Intercultural Dossier
Stereotypes About Africa and my Semester in Nigeria

Quick Overview

- **Place and Country**: Enugu, Nigeria
- **University**: Godfrey Okoye University
- **Time and Duration**: Sept 26, 2013 – Feb 28, 2014
- **Contact Person**: [...]

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1. Introduction

1.1. How I Ended Up in Nigeria

Despite globalization, worldwide media coverage and cheaper means of transportation, Africa still seems to be a fairly exotic continent to many. It is usually not the first place that comes to mind when one thinks of opportunities to work, study and live. While it has become quite popular to serve as a young volunteer somewhere in the "third world", I have personally never heard of any German student actually *studying* in an African country. I myself have worked for nine months in Senegal, mostly as a general helper and teaching assistant in a boarding school for missionary children. However, due to the international nature of the school, my exposure to African student life was fairly limited.

Thus, when I found out that the English Seminar of the University of Münster is affiliated with a partner university in Nigeria called "Godfrey Okoye University", I was intrigued by the opportunity to study in an African country with the support of my own university. After exploring the university's profile and its courses, the "Godfrey Okoye University" appealed to me due to various factors: First it offered courses in both of my subjects, English and History. Secondly, the Christian and holistic profile resonated with my own beliefs. Furthermore, the residential character of the small university promised good community life.

Many of my family members, friends and persons responsible at the English Seminar expressed fears and reluctance when I told them about my plans, due to various security threats within Nigeria. Yet after some prayer and more balanced information from Nigerians and Germans familiar with Nigeria, I decided to go nonetheless, clinging to the hope that the potential benefits of that "step of faith" would eventually outweigh the difficulties.

1.2. Expectations and Goals

Most of these potential benefits that I thought a university stay in Nigeria would bring could be subsumed under the area of culture. I anticipated unique insights into the culture of an African country, particularly their academic culture. Although I have befriended a few African students in Germany, I didn't know much about how it is like to study in a so-called "third world" country with entirely different preconditions and cultural beliefs underlying university life and the surrounding society at large. I wanted to find out how economic and political difficulties affect the conditions on campus, how a different cultural framework influences critical thinking of students and how the academic standard in general compares to the one in Germany.

Outside university, I was interested to develop an understanding of the country Nigeria and its peculiarities.[1] Even while in Senegal, I got to know the enormous influence Nigeria

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[1] In doing so, I am aware that, as an outsider living in only a small part of a country, "cultural understanding" is hardly possible.

has on the African continent through movies, religious movements and migration. The "giant of Africa", as Nigeria is often referred to, is the most heavily populated country in Africa and a major player in the international arena, mostly due to its sheer size, its natural resources and its cultural, natural and religious diversity that is somehow representative of Africa as a whole. On the other side, endemic corruption, abductions, infamous email scams and terrorism gave Nigeria a rather bad name. By actually living in Nigeria, I wanted to discover how reality differs from or matches the public perception of Nigeria. I was also keen to learn more about various aspects of Nigerian culture(s), for example religion or food.

Furthermore, I was also interested in learning more about the commonalities and differences within Africa. Having been to Senegal and the Gambia already, I hoped that a stay in Nigeria would help me to identify both common features in Sub-Saharan African countries and particularities between them.

Language-wise, a stay in Nigeria promised me to learn more about the role of English in an "Outer Circle Country"[2] and its interplay as a second language with other ethnic languages. I was aware that I might face difficulties in communication due to the Nigerian accent on one side and my lack of knowledge of Pidgin English and Igbo[3] on the other side, but I was determined to take up these challenges and find ways to communicate nonetheless.

On a rather personal level, I desired to relate to my Nigerian fellow-students in a more natural environment, as opposed to the helper/helped hierarchy that volunteer work often brings along. I hoped that by just being among them on an equal footing and without a specific "mission", I would be able to understand them and their individual dreams, problems and lifestyles.

Lastly, one of my primary goals was to be a good ambassador and a mediator between Nigeria (or "Africa") on the one side and Germany (or Europe) on the other side. Being aware of many simplifications and stereotypes, I wanted to reduce anxieties, cultural barriers and prejudices. In order to that, I resolved to be an approachable person in Nigeria, someone that Nigerians can talk to, have fun with and work along with. In addition, I have created a blog for my German audience where I published various reports, thoughts and videos so that readers can get a sense for the rich and diverse Nigerian life.

1.3. Academics

In terms of my academics, I tried to seize the chance of being at a Nigerian university by choosing subjects that are somehow related to Africa. In the field of English literature, I chose subjects such as "Written African Fiction" and "Written African Poetry", because these

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[2] According to Kachru's Three Circles Model (Kachru 5).
[3] The native language in the region my university is placed.

kind of courses are less likely to be offered in a German university. In my history-related courses (such as "International Relations") I have studied "Sub-Saharan Africa" and rather general courses such as "Human Rights", mostly because I was interested in taking a different, non-Western perspective on African and non-African historical events and contemporary issues. I have also tried to diversify my choice of lecturers, choosing only one or at most two subjects by one lecturer, so that I get to know different teaching styles within a foreign culture.

However, in the beginning of and even during the semester, some courses were changed or canceled, due to a "change of curricula".[4] In total, I studied eight subjects, all of them ended with an exam.

