, essentialism, emancipation and representation. In tracing connections of the theoretical trails of nomadism, we draw on the Foucauldian conception of subjectivities as a set of practices and technologies of the self.²

*Of nomadic thinking or to think is to experiment*³

Rajchman has suggested that the problem of experiment in thought for Deleuze, 'becomes one of forging conceptual relations not already given in constructions whose elements fit together like pieces of a puzzle but rather like disparate stones brought together temporarily in an as yet uncemented wall' (2000, p.20). In thus following the Deleuzian project of experimenting by thinking in terms of multiplicities, we will now turn to Rosi Braidotti's influential work on *Nomadic Subjects* (1994). We do not suggest that Braidotti's use of nomadism 'fits perfectly' to Deleuze and Guattari's treatise on nomadology (1988); on the contrary, we think that a phantasy of 'a perfect fitting' would be detrimental for the very project of nomadism. What we propose however, is that Braidotti's use of nomadism makes an interesting connection between Deleuze and Guattari's project and feminist theorisations of subjectivity. The discussion of this paper will therefore be deployed in the 'smooth space' of this connection.

In tracing the various spirals that revolve around the notion of nomadic subjects, Rosi Braidotti regards it as 'a suitable theoretical figuration for contemporary subjectivity' (1994, p.1). Nomadism starts by acknowledging the bodily roots of subjectivity at the same time, however, that it rejects essentialism. As the nominal concept of nomadism suggests, nomadic subjects, are subjects in transition. They are not characterised by homelessness, but by their ability to recreate their homes everywhere. 'The nomad has a territory; [he] distributes himself in a smooth space; [he] occupies, inhabits, holds that space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 380). However this territory, the nomad's home is a 'smooth', open space, 'one that is indefinite and noncommunicating' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 380); it is not 'striated by walls, enclosures and roads between enclosures' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 381). Distributed in a 'smooth' space, the nomadic identity is not permanent. It is constituted by continuous shifts and changes, which however have their cycles of repetition and recurrence. The nomad is not unified, but is not completely devoid of unity either. The nomad passes through, connects, circulates, moves on; s/he makes connections and keeps coming back: '[he] follows customary paths; [he] goes from one place to another; he is not ignorant of points [...]

Although these points “determine paths”, they are strictly subordinated to the paths they determine’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 380). It is however, in passing between these points that the nomad enjoys the autonomy of an independent, self-directed life. The life of the nomad is the going between, ‘the intermezzo’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 380). The nomadic subjects cannot be integrated into established social structures, and react critically to the discourses and practices that have set the conditions of their existence in this world. In this light Braidotti sees ‘nomadic consciousness as a form of political resistance to hegemonic and exclusionary views of subjectivity’, (1994, p.23) and relates it to the Foucauldian notion of counter memory that has the possibility of ‘enacting a rebellion of subjugated knowledges’ (ibid., p. 25). It has to be remembered here, however, that resistance is not taken as the reverse of a top-down configuration of power. In the *History of Sexuality*, Foucault defines power as dependent on resistance: ‘Where there is power, there is a resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority, in relation to power’ (1990, p. 95).⁴ Foucault has therefore pointed to terrains of local resistances, while Deleuze has used the notion of molecular revolutions (Braidotti, 1991, p. 126), and it is in this context that nomadic consciousness as a form of political resistance is delineated.

Travelling is not essential in the condition of the nomad. As Deleuze and Guattari have put it, ‘the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 380) and in this line of analysis, the nomad’s transition from point to point is indeed a consequence, ‘a factual necessity’, while ‘it is false to define the nomad by movement’. On the contrary, the nomad is ‘[he] who does not move, [...] does not want to depart, [...] knows how to wait, [...] has infinite patience (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 381). Braidotti has therefore noted that ‘it is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of travelling’, adding that ‘some of the greatest trips can take place without physically moving from one’s habitat (1994, p.5). Nomadism is not a situation of being, but of becoming, in Deleuzian thought: ‘nomadic shifts designate therefore, a creative sort of becoming, a performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction, of experience and of knowledge’ (Braidotti, 1994, p.6), or as Deleuze and Guattari have put it, ‘if the nomad can be called the Deterritorialized par excellence, it is precisely because there is no reterritorialization afterwards’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 381). Braidotti stresses the interdependence of travelling and nomadism in an attempt to respond to certain critiques that have problematised the use of travel metaphors in contemporary social and cultural studies and in feminist theories in particular (Kaplan, 1986, Wolff, 1992). In addressing Kaplan’s reservations about the romanticising of the notions of deterritorialization and the nomad, Braidotti argues that the ‘radical nomadic epistemology Deleuze and Guattari propose is a form of resistance to microfascisms in that it focuses on the need for a qualitative shift away from hegemony, whatever its size and however “local” it may be’ (1994, p.5). As Deleuze and Guattari have pointed out, ‘one of the fundamental tasks of the state is to striate the space over which it reigns or to utilize smooth spaces as a means of communication in the service of striated space’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 385). In this light, ‘it is a vital concern of every State to vanquish nomadism; [...], decompose, recompose and transform movement, or to regulate speed’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 385-6). These attempts of the State to control, are not however met without resistance: ‘each time there is an operation against the State -it can be said that a war machine has revived, that a new nomadic potential has appeared, accompanied by the reconstitution of a smooth space or a manner of being in space as though it were smooth’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 386). However, while

we agree with Braidotti about the subversive potentialities of nomadic subjectivities, we think that Kaplan's reservations about the absence of specific historical and cultural context within which nomads should be situated and analysed have some merit (1998, p.90), and it is addressing this need that the discussion of this paper now turns.

