



## Transforming Stereotypes, Classism, Racism and Misogyny through Social Media

by Kendra Staley (Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia)



### Introduction

Teaching about global issues is rewarding, albeit challenging, when working with English Language Learners (ELLs). Social media can be beneficial in transforming misogyny, racism, classism, and stereotypes. This article outlines how Colombian students used social media to analyze stereotypes in Korea, classism in Kenya, racism in Latin America, and misogyny in Somalia.

### Course Outline

The activities in this article were created for an *Intercultural Communication* (IC) course taught at the Universidad del Norte in Barranquilla, Colombia. This undergraduate English course aims to have students obtain B2 proficiency on the *Common European Framework of Reference*. The course combines language teaching, including all four skills, grammar, and vocabulary, with content-based material. Students are 16-20 years of age, with many coming from wealthy families.

The use of social media is interwoven throughout the course in order to foster critical thinking, challenge perceptions, and engage student interest. Activities are carefully scaffolded to ensure comprehension and active participation.

- (1) First, to start each unit, learners read excerpts of authentic material as homework.
- (2) Second, they watch related videos. For both tasks, they complete comprehension questions and participate in small group discussions.
- (3) Third, additional homework is assigned with input synthesized from responses posted on class blogs related to the topics. Students are then required to comment on each other's blog posts to encourage online discussion. The class blogs promote learner autonomy and enable students to enhance course work with social media. (Refer to the sample class blog on page 11 for further information).
- (4) Fourth, students create videos about aspects of Colombian culture that they are most proud of. This results in them actively claiming the English language as their own.

### Social Media and Language Ownership

The use of social media within content EFL courses gives students the means to deconstruct socially-created categories within their own communities as well as globally. They benefit first

of all by gaining a solid knowledge of different world cultures. They also develop the ability to compare their native culture to other cultures, to critically evaluate and interpret these comparisons, and to apply this knowledge successfully in both verbal and non-verbal communication. Intensive intercultural education seems to be a good way to teach students what tolerance, acceptance, understanding, and respect really mean (Irimia, 2012).

Clearly, as educators, we want our students to have these higher order thinking skills along with compassion and empathy. Social media offers a platform for students first to learn about other cultures and then, to educate others about themselves. Essentially, the use of social media encourages mutual understanding and respect across physical and virtual borders (Jia, 2015).

An important aspect of IC courses is questioning power-dynamics and privilege (Abu, 2011). If learners come from a country with a history of colonization and/or imperialism, there can be resistance to learning specific foreign languages. While most of my students consider English useful as a global language, there is criticism of the USA's economic and political influence throughout the Americas.

A way to respond to this is to transform English language learning from an imperialistic force into a tool for ELLs to teach others about their own cultures and to learn about others – not just dominant countries (Cates, 2016). In this course, students begin by analyzing misogyny in Somalia, racism in Latin America, classism in Kenya and stereotypes in Korea. They then compare these issues to their own cultural context: the Caribbean coast of Colombia.

### Misogyny in Somalia

In class, learners analyze stereotypes as well as socially constructed categories like gender, race and class. To reflect on misogyny, for homework, on the class blog, students watch a *Ted Talk* "Mother and daughter doctor-heroes" detailing the lives of three Somali doctors (a mother and her two daughters) in a refugee camp. Aside from describing the logistics of running the camp, school, and clinic, these women address domestic violence, such as forbidding men to beat their wives, and talk about the strong role of women within the camp and society. Students respond to the video and comment on classmates' posts.

### Racism in Latin America

Denial of racism towards Afro-Latinos is common. With this in mind, I found 3 *Al Jazeera* videos about racism in Latin America: “[Skin Color in the Dominican Republic](#)”, “[Racism in Brazil: Diverse Society Struggles for Harmony](#),” and “[Racism in Ecuador: Minority Community Feels Marginalized](#).” After viewing these, about half the students admitted there is racism against Afro-Latinos, but claimed that it’s not as bad in Colombia. This reaction is natural as we all want to ‘protect’ our self-images by pointing out the faults of others.

For homework on our class blog, students watched “[DiscriminACION en Colombia](#),” about racism in Colombia. They then commented on this in their blogs, where literally all students openly discussed racism in Colombia. This clearly shows the power of social media to broaden students’ views of their country while allowing them to express their opinions. The point of encouraging learners to identify racism in their environment is to help them consider ways to rectify the problem. If people refuse to admit to the existence of discrimination, it will never be eliminated.

### Classism in Kenya

Because of the nature of privilege where, if you have it, you’re unaware of its far-reaching benefits, our students’ high socio-economic status frequently goes unnoticed. To address this overlooked privilege, students watch an *Al Jazeera* video “[The Reluctant Outlaw](#)”. This describes the life of James Kariuki, a *matatu* taxi driver in Nairobi. (See Kairiuki’s [blog](#) about the lives of *matatu* drivers.) After answering questions on this, students then compare negative stereotypes of local *mototaxistas* (motorcycle taxi drivers) to Kenyan *matatu* drivers. One of the students, Loraine Orozco (2013) posted:

*I think that they are discriminated in very similar ways...The cops accuse them of breaking the law because they are Matatu drivers or moto-taxistas. Most people think they're thieves and disrespectful persons. I used to think that due to the fact that in the south of the city you can see a lot of motorcycles violating traffic laws or with a lot of people on board...I think a similar situation happens in Kenya. But that's not okay! We need to stop those stereotypes and start giving people opportunities to succeed.*

Barranquilla is a stratified city with wealthier classes in the north and others in the south. In fact, Colombia has 6 official strata based on where people live. A person’s strata affects every part of their life, from how much they pay for utilities to university fees. Class is a defining factor in Colombia, like race

in the USA. Analyzing class and stereotypes in another cultural context helps students to discuss classism in their own society.

### Stereotypes in Korea

To start this unit, learners watch two videos: “[Korean Stereotypes](#)” about common stereotypes that foreigners have of Koreans and “[Stereotypes about Foreigners in Korea](#)” about images that Koreans have of foreigners. The people in the videos hold up signs that describe untrue stereotypes. In groups, my students make their own signs about stereotypes of Colombians that they disagree with. In groups of 3, they create 6-8 minute videos on Colombian topics such as street vendors, music, public transportation, and graffiti. The medium of student-generated videos in English enables them to refute common stereotypes of Colombia while connecting with the international community.

### Conclusion

Integrating social media has been invaluable in challenging students’ assumptions of others as well as educating the world about them. Hopefully, this approach will be useful to educators when broaching challenging themes in their classes.

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**Sample Class Blog (2014)** <http://uninorteinterculturalcommunications.blogspot.jp>

**Kendra Staley**  
Universidad del Norte, Barranquilla, Colombia  
<kstaley327@gmail.com>