I believe that clear contrasts and very distinct experiences can contribute to a more holistic and balanced understanding. Hence, I was confident that my stay in Nigeria would tie in with my courses of study nicely since living and studying in such a different environment would certainly provide a new perspective on things I have learnt before, be it postcolonial literature in my English studies or educational systems and styles in my pedagogical studies.

1.4. Studies and Life at The Godfrey Okoye University

The Godfrey Okoye University in Enugu is a small private university supported by the Catholic church. Founded in 2009, about 1400 students are currently enrolled, most of them are required to pay a relatively high amount of school fees. These fees, along with the financial support of German and Austrian donors, enable the university to have a fairly well-equipped library, a somehow reliable school WiFi, small classes and various honorary professors. However, there were severe limitations: Many times, neither the electricity nor the

Students celebrating their matriculation.

internet worked. In addition that, there were hardly any materials, PowerPoint slides, no online learning platforms and no easy way to get certain books. Sometimes students had to stand during a lecture due to a lack of chairs. Yet, compared to the oftentimes overcrowded public universities in Nigeria, the study environment was reasonable.

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4 For instance, two months into my studies, two courses on "Discourse Analysis" and "Creative Writing" were substituted by completely different subjects such as the aforementioned poetry class,

During my stay, the university offered a wide range of special activities. During my five months, I have attended a lot of festivities, cultural celebrations, retreats, a "creativity day", many guest lectures, a large-scale convocation ceremony as well as a matriculation ceremony and Christmas services. Regular activities included daily prayers, a weekly Sunday program and weekly sport events. Students were free to participate in groups such as drama groups, a choir, a Christian student union, traditional dancing and many more. I myself was involved in the NIFES[5] group, the university choir, a drama group and various speeches during the daily afternoon prayer or special occasions such as a guest lecture on studying abroad.

2. Main Part - Stereotypes About "Africa"

There are a multitude of myths and stereotypes about Africa and "Africans". One of them is the notion of referring to Africa as a country, instead of distinguishing between the 54 countries that constitute Africa. So although the following stereotypes do not refer to Nigeria in particular, they nonetheless represent popular notions about "Africans", as most of my friends see Nigerians in the first place.[6]

2.1. Unspoiled or Broken Africa? Nigeria Between Utopia & Dystopia

A few weeks into my stay, my sister from Germany called me and complained about her consumerist colleagues, telling me "I wish to be where you are, because I think Africans are less materialistic". She expressed a popular version of Africa that assumes that Africa is unspoiled by civilization, enabling "simple Africans" to live in harmony with nature and with one another, without stress, racism, exploitation or other social ills (cf. Gilbert, and Reynolds XIX).

Closely linked to that notion is the idea that all Africans live in huts, wear loin cloths, beat drums and are surrounded by wild animals. Movies like *The Gods Must be Crazy* or *The Lion King* depict this simplistic version of Africa that is all too often considered to be the "real Africa".

Ironically enough, that notion coexists with a contrasting image of Africa that emphasizes the problems of Africa. This notion of a "broken Africa" depicts the continent as one

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[5] Nigerian Fellowship of Evangelical Students
[6] I cover the categories listed in the "Guidelines Intercultural Dossier" as follows:
- Category A (Everyday culture):
    - 2.2 "Lazy and Late? Time Approaches and Work Ethics"
- Category C (History, Geography, Religion):
    - 2.1 "Unspoiled or broken Africa? Nigeria between utopia & dystopia"
    - 2.3 "Idols and Shamanism? Religion in Nigeria"
- Category E (Media):
    - 2.4 "Just drums and dances? Music in Nigeria"
    - 2.5 "African movies? Nollywood and Nigerian industriousness"

where nothing works; a continent full of challenges, decay, civil wars, abject poverty, endemic corruption and starving children that beg for help (cf. Gilbert, and Reynolds XIX). This is perpetuated by one-sided media coverage that highlights the problems and catastrophes of Africa rather than encouraging or uplifting stories. In addition, German parents who tell their children to finish their plate "because kids in Africa are starving" do not help in creating a more balanced picture of the situation in Africa.

My own experience has been that both the romantic as well as the dystopian version of Africa are inaccurate and incomplete. The romantic view disregards many obvious aspects: Once I have arrived in Lagos, the most populous city in Africa, I saw a megacity full of cars, noise, technology and businesses. You're not likely to meet any "bushmen" throwing spears at exotic animals. In fact, I have never seen any so-called "African animals" outside zoos. Instead, seeing rubbish almost everywhere

The capital Abuja and other metropolian areas showcase sophisticated buildings.

helped me to quickly discard any notions of "Africans living in harmony with their nature".

