

## LESSON 4.1

## "SINGLE STORIES" EXAMPLES

***"Misinformation about Africa has become  
a growth industry in the West."  
~Ama Biney***

Think of all of the stereotypical portrayals of Africa in our schoolbooks, television programs and documentaries, the movie industry, the Internet, as well as the print media including the newspapers, magazines, journals and books depicting "Africa" almost as one country instead of a continent of diverse cultures, religions and ethnicities. Or the old documentaries of explorations of the "exotic third world", or depiction of Arabs in Hollywood movies as having predominantly the roles of terrorists, enemies of the state, greedy oil shakes, etc. Such portrayals can lead to racial profiling, hate crimes and discrimination and bullying, which further inflames the already wide-spread xenophobia. There has been, for a long time now, a systematic trend of misrepresenting Africa in the West, and the powerful Western media has been responsible for this.

### **FURTHER THOUGHTS AND REFLECTIONS:**

*Who owns the media (globally and also in your respective country)?*

*How does this influence the content?*

*What motives do media have when deciding on the narrative they would like to push forward?*

When the "protagonists" of such single stories fight back and make their own versions of these "single stories" and project them back as a mirror image to their "narrators", wonderful and exciting results can be seen. Some as parodies, the others as satire, but always very relevant for changing the perspectives of the majority population growing up with such original single stories which are at the very centre of such role-reversal. Below you can witness some examples, which can help you reflect upon the issues raised by the writer Chimamanda Adichie.

- Video: **Festival of the Chicken** (1992): The morals and customs of the "native peoples" of Upper Austria are described by a team of anthropologists from Sub-Saharan Africa in the style of European and American anthropologists in the non-western world. While making the "documentary", they discover new cultural phenomena. The director Wippersberg turns around the research methodology of Western anthropologists of performing ethnological studies, and then popularising them by means of a documentary film. The name of the film derives from the discovery that the protagonist researchers made in his parody, that is, that in this part of the world, the churches are empty and lone buildings, but the locals instead tend to gather in large tents, and drink a yellowish fluid by the liter, while primarily eating chicken and then engaging in a "chicken dance". The researchers thus come to the obvious conclusion that the chicken has taken the religious-sacrificial role of the lamb and has the central role in this European culture.



- Video: **Babakiueria** (also known under the video-title Babakiueria (Barbeque Area)) is a 1986 Australian satirical film on relations between Aboriginal Australians and Australians of European descent. Babakiueria revolves around a role-reversal, whereby it is Aboriginal Australians who have invaded and colonised the fictitious country of Babakiueria, a land that has long been inhabited by white natives, the Babakiuerians. After around 200 years of Aboriginal occupation, white Australians have become a minority. Aboriginal people have assumed power, taken all of the available land and have mostly confined whites to suburban ghettos. They are expected to follow the laws and customs of the colonisers and their lifestyle is seen through the patronizing eyes of the majority culture. The inversion of reality in Babakiueria highlights the unfairness of Australia's past and present Aboriginal policies and the entrenched racism in society. This subversion of normality allows viewers to see what is wrong when one group tries to control and dominate another and questions the fairness of the current power structure in Australia.
- Poster "**We will give you to the Slovenians**": Growing up, the majority of South-East and Central European children (although these traditional prejudices also live on in Western European countries such as Italy, Austria, France and others) including the majority of Slovenian children were hearing songs and proverbs about the Roma minority, referred to as children-stealing Gypsies. One of such proverbs or even threats of a punishment goes: "If you are not behaving, we will give you to the Gypsies!" Authors of the 2005 campaign decided to reverse the saying, picturing a Roma child with captions: "If you misbehave, we will give you to Slovenians!" The poster "Little Gypsy", a product of the advertising agency Lowe Avanta, which was plastered on billboards across Slovenia, not only received considerable attention in the local public, but also provoked offended reactions, and criminal charges were even filed against the authors of the advertisement and the providers of the advertising space. According to the authors, the poster with the Roma boy intended to encourage reflection on intolerance and draw attention to prejudice, to injustice, to show how it is to be put into someone else's shoes.



Photo: Mladina, 2005

### **SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT**

*Find some other examples from your schoolbooks (that you can remember), newspapers or current historical depictions or popular culture representations which contribute to a “danger of a single story”. Explain why they are harmful and problematic. Create a collage of images and titles to create a different story, one that seems more just, accurate and inclusive (refer to the points in HEADS-UP tool to assist you with your brainstorm). Now send your course-colleagues your collage and findings (Google groups), and welcome their contributions as well.*