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Topic proposal for Extended Inquiry Project

"If you want to dispossess a people, the simplest way to do it is to tell their story, and start with 'secondly'..."

- ***Mourid Al Baghouti***

In layman terms, stereotypes are assumptions, generalizations regarding a group of people's character and attributes. In modern society, we battle stereotypes everyday. Trying to correct assumptions that people outside of our culture, society or background make about us. Stereotypes are extremely powerful instruments of representation and are almost always believed wholeheartedly by people who do not have any contradictory information. The power of stereotypes are so extensive that even when provided with information or representation that contradicts this stereotype, people and groups resist changing their opinion or acknowledging that the stereotypes, rather than reckoning with the fact that there cannot be one accurate assumption for a people, people outside of this culture, background or people will intentionally

resist this knowledge and continue to stereotype people. So how come representations have so much power? **Where do stereotypes get their power from anyway?**

Below is a link to a Ted Talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie- a Nigerian-American Novelist and one of my role models, this Ted talk inspired my Extended Inquiry Project Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Ted Talk, 2009

In the Ted Talk, she talks about a concept she has chosen to dub "the danger of a single story" in which she uses her own journey as an International student in the United States from Nigeria to draw attention to the power of representation and the danger of misrepresentation. An analysis I strongly identify with as well because I am also a Nigerian getting an education in the United States. I will not spend more lines relating what it is in her Ted Talk, but I will begin my inquiry into stereotypes, not from novels and the art of storytelling as Chimamanda does, but from the media.

The Media(the news in particular) has always had freedom to present information as they please and interpret people, places and situations however they see fit. I imagine International News prides itself on reporting information and events from all around the world in a timely manner,without bias and misinterpretation. However, I think it's unfortunate to say that I don't think I have encountered another media source as talented at misinterpretation as they are. If there is a political debate on news channels regarding the potential presidential candidates in the

2020 elections, in the background of the newscaster, there is the gleaming white house and its perfectly groomed rose bushes or perhaps the Statue of Liberty proclaiming the long and (mostly) successful history of the United States, maybe it's even the gleaming Manhattan skyline or the Washington monument. But when it's time to share some(especially negative) news about Nigeria, CNN takes the time to find the dingiest, dirtiest, poorest streets in Nigeria to be in the background while reporting the news, not to mention what I call the famous "oh no, backward poor, suffering, dirty Africans!" look that all-not just CNN- newscasters seem to have mastered.

This representation doesn't only occur with negative news. When West Africans are found winning nobel prizes and other international accolades international news has very little to say about it . On the other hand, when there is a disease outbreak, like the Ebola Virus in 2015, or some email scammer or oil spill they have plenty to say. It may seem that this is a microscopic issue to be making a big deal about, that we all know how news stations make things bigger than they are, but, recall, that in some parts of the world where people have almost no contact with foreigners or foreign culture, this misrepresentation from the media is all they have. Dirty, suffering, backward, poor, illiterate people dying from AIDS with no sense of civilization.

This is exactly why people remember countries like Nigeria as the "failed state" and "professional scammers" rather than the most educated immigrant group in the United States generating millions of dollars for the country. For some perspective, watch these two links when two different things happened. When a travel ban was imposed on the Federal Republic of Nigeria by the Trump administration in 2020, [Trump administration travel ban](#)

And when some Nigerian scammers were arrested In Texas for fraud

,Nigerian scammers in four states caught

 notice how the news keeps highlighting the fact that they are Nigerian like that somehow

explains everything.

I will not deny that NIgeria and even Africa at large are developing nations with image

problems. but like Chimamanda said in her Ted Talk, "the problems with stereotypes is not that

they are untrue, but rather that they are incomplete." Representations like those can really go a

long way in making or breaking impressions. So with that in mind is it really shocking when

educated people say to me "African? Really? But you speak English so well! It must have taken

you so long to learn the language!" I am in fact multilingual, but the official language of the

Federal Republic of Nigeria is English Language (U.K). I have spoken English all my life and

it's rather belittling to think that I may have struggled to learn English because I am African.

A one sided portrayal of an entire continent, country, culture, gender, race does a lot of harm, it

makes an entire continent seem distant, backward and not at par (at least socially) with western

civilizations, it encourages stereotypes, assumptions, ignorance and worst of all it builds bridges,

not walls between people and between cultures.

I have many questions regarding modern stereotypes,

1. Where are stereotypes even from? Who started the concept?

2. What kind of intercultural/interracial/intersexual/intercontinental/international havoc do stereotypes wreak?

3. Why is representation(read misrepresentation) so powerful?

4. Most importantly, is this damage reversible?

5. If so, how can the damage be reversed?

6. Are there any examples of reversed stereotypes?

7. How do stereotyped people feel about stereotypes?

Next steps

- Find out about stereotypes, their origin and the degree of power they have in shaping image in the modern world.
- Achieve this using academic and non academic sources like movies, tv interviews etc.

Citations.

- **Chronicle News article,Casimir, Jan 12, 2018.**

  https://www.chron.com/news/article/Data-show-Nigerians-the-most-educated-in-the-U-S-1600808.php