The notion of Africa as a broken continent is not necessarily untrue, but rather incomplete, as it not only often neglects positive developments, it also fails to explain the root causes of many issues that are prevalent today. One such root cause for almost all problems in Nigeria is tribalism, an issue I want to elaborate on since I have experienced its effects first-hand. Tribalism can be described as "a kind of morbid loyalty and commitment to one's ethnic group to the exclusion, prejudice and often at the the expense of other ethnic groups" (Afolayan 51). Historically, Nigerians did not consider themselves as "Nigerians", but primarily as members of a family and secondly as members of a tribe. This becomes evident through the family obligations that are still very strong up to day. Many of my fellow students told me stories of how they help each other among their immediate and extended

An Igbo cultural dance performed during a wedding.

family, for instance in the case of school fees. This further extends to a system of mutual help within one's own tribe. Although my university was dominated by members of the Igbo tribe, students from other ethnic groups were also enrolled. As soon as I arrived, I was confronted with a lot of prejudices towards certain groups: An "Efik" told me I should watch out for "greedy Igbos", Igbos complained about "violent Hausas" and a "Tiv" student felt some

Igbos might gossip about him even in his presence, since he cannot understand the Igbo language. All these tensions are rather benign compared to ethnic riots and massacres that have frequently occurred in Nigerian history. Discussing politics with students, I realized how often Nigerians think and vote by tribe rather than party. During class debates in the International Relations department people voiced opinions such as "We need an Igbo president in 2015, we never had one yet". These kind of statements amazed me as I have never considered regional factors in my own voting decision. It is not difficult to imagine how this tribal mentality affects politics, society, corruption and national unity. The problems Nigeria faces today are partly due to the amalgamation of many conflicting tribes to an "entirely artificial country born out of the womb of an international Western conference" (Collis 24).

I have learned that in order to portray a more balanced picture of Nigeria and Africa as a whole, one needs to refrain both from simplistic "feel-good" portrayals and from superficial and negative reports of symptoms only. Root causes such as tribalism and the poor nation-building initiated by colonial powers need to be considered, since these realities deeply affect day-to-day life.[7]

2.2. Lazy and Late? Time Approaches and Work Ethics

When I'm a little late for a meeting, some of my German friends now joke around: "Don't worry, I understand, you're just coming back from Africa!" By doing so, they communicate a common stereotype which juxtaposes rigid and joyless Germans with laid-back yet lazy and unpunctual Africans. There is indeed a different attitude towards time in Nigeria, which I will try to tackle with some stories and observations:

One morning, I bought a Nigerian snack and since I was somehow busy, I ate it while walking to my lecture. People stopped me in disbelief and told me that in Nigeria, there is no way to eat food in this 'on the go' manner. I was supposed to properly sit down and eat it slowly. This little incident illustrates how my time-conscious attitude clashed with a culture that values the moment rather than the schedule. Although

Food and drinks are to be enjoyed while being seated.

some lecturers and "Masters of Ceremonies" emphasized that their lectures or events would definitely start at a given point in time, the so-called "African Time"-mentality usually delayed the start of events, at least in my experience. Since hardly anyone really expected atten-

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[7] Tribalism serves as only one example of a "root cause". Another root cause is the "institutional disconnect" (Dia 51) between the formal and informal sector. In Nigeria, you can see thousands of little shops along the road. After talking with some shop owners, I've realised that many shops make hardly any profit. Yet, transitioning to more efficient medium-scale enterprises is difficult due to a lack of capital, education or government support. In discussing poverty, that needs to be considered.

dants to appear "on the dot", most people I have met did not bother to come early and wait, which further perpetuates this conduct. This behavior might appear problematic to an outsider, yet I have learned that most of my Nigerian friends managed to adapt to this lifestyle in various ways. When a notoriously-late lecturer suddenly arrived, my fellow-students quickly called one-another so that those still outside could rush to class. When they were forced to wait, they seemed quite indifferent and relaxed, while in Germany, a minor delay of the "Deutsche Bahn" can already cause tension and anger in some cases.

Other areas of public life were just not that dominated by time. For instance, public transport was not organized according to schedules. Rather, busses kept on driving certain paths with people entering and leaving the bus almost everywhere along the way. At university, most lectures did not provide "office hours". In case I wanted to visit professors or administrators, I just needed to figure out how and when I could meet them. On the positive side, when I did get to speak to some of them, they usually took time to talk to me at length, sometimes even at the expense of coming late for their next meeting...

Personally, although Nigeria often stretched my patience, I did enjoy this different pace of life, not being pressured by rigid schedules. After my stay, I have met a Nigerian student in Münster who, while discussing our cultures, complained that Germans were "too mechanical", an objection I can now understand due to the feeling I got for the different rhythm in Nigeria.

Concerning work ethics and the supposed laziness, I want to abstain from simplified judgements, yet still provide some general observations. In many ways, life is quite hard for my Nigerian fellow-students. In order to make it through the day, they have to get up very early (around 4:30 am), do their chores (e.g. hand washing their cloths), operate within limited resources (borrowing laptops from other people, not having enough money to buy books etc.), deal with unreliable power supply, protect their belongings against thieves, support their family and friends and spend a lot of time on administrative and seemingly simple things such as getting permissions, photocopies and many other things that require time and energy. Being in Nigeria helped me to realize how much technology and infrastructure has simplified life in Germany in such a way that we can focus on important projects more easily.

Besides, I have seen how work ethics depend on numerous factors. One such factor is gender. By and large, women and especially mothers have to handle a gr eat variety of responsibilities. I was astonished how women had to cook, wash, go to the market, raise children and welcome visitors without any noticeable support of men. Yet, they never seemed to complain, which is probably due to a fairly patriarchal society. Another factor

Mothers do the bulk of housework.

is the kind of work people do. I have found that some people working in "white-collar-jobs" enjoyed performances more than actually getting things done efficiently (e.g. by focussing on status, greetings etc.). Thus, some procedures for even simple requests were unnecessarily slow.