A first reading of the young women's interviews does not reveal much in the way of mobile tendencies in any pragmatic sense. On the contrary, the diagram of their life is very much seen as arboreal rather than rhizomatic; these young women seem to be deeply rooted in the context of a triangle that is designated by their family, their local school/college and their community. As suggested by Mann (1998, p.46), family context and interpersonal relations are often a key feature of how the young women make sense of their lives: "...I chose Hammersmith... My sister went there, and they were doing a scheme for like black students...". This is how Amma explains her choice of a Further Education college. What the young women choose, or what they decide to do typically rests upon the fragmented hearsay and personal recommendations they collect from people around them - family and/or friends. They rely on 'real life' experiences, what (Ball & Vincent, 1998, p.434) calls 'hot knowledge' rather than the 'systematic' guidance the career officers and teachers are supposed to offer them at school;. Family pressures and expectations are particularly evident in choices and decision-making. As has been noted in sociological work on careership (Hodkinson and Sparkes, 1997, p.33), the decisions of the young women are influenced by emotional bonding rather than a simple, rational and systematic examination of what is on offer and what they want to do. We have, however, the paradox, that although the young women seem to be prioritising relationships referring to their family, family support is frequently presented as misleading: "I think, I should have talked to a lot more people rather than leaning on what my sister said, or what her friends said, you know ... I left my choices late and very limited" admits Amma, in one of her later interviews, as she looks back to the decisions she has already made and regrets her choice. As the lives of these young women unfold, the arboreal diagram seems more and more inadequate as a way of accounting for their life-moves and choices. In making decisions about their lives, the young women seem to circulate in a network of 'freedoms' and limitations. In grappling with a variety of real and/or virtual choices they sometimes respond to 'coercive invitations' (McLaren, 1996, p.279), but they may also interrogate and even resist the constraints and expectations they confront (as we shall see). The young women are constantly avoiding the simplicities of 'cultural scripts' they voice regrets about what they have/or might do with their lives and are making nomadic choices. They move from one point to another as a pragmatic consequence of not being able to accommodate themselves in striated educational spaces. Their 'careership' is marked by false starts, new beginnings, hiatuses and interruptions. Their decision-making is social rather than individual, exploratory rather than definitive⁵.

As it has been noted elsewhere, beyond the family circle, the young women 'articulate, comprehend and shape their lives in relation to public narratives' (cited in Mann, 1998, p. 46) and populist themes. In doing this, they are sometimes confronted by powerful and seductive racial and gender stereotypes and social conventions. Delisha admires and fears the conventional aspects of family life "most of my family... earn a decent wage, they live in a decent house they have got a car, they have got their kids ... I don't really want to be doing it but most of my family are secretaries... in the long run that's where it leads, house, car, mortgage, kids". Rena, who is from a Gujerati family, is contemplating the prospect of an early marriage as likely to block her aspiration of a business career in hairdressing: "I want a salon but I don't see it actually happening ... I don't see my

mother-in-law and father-in-law actually letting me do that”. Amma struggles with the idea of a black culture and identity⁶:

There is a certain kind of stereotype within black people that they think of black people, so to be a black person from one black person’s perspective, you listen to R&B music, you wear like kind of clothes, you have your hair a certain way, ... it is like you are somebody else, you are not really, really black, you know. Really silly, but when I was younger I honestly felt that I wasn’t all black...

Amma seems not to recognise, to know herself in terms of the identities and positions available to her within the discursive practices of her immediate collectivities. She would appear to ‘speak for herself’; that is as someone ‘who accepts responsibility for their actions, that is as one who is recognisably separate from any particular collective, and thus as one who can be said to have agency’ (Davies, 1990, p. 343). Here, Amma’s agency is articulated as her will to become different from what she is or what she is expected to be. Similarly, Kaliegh is struggling towards some sense of identity and purpose over and against ubiquitous racist stereotypes and her experience of life on “the estates”. This involves her in distancing herself from “other” Black students who are “not like her”; “I don’t want to be seen in that way”. In Davies terms, Kaliegh becomes ‘agentic’ (1990) by attempting to distance herself from her compulsory community. However, this type of ‘discursive agency’ is parodic, unstable and fragile. It is a shuttle to take her from one point to another, a nomad’s tent to shelter her anxieties; it is definitely not the type of a hard core agency that will enable her to permanently recognise herself and her position in the world. Here, there are also some parallels with Fordham's (1996) analysis of the 'liquidating of the Black self'. Fordham represents young women like Kaliegh and the others here as engaged in an ultimately pointless "pretending" that the social reality they experience everyday is not real' (p.330). While we would not want to subscribe entirely to Fordham's uncompromising essentialism, it is clear that these young black women are invited to inhabit subject positions which have been created by dominant social structures and hegemonic discourses and they are asked to regulate their own desires and behaviours accordingly. Thus, what first emerges from the interviews, are acute feelings of entrapment, both physical and discursive, but there is also a sense of rebellion and agency and there are attempts to distance themselves from conventional identities, which are not as simple nor as pointless as an 'appropriation of the image of (an)other' (Fordham, p. 330). Rather they appear as moves to the outside of image.

