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Identity and Context

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IDENTITY & CONTEXT

Prejudice Awareness

Societies across the globe are comprised of countries with different ethnic, religious or cultural groups and sometimes these groups feel like they do not fit together. This may be due to historical, colonial legacy or more recent events. This leads to tension which in turn may lead to conflicts.

Identity based conflicts are hard to manage as identities are complex. We are often aware of the aspects of our identities that are targeted by a dominant group in society. We are hence predisposed to be prejudiced and hold biases towards groups of people we haven't interacted with beyond a certain level. Our identities are not static, we negotiate them on a daily basis. Our identities as a member of a group can be challenged or threatened at the individual level, in a one - on - one interaction with a member of the dominant group just as easily as the entire group we belong to, can be challenged or threatened at the national or international level.

The reason why need to learn about identity and aware of prejudices is to help us manage our differences and emerging conflicts. Being aware of your own identity, understanding what this identity means to you and learning how to accept others' identity are essential components of conflict prevention and significant considerations when managing conflicts.

In the Nature of Prejudice, Gordon Allport (1958) observes that prejudice can be seen as a series of increasingly more serious actions ranging from simple acts of bias to avoidance, exclusion, physical violence and genocide. If we look at examples of genocide in the 20th century, we can see how acts of bias can escalate to genocide over a period of just a few years. Observing how bias can escalate reminds us why it is important for individuals to address seemingly harmless acts of bias when they occur.

General Assumptions Regarding Prejudice (Cotton, 1993)

- Prejudice is learned and can be unlearned
- An effective method of addressing prejudice is to focus on the self and then to explore similarities and differences between groups
- People who feel good about themselves do not need to denigrate others
- Facts alone do not lead to improved intergroup relations. This requires education focusing on cooperative learning and critical thinking.



#defyhatenow workshop in Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement Uganda, 2018



SOCIAL IDENTITY WHEEL

The Social Identity Wheel is an activity that encourages students to identify and reflect on the various ways they identify socially, how those identities become visible or more keenly felt at different times, and how those identities impact the ways others perceive or treat them.

The worksheet prompts students to fill in various social identities (such as race, gender, sex, ability disability, sexual orientation, etc.) and further categorize those identities based on which matter most in their self-perception and which matter most in others' perception of them. The wheels can be used as a prompt for small or large group discussion or reflective writing on identity.

Social Identity Wheel (adapted from “Voices of Discovery”)

Image description:

The chart below features a circle that is separated into 11 sections.

Each section is labeled: (starting at the top and moving clockwise around the circle) ethnicity; socio-economic status; gender; sex; sexual orientation; national origin; first language; physical, emotional, developmental (dis)ability; age; religious or spiritual affiliation; race.

In the center of the circle, there are five numbered prompts:

- (1) Identities you think about most often
- (2) Identities you think about least often
- (3) Your own identities you would like to know more about
- (4) Identities that have the strongest effect on how you perceive yourself
- (5) Identities that have the greatest effect on how others perceive you.

Citations: Adapted for use by the Program on Intergroup Relations and the Spectrum Center, University of Michigan. Resource hosted by LSA Inclusive Teaching Initiative, University of Michigan (<http://sites.lsa.umich.edu/inclusive-teaching/>).



IDENTITY & CONTEXT [I]

Constructed and Open Identities in the Fog of War and Peace

Socio-Political and Historical Context of Hate-Speech in South Sudan

Introduction by Roman Deckert

The people of South Sudan are suffering one of the gravest contemporary humanitarian crisis globally, since major armed conflicts erupted in 2013. About 2 million people have been internally displaced, while more than 1.5 million fled to neighbouring countries, mainly Uganda, Kenya and Sudan. Altogether, some 6 million citizens – out of an estimated total population of 10-12 million – are in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, with famine in some parts of the country officially declared by the UN. Western diplomats estimate that more than 100,000 people have been killed since nationwide fighting started. Though violent conflict does not constantly rage all over the country, most places have been severely affected at one point in the five years since independence, and only a few areas have been spared. In a particularly alarming escalation, the Equatorial region has become a major flashpoint of large-scale violence since 2016, raising international warnings against genocidal actions. Other areas, like Jonglei, were already suffering heavily from recurring massacres against civilians by armed forces before 2013.