Considering all these factors, simple attributes such as lazy or late are neither legitimate nor useful in describing work and time ethics in a context and country that is run totally different than the one I grew up in.

2.3. Idols and Shamanism? Religion in Nigeria

When it comes to religion in Africa, children tend to picture exotic and half-naked Africans dancing around a fire, performing bizarre rituals to please their ancestors. While these forms of animistic practices might exist in some remote villages, the religious landscape in Africa is much more complex. Islam and Christianity are now prevalent in all Sub-Saharan African countries. In Nigeria, the North is primarily Muslim, while Christianity is the major religion in Southern Nigeria. Hence, since my university was in the South-East of Nigeria, I have only been exposed to the Christian faith. As a committed Christian myself, I went to a wide range of Christian churches and organizations, which helped me to specify some of the following particularities of Nigerian Christianity.

2.3.1. Predominance of Religion in Everyday Life

Whereas faith does not seem to play a major role in the lives of my German fellow-students, Nigerian society and daily life are very much influenced by religion. Religious words abound in public discourse: When asking my friends how their exams went, many responded with phrases such as "We thank God" or "By the

Even laundry shops use Christian wording.

grace of God I did well". When confronted with political issues, I noticed people stating that "only God can help us". Dignities usually start their speeches by referring to God.[8] On Sundays, plenty of people carry their Bibles and go to well-attended churches that are literally around almost every corner. Almost every Nigerian I have met in Enugu identified himself as a Christian, as the concept of atheism is still very foreign to many Nigerians.[9]

Being a Christian myself, I found it inspiring to see many fresh expressions of faith and to meet people who are not ashamed of what they believe in. Yet, the pervasiveness of relig-

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[8] For instance, check out a video about the Nigerian First Lady crying out "There is God oh" http://www.freshgist.com.ng/video-patience-jonathan-crying-there-god-o/.
[9] Something that became clear to me once I sensed their astonishment after my reports of (German) people who don't believe in any God at all.

ion appeared odd to me at times. Some people fasted and prayed for their exams to such an extent that they neglected their studies. I suspect that this might have been brought about by a fatalistic attitude and challenging circumstances that drive many Nigerians into prayer and faith.

In addition, I believe that the familiarity with religion caused some people to accept the faith that has been passed down to them uncritically. Faith is not always a personal decision but rather a part of the whole tribal and cultural "package" (e.g. being Igbo almost always means being Christian). This may also be affected by a rather hierarchical society in which children do not dare to skip church due to their parent's authority.

2.3.2. Animistic Influences

Although purely animistic believers are rare to find in Nigeria, the influences of animism are still obvious in many churches: Pentecostal pastors offer "deliverance" from curses, demons, evil spirits and spiritual oppressions. In order to do so, they often pray in a loud voice and repeat their words as if their prayer is some kind of mantra. Oftentimes they put their hands on the person they want to "set free" which then usually falls to the ground in a dramatic manner. Furthermore, failure and lack of money are often associated with "bad destinies", generational curses and witches that need to be fought in order to be successful. Being a

The belief in "Generational curses" is quite common in Pentecostal churches.

rather matter-of-fact person, I felt a bit uneasy observing these phenomena. After having written about this topic on a Nigerian blog, a couple of people commented and noted that these practices result from former pre-colonial religions that influenced the mindset of previous generations. Some critics go so far as saying that Christianity (in some of its forms) is just "a thin coating over the religion that has been on African soil for time immemorial" (Mbewe).

2.3.3. Different Styles and Themes in Church Services

The church services I have attended were, generally speaking, more lively and joyful than the ones I have attended in Germany. Even traditional churches like the Catholic church included numerous dances and cheerful songs in their masses. As the only foreigner in church, priests and pastors sometimes publicly introduced me "as our special friend", which was often followed by clapping and friendly greetings. During sermons, the audience expressed their agreement with "Amens" and "Hallelujahs". I have thoroughly enjoyed the friendly and almost enthusiastic atmosphere in many churches. Part of it can be explained by an expressiveness that I have observed in other parts of society as well: most Nigerians I

have met did not mind showing emotions, whether in class or on the football pitch. So when they raised their hands or shook their body in church, it looked "unforced" to me.

2.4. Just Drums and Dances? Music in Nigeria

In the matter of African music, most Germans I know tend to think of jungle drums, a lot of dances and very little "modern" and melodic instruments. While this stereotype certainly holds true for many traditional events I have attended (weddings, festivities), Nigerian music is much more diverse than I expected it to be.

Modern Nigerian musicians are oftentimes inspired by African-American artists.