Locating Entrapment

One prime striated space within which young women feel confined, is their own bodies. Delisha admits that “I always want to lose weight. Every other week I am on a diet because the clothes look so nice on those models and when you bring them home, I know that they can't make you look like the models ...”. Rena gets “really pissed-off” because “when we go out on Sunday night I cant wear anything as short as that, I haven’t got the body for it ... I suppose it is my own fault the way I look”, but also “I think why do boys just look at the figure and it annoys me...” and “I don’t care what everyone else wears”. McDowell regards the body as the most ‘immediate place, location or site of the individual’, further arguing that the ways bodies are gazed, depends on the specific spaces and/or places they are situated (1999, p.34). Feminist theorists have been particularly concerned with the implications and effects of the diet culture and the various

ways they discipline women's bodies⁷. As Rena suggests above, women are expected to take responsibility for their bodily self. Examining the interlocking symptoms of anorexia nervosa and bulimia, Susan Bordo has pointed out that 'these disorders reflect and call our attention to some of the central ills of our culture—from our historical disdain for the body, to our modern fears of loss of control over our futures, to the disquieting meaning of contemporary beauty ideals' (1988, p.88). It is perhaps interesting here, to note how Delisha attempts to surpass the constraints of the 'good-for-models-clothes' by suggesting that "they should make the clothes a little bit bigger ... but still tight ...". At this point, Delisha does not altogether reject the female fashion stereotypes, yet, she seems willing to depart from some of their strict limitations. While traditional forms of femininity have value for her, she shows an awareness of the 'unbearable heaviness' (no pun intended) of the female image she has to adopt, and suggests 'alternatives'. In a way she attempts to play the system by inflecting the norms that regulate the space a 'beautiful' female body is allowed to occupy, broadening thus her chances of being if not beautiful, at least 'in the beautiful'.

The young women also convey a sense of entrapment in the ways that they describe their future employment prospects. As noted already, Delisha dreads the idea of "ending up in one of those office jobs", while she has already embarked on an IT course in a local college which she actually hates and resents her decision of going there: "I am not enjoying it at all, I hate it". However, she finds it very difficult to escape the computer career since this is a "steady job" which safeguards a "decent" life. Kaliegh is quite uncertain about the kind of job she will be able to get after finishing her college: "I don't know what job I can get after... Of course you can be a manager but it's like how are you going to get there". Kaliegh seems to be conceived that there is more than simply gathering qualifications in getting a good job: "You have to work your way to the top, you can't get straight there". She also knows that not all courses can "get you a job". Thus while she "wouldn't mind being a social worker", she believes that it is not easy to find a job afterwards. She eventually decided against college and found a job in a newspaper office.

The ambivalence surrounding their future employment prospects deeply influences their educational choices. On the one hand, there is the stability of some "decent" jobs and life patterns that are envisioned by their families rather than the career advisors, who more or less appear to be useless or indifferent: "I seen the woman [career officer] once and she gave me a list of the Colleges ... she couldn't even really explain to me what all of them were about. She just gave me a list and that was it basically". On the other hand, however, there are various fantasies, that although rarely spoken out, shake the existing certainties and destabilise the grounds on which decisions must be taken. Delisha sees her future self engaged to "a very wealthy man", the 'some day my prince will come' imaginary discourse. This fantasy, however, strangely coexists with plans of becoming a business woman and even taking up photography as a career! Delisha forcefully articulates her desire for 'a man', money and artistic creation. She has access to multiple femininities and can imagine herself located in a variety of subject positions. In Davies' (1990, p. 360) terms, she has access 'to recognised/recognisable discursive practices, in which a range of alternative ways of seeing and being are available, such that the positionings one currently finds oneself in are not experienced as inevitable'. Her dreams give a glimpse of the complex ways young women construct various self-images, drawing on a matrix of contradicting discourses (McLaren, 1996). Indeed there is here much movement and interweaving of discourses and contexts. This complexity becomes

even more striking, if we consider the ‘detail’ that for Delisha, there are also the counter claims and possibilities of a criminal career: “I know what is going on... I have seen everything, I have seen every type of illegal thing...”. What emerges here is a very different, very dangerous and obviously very transgressive type of nomadism; outside law and correction, a move across the boundaries of ‘legitimate’ identities. It is from ‘the outside’ of the State, ‘the neoprimitive tribes of society’ that Delisha speaks here, the terrain of ‘the local mechanisms of bands, margins, minorities, which continue to affirm the rights of segmentary societies in opposition to the organs of State power. (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 360). Her ‘community’ offers both temptation and warning, “my area... the people I know, the things that I have seen...” have influenced her “not to do the things that they are doing”, although she admits that she sometimes succumbs to temptation, rendering the boundaries even more ambiguous. Such a risky and improbable interweaving of patterns of subjectivities is indicative of ‘the hesitant voices of participants who [keep] refashioning new identities and investments as they [are] lived and rearranged in language’ (Britzman, 1995, p. 232). As Britzman has further pointed out, these data ‘challenge a unitary and coherent narrative about experience’ (p.232).

Thus, the young women appear either indecisive, or unable to ‘choose’ and they are continuously changing their mind about where to go and what to do. They often interrogate the existence of choices. When she is asked about the choices people of her age have, Kaliegh says:

I don’t think they have a wide choice, it is not even a choice really. It is either one or the other because the other Colleges if you went to them then I know you will be coming out with no better marks than you got already, so, I think you have just got a choice of staying on at school really, and St Faith’s College or the other one, because the other one is new and it hasn't got a reputation...

The choice in question is neither a sum of subjective intentions, nor the expression of a collective programme. It is rather about an incapacity to choose and perhaps even to think. However, Deleuze and Guattari, point to the fact that ‘thought operates on the basis of a central breakdown, that it lives solely by its own incapacity to take on form’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 378). Therefore not only does Kaliegh not see any real difference among the Colleges she can choose from, but in the light of nomadism, she seems able and prepared to ‘recreate her home/school everywhere’. In grappling with real or imaginary choices the young black women are involved in negotiations and they often adopt contradictory strategies as they make choices in the triangle of school-home-friends. Within their narratives, they become nomadic. ‘Their language moves backwards and forwards between the perspectives of home and peer group’ (Mann, 1998, p.52) but beyond these, is their ‘dreaming of elsewhere’. It is here interesting to note, that from the experience of nomadism, the young women occasionally perceive their indecisiveness and their consequent continuous shifts as a negative aspect of their life, as a vice to be avoided. In criticising the way her friends make their decisions, Kaliegh notes that: “I think they help me because they say what they want to be, and change their minds every minute and I hear it and say to myself do I want to be that, and I say no, like that to myself”. Kaliegh seems here to resist the nomadic aspect of her situation. “Changing her mind every minute” cannot help her settle down and becomes a source of anxiety and ontological insecurity. Organising some sort of meaningful activity is occasionally necessary especially when the subject in question is grappling to find a place for herself within a system with clear aims and strategies.