“

The vastly overwhelming majority of South Sudanese just want peace

”

Semantics Matter Greatly

The extremely complex and inter-woven conflicts in South Sudan defy simplistic explanations. Yet, such clichés still dominate most media reporting, both inside and outside the country, thus mutually reinforcing one another in a feedback loop. All too often, headlines about “ethnic violence” and “tribal conflict” imply ethnicity as the root-cause of the bloodshed. Many articles – even those published by highly respected international media like the BBC and The Guardian – introduce the conflict as one between “President Kiir, a Dinka, and former VP Machar, a Nuer”, thus suggesting two clear-cut camps divided along ethnic lines. Such handling of news gives an image of South Sudanese as tribalist savages who are – as it were – destined to fight one another. This is effectively a racist logic, which only deepens and reinforces existing divisions.

The idealisation and glorification of trigger-happy warlords as martyrs and heroes should be considered as one of the root-causes of South Sudan’s conflicts. The bloody battles in South Sudan are not only fought with military means, but are equally battles over narratives and identities. Semantics matter hugely, as even one syllable may make all the difference, e.g. between Southern Sudan and South Sudan (which are in fact two entirely separate countries). In that sense, it is also wrong to call the current conflict a “civil war”, because it implies a fight between civilians whereas in fact it is a conflict between warlords. There is no doubt that the vastly overwhelming majority of South Sudanese just want peace, therefore the term “civil war” is totally misleading.

These conflicts between the so-called elites can only be understood by taking a deep look at their historical background and by distinguishing between myth and reality.

“

It is necessary to critically question these dominant narratives in order to gain a deeper understanding and contextualisation for the phenomenon of hate speech, its origins and its role as an obstacle to a lasting and just peace in South Sudan and neighbouring regions.

”



#defyhatenow Street Theatre performance in Juba, 2017

Building state institutions and a national identity has been at the core of international diplomacy to assist South Sudan. This may appear plausible, although in practice the concept has evidently failed. This peak time of South Sudanese unity and nationalism should serve as a warning not to uncritically support the promotion of a national identity to overcome tribalist identities.

While it may be necessary in a world of nation states to create some national cohesion and stability for peace, one should be aware that the creation of a “We” is bound to result in the exclusion of “They”. In this context, it should also be remembered that xenophobic sentiments against traders and workers from East African countries, which had given shelter to millions of Southern Sudanese refugees before, were sharply on the rise at that time of national unity in South Sudan.

The de facto collapse in July 2016 of the power-sharing agreement between Kiir and Machar, which was brokered by IGAD in 2015 and only reluctantly accepted, was largely due to the distrust between the warring parties and, particularly, about the lack of resources necessary to continue feeding the elite political patronage system. Under these circumstances, the spread of online messages escalated, directly contributing to a specific incident that triggered the explosion of violence around the 5th anniversary of independence, when government and rebel spokespersons spread false information via Facebook with direct repercussions on a conflict event.¹

Since then, a number of researchers have thoroughly examined and established the key dynamics of hate and dangerous speech in the context of the conflicts in South Sudan.² High level officials and institutions of the UN have also recognised that online media, especially Social Media, get “weaponized as a tool for mass atrocities.”³ And they do so by deliberately encouraging and reinforcing the narratives of ethnic polarization.

“ Any peacebuilding campaign must promote far more open identities ”

Any peacebuilding campaign must necessarily counter this narrative of ethnicisation, not by re-enforcing the prevailing narrative of the many South Sudanese tribes, but rather by promoting far more open identities. The call for peaceful coexistence of ethnic groups may sound constructive, yet it is essentially affirming the troubling notion of supposedly clear-cut communities. In reality, identities are much more complex, not least through common inter-marriage bonds over generations.

