

Normalizing Inclusion

The Singled Story

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By exploring the concept of “normalizing inclusion” within a society torn apart by a conflict between two people who share a language but differ on identity, I will outline the single story of the locals of Kigali and the expatriates returning to the city. The goal is to examine what it is about identity that has put a barrier between the locals and the expatriate returnees in the aftermath of the conflict. To further grasp the idea of inclusion, I will make the comparison between exclusion on the Boulder campus to exclusion in Rwanda which will include yet another look into the single story of international students on the Boulder campus. The key piece of this paper will be identity and the importance it plays socially.

During her appearance on Ted Talks (2009), Chimamanda Adichie introduces the idea of a single story and the dangers of a single story. She says that “single stories create stereotypes. The problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue; it is that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story.” Given the theme Normalizing Inclusion, single stories are detrimental to the progress of inclusion. This essay will explore the concept and potential of “normalizing inclusion” within a society torn apart by a conflict between two people who speak the same language but differ on physical identity. I will outline the single story of the locals of Kigali and the expatriates returning to the city. In order to better understand the role of identity in the greater society, I will compare exclusion on the Boulder campus to exclusion in Kigali, Rwanda. It is important to keep in mind that I am in no way saying Kigali and Boulder are comparable in all aspects. I am specifically speaking about my experiences in both societies.

The single story often told about a local in Kigali depends on the identity of that individual. If you’re Tutsi like my family, the single story begins with how you survived the genocide. If you’re a Hutu, the single story is your involvement in the genocide. It has been a little over fifteen years since the genocide against the Tutsis but the road to reconciliation has been long and painful for both sides involved. In Kigali, there is an unspoken attempt to move forward and reconcile but the process gets held back when news of unrest in the rural areas reaches the city. The commonality in these single stories is that it is focused around the same event. The difference is that the single story for a Tutsi in Kigali is a constant reminder of the atrocities committed against them and the loss of loved ones while for Hutus it is the fear of living the rest of their lives in judgment for these atrocities, especially for those who did not partake in the slaughtering of thousands of Tutsis. The problem with these differences is that the single story for Tutsis keeps them victims and does not allow them to heal and get over the

devastation. With this, fears of another conflict may arise. Neither side wants to openly address these fears due to the vulnerable state that the country is still in but the separation is still very much apparent.

The reconciliation process has allowed many expatriates living in Diaspora to return. The expatriates returning to Rwanda have inherited the single story of privilege because they have lived and studied abroad and therefore automatically fall under the elite group of Rwandans. There's some truth to the returnees being privileged due to the experience they bring back from the more developed countries but speaking from experience, this story fails to recognize that some returnees do not fit into the elite group. They come back after years apart from their families and friends not realizing how developed Rwanda has become and once again they are consumed into a competitive society. Some take advantage of these privileges and succeed while others are torn between success and social status. It can be a true test to one's values as well. There are those returnees who strive to remain in the elite society, making this single story hard to revise and determines the fate for the rest of the returnees. This story is problematic because it is creating a barrier between the locals and expatriates. This barrier does not allow room for integration because many locals cannot afford to socialize with the returnees.

I recently returned to Rwanda and spent three months in Kigali. While socializing this word 'fresh meat' was often used about me referring to the fact I was the new American girl in town. This term immediately set me apart as a foreigner and an uneasy feeling of being excluded resurfaced. Being a student on the Boulder campus with an international background, the most significant single story told is that I am an immigrant who migrated to America due to political unrest in my native homeland, "a single story of catastrophe" as Chimamanda Adichie puts it. There is an uneasy feeling and negative connotation that comes with this single story. My story

is complicated but it gets significantly reduced on this campus because it does not fit the status quo in the same way my single story in Kigali did not fit the status quo of what it means to be a local. The reality is that I was adopted by an American family but still very much in touch with my biological family. I am an American citizen and a Rwandan citizen. What my fellow students fail to understand about my story, is the mere fact that there is nothing single about it. Both cultures play major roles in my everyday life. Being an American has opened so many doors and opportunities while being Rwandese has subsequently allowed my peers to be open-minded of other cultures and more importantly, they have become accepting of difference.

Adichie concludes her talk on the positives of stories by stating that “stories can also be used to empower and to humanize”. When a society is in the midst of reconciliation, this is the time to be inclusive of all the stories and soon enough inclusion will become the norm. For a society that fights to uphold the status quo, exclusion becomes normal. In order to normalize inclusion in these societies, stories need to be told truthfully and completely. In truth and completion is where stories are better understood. With understanding, society can begin to break down these barriers we have created.

Work Cited

Chimamanda, Adichie, writ. *The Danger of a Single Story*. YouTube, Web. 16 Nov 2011.
<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg>>.