

*You are going to study in London! It will be the best three years of your life. This is going to be great!*

I write this essay faster than it took to even begin thinking about the title of my final year dissertation, which I should probably be working on. Perhaps I write this willingly because the theme of the competition this year is Challenges, meaning that I can share my experiences without the pressure of positivity and fear of being judged.

“Where are you originally from?” *Kenya*, I respond. I soon learn that this is the culture here: asking where someone is originally from (especially after they answer anything UK-related to your initial question) to establish their otherness and assign them the identity that you think they should own louder than the one you want reserved for people who look like you. Sometimes it is harmless - maybe out of curiosity. “Wow all the way from Africa? But you speak English so well?” *Well Britain coloni-* “I mean your accent is different but otherwise it’s good. Anyway, you speak Kenyan?” *Actually it’s Swahi-* “Can I touch your hair?”

Such conversations never end. Occasionally it is fun and empowering to educate others about your cultural heritage, other times it is tiring explaining things that are never really understood especially when the other party does not want to. Sometimes non-verbal cues solidify your dissimilarity: counting people in your lecture who look like you and having almost all fingers left down or being around those you thought would be like you but not belonging there either. It all takes a toll eventually, especially when you have no outlet to rant about it because people are uncomfortable discussing such issues. Even worse, you are now an ethnic minority - a foreign concept.

“Welcome to London! The weather is good today - five degrees Celsius...” the pilot announced. This moment was a perfect juxtaposition from where I was from – a warm and sunny Christmas home filled with family, friends and great food. As the plane touched down, so did all the affirmations I had spent the last eight hours convincing myself of regarding coming back. *Good weather* he said, *five degrees Celsius* he dared to add.

Ironically, talking about the weather exhausts me but I always talk about it. Maybe because Kenya lies on the equator and I had never experienced winter or considered its impact on your mood. It is not just the cold or the wind or the rain, it is the greyness, the early darkness, the absence of leaves, smiles and colour. It is the dullness of it all. This paired with the practicalities

of living alone and fending for yourself while keeping up with a demanding course is disheartening and overwhelming.

*You are in a busy city in a foreign country and settling in is always the hardest. It should be uphill from here. This is going to be great.*

Pros of studying in London? London is your campus. Cons? London is your campus.

I remember being told that London is the best place to cry because no one will bat an eyelid. It can be a cold atmosphere, in more ways than weather and it can be daunting to adjust to an unfamiliar individualistic culture particularly in a big city where everyone is always running. More so when you think you are taking a break from London when stepping into your city-like university only to re-enter London again.

London is expensive and being in a centrally located university intensifies this. It obviously has its perks but everything comes with a price and you will incessantly pay it; the struggle of searching for accommodation nearby and finally getting one yet it is not nearly as luxurious as your friends' just cities away who are paying less than half for instance. It is also not as easy making friends as it would be in a campus university with a community-like environment. But then again, London is your campus so you are not tied down to university life.

There are two sides to every story which a 850 word essay cannot fully capture but it would feel incomplete to not mention that despite the drawbacks, London is vibrant and exciting, Cass offers top quality education, living alone is refreshing, interacting with people unlike you is enlightening and for all this I am grateful.

My experience has definitely fast-tracked my growth in a way no other would through the constant requirement of fortitude and the need to step out of my comfort zone. Furthermore, in as much as London is fast, in a way it is analogous to life. Life *is* fast and waits for no one and one of the main things I have learnt from London is that sometimes, sometimes I do need to run. I am Kenyan after all.

*Well, that was not the best three years of your life but you made it this far. Now you are about to enter a world where you are no longer a student, uncertain about the future. This is going to be... great?*