One obvious way to overcome the politics of identity and the discourse of ethnic affiliations may seem to be to emphasize the national identity as South Sudanese. However, history has shown that this is a slippery slope that can swiftly turn “positive” patriotism into antagonising nationalism of an even larger “us vs. them”.

This is all the more important as South Sudanese peace campaigns must ask difficult questions about the predominant mythology of a very violent recent past. Fully recognising the traumata of decades and centuries of foreign oppression and the overwhelming desire of South Sudanese for independence, a critical review of history is needed in order to prevent it from repeating itself over and over. Cultural heritage has to be recognised – and transformed into a more Open Culture.

Finally, although the military, political and humanitarian situation seems to grow ever more catastrophic, there may be a glimmer of hope in the current fragmentation of the nation, as Alex de Waal sees it: “With neither side able to win a decisive victory, more power is slipping into the hands of increasingly decentralised communities. Ignored by the 2015 agreement, these communities could organise

1. <http://secgovcentre.org/2016/07/facebook-and-social-media-fanning-the-flames-of-war-in-south-sudan/>

2. https://www.buzzfeed.com/jasonpatinkin/how-to-get-people-to-murder-each-other-through-fake-news-and?utm_term=.liMjW5zA8w#.oidqD-0pwBx;

<https://www.pri.org/stories/2017-04-25/online-fake-news-and-hate-speech-are-fueling-tribal-genocide-south-sudan>

3. http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2017/06/in_south_sudan_fake_news_has_deadly_consequences.html

themselves and begin to call their leaders to account".⁴

The opinions expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of #defyhatenow.



#defyhatenow social media #PeaceJam & Concert, Juba 2017



HATE SPEECH AWARENESS

Hate speech, as defined by the Council of Europe, covers all forms of expression which spread, incite, promote or justify racial hatred, xenophobia, anti-Semitism or other forms of hatred based on intolerance, including: intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism, discrimination and hostility against minorities, migrants and people of immigrant origin.

With the development of social networks we can all participate online in a variety of ways that range from keeping in touch with your friends and developing new contacts to sharing content and exploring your self-expression. This online space gives us new opportunities: engaging with others for causes that we care for. But we may equally be victims and agents of abuse and human rights violations, among them, hate speech in various forms, and cyberbullying. The online world is not without values either. The online world is not without values, as it does not exist in a vacuum, but rather reflects the society that creates it either. Hate speech is not a new issue on the internet, nor in the struggle for basic human rights, justice and equality for all citizens around the globe. Its online dimension and the potential damage to democratic processes gives us all urgent reasons to act.

⁴<http://www.africapedia.com/2017/08/16/jaw-jaw-war-war-long-suffering-south-sudan/>

Pyramid of Hate

The Pyramid shows biased behaviors, growing in complexity from the bottom to the top. Although the behaviors at each level negatively impact individuals and groups, as one moves up the pyramid, the behaviors have more life-threatening consequences. Like a pyramid, the upper levels are supported by the lower levels. If people or institutions treat behaviors on the lower levels as being acceptable or “normal,” it results in the behaviors at the next level becoming more accepted. In response to the questions of the world community about where the hate of genocide comes from, the Pyramid of Hate demonstrates that the hate of genocide is built upon the acceptance of behaviors described in the lower levels of the pyramid.



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Cycle of Socialization

The Cycle of Socialization helps us understand the way in which we are socialized to play certain roles, how we are affected by issues of oppression, and how we help maintain an oppressive system based upon power. The Cycle is comprised of 3 arrows, 3 circles, and a core center.

Each of these components represents the following:

1. The beginning of the cycle, depicted by the 1st circle, represents the situation into which we were born. We have no control over this. We are also born without bias, assumptions, or questions. We are either “lucky” to be born into a privileged situation or “unlucky” to be born into an underprivileged situation.
2. The 1st arrow represents that fact that our socialization process begins immediately. We are given a pink blanket if we are a girl or a blue one if we are boy. The rules and norms are already in place and we subtly (and in many cases not so subtly) are made aware of the rewards of conforming and the consequences of rebelling.
3. The second circle represents the institutions that help shape our views and beliefs, and help instill within

us prejudice or acceptance.