‘Struggling to win some space’ for themselves, the young women construct scenarios which can accommodate and give coherence to their otherwise fragmentary and contradictory life decisions and actions. These scenarios are made up of a bewildering array of actions and events, which serve to rationalise their actions and attitudes and compose a sustained narrative of themselves. In a way, they ‘gain some time and then perhaps denounce or wait (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 378). In these narratives they construct accounts of their struggles against expectation. In hers, Delisha, is a complex anti-heroine. She describes how she came to be excluded from her first FE College as a result of an incident in the library: “Okay, there was a certain incident ... I saw her one day in the library and picked up a chair and threw it and it hit her”; she recounts the scenario of her HIV girlfriend, to explain her celibacy; and the scenario of the boy who “stopped” her from “mugging”. What all these scenarios have in common is the emergence of an incident that creates a rupture with her previous way of life and opens up a nomadic passage to a different mode of being.

Nonetheless, the young women feel restricted within the boundaries of their local community, their educational milieu and the surrounding neighbourhood. In this case, entrapment is occasionally expressed as the fear of ‘the gaze’. Women’s sense of alienation from the everyday spaces of their lives is related to a fear, that they are always watched and evaluated. As it has been argued, this threat of being the object of the other’s gaze is of critical importance in the objectification of the female self (Rose, 1993, p.146). Thus, Kaliegh does not want to stay to the sixth form of her old school: “I just don’t like this school that much. Too many bad people, just because of how people look and everything they just judge you”. Sometimes the frustration of being watched is extended in the social places of the girls’ community: Here is Delisha, explaining the difficulties she encounters when she goes out dancing. “... If you are walking past a group of girls yes, especially black girls and you look better than them, they look at you and will watch you all night ... it is just them watching you, watching you every move ...” What is striking here is that the disciplinary gaze, Delisha so forcefully portrays is a female gaze upon female bodies. Delisha’s narratives revolve around racial stereotypes. She feels more relaxed when she goes out dancing to places where “there is more white people”, who are themselves “more relaxed”, while “black people are more tense” and particularly boys who “think that they are too bad”. Amma makes a similar point about her first College: “black students really know how to get to each other and they really knew how to get to me ... every time I see a lot of black students I feel, okay, am I going to be able to learn here”. Kaliegh is also fearful of the ‘racial gaze’. She describes her sister being threatened by other Black girls “She just said ‘well if you don’t like the way I look, why are you looking at me anyway’ ... basically when she walked past, snide comments!”. Kaliegh does not “want to go to a school that is all Black people because, you know, a lot of them just do not work and we all get a bad name”. Rena (below) talks about how she ‘gets the looks from the Asian guys when she is with white students in her college canteen.

Delisha also speaks of herself within the discursive constraints of gender stereotypes: she describes herself as “more feminine” now that she has “calmed down” and is not so ‘outspoken’ and she explains that she has a lot of male friends, because she feels she cannot bear the continuous intimacy of young women’s company:

... women are more bitchy you know. Like with my male friends I can go out you know if I want to go about my business, I can go about my business with girls I could just stay with them all the time and they want to be with you all the time. With boys they are less demanding as friends you know ... with girls they are more dependant.

Like Delisha, Kaliegh admits that “it is easier to mix with boys than it is with girls”. Rena’s narrative is equally enmeshed in racial and gender stereotypes.; although herself, Asian, she dislikes Burbley College because “it is like Asian people that go there” and what she finds particularly problematic is that “it was really bitchiness between girls”.

There are often fears of confinement within their communities. Kaliegh does not want to go to a college which is “too close” where she lives because: “I live in Streetley, I know everyone on the way round and I don’t want to know people, I don’t want to know too many people, because they will distract me from work, so, if I know people I end up talking to them in lessons and I wouldn’t learn hardly anything”. In the same way, Amma does not want to go to a college with ‘too many black people’ around her... “sometimes black people can you know stop you from doing your work and it really depends upon the black person...”. While entangled herself within racial stereotypes, at this point Amma resists the essentialist connection of blackness with laziness. Thus, she also chooses to distance herself from educational places with “too many black people”, to displace herself. As it has been commented, the nomad in Deleuze and Guattari’s texts embodies ‘the practice of shifting location, vectors of deterritorialization’ (Kaplan, 1996, p.89).

The young women further feel restricted and entrapped within their local colleges in terms of gossip and rumours going around about their sexuality. Delisha was in fact expelled from her college, having been involved in a violent incident with another girl who was spreading those rumours (as described above), while Rena says that “I wouldn’t go with anyone from College, everyone knows about it and you think bloody hell”. When she hangs out with white girls from her college, which is inevitable since she is the only Asian girl on her hairdressing course, she “gets the looks from the Asian guys” and feels intimidated.

The stories of these young women can then be read within a register and lexicon of entrapment but, we will argue, 'not merely' that. They can also be read as 'escape attempts'. They contain possible 'ways out', ways of being different, other places in which to be. In other words the stories are richly contradictory.

