



EUUCI **PORTFOLIO**

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MY UPBRINGING IN SOUTH AFRICA:

Growing up in the northern suburbs of Cape Town, I was constantly surrounded by cultural and linguistic diversity. I attended a large primary school with five English classes and three Afrikaans ones, but most of my everyday interactions were with Afrikaans-speaking classmates. As a first-language Afrikaans speaker, this environment felt familiar, but it also subtly reminded me of how language shapes who we connect with most easily. We also learned isiXhosa at school, and what started as a subject soon became something I used playfully and meaningfully in everyday life. I would often chat in isiXhosa with our housekeeper, and later, even with petrol attendants when I got my driver's license. Seeing how people's faces lit up when I made the effort to speak their language showed me how deeply language can build trust, break barriers, and create a sense of belonging.

Coming to Stellenbosch University was another shift. While my high school experience had been relatively homogenous, university introduced me to peers from all over South Africa and beyond. I formed deep friendships with people whose lives and perspectives were very different from mine. Looking back, I realise how each step of my upbringing has added to a growing understanding that identity is layered, and that being South African means being part of a constant negotiation between cultures, languages, and lived experiences.

Over time, I've realised that language is far more than a tool for communication - it is also a gateway to empathy, connection, and inclusion. This experience opened my eyes to how powerful even a few words in someone else's language can be. It made me more curious and intentional in learning greetings in other South African languages like Sotho and Zulu, not just Xhosa. Small efforts like these often create unexpectedly meaningful moments. I no longer see linguistic or cultural differences as barriers; I instead see them as opportunities for deeper understanding. And where I once thought that people from different backgrounds might be too different to relate to, I now know that shared humanity, humour, and kindness matter far more than any language divide.

INTERCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS IN AUSTRALIA:

A key intercultural experience that reshaped my view of global citizenship took place when I travelled to Australia with my family to visit relatives in 2017. It was my first time engaging for an extended period in a different English-speaking country, and although I could speak the language, it wasn't the one I used at home. Afrikaans is my first language, and in the beginning, I found it challenging to express myself in English constantly, but after a few weeks, I even caught myself thinking in English. That shift made me realise how language influences not only communication, but also how we experience and adapt to a space.

I recall a moment when my Afrikaans-speaking grandmother would say things like “we must go to the store” or “we must pack this,” which my Australian cousin found unusual. I eventually realised this was a direct translation from Afrikaans - “ons moet” - whereas in natural English, we'd usually say “we should.” It was a small linguistic detail, but it revealed how language and culture are deeply intertwined. I also became fascinated by how much local slang was used - like “sunnies” for sunglasses and “arvo” for afternoon - and how even physical environments reflected cultural difference.

From my cousin's perspective, I imagine it was strange to hear us speak with our Afrikaans South African accents that felt unfamiliar to her. I often had to pause conversations to ask her to explain certain Australian slang or cultural references. While she was always willing to do so, I now realise that it might have been frustrating at times, especially when our pace of understanding didn't always match. Similarly, she may have found some of our behaviours confusing, like our grandmother's persistence in using phrases like “we must go now” when in her mind, there was no rush. I learned the importance of patience and truly listening, not just waiting for my turn to speak, but listening to really understand. This experience shifted my mindset: now, when someone speaks differently to me, I try to approach it with curiosity and openness instead of assumptions or frustration.



This experience also taught me that cultural difference exists even within shared language. I realised how deeply language affects identity and connection, and that true intercultural understanding means paying attention to the subtle, everyday details, like how we phrase things or interpret social norms.

One of the key differences I became aware of during my time in Brisbane was how everyday living is shaped by place and environment. I noticed this most clearly in the way homes were designed and used. Many houses in Brisbane are built on wooden stilts with lightweight panels, allowing for ventilation and adaptation to the warm climate, which contrasted sharply with the solid brick homes I was used to growing up in South Africa. This difference made me more aware of how climate and lifestyle influence not only architecture, but daily routines and ways of living.

Beyond the physical environment, I also became conscious of how these differences extended into social behaviour and communication. Even though my cousin and I were raised by mothers from the same household, our day-to-day experiences, speech patterns, and ways of interacting had developed quite differently. Observing this helped me understand that shared family roots do not necessarily result in shared cultural experiences.

