

Different culture. Different me.

*A kaleidoscope of changes*

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The words “Different culture. Different me ” playback at me, taunting me like a mental ambigram as I struggle to tell a story that is still being written, and also make an objective opinion of what they mean to me. My Nigerian mother would say that this would be akin to eating hot morsels of pounded yam or *fufu* while it is still being prepared. It is indeed fun and sets the stage for the meal to come but you are likely to get your mouth burnt or suffer stomach pains. The fact is that what these words mean to me can only make sense if elements of subjectivity are reflected in this narrative.

I have always wanted to see the world. Yeah, I know it sounds cliché, but it is true. From childhood musings to mental escapes as an adult, I have always been thrilled by thoughts of what lies on the other side of the cultural backdrop I was raised in. Brief vacations outside my country, reinforced by numerous Hollywood movies I had watched, also made me believe that I would easily blend in and blossom in the Global North. While I acknowledged the naivete of those thoughts back then, I simply would not believe otherwise. I preferred the simplicity of the fantasy that blending into the life on the other side of the cultural fence was going to be a breeze.

Well, this did not happen. Indeed, I am blossoming, but the process is no breeze at all.

Two years in the United States, after leaving Africa, I am still learning to understand, adapt, and manage the differences in culture and perceptions as I try to “blend” in. More intriguing is the fear of changing to someone entirely different or something I didn’t anticipate.

A change was what I sought before I left home but the fear of changing too much left me in something of an existential maze in my first year here. Still, I simply could not control the fact that I was changing. In many ways good and some ways not so good. What I have loved most about the experience so far, is how my view of life expands as I open myself up to see life from culturally different perspectives. I have come to appreciate the sweetness of the multicultural diversity I get to experience every single day on the streets of campus and Charlotte as a whole. The beautiful lattice of different skin tones, accents, scents, aromas, and perspectives is exhilarating. Until now, I never believed a single space on earth could hold such multicultural diversity and still maintain a silent stability and grace.

Though some experiences have been exciting and fun, nothing prepared me for some cultural shocks I have experienced so far. Coming from a very communal and deeply social society, I have been jolted countless times by the individuality and mannerisms of this society. Where I expect a returned greeting, smile, or wave, many times have been met, with silence or no acknowledgment at all. This reality was as shocking as it was disappointing. Something in me changed every time I experienced some of these cultural shocks. What has emerged from this metamorphosis of some sort is a deeply thoughtful and enigmatic personality trying to wade through the waters of different cultural presuppositions, beliefs, views of who I am, and how others interpret the world differently from the way I do. I honestly did not expect that in addition to obtaining a graduate degree, I would have to learn how to navigate these waters while trying my best to stay anchored to the roots that held me grounded before I crossed borders into this new experience.

I have been pruned in so many ways. Discarding some archaic branches and embracing the sunny realities of the cultural evolutions taking place in the forest of our current global civilization. This truth is now more real to me and I have learned the necessity of leaving enough room for change and acknowledgment of more diverse perspectives about life. I now more than ever, identify as a citizen of the world walking the trails of a global village with a bigger dream of crossing more borders. I have also become an ardent lover of learning through experience as I spread my wings to fly, as far as the currents of change can take me.

The truth is that I am no longer who I was before this new life. I am evolving. Many times, I miss the old, but I am glad that life has given me a chance to “see the world” as I have always dreamed of. However, I stay anchored to the roots which first gave me the ability to dream. Even as I write this, I can almost hear the drums of my African homeland beating in the distance, and the voices of those who crossed borders before me, cheering me on. It is a rhythm I have come to find in my heart and even now, I realize I am one with it. And so, I dance, dressed in the beautiful patterns created by this kaleidoscope of experiences and changes; patterns that resemble the designs on an African *ankara* cloth. I trust this rhythm to help me make tangible imprints of change in my homeland and create even more beautiful patterns in the sands of other borders I am destined to cross.