Escape attempts: the becoming- thought of the young women⁸

For these young women, studying is often considered as an oppression itself (Mann, 1988, p.55). There are often tensions between ‘knowing what they have to do’ and actually ‘doing it’. Nonetheless, they seem to conceptualise education and information as a route of escape. Rena regards herself as good at what she does but she also admits being lazy and she does not know why. Kaliegh knows that she “will get higher money for higher qualifications” and that “whatever I can get good grades in I can always take it further”. Her family are clearly urging her to get more education so as to avoid ‘a dead end job’. This is how Delisha describes her imaginary ‘different self’: “I would have

studied more, I would have stayed in the first school I went to in the first place". Distraction and laziness are recurring themes in the young women's narratives that seem to hinder their progress, as they restrict their access to information:

I realise now that I don't even know what most of the Colleges do. It really is difficult making sensible decisions, you know, when you only have patches of information. I realise now that I didn't even know the questions to ask. It's terrible. I think I should have talked to a lot more people... I think information definitely, just knowing more about what is out there and visiting all places ... really information was the key for me and obviously I didn't get that information... I mean I can't blame it all on the school. But it is like I was really naive to what was going on around me.

Amma blames herself for not being able to get the information she needed to make a 'sensible' decision. She regrets not having widened her circle of informants, because she thinks that talking "with a lot more people" would have given her more ideas and options. For her, as was the case for the vast majority of students interviewed in the main study (Ball, Maguire and Macrae 2000), it is social relations and personal communication and not some systematic use of the advice of the careers advisor that can make the difference. She is certainly far less advantaged than Kaliegh, who had the support of both her parents and especially her mother, in gathering information about the educational options available to her, but who strikingly remains ambivalent about what she wants to do: "I am not sure whether I want to go there, I might just stay on here". and later on " ... A levels, I am not sure whether I want to do them any more. I want to do advanced GNVQ or something like that" and when she is asked about the subjects she wants to do, she simply has not got a clue, but "it would have to be something I enjoy". Kaliegh may have been helped by her mother, but she also accepts a great deal of pressure from her, to 'make up her mind' as she is running out of time. However, the young black women sometimes seem to escape the discourse of the possibility of choice and at times see behind the masquerade of the 'wide range of possibilities' the career officers are supposed to present them. Delisha says that she would never go to a career centre because 'they [careers officers] just really draw an outline of what you want to do and you can go to a library and get a book like that instead of making the appointment. They don't really make that much difference'. Sometimes the young women even decide to reject advice altogether and draw on their own resources: 'It is just my own experience and I just build on myself, I don't follow nobody I make my own choices and it is up to me, if I fail it is up to me, I done it you know'. The young women's talk is imbued with a strong sense of what (Rose, 1992, p.400) calls 'responsibilisation' but this also reflects again Davies' (1990, p.360) notion of agency, as the young women 'make the relevant choice, carry them through and accept the moral responsibility for doing so'. In making her choices, Delisha becomes here a temporal actor, moving along unstable and shifting positions. Like Lyotard's postmodern subject, she finds herself at 'nodal points of specific communication circuits' (cited in Kaplan, 1996, p.16) and can therefore be seen as 'a construction of multiple locations':

A self does not amount to much, but no self is an island; each exists in a fabric of relations, that is now more complex and mobile than ever before ... one is always located at a post through which various kinds of messages pass. No one, not even the least privileged among us is ever entirely powerless over the messages that traverse and position [him] at the post of sender, addressee or referent.

(cited in Kaplan, 1996, p.16)

In the past, Delisha has escaped her gendered identity by becoming a bully at school, although she “never used to pick on girls, just boys and sixth formers”. Here again, she speaks from ‘the exteriority’ of what escapes schooling as an organ of the State, mixing as we have already seen with ‘tribes wandering or hanging about’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.360). Her attitude and her particular choice of boys as her victims is in stark contradiction with her perhaps later views about her preference to male friends and her views about the women being “bitchy”. Perhaps as she moves through adolescence, her gendered identity inflates and absorbs her previous subversive acts. Her thought, coming from a ‘body charged with electricity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p.378) seems to move to other planes, where she can more easily accommodate the contradictions already arising from the gendered positions she adopts.

The young women are attempting to escape the idleness of their college class and to work harder to go beyond. Rena observes that: “... people in my class ... they are really dosing and that really came out in their work”. While she admits that she has herself “slacked”, she presents herself able to control her slackness “I do know when to do it and when not to” and this self-consciousness distinguishes her from the rest of her peer group: “I know for a fact that half of them wont even do it”. Here Rena’s experiences can better be viewed as rhizomatic, as they move away from the arborescent type of experiences coming from her class, ethnicity and locality.

The young women’s narratives suggest that they have internalized contradictory discourses that ultimately constrain their agency in complicated ways. They have also absorbed the thematic structures of the family and their locality, while at the same time knowingly negotiating their way around these themes and discourses. In general the young women are seeking to reconcile their educational choices with contradictions in their lives and at times when social frameworks are highly unstable and constantly shifting. It is therefore not surprising that there are often contradictions in their discourses. Here experience is lived as ‘disorderly, discontinuous and chaotic’. In the end of her interview, Delisha wishes she *could* change while she has started the interview with the assertion that she *has* changed as a person. She describes her family as “secretaries”, only to expose a number of “delinquencies” among them later on. Kaliegh talks about “too many option” but “not even a choice”. As she explains how much she and her sister have been influenced by their mother’s hate for Moslems, she reaches a point of utter contradiction where she admits that although she is an anti Moslem and “we [she and her sister] go oh we hate them, hate them ...” she actually has Moslem friends and ultimately she reaches the conclusion that it all depends on how parents bring them [Moslems] up. The young women’s identities are built and rebuilt with small and contradictory details (Britzman, 1995, p. 234). They are confident and insecure, certain and ambivalent, goal-oriented and aimless. What is ever-present in their identities is the uncertainty of identity and indeed a tendency to move beyond it.