This experience reinforced for me that cultural difference can exist even within a shared language. It highlighted how identity and connection are shaped through subtle, everyday practices, and that meaningful intercultural understanding requires attentiveness to these small but significant details, such as how we phrase things or interpret social norms.



*Example of the houses in
Brisbane, Queensland*

TRAVELING THROUGH EUROPE:

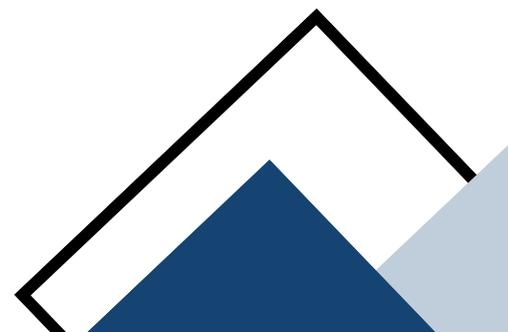
Reflecting on my time in Australia, I now see how valuable that experience was, not just personally, but in shaping the way I approach cultural difference and communication. Choosing to spend time with my family overseas was a deliberate step toward understanding where I come from and how culture evolves across borders. Immersing myself in their daily life helped me become more observant, adaptable, and curious about how others live. That awareness now influences the way I engage with people from diverse backgrounds and has deepened my appreciation for the subtle differences that shape identity and connection. It was a reminder that growth often starts with the decision to step into unfamiliar spaces and really listen.



MY CONTIKI ADVENTURE ACROSS EUROPE:

After hearing great feedback from a friend, I decided to join a two-week Contiki tour through Europe in 2024, visiting France, the Netherlands, Germany, and Italy. Contiki is a group travel company for 18–35-year-olds, designed for solo travellers who want to explore the world in a group setting. The trip was dynamic and full of surprises, offering meaningful moments of growth along the way. Our trip leader was a kind woman from Germany, and most of the people on the trip were from Australia. At first, I was nervous to meet everyone, but what I quickly realised was that everyone was there with the same goal: to explore, to connect, and to learn from one another.

I met people from across the world, including a woman from Texas named Abby, who shared stories about her life in Fort Worth. We spoke about everything from college culture in the U.S. to the odd little quirks of our hometowns. Despite being strangers, we walked around cities together, shared hotel rooms, and navigated foreign transport systems. It pushed me out of my comfort zone, but I came to understand that when you approach others with trust and openness, meaningful connections can form quickly.



The other travelers on the trip were warm and welcoming. Interestingly, my earlier experiences with my cousin in Brisbane helped me connect with the Australians in the group specifically - understanding their slang, accents, and even being able to share some insights about Australian culture made conversations easier and often more fun. A few of them even invited me to visit again, suggesting places like Perth or Adelaide next time.

Throughout the trip, I encountered several moments of cultural and linguistic contrast. Sometimes I struggled to express myself perfectly in English, or I had to pause to ask what a slang word meant. One funny surprise was during a biking tour in Munich when I found out our guide was from Johannesburg. Speaking to another South African reminded me how comforting it can be to return to familiar sounds and languages, even when you are thousands of kilometres from home. Another fascinating moment was in Amsterdam, where I noticed I could understand bits of Dutch thanks to my Afrikaans background. Yet, I also realised how distinct the two languages truly are. Language similarity doesn't automatically mean cultural similarity, and that nuance stuck with me.

After the Contiki tour, I spent a week with family friends in the UK - first in Cambridge and later near Manchester and in the Lake District. I'd met them through my Australian relatives, and once again, I saw how global friendships can weave together across generations and continents. In Cambridge, I bonded with a girl my age whose British slang and accent felt surprisingly familiar - she even used the word "hectic," which we say all the time in South Africa. One afternoon, we went punting on the River Cam, a classic Cambridge activity that involves navigating a flat-bottomed boat using a long pole.

At a traditional dinner in Manchester, we ate Yorkshire puddings and lamb, and I was struck again by how food, like language, holds so much cultural memory. Unlike my traditional Afrikaner upbringing where the woman usually does the cooking, here the husband took charge of preparing almost the entire meal. It was interesting to see this different family dynamic, especially since my father occasionally helps in the kitchen but isn't as hands-on. It made me realise how easily we assume our own family dynamics are the norm, and how everyday routines can reflect broader cultural expectations without us consciously thinking about them.

