Stereotypes: A Theoretical Hypothesis

S. N. Balagangadhara

Research Centre Vergelijkende Cultuurwetenschap

Apotheekstraat 5

Universiteit Gent

9000 Gent Belgium

Tel.: 09-264.9371

Fax: 09-264.9483

E-mail: balu@UGent.be

Abstract

Research on stereotypes has long been dominated by political correctness and the fight against social prejudice. Only recently has social psychology raised scientific issues such as the durability of stereotypes and their role in human cognition. Even here, the problem of the identity or structure of stereotypes is not tackled. We take classic examples to argue that stereotypes appear as descriptions of the world, but, lacking quantification, they are not. Adding quantifiers make a stereotype either trivially false or trivially true. What are stereotypes and why do they persist? We show that stereotypes are linguistic statements that formulate heuristics for social interaction. Rather than describe people, they transmit instructions to human beings for going about with each other. Some consequences of this hypothesis are: stereotypes are neither true nor false; stereotypes are also present in personal relationships and self-understanding; and that they are dominant in the Western culture.

One of the pernicious effects of the culture of political correctness is its debilitating impact on scientific research. Nowhere is this more obvious than in social psychology, more specifically regarding stereotype research. For more than a quarter century after the Second World War, most social psychologists were inclined to look at stereotypes merely as expressions of social prejudice. The scientifically flawed study of Adorno, et.al., set the "norms" for research by making claims about people using stereotypes.[1] Such people had authoritarian personalities; inflexible and cognitively rigid, these bigots belonged to the cognitively inferior specimens of the human race. Both in public life and in other domains of social sciences and humanities, false claims about stereotypes still rule unchallenged. It is a matter of established consensus in the academic community and elsewhere that one 'ought not' to use stereotypes, especially when it comes to framing public or state policies or in conducting discussions about the 'minority groups'.[2]

Even social psychology has not fully freed itself from the notion of stereotypes implied in the above consensus.[3] It is only during the last decade or so that the social psychologists are raising issues about the durability of stereotypes and their role in the human cognitive makeup.[4] Their staple diet of stereotypes[5] invariably includes such examples as "lawyers are extroverts" and "librarians are introverts". How do we know that these statements are examples of stereotypes? If they are not, any psychological research into these examples will not tell us much about stereotypes, whatever else they might tell us.

Of course, one could provide a definition of the word 'stereotype' in such a way that it enables one to construe the above examples as instances of stereotypes.[6] Such a definitional move, however, is not of much scientific interest; it merely clarifies the language-use of the author in question. Perhaps, this constitutes a major weakness of the current state of research into stereotypes, viz. the presence of a multiplicity of definitions. With a just a little bit of exaggeration, one could say that there are as many definitions of the word 'stereotype' as there are major researchers in the domain.[7]

Stereotypes might involve making use of a 'general category', but not all general categories are stereotypes.[8] Stereotypes might ascribe a property to an individual because of his membership in a group. However, there is nothing significant to this ascription because it is logically valid ('if some individual belongs to a set then that individual has all the properties of the set'). Besides, every statement ('Belgians carry identity cards') that involves the above principle becomes a stereotype. In fact, each of the definitions of the word generates more problems than it solves and does not help with the problem of identifying stereotypes.

This, then, is the first problem: *how to identify stereotypes*? That is, under