Moving off, becoming a nomad

A feeling of living in existential transit is a theme that occasionally appears in the young women’s narratives, especially at the point where they see their school life end and new routes ahead of them. Despite the various difficulties that they experience, this transitional phase at the end of compulsory schooling opens up space for the emergence

of imaginary discourses of change: “It feels great. You know when you can't wait for it to end, you know come on, I have been here for so many years I just want it to hurry up and go”. However fears of being entrapped again are openly expressed: “It will be just great to leave, I can't wait, but the thing is I might be coming back”. It is against these fears that Kaliegh's imaginary discourses are articulated. In six months time, she hopes to be “in a college somewhere, that is as far as I know at the moment”. At times the young women seem to oscillate between the fear of the unknown and their wish to leave the local context of their college. Thus, although Kaliegh is not so keen on the idea of staying to the sixth form of her old school, “I don't want to stay in this school. I want to meet new people”, she thinks that knowing the teachers is an advantage she will have to bear seriously in mind: “I think I would learn better from the same teachers”. Money is also a serious hindrance to trying new things, far away from their localities: “I am going to try and find out where could I go, basically if I wanted to go somewhere further out would I be able to get a grant or whatever ...”, says Kaliegh considering further opportunities, beyond her local sixth form college. All of this is very different from the vivid ‘imagined futures’ and material security of their middle-class counterparts (see Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000b). They are constrained by the limits of their imaginations but in a sense freer in not having to live up to their imaginings as their middle-class peers are expected to do (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 2000). What remains as ‘a consequence’, or ‘a factual necessity’, is that in the end the young black women will have to depart. How they will move in between points of perhaps already established or decided paths, is however, the nomadic experience, which fills them with images of free and autonomous moving.

Space is important in the imaginary discourses of the young women. Speaking about her future college, Amma expresses her interest in the “physical buildings and the vibes of the place”. Sometimes, however, space, as a place of dreams and possibilities, seems to open up beyond their present educational and local environment. Rena talks about wanting to “travel and do artistic stuff” - make-up work for Indian films. Amma travelled to the USA for one week, with a dance troupe, as assistant to the producer: “...on the films you see, especially black people you feel a connection ... in a way you kind of feel, not that you are going to find your roots, but you are going to find out more about you”. Delisha sees her future in a place of her own, enjoying life and seeing “nice things”. Travelling is for her part of a ‘fantasy future’. It is quite striking that when she talks about her journeys to the Caribbean, she does not regard it as a real displacement, since she has never stayed “in a hotel”. In Delisha's narrative, the hotel symbolises a place of transit, where stability is shaken, but only temporarily, perhaps as long as the stay itself lasts. Staying in a hotel may also be an indicator of having entered a different kind of lifestyle. Whatever its subtext, the hotel functions here as a transitional place, enabling Delisha to detach herself from home, ‘as a place of escape yet as a home-away-from-home ... as a transit-place for women able to use it’ (Morris, cited in Wolff, 1995. p.122). Braidotti has expressed her special attachment to ‘places of transit, ... in between zones, where all ties are suspended and time stretched to a sort of continuous present’ and has further defined them as ‘oases of non belonging, spaces of detachment, no (wo)man's land’ (1994, p.18-19). Braidotti refers here to real places of transit, like stations and airport lounges, which she associates with sources of artistic creation for women. We think, however, that the metaphor of transit can be used to stress women's experiences of existential fluidity in real and/or imagined spaces. As it has been argued, ‘the notion of feminine identity as relational, fluid, without clear boundaries seems more congruent with the perpetual mobility of travel than is the presumed solidity and objectivity of masculine identity’ (Wolff, 1998, p. 124). On the other hand, in using travel metaphors to explore aspects of

female subjectivity, we are aware of Kaplan's (1996) critical comment that the imaginary discourses of travel have been associated with the existential expansion of the white bourgeois Western man. Developing on this line of criticism, Morris has argued that:

... there is a very powerful cultural link- one particularly dear to a masculinist tradition inscribing 'home' as the site both of frustrating containment (home as dull) and of truth to be rediscovered (home as real). The stifling home is the place from which the voyage begins and to which, in the end, it returns ... The tourist leaving and returning to the blank space of the domus is, and will remain, a sexually in-different 'him'.

(cited in Wolff, 1995, p.122)

We think, however, that women's long insistence on travelling, despite all sorts of difficulties and restrictions has created interstices and ruptures in the colonial practices and ideologies of actual travel. As McDowell (1999, p.206) has put it, 'travel, even the idea of travelling challenges the spatial association between home and women that has been so important in structuring the social construction of femininity'. Therefore, although not unproblematic, transit as a metaphor can be used to rethink concepts of gender, space and subjectivities in a specific social, historical and cultural context. In this light, it is perhaps interesting to see how Delisha's first holiday plan is to go on to Italy 'on her own'. While it is tourism here, rather than nomadism that underpins Delisha's plans for the future, tourists share a need to get away from the stagnancy of their everyday routine and in travelling, they break the monotony of real time and search for different modes of existing in this world (Kaplan, 1998, p. 59, 60, 71). Rena, on the other hand, has "set her heart" on displacing herself, which is articulated in her decision to go on a cruise and combine working and getting experience as a hairdresser, with some leisure. Rena has decided to try a cruise contract, being aware that it is not at all "party ... it is really, really hard work you are on an eight month contract, and you can't come home, you know you have to stay for eight months". Her decision is neither superficial nor based on false impressions about the difficulties that are involved. "I am thinking oh my god!, but I still want to try it" indicates her determination to dislocate herself and face up to travel and risk. Rena's imaginary is set over and against her parents' expectations of an early marriage and a 'domestic career'.