Most of my fellow-students listened to both Nigerian pop music and to African-American artists. Although the latter definitely influenced the former, contemporary Nigerian music has its own distinct features. For a start, many lyrics are marked by frequent "code-switching". I have hardly listened to any Nigerian song that does not contain a few traces of English, Pidgin English as well as indigenous languages (Igbo, Yoruba etc.). By doing so, Nigerian musicians mirror everyday conversational behavior. Especially in urban areas people tend to switch languages constantly. On the one side, Nigeria's multilingual character probably contributed to this phenomenon. On the other side, I feel that frequent code-switching reflects a general attitude of not bothering too much about fixed rules; an approach where one tends to try to get the message across instead of focussing on accuracy. This was quite different from my own school experience when pupils were often hesitant to speak in English unless they felt they knew enough grammar or vocabulary.

When it comes to African-American music in Nigeria, I noticed that especially some young Nigerian men adapted the style of most of these musicians in terms of cloths or jewelry. I felt doing so gave them a source of identity, since popular African-American artists represent fame, success and wealth, goals that are increasingly aspired by the young Nigerian generation. Many Nigerian songs abound with remarks about money and material items. The song "Bottom Belle" by Owamumi and Flavour serves as an example:

> You tell me say you like me
> Me sef tell you my own eh
> When e reach to buy me fine things
> Iwo l'Aradite
> [...]
> Try understand
> I say as a woman we like plenty money [...]

These few multi-lingual lines (Yoruba, English and Pidgin) are the beginning of a song that is mainly about a woman seduced by a man with money and other goods. Other songs

like "Chop My Money" by P-Square are even more obvious in their money-centeredness. Being accustomed and raised to be rather modest and silent about financial issues, this whole theme of praising one's wealth proudly seemed quite unusual.

Traditional songs from the various ethnic groups are in a completely different category. They are often performed during cultural events and, due to their focus on rhythm, open up opportunities for dances and drama performances. They carry cultural traditions into the modern Nigerian world, yet I felt that these isolated cultural events were somehow detached from the rather Western and materialistic lifestyle that dominated many Nigerian lives.

Personally, I have enjoyed both traditional and modern Nigerian songs for their upbeat character. In fact, I often find myself listening to them even now that I am back in Germany, since they not only evoke memories, but also put me into a cheerful mood.

2.5. African Movies? Nollywood and Nigerian Industriousness

I suppose there are not many stereotypes about "African movies" or the Nigerian movie industry since most Westerners have probably never even heard of or watched home-made African movies. Yet, since about 1992, a new phenomenon often referred to as "Nollywood" has changed the media landscape in

A Nollywood movie shown during a bus trip.

Nigeria and the rest of of Sub-Saharan Africa significantly. "Nollywood" movies are low-cost films that are distributed through VideoCDs, DVDs and television broadcasts. I have personally watched some of these movies in busses and homes and considered the movies to be quite telling about the culture at large.

First, by demonstrating how much can be done with little resources, the Nigerian movies represent a certain "can do mentality" that I have observed in many parts of Southern Nigeria. Compared to Hollywood or even Indian Bollywood movies, I have found most Nigerian films to be extremely basic in terms of storyline, depth, equipment and effects. This is mostly due to the limited budget (on average, $50,000 budget per movie (Haynes 95)) and the short time span for the shooting (10 to 14 days). Despite these technical and financial odds, these movies prove to be extremely popular and proliferate throughout mostly anglophone Africa, thereby creating a sense of "Pan-Africanism" (McCall 92). It is estimated that 14,000 full-length features have been produced between 1992 and 2013 (Haynes 94).

The somehow rigged, unapologetic and almost aggressive style in which these movies are made and distributed and its equally "audacious" (Barrot 46) content reminded me of the

creative ways in which many Nigerians I have met get things done. Some of my fellow-students created their own music, sold beauty products, wrote books, started their own on-line shop and launched their own religious campaign in a rather confident manner. Although some of these creations don't match "German standards" - a "history book" my friend wrote included lengthy wikipedia quotes and numerous spelling mistakes – they nonetheless illustrate the industriousness and self-confidence Nigeria is often known for. The successful Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie summarizes this attitude quite well:

> "We're not popular in any part of Africa. And we're rather proud of it. If I wasn't Nigerian, I think I would understand why. There's a kind of Nigerian aggressiveness … 'Why shouldn't we?' We'll do it very loudly and without much finesse. Inside Nigeria there are different cultures, but this is Nigerianness – it cuts across ethnic groups. I don't know if it's from our large size, I don't know if it's because we never had white people settle and stay. So Nigerians go to Kenya and Tanzania and we think, why are you so apologetic?" (Brockes)

This "Nigerianness" manifests itself also in the acting and the plot of Nollywood movies. Most characters behave confidently, be it the cheating husband, the nagging mother-in-law or the boastful young adult. Discussions between characters are loud and dramatic. The themes of these movies often revolve around money, family feuds, witchcraft, redemption, marriage and "good values". The movies I watched did not leave much room for sentimental, ambiguous and nuanced thoughts, something I have missed in Nigeria in general. Whether in private conversations, church settings or classroom debates, most talks were rather "straight-to-the-point" and rough, which left me longing for a certain way of engaging conversations that I have gotten used to in Germany. This became clear to me when, after I had given a speech, a student approached me saying, "you white people really think differently, you have this emotional component". Still, I adapted quite fast to my Nigerian friends and their ways of engaging one another and, in retrospect, I actually benefitted from being exposed to a more confident and direct lifestyle, being a rather insecure and sometimes overly apologetic person myself.

