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Before I arrived in Nigeria, I assumed I would fit right in and adjust seamlessly. I quickly realized that identity, especially as a member of the Diaspora is a delicate and complex subject. In my assumptions I had neglected the fact that, though I had an upbringing in the Nigerian culture, I was still born and raised in the United States with a Nigerian upbringing. Needless to say, this was not the genuine Nigerian experience. I began feeling as if it was a bad thing to not belong exclusively to one culture or another, but with time I am learning to accept the complexity and uniqueness of the life I am living with access to two very different cultures.

Though I was grateful to be surrounded by my culture and language, I was quickly surprised by how many things would be unfamiliar to me and how many things I still had to learn. One very immediate realization was that my conversational Igbo skills were not as excellent as I had imagined. I only struggled to respond when necessary on an intermediate level. Another major observation I had to adjust to was the unavoidable "tenacity" of Nigerian people who were not afraid to speak their minds at any given time, which was quite intimidating for my reserved and introverted self. I was reminded that there is no voice that deserves to go unheard. I allowed myself to be more of an observer as I took in everything around me, but I honestly wish I would have stepped a bit further outside of my comfort zone. I was heavily reliant on the network of people that my uncle and his doctor friend were able to connect me to. Their painstaking commitment to arrange transportation and convince the interviewees that I was worth their time was incredible. I also have plenty of gratitude towards all the people who generously took time out of very busy schedules to speak with me.

Over the course of this summer, I came to understand that research is not necessarily as glamorous or easy as I had imagined. It was hard work, but I am grateful for the connections that were arranged for me. I was quite intimidated during a lot of the time that I was in Nigeria. I was in a place that felt somewhat familiar, but still felt foreign in so many ways. I had to attempt to navigate certain things on my own, but fortunately I had the help of relatives to connect me to their colleagues. I quickly realized that my lofty goal of interviewing 50 people over the course of two months was a bit of a stretch, especially for my first time attempting research in the field. I was later told to aim for 30 interviews and fell just short with a total of 27 by the end of my time in Nigeria. I had imagined listening to enthralling stories of people's experiences and being excited to talk to a plethora of people. As time passed, I was hearing very similar stories from people during interviews day after day. This was good for consistency's sake -- to know that a wide range of people shared similar experiences when they traveled abroad for medical treatment. However, I slowly began to feel indifferent towards the interviews, knowing I would hear very similar stories over and over again. I had to hide my disappointment with the slight monotony in many of these interactions, especially when interviewing multiple people in one day. Though, not every moment was dull. There were some very memorable moments that occurred during my unique experience in Nigeria.

I recall early on in conducting my interviews when a man gave me a very difficult time and questioned the validity of my project. I thought he would decline the interview due to his being so inquisitive and demeaning towards the topic I had described to him, however, he eventually complied. His reaction magnified the doubt I had in my project from that moment on. After reflecting on this experience I realized one of the biggest issues was the manner in which I framed the research question to the interviewees. I usually told them that I would like to compare

their experience with receiving medical treatment in Nigeria to receiving medical treatment abroad. Then, I would ask what they would like to see change in the Nigerian healthcare system based on their experiences abroad. A very typical answer was "there is absolutely no comparison." Some found such a comparison to be absurd to make. I agree with them. These experiences made me realize I should have gone into my project with a clearer articulation of what I wanted my end result to be after conducting the interviews.

One of the biggest challenges I faced was a matter of confidence: in myself and in my research project. In retrospect I realize that this stemmed from lacking a narrow enough goal in my research question. In fact, my indecisive nature showed through in the fact that I had multiple research sub-questions, and they were all quite different. I also did not realize the grave importance of my being able to confidently present the topic and relevance of my research to the people I was speaking to. Personally, I had an overarching goal of hearing people's experiences to get a more concrete grasp of what reforms need to be made in order to encourage more people to not have to seek medical treatment outside of Nigeria. Because of my goal to eventually become a doctor that will serve the needs of those most in need in Nigeria, I wanted to discover more about the deficit between what is currently available and what is needed to meet people's medical needs. With a better understanding of such, I intended to use the information I collected to begin conversations and initiate collaboration to incite the necessary change in the Nigerian healthcare system. I realized over the course of conducting my project that what I desired to know entailed a very broad, complex set of issues. Such issues are quite evident to the people that are daily faced with the challenges of not having their medical needs met, as opposed to me, an outsider, who does not have intimate experiences with these challenges. With a more focused goal in mind, I would have been able to more coherently articulate my objective to the people I

interviewed. However, I was still able to learn an immense amount about the current state of the healthcare system based on the interviews I was able to conduct with people.

As I spoke with a number of people I gained a more coherent understanding of how not only the Nigerian healthcare system, but also how Nigeria as a society works. I vividly remember an enthralling conversation with a young man who realized my naivety to the complex array of factors that I needed to understand as context to explain the current state of affairs in the Nigerian healthcare system. His willingness to be so friendly and explain everything in such a detailed way left me feeling much more encouraged and enlightened by the end of the hour-long conversation. He helped me understand the overall landscape of Nigeria and the medical system from an ideological standpoint.

One of the most enriching experiences I was able to have during my time in Nigeria was observing first-hand how things were done in a Nigerian hospital. Beluchukwu Hospital and Maternity, a private hospital, is where I spent five weeks shadowing a doctor. I was able to go on ward rounds, sit in on patient consultations, observe five surgeries, and interact with the staff. Unfortunately, I was unable to visit the University Teaching Hospital that I originally intended to volunteer at due to a lapse in communication. The medical director misunderstood my project and was wary of my "foreign research/surveillance" in his hospital.

I learned a lot outside of the medical realm as well. As I spent time in different places across the South-Eastern part of Nigeria, I was able to see the variance in available infrastructure from region to region. The most obvious of these were the roads and power supply which are the major sources of complaint amongst Nigerians, and rightly so from my experience. As I continually tried to envision myself living in Nigeria in the future, I was constantly thinking in the back of my mind how difficult it was to live in this country. People are honestly struggling to

make ends meet. Every day I realized how insulated and convenient of a life I am privileged to live in the States. I respected the amount of resolve embodied by the people of Nigeria, because each person truly had to be exceptionally persistent and creative in their “hustle” in order to make a living for themselves.

Though I was faced with a number of challenges that helped me to learn and grow during my stay in Nigeria, there were also many rewarding moments that I am grateful for.

Experiencing life and gaining a better understanding of the context in Nigeria, where I hope to have a future career as a medical doctor, was an immensely rewarding experience. I had not been back to Nigeria for six years, and I was grateful to revive the memories of places and people that had begun to fade in my memory. I would like to thank the Kellogg Institute, my advisor Fr. Robert Dowd, my professor Jaimie Bleck, and the many friends who helped me along the way. I truly benefited from this unique learning experience and look forward to continuing this journey of growth and enlightenment.