

**EUTOPIA CERTIFICATE OF
INTERNATIONALIZATION (EUCI)
REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO: MY BECOMING**



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COVER LETTER

Thanks to globalization, we live in a global village where we get to share and interact with others locally and internationally in real time via the internet and social media. Thus, it has become imperative to know, understand and accommodate other cultures and ways of life to ease communication, interaction, integration and acceptance of people in the society. Though different countries and nations speak different languages and have diverse cultures, I have come to realize that the human race understands two very paramount languages *love* or *hate*. No matter the technicality of a people's cultural heritage or language, when love is expressed especially to a person foreign or new to that culture, it is very well understood; likewise, hatred. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that humanity speaks two broad languages – *Love*: which is inherent in our beings as our natural instinct and *Hatred* which is learnt from the society. For the purpose of this reflective essay, I would be focusing more on the *Love* attribute of humanity which has been portrayed in the desire to learn more about other peoples culture, respect and accept it just the way it is.

Being born in a country of multi-cultural ethnicity (Nigeria), I learnt at a very early age to interact with people of different cultures; to try to learn their ways, avoid their taboos and live amicably. This trait has helped me in my international sojourn across the world as I find it very easy to adapt very quickly to my new environment and integrate with the people of the new locality I find myself. It further sparked the desire to travel more to see the world and experience more beautiful cultures. Thus, as at date, I have travelled to a total of six different countries - Four (4) African countries, one (1) Middle Eastern Country, and one (1) European Country and look forward to adding more countries to the list in due time.

Throughout these journeys, one unifying trait was the eagerness of the people to show the beauty of their way of life and teach the basics of their culture. For instance, in Ghana, a unique way of welcoming people is by saying '*Akwaaba*' which is a tiwi word of the Akan ethnic group in Ghana. Of the countries I have visited, a striking resemblance in cultural experience stems from one African country namely Togo (where I went for a one week course in French Language at the *Ministere de L'enseignement Superieur et de la Recherche*) and France (where I am currently pursuing my Master's Degree program in *Politics in a Digital Age* at Cergy Paris University). There appears to be some similarities of culture which is prevalent in the official language of both countries, the color of the uniform of the police forces in both countries and even the food (lol). I first got to know and have a taste of *Couscous* in Togo and same can be said of *baguette*! I got to have a first experience

of the French culture in Togo, even though diluted because it was a blend of the African culture and that of the French which in some way, created a new variant of culture which I have termed the AFRO-FRANC culture. Now, being in France for my post-graduate studies, I see the French culture in its truest and purest form and it has been intriguing! A lot more of the cultural intrigues of the French people would be shared later on.

REFLECTIVE PORTFOLIO

The EUCI seminars have taught and made me realize that internationalization experiences are actually impacting my life positively and shaping my perceptions and view of life. Prior to EUCI, I did not attach much importance to these experiences, neither did I take note of the impacts they are having in my personal life and beyond. However, having to reflect on these experiences has exposed different areas in which I have improved as an individual and I would like to classify the learning outcomes in different categories, namely; Personal, Academic, and Cultural.

PERSONAL:

One of the ways in which my internationalization experience has improved my personal life is by helping me to become a good communicator. Coming from a conservative African culture, self-expression is not really encouraged as silence is mistaken for politeness and timidity is mistaken for respect which ought not to be (though this is changing for the better in recent times).

As I moved across countries interacting with people, I became more and more bold in expressing myself and communicating with people then I realized, confidence is attractive. This changed my outlook to life as I became more daring and confident in approaching issues, taking up tasks and challenges that ordinarily, I wouldn't. A typical example is participating in the EUCI seminars and class activities.

Another example would be participating in my Masters class activities and making Power Point presentations during my studies here in France. I realized, I enjoyed communicating with people and sharing valid information; most importantly, when I shared ideas, it didn't suck (people liked my ideas) so much that now, I have begun taking online classes in Public Speaking. Who would have thought right?

More so, still in the area of communication, my internalization has exposed me to learning new languages to better integrate with the locals. When I first arrived France, the level of my French language was basic but now, there has been immense improvement as I can now hold conversations in the French language and on a fast track to becoming officially bi-lingual (*ouais... je parle francais maintenant!*).

ACADEMIC:

In the area of academia, beyond acquiring international certifications, studying abroad here in France has taught me to question pre-existing knowledge and the status quo. In this sense, permit me to go a little philosophical, *who is to say that what we know to be the truth as is, is actually true?* Is it because science said so, or we have come to accept what we have been told to be facts as the truth?

BEutopia

I particularly enjoyed participating in the BEutopia conference in 2023 which focused more on the notion of *multi-culturalism, inter-culturalism and transculturalism and the emergence of a new world in the face of global warming*. The notion of seeing oneself in ‘the other’, the fact that an individual can comprise of different ethnicities and decide to trace his or her heritage to the ethnicity different from what he/she was born to; is very fascinating for me. This conference further broadened my horizon to the naked truth that we as humans are more interconnected than we think.



CY Eutopians:

The BEutopia Conference made such a lasting impression on me that afterwards, I volunteered for CY Eutopia (an offshoot of Eutopia University). Here, we meet the second Thursday of every month to discuss ways in which we can further help international students integrate and have a good international experience through the alliance.

We brainstorm on the different strategies that can be employed and deployed to achieve this aim and come up with different activities that would be interesting and engaging to students. Through these participatory exercises, I am able to share my ideas, harness and hone skills and see the technicalities of developing, planning and working on a project which I believe would come in handy in an official environment.