3.   Conclusion

My greatest problem in writing this dossier was selecting what to include. I have gathered so many experiences and insights into Nigeria that summarizing and processing these was quite a challenge. It was such a valuable stage in my life that all my expectations were far exceeded.

Concerning the cultural understanding I aimed for, I have come to realize that I did not know much about "Africa" before I actually went there and lived among Nigerians. Being immersed into Nigerian life was just much more profound than merely reading about colonial oppression or debating developmental aid from a far distance.

Although I appreciate my insights into the Nigerian culture(s) at large, what I truly cherish now are the various individuals I have met in university, in town and during my travels. Listening to their stories, they desires and their struggles, getting to know their different personalities and circumstances and laughing and engaging with them on a daily basis created a sense of emotional connection and empathy that still lasts to date. This connection allowed me to learn two personal lessons with regards to culture and the sensitive issue of race. On the one hand, my experience taught me that I do not need to be necessarily "colorblind" (Burgess 155), trying to neglect all possible cultural differences that inevitably exist when people are brought up in tremendously different environments. Color and the culture someone was raised in are important parts of one's identity. My stay in Nigeria made me more conscious of this as I was often being referred to as "white" or "German", in addition to the many questions people asked me about my country, my hair, my skin, our food etc. Instead of ignoring differences, I learnt to celebrate them, learn through them and take some of them with a sense of humor.

On the other hand, I realized that with time, concepts such as race, color and even culture disappeared when I began seeing people as individuals with unique identities. By doing so, I grasped the "richness" (Newbell 20) of really knowing someone who is different from me, the richness of diverse people all sharing the same humanity.[10]

With regards to my academic goals, I was both frustrated and delighted – frustrated about lecturers who only dictate their lessons notes, about chaotic schedules, lack of materials and many other issues that hindered my learning experience. By and large, these issues are probably due to a lack of money as well as a lack of familiarity with "modern" teaching methods. On the positive side, I gained unique insights through seeing life through the eyes of Nigerian lecturers, students and authors. For example, reading African literature in two of my courses was a highly enriching experience that really helped me to interpret my everyday observations in a new way. I also learnt to have a sense of ownership over my education, since I had more capacity to choose courses I liked. I could have passed through this semester with minimum effort and only a few courses, yet I choose to do more than expected since I desired to make good use of my short time. In connection with my future career, my stay encouraged me to further focus on postcolonial and specifically African or Nigerian issues, since I find that African studies are rather underrepresented in German schools and universities.

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[10] One factor that accelerated cultural adaption and intercultural friendships was the fact that I was on my own. This way, I had no opportunity to hide in a subculture of international students, rather I was forced to make friends and immerse myself into Nigeria. In hindsight, this proved to be invaluable: not only was I was a lot more flexible in my movements, also strangers felt more comfortable approaching or inviting me when I was walking on campus or on the street.

With respect to the country Nigeria and its role in Africa, I was surprised to see how different African countries can be from one another. In terms of economy, language and attitudes, I found Nigeria to be vastly different from Senegal. Even within Nigeria, certain ethnic groups were noticeably different than others. Among the Nigerian particularities, the industrious nature and creativity with which many Nigerians face life as well as the outgoing, rough and dynamic spirit that I have sensed in many parts of Nigeria inspired me. Concerning all the various problems Nigeria faces, I became aware that public media often only portrays a "single story" (Adichie) and that the everyday life of Nigerians is much more nuanced and joyful than media coverage might insinuate.

Language-wise, it was interesting and sometimes even amusing to observe the dynamics of multilingualism, code switching and Pidgin English. Although I probably could have improved my English proficiency more easily in "inner circle countries", I nonetheless learnt a lot of new words and their different shades of meaning, both in English and in Pidgin English. Most importantly, I learnt to adapt my speech to make myself understood and to connect with my fellow students by using some idioms, slang and Igbo words.

Another benefit of my stay was the ability to see my own culture from the outside. While I enjoyed the people-oriented, easy-going and rough lifestyle in Nigeria, I now "re-appreciate" the resources, infrastructure and the general organization we have in Germany. Many things here just work and flow so seamlessly, be it administration, education or transportation. I am also greatly indebted to my country for offering me an education that fosters critical thinking and independence, qualities that were not always present in Nigerian education where some of my fellow-students just took things for granted. Although Germans are often accused of being reserved and unfriendly, my stay abroad taught me that cultures have just different "scripts" guiding people's everyday behavior and talks. Certainly, most Nigerians I encountered are a lot more eager to engage in small talk or to invite you into their home than their Westphalian counterparts[11], but we also have our own ways of engaging one another, ways that are not necessarily better or worse. For instance, eating in a "Mensa" for an hour and having a focused conversation with just one person is a ritual not quite common in Nigeria that I began to value once I reintegrated into student life in Münster.

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[11] However, this fact needs to taken with a grain of salt. As a foreigner, I attracted a lot of hospitality since it is often esteemed an honor to be seen with a "white man" and to host foreigners. I doubt that a fellow Nigerian from another part of Nigeria would have enjoyed as much hospitality as I did.