What the young women want to avoid is being stopped or hindered from going beyond the limits of their local communities. As Grossberg points out in the opening extract, taking nomadic positions, the young women are attempting to 'win some space' within their local context, but at the same time open up their place and go beyond their locality. The racial and gender stereotypes that fill their narratives are reverberating hegemonic discourses in their culture that the young women use to designate the social setting within which they feel constrained and inhibited. In a Deleuzian sense, the young women somehow want to become 'other' from what they are and to do this they want to depart from where they are, create a distance between themselves and their surrounding communities, without, however, feeling utterly excluded from where they 'belong'. Amma talks very positively about her second College with, compared with her first, a mixed ethnic population: " I don't know how to explain it, it was just a feeling of 'I have found my place', you know". As Braidotti lucidly notes in the above quotation, being a nomad involves shifting subject positions that allow oneself to be active in ones community, without being obliged to accept the conventions of this very community one belongs. Being 'in' but not 'of' it perhaps? Therefore, as it has been indicated, the figure

of the nomad can track a path through a seemingly illogical space without succumbing to nation-state and/or bourgeois organisation and mastery; the nomad represents a subject position that offers an idealised model of movement based on perpetual displacement (Kaplan, 1998, p.66). This ability to continually depart from wherever one is, creates possibilities for resisting hegemonic discourses that dictate ‘the manner of being’ you should be, because of your gender, race, class, sexual preferences or nationality. Amma, regarded as a failure by her school, is now contemplating going to University; but as she peruses the brochures she looks “for the kind of cultural, ethnic things they have going on. Because ... I want to feel comfortable”. The nomads will have to negotiate the terms of their organic connection to their community, without however, fixing themselves anywhere permanently. As noted above they want to ‘blur boundaries’ rather than ‘burn bridges’. By distancing themselves from where they stand they do not want to reject their place, but rather leave it temporarily and open it up, and themselves, to new possibilities of being. As Rajchman suggests, it is about how ‘to invent an ‘at home’ of a very different kind, no longer given in the opposition of “lived space” to “abstract space” and requiring a different idea of what territories and borders are’ (Rajchman, 2000, p.94). McDowell has used the term ‘global localism’ to describe the possibility for the openness of place and has suggested that: ‘For all people ... whether geographically stable or mobile, most social relations take place locally, in a place, but a place which is open to ideas and messages, to visitors and migrants, to tastes, foods, goods and experiences to a previously unprecedented extent’ (McDowell, 1996, p.38). Or perhaps this is an example of what Appadurai (1990), Bhabha (1990) and (Hall, 1991) call a ‘third space’, a space between ‘indoors’ and ‘outdoors’, or between convention and fantasy. In the project of nomadism learning to be ‘at home’ in such transitional spaces, is ‘to see oneself as native prior to the identifying territories of family, clan or nation’ (Rajchman, 2000, p.95), a wandering self in nomadic cycles of one’s life.

Therefore, in working with Braidotti’s definition of nomadism, as related to the young women here, the idea of rejecting permanency rather than rejecting identity seems useful in cartographing the variety of ways young black women use to construct themselves. The young women as nomadic subjects, are perhaps struggling against fixity and unity, looking and hoping for some kind of more flexible, dislocated identities. This may mean giving up a sense of a clear and predictable future, of a ‘normal biography’ (Du Bois-Reymond, 1998, p.741), of cultural scripts, and accepting uncertainty, instability and risk, and thus fear. This may also relate to what Bourdieu (1986, p.370) calls a denial of attachment to the local field, an attempt to evade the traces of local classification, ‘a sort of dream of local trying, a desperate effort to defy the gravity of the local field’ . In this light, the young women are neither ‘persons to blame, nor heroes of resistance’ (Britzman, 1995, p.233). Nonetheless, perhaps, we can see them as attempting to speak outside or beyond the positions available within the collectivities to which they belong. They have access to and are able to mobilise a ‘different’ set of discursive practices (Davies, 1990, p.991). Seen as a discursive practice (Davies, 1990) their agency is constructed along three axes: first as their will to become different from what they are, second as an attempt to distance themselves from where they belong and third as their ability to make specific choices. In other words, they are enabled to speak outside of the positions made available to them within their immediate social collectivities; to ‘speak for themselves’ and thus take themselves up, ‘think’ and ‘do’, differently. The question of agency has here been raised on a Deleuzian plane of thought, ‘in terms of minorities, and the manner in which they insert “becomings” into the official histories of majorities’ (Rajchman, 2000, p.121). In exploring their nomadic passages, we have sketched out a

cartography of various subject positions that the young black women inhabit, not in a permanent manner, but rather moving around them. We have argued that in travelling around unstable and contradictory subject positions, these young black women have been trying to recreate patterns of their existence and imagine new relations to the world surrounding them. However, since their travels lack a specific starting or end point, their movement is difficult to trace and it thus remains ambivalent and not quite real.

However, Pfeil (1988 p.386) has argued that 'just as the vision of the boundlessly dispersed self is caught up within the fear of distortion, the flip side of the ease of 'breaking' and 'staying open' is the terror of contingency from which all possibilities of eventful significance have been drained'. Maybe Braidotti has underplayed this flip side and this is a point we have to consider when we confront the many fears, uncertainties and contradictions to be found in the young black women's narratives, which drive them through continuous shifts and changes that sometimes exhaust them and restrict their 'pragmatic' mobility. Nonetheless, even when they ultimately choose to remain local, they reject essentialism, open their localism to global messages and construct themselves within a culturally and historically specific context. As Clifford (cited in Wolff, 1998:168) has noted:

'Location', here is not a matter of finding a stable 'home' or of discovering a common experience. Rather it is a matter of being aware of the difference that makes a difference in concrete situations, of recognizing the various inscriptions, 'places' or 'histories' that both empower and inhibit the construction of theoretical categories like 'Woman', 'Patriarchy', or 'colonization' ... 'Location' is thus, concretely, a series of locations and encounters, travel within diverse, but limited spaces.