CULTURAL:

Embracing other peoples culture and way of life has never been a challenge to me; in-fact, I find it fascinating as it adds more beauty and color to life. Comparing the French culture with that of my home country, I can see a great many differences, both positive and the areas which require some improvements. However, just like with everything else, I choose to focus on the positive as this encourages and re-enforces growth.

Time Consciousness:

The first take home lesson for me from the French Culture is time consciousness. The French are always on time! This is something that though in my local parlance, we jokingly say '*time waits for no man*' but in our subconscious, we know that the *Nigerian time* (an unofficial term for lateness) factor would come into play. On the other hand, the French don't joke with time. Their ability to always be prompt has made a huge positive impact on me. Now, more than ever, I have gained good grasp of proper time management and this has helped me to multi-task and get things done quicker and better.

Healthy Living, Sports and Exercise:

'*We Parisians walk fast*' was the remark that brought to my attention the effort put in by the French people and even the government to encourage healthy living. The streets of Paris are such that they encourage cycling activities, long walks, morning Runs and other sporting activities. This culture transcends all through France and CY university caught the vibe!

I have never been one to be very open to Sports activities let alone participate in them but being here in France has changed that for me. Now, I get motivated and challenged to be physically fit so much that I registered for archery lessons at the community sports Centre. I kid you not, this has been a whole new world of fun experience for me. At first, it was a bit challenging communicating with the locals due to language barrier but as I improved in learning the French language, it became easier and more fun. Why Archery? One might ask; it is a sport which requires a lot of focus, calmness and stealth to be able to hit your target. These are soft skills that I think is required in life to be able to achieve set out goals. Of course, as expected when I first started out, I couldn't even hit a target but with practice and focus, I became better. Now, I apply this approach to other situations in life and it keeps getting better.

Thus, not only have I been able to achieve healthy living through sports, but equally apply the subtle lessons to life.



Multi-culturalism:

Multi-culturalism has been very pre-dominant in France and it came as a pleasant surprise to me. The French have successfully shown that multi-culturalism is a tool for unity and integration rather than a threat to the local culture. One unique way this message has been conveyed is by hosting the just concluded 2024 Olympic Games which I participated in fully in my own little way in the Golf Sport tournaments.



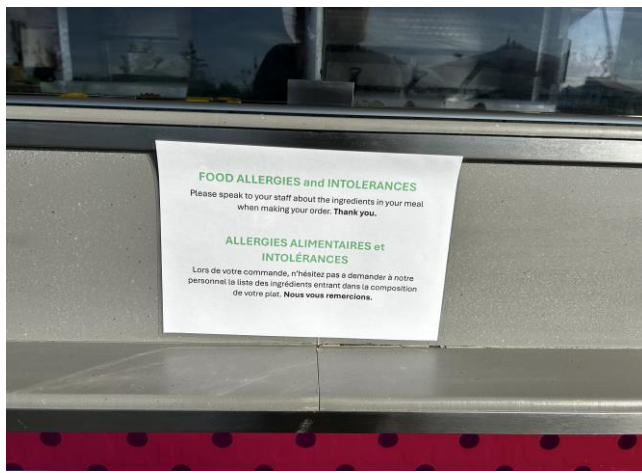
Here, I was part of the team that ensured that all the guests present on the Golf course had something to eat, drink and have a pleasant time watching the games.



So much thought and organization went into the planning of this activity and competence remained the watch word. Ranging from the arrival of the groceries, the

storage of the food items to ensure its freshness, to the logistics / technicalities involved in actually preparing the food.

I never thought that the act of serving people could require so much grit but during the Olympics, I was proved wrong. On a daily basis, I catered to the nourishing needs of at least 30,000 people serving them food such as hotdogs, French Fries, Chicken, Burger, drinks, water (still and sparkling), handled the tiller which was only Visa Compliant, ensured that those with food allergies got their specific required order and doing this all while remaining calm, composed and happy (whew!). The quality of the food was at its best as we had food inspectors going round all the booths on the whole golf course inspecting the food served. Beyond serving the meals, the most important thing for me was ensuring that at my booth, the guests had a nice experience and left smiling with food in their hands.



In the course of this service, I met and interacted with people from diverse ethnicities – Americans, British, Cameroonians, Indians, Nigerians, people from everywhere and it was interesting for me because through my interactions with them, I realized that they each had very unique experiences of the games and the Parisian culture as a whole.

Waste Disposal:

Proper waste Disposal I have come to know, is a huge part of the French culture. This is evident in homes, public places and was equally pronounced at the Olympics. In line with the United Nations SDG goals and in a bit to conserve energy and combat global warming, the waste disposal culture in France is such that even a layman can understand thus, curbing unnecessary littering of the environment and keeping it clean.

At the Olympics, almost at every turn, waste disposal bins were available for use. These bins were carefully labelled and regularly emptied even as the games were on-going. For me at the serving booth, it was particularly important to separate each waste for disposal at the end of each day's games as it would have been improper not to do so.



CONCLUSION:

Throughout my internationalization journey, I would say that my experiences in the last one year in France has surpassed my expectations, teaching me lifelong lessons and birthing the impacts in my daily activities. The most important lesson of them all being acceptance; acceptance of self and acceptance of others.

I do not know what the future holds but with all these lessons acquired so far, I know that I am better equipped to face the world as I journey through life.