When it comes to my attempt of being an "ambassador", I was surprised and grateful for the many doors that opened up during and after my stay. In Nigeria itself I was able to foster cultural exchange just by cultivating friendships, which was quite special for some Nigerians, since many of them told me they never had a "white friend" before.[12] My mostly well-received blogs also proved to be helpful in sparking cultural dialogue,

My stay in Nigeria helped me greatly in connecting with Nigerians in Münster.

especially some write-ups about personal struggles seemed to resonate with readers. After my return, a lot of Germans and Nigerians expressed interest in hearing my stories; some of them even invited me to speak at conferences. I suppose that the scarcity of German students studying in Nigeria may have contributed to the great interest people take into my experiences.

Indeed, it was quite a scarce, a unique experience. An experience that was like no other in my life – rich, beautiful, humorous and intense. I'm grateful for having taken the "step of faith" of going to Nigeria, a country that, despite its problems, I will always remember with fondness.

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[12] For instance, one girl told me that, before meeting me, she considered "whites" to be arrogant or "far away", probably because many foreigners are not easily approachable due to security restrictions or different living environments. Being able to interact with me helped her to change that perception.

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4.   Interview with Ayo T.

Good evening, Ayo T.. Thank you very much for taking part in this interview! Could you briefly introduce yourself so that we know your background?

Thank you for this opportunity. My name is Ayo T., I am a Nigerian, from – what I consider the best State/city in the world :-) – Lagos state, and precisely from the Lagos Island local government area also called Isale Eko. I have lived most of my life in Lagos and I speak the Yoruba language fluently. I work in the Not-for-Profit sector to develop and champion the rights of children to access quality basic education.

Recently, the kidnapping of over 200 girls has put Nigeria in the limelight of international media. Most reports focus on troubles, corruption, disunity and other challenges Nigeria faces. How do you see the media coverage of your own country? Are Nigerians well-represented in the media? If not, which kind of stories or aspects of Nigerian society would you like to see covered more often?

I don't think at all that Nigeria and Nigerians are properly represented in the media. Unfortunately, bad stories 'sell' more than good ones so the international press would rather focus on the under-developed or developing aspects of the country and people, rather than the many wonderful and beautiful parts. It would be nice to see the rich culture of Nigeria better highlighted in the media, as well as the pride that we as a people have in our traditions and customs. For instance, our beautiful and elaborate wedding ceremonies (everyone knows the Nigerian traditional wedding is a lot more exciting and colourful than the formal church or civil wedding). Our fabrics and enchanting fashion sense, the creativity of the average Nigerian – art, literature and so many things. I believe our need to survive despite all odds has brought out a great side of our creativity. Nigerians are very intelligent people who know how to seize the moment! We have achieved a lot in various sectors and built many industries, home and abroad.

You have spent over eight years studying and working in the UK. Which kind of stereotypes and prejudices about Nigerians or "Africans" in general have you encountered? Were there any that annoyed you in particular?

Oh, I could write a book about that one! Many Nigerians and Africans who have had to 'suffer' at the unfortunate ignorance of our European friends often laugh about it for a long time afterwards (great stories for our grandchildren!). It could also be very annoying when people make unrealistic assumptions about you. You can't blame them though, their only form of information is the media which is quite biased. For instance, some people are quite surprised that we speak very good English, whereas the official mode of communication in Nigeria is English! You hear this phrase a lot "Oh, your English is so good!", whereas you are taught from a very young age to converse moderately at the least, in English. Also, some people believe that Nigeria is very under-developed! If only they knew how wrong they were. Some people are surprised that you can sing along to pop music, that you live in a house rather than a hut among animals (unbelievable but sadly true!).

One well-known stereotype is that "Africans" are notoriously late and follow their own "African time". How would you respond to such a claim?

The infamous 'African time'... Unfortunately, this is quite true in many cases but we are working really hard at it to change this culture and mindset. The world is a global village, especially in business and more Nigerians are engaging in international business relations, therefore making it pertinent to keep to the agreed time for meetings and appointments. However, socially, we have an 'easy' attitude to life sometimes – We take time out to enjoy life – 'Don't be so serious all the time.' YOLO (You Only Live Once). So take life easy.

How did your stay abroad change your perspective on your own country?

It changed it in many ways. I couldn't possibly mention all but I will mention a few examples. Having lived in Britain where there are a million and 1 accents, I came to appreciate the fact

that as Nigerians, we shouldn't be so hard on ourselves when our local accents are detectable when we speak. The 'owners' of the language have numerous accents! It's important because it has a lot to do with self-esteem, being proud and true to who you are and not trying to be like someone else.

Also, I could see that there is a lot of potential in Nigeria. We are a country 'waiting to happen', we only need that extra push and belief that it is possible to make it happen! Nigerians are very ambitious - 'no dulling'.

Also, Nigeria is a very hospitable and warm country (not just the weather). We are accommodating and we really do care about people. I think that's a really great trait.

In the 19th and 20th century, Southern Nigeria was Christianized mostly by British colonialists and missionaries. Having been in both the "colonizing" and the "colonized" country, how do you see the religious landscape in the UK and in Nigeria now, over a hundred years later?

The interesting thing is that it seems that the tide has turned! 100 years ago, the British people introduced the Christian religion to Nigeria, now Nigerians are taking it back to Britain, as religion has unfortunately taken a back-seat in many parts of Britain, while Nigerians are getting 'hotter' by the day!