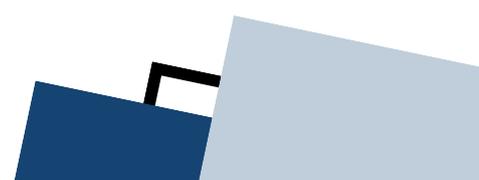
As I immersed myself in British customs and rituals, I became increasingly aware that every country, no matter how developed or historically rich, has its own assumptions and blind spots. This stood out to me in a subtle way during high tea at Fortnum & Mason in London. The experience celebrated a wide range of teas inspired by different regions and cultures across the world, yet these influences were largely presented within a distinctly British narrative. As a marketing student with a strong interest in ethical representation, this prompted me to reflect on how cultural contributions can become absorbed into national traditions without much visible acknowledgement of their origins.

It was not something overtly problematic, but it highlighted how easily global influences can be normalised and depoliticised, and how important recognition and context are in shaping respectful cultural exchange. Through these varied encounters, I learned to suspend assumptions and approach others with curiosity and respect. Whether navigating slang misunderstandings or bonding over shared experiences, I gained a richer appreciation of how culture lives in language, behaviour, and humour. Being immersed in other cultures also made me reflect on my own values, behaviours, and assumptions.

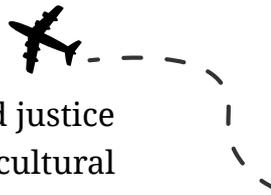
HOW MY UNDERSTANDING OF GLOBAL CITIZENSHIP EVOLVED:

Earlier this year, I enrolled in a Global Citizenship online course through Stellenbosch University. The course explored what it means to be a responsible and engaged global citizen in today's interconnected world. When I began the course, I understood the term mainly as cultural awareness. While this is still true, my understanding has deepened significantly. Through learning about concepts such as intercultural competence, identity and global citizenship, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), I came to see global citizenship not just as awareness, but as action - a commitment to justice, inclusion, and shared responsibility.

Activities like the personal and social identity wheel encouraged me to reflect on how my identity is shaped by my background, privileges, language, and lived experiences. It made me more aware of how these elements affect how I see the world and how others may perceive me. The module on intercultural competence taught me the importance of developing skills like empathy, perspective-taking, and openness - not just for traveling abroad, but in everyday life.



There were discussions during the course that made me rethink my own background and privilege, especially in relation to language, access, and education. For example, when we spoke about identity and the personal & social identity wheel, I began to reflect on how growing up as a white South African comes with invisible privileges, like the expectation that people will accommodate my language or cultural norms. Even small moments, like someone in the class explaining how their accent made them feel judged, or how they had to work twice as hard to prove themselves, made me pause and reconsider how easy it can be to take certain forms of respect or access for granted. These conversations pushed me to be more self-aware and intentional about listening, sharing space, and challenging assumptions, especially in intercultural settings.



Writing about the SDGs also challenged me to think about sustainability and justice in more systemic ways. I began to see global citizenship as not only about cultural exchange, but also about being aware of inequities and actively working toward inclusive solutions, whether locally or globally. Throughout the course, I realized that global citizenship is not a destination but a mindset - one rooted in curiosity, humility, and a willingness to keep learning. Today, I value empathy and critical thinking as essential traits of a global citizen, along with the courage to examine my own identity and engage respectfully with others. This course helped me move from theory to lived understanding, grounded in both self-reflection and real experiences.

Moving forward, I am committed to actively applying the principles I have learned by continuously expanding my intercultural competence and engaging in meaningful dialogue across differences. Strategically, I plan to seek out opportunities for cross-cultural collaboration, both professionally and personally, and to remain mindful of my own privileges and biases in these interactions. I also intend to contribute to sustainable and inclusive initiatives within my community, aligning my actions with the broader SDG's. Ultimately, I see global citizenship as an ongoing practice - one that requires deliberate reflection, empathy, and purposeful action to create positive change locally and globally.