NOTES

1. This paper draws on a study of the post compulsory experiences of a cohort of young people from an inner London comprehensive school, Northwark Park, and the nearby Pupil Referral Unit. PRUs provide education and support for young people who cannot attend mainstream school; they may be school phobic, they may have been permanently excluded from schooling etc.. The study involved the tracking of a group of 59 students (42 from the school and 17 from the PRU) from their last year of compulsory schooling through three additional years of post 16 education, training and social relations. The cohort was deliberately chosen for its diversity i.e. 'race', class and gender as well as post 16 'careers'. The local post-16 education market extends over an inner-city/suburban setting based around the Northwark area of London (see Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995) and is defined in terms of the expressed interests and choices of this cohort of year 11 young people. This local, lived market encompasses several different, small LEAs that organise their schools' provision in different ways. The main players in the market for these young people are two 11-18 secondary schools, 5 FE colleges, a tertiary college, a denominational sixth form college and two TECs. Three other FE colleges, another sixth form college, and an 11-18 denominational school impinge upon the margins of this market. A sample of the main groups of actors in this market; providers, that is those offering education, training or employment; intermediaries, that is those offering advice or support,

- including teachers, careers officers and parents; and consumers or choosers, that is the young people themselves and their families, was interviewed (see (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 1999b), (Ball, Macrae & Maguire, 1999), (Macrae & Maguire, 1999).
2. In his discussion of ethics, in relation to the formation of the self, Foucault had focused his analyses on the *technologies of the self*, a set of practices which 'permit individuals to effect, ... a certain number of operations on their own bodies, and souls, thoughts and ways of being so as to transform themselves, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p.18). According to Foucault, these self- technologies were integrated with various types of attitudes, rendered difficult to recognise and set apart from everyday experiences (Foucault 1990, p.45).
 3. John Rajchman argues that in the Deleuzian thought, 'to think is to experiment and not, in the first place to judge'(2000, p.5).
 4. Resistance is immediately bound to freedom as it is unfolded in four different theses in Foucault's thought: First comes the understanding that freedom is not tautological with liberation, second the view that freedom is a matter of concrete struggles for situated values, third a recognition of the historical contingency of freedom and fourth, the acceptance that there is no necessary end point in the struggle for freedom (See Tamboukou, 1999, p.33)
 5. (Pignatelli, 1993, p. 421) argues that 'agency is an agonistic, daring enterprise marked by uncertainty, resolved and trail'.
 6. We could note that Foucault's project of freedom rests upon the risks involved in a refusal of 'what we are' (Foucault, 1983, p. 216) - a refusal to base one's actions upon a fixed identity.
 7. Bordo notes that 90% of anorexic are women (1988, p.100)
 8. the becoming-woman of the thinker, the becoming-thought of the woman (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 378).

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¹ This paper draws on a study of the post compulsory experiences of a cohort of young people from an inner London comprehensive school, Northwark Park, and the nearby Pupil Referral Unit. PRUs provide education and support for young people who cannot attend mainstream school; they may be school phobic, they may have been permanently excluded from schooling etc.. The study involved the tracking of a group of 59 students (42 from the school and 17 from the PRU) from their last year of compulsory schooling through three additional years of post 16 education, training and social relations. The cohort was deliberately chosen for its diversity i.e. 'race', class and gender as well as post 16 'careers'. The local post-16 education market extends over an inner-city/suburban setting based around the Northwark area of London (see Gewirtz, Ball and Bowe 1995) and is defined in terms of the expressed interests and choices of this cohort of year 11 young people. This local, lived market encompasses several different, small LEAs that organise their schools' provision in different ways. The main players in the market for these young people are two 11-18 secondary schools, 5 FE colleges, a tertiary college, a denominational sixth form college and two TECs. Three other FE colleges, another sixth form college, and an 11-18 denominational school impinge upon the margins of this market. A sample of the main groups of actors in this market; providers, that is those offering education, training or employment; intermediaries, that is those offering advice or support, including teachers, careers officers and parents; and consumers or choosers, that is the young people themselves and their families, was interviewed (see (Ball, Maguire & Macrae, 1999b), (Ball, Macrae & Maguire, 1999), (Macrae & Maguire, 1999).

² In his discussion of ethics, in relation to the formation of the self, Foucault had focused his analyses on the *technologies of the self*, a set of practices which 'permit individuals to effect, ... a certain number of operations on their own bodies, and souls, thoughts and ways of being so as to transform themselves, in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality' (Foucault, 1988, p.18). According to Foucault, these self- technologies were integrated with various types of attitudes, rendered difficult to recognise and set apart from everyday experiences (Foucault 1990, p.45).

³ John Rajchman argues that in the Deleuzian thought, 'to think is to experiment and not, in the first place to judge' (2000, p.5).

⁴ Resistance is immediately bound to freedom as it is unfolded in four different theses in Foucault's thought: First comes the understanding that freedom is not tautological with liberation, second the view that freedom is a matter of concrete struggles for situated values, third a recognition of the historical contingency of freedom and fourth, the acceptance that there is no necessary end point in the struggle for freedom (See Tamboukou, 1999, p.33)

⁵ (Pignatelli, 1993, p. 421) argues that 'agency is an agonistic, daring enterprise marked by uncertainty, resolved and trail'.

⁶ We could note that Foucault's project of freedom rests upon the risks involved in a refusal of 'what we are' (Foucault, 1983, p. 216) - a refusal to base one's actions upon a fixed identity.

⁷ Bordo notes that 90% of anorexic are women (1988, p.100)

⁸ the becoming-woman of the thinker, the becoming-thought of the woman (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988, p. 378).