There are many Pentecostal churches that are being promoted in many parts of Britain. My church which was founded in Nigeria - the Redeemed Christian Church of God (RCCG) is said to be the fastest growing Pentecostal church in Great Britain.

This year, Nigeria celebrates the centenary of its amalgamation in 1914, when Northern and Southern Nigeria were merged into the "Nigeria" as we know it today. With all the different ethnic groups and enmities between them, do you believe that Nigeria is strong enough to unite all these peoples, or would you rather opt for a division?

One of the great things about Nigeria is our resilience. We have survived a lot of things that could bring a nation crawling to its knees; however, by God's grace, we have survived and are still standing. I believe the different cultures and ethnicities make for a more beautiful Nigeria. For me, our diversity is actually a plus rather than a negative. We only need to be more tolerant of our differences to build a stronger country. Also, the man on the street must refuse to be used as a 'weapon' of destruction by the minority who want to cause ethnic problems for personal or political gain. We have done this for 100 years so far, things will get better.

Do you watch so-called "Nollywood" movies? Why do you think are they so popular?

Unfortunately, I rarely do. However, I believe they are popular because in a way, many people can relate with the characters and the stories (not all the time though). It's also probably because for many years we have watched Western movies that seem so far-fetched and finally we can watch something that could have happened next door (or actually did happen next door...).

In which ways does contemporary Nigerian music reflect the lifestyle and the mentality of (young) Nigerians?

Good and bad I guess. I think it's a world-wide phenomenon that Popular music (Pop) is sadly getting watered down by the quality and attention paid to the lyrics. People want the beat – as long as it sounds nice, you might as well be repeating the same meaningless word throughout the song! Also, contemporary music is a reflection of the influence the Western world has had on us as a people. Some things that would have been considered 'unheard of' is now freely sung about and happily danced to.

On the plus side, Nigerian contemporary music reflects the sheer genius and creativity of Nigerians. A lot of the music that is produced (quality and sound), is just amazing! Nigerians are pushing boundaries and trying new things. We are no longer just importing music, we are exporting our sounds abroad as well! It is always a joy to listen to Michelle Williams's

(from the American band, Destiny Child) latest song 'Say Yes' which comes straight from Nigerian churches.

You've blogged for almost six years and also read many Nigerian novels. What is your stance on the reading culture in Nigeria? Have you seen a shift caused by technology?

The reading culture has definitely changed! I believe that Nigerians have embraced reading more indigenous novels and we have produced some fine young writers too – Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (Half of a Yellow Sun, Purple Hibiscus, Americanah), Chibundo Onuzo (The Spider King's Daughter), Bobo Omotayo (London Life, Lagos Living), and so many others.

In terms of technology, blogging is the 'fashion' of the day! More people are trying their hands at blogging and find it an easy avenue to express themselves. The Nigerian blog community is quite huge and growing every day. This also means that people are able to have more interactions with the international community and widen the scope of their information as well.

4.1. Comment on the Interview

Of course, this interview provides only a single perspective and is in no way representative of all Nigerians. Nigerians with a different educational, religious, tribal or social background might have a different perception of their country. However, I consider the interview to be revealing in several aspects. First, Ms. T. mentions God and other religious phrases ("by God's grace") rather frequently, a habit that I have observed in Nigeria quite often and something that I have touched upon in 2.3.1.. It seems to me that many Christians (and probably Muslims as well) in Nigeria do this almost unconsciously, since religion is so dominant in public discourse (at least in the environment I stayed in).

Her desire for Nigeria to remain united is controversial, as I have also met South-Eastern Nigerians who think that the tensions and differences between the North and the South don't allow a peaceful coexistence. Yet, the "resilience" she referred to and the desire to "make things work" is something that definitely contributed to the survival of the nation and its economy (also see 2.5.). I have met a lot of Nigerians who had a similar positive outlook on the future of their country: "Give us time, and we will succeed. Didn't Europe also need some time to develop?" Then again there were people who expressed frustration with the system and wished Nigeria to start all over again. To my mind however, the "optimistic group" seemed to be in the majority. To this group, successful Nigerian musicians and authors such as the ones Ms. T. mentioned often serve as an inspiration.

Lastly, one issue she raised is less controversial: the longing to be represented well, to be not reduced to a single story of misery. Before my return to Germany, many Nigerians encouraged and almost urged me to tell good stories about Nigeria, to let "my people"[13] know that it's not such a bad place. Although this desire might be driven by patriotism and even though Nigeria does face a lot of challenges and tensions that are not easy to overcome, I believe that this longing is legitimate. I have tried to do my part in portraying a more balanced picture of Nigeria and its people and I hope that this Intercultural Dossier and the complementary resources were somehow helpful in this endeavor.

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[13] In Nigerian English, 'people' (in combination with a possessive pronoun) is used to refer to immediate and extended family members.

5.   Plagiatserklärung

Hiermit versichere ich, dass die vorliegende Arbeit über

"Intercultural Dossier – Stereotypes About Africa and my Semester in Nigeria"

selbständig verfasst worden ist,
dass keine anderen Quellen und Hilfsmittel als die angegebenen benutzt worden sind
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