4. The second arrow represents the way in which the instilling of ideas, beliefs, and behaviors reinforce the cycle of oppression. Behaving differently is not as simply as most of us think. We are rewarded for good behavior – conforming to the norms and standards. By the same token, we are punished for bad behavior – questioning or rebelling against oppressive societal norms.

5. The third circle represents the devastating result upon all of us that this self-perpetuated cycle of oppression produces.

6. The final arrow represents a point at which we all arrive – the results of the cycle. We are forced to make a decision, even if that decision is to do nothing. Doing nothing is the easier choice, especially for those who benefit from the perpetuation of the cycle: we are all victims of the cycle and we are all hurt by it. Oppression hurts the oppressed and the oppressor.

7. And finally, it is the wheel that turns or enables any cycle. At the center or core of the cycle of socialization are fear, misunderstanding, insecurity, confusion, etc.

This handout offers a diagrammatic representation of how social identities such as race, gender, sexuality, and class are constructed and reinforced by socio-cultural interactions and context. It prompts students to reflectively engage with aspects of their own identities and identities they learned about but don't share to consider how their understanding of identities is enforced and how they reinforce or challenge the socio-cultural construction of identities. The activity includes questions for reflection and discussion that will encourage students to recognize the larger social context of identities and how identities are socially constructed and maintained.



Diagram: Cycle of Socialization, Developed by Bobbie Harro (2008)

IDENTITY & CONTEXT [II]

AM I? THE FILM & QUESTIONS OF IDENTITY.

How identity informs opinions in South Sudan.

The conflict in South Sudan is very complex and multilayered, which is evident in the uncertainty of the Peace Agreement, continued economic instability, and overall insecurity.

One contributor to the current conflict is identity; whether through political or tribal affiliation(s), religion or ethnic group, etc. In #defyhatenow meet-ups we explore this theme in discussion with the South Sudanese diaspora. This workbook encourages you to take these questions as a starting point with the group and develop your own perspectives.



Painting by South Sudanese artist Abul Oyay



VIDEO [USB STICK]

"Am I?"

Too African to be American, Too American to be African

<https://youtu.be/Et3crszAXFc>

"Am I The Film " documentary directed by Nadia Sasso.

Women of African descent who live in the United States share their unique stories on identity development and talk about the tensions experienced between their West African and American cultural experiences.

The film raises questions about the challenges of being African in the US, and offers personal perspectives on how these women confront the challenges of identity. Discuss how South Sudanese (in South Sudan and the diaspora) can strive to resolve and understand these questions of identity.

Producer, Writer, and Director: Nadia Sasso (@iamNadiaMarie)

Cinematographer and Editor: Corey Packer (@ovipack88)

www.amithethefilm.com



#defyhatenow Street Theatre performance entertains the audience in Juba



MISTAKEN IDENTITIES PODCAST

Partly inspired by the BBC Reith Lectures 2016 series Mistaken Identities. In these lectures, British-born, Ghanaian-American philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, explores confusions of identity through an examination of four central kinds of identity - creed, country, colour and culture. He argues against a mythical, romantic view of nationhood, saying instead it should rest on a commitment to shared values. Listen to these lectures on the accompanying USB key.

CREED: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07z43ds>

COUNTRY: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b07zz5mf>

COLOUR: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b080t63w>

CULTURE: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b081lkkj>

BBC Reith Lectures: Mistaken Identities 2016
Philosopher and cultural theorist Kwame Anthony Appiah



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

- How would you describe your cultural background and upbringing?
- How do you identify yourself? (age, tribe, race, political, religion, gender?)
- What values and traditions were important to your family and community groups?
- What are the benefits and challenges to identifying with a certain group?
- Examine key aspects of your identity in relation to environment, circumstance & experience
- Layers of identity: Broader perspective vs personal perspective
- Communal/tribe/political/religious/professional identities - blurred across various lines
- Who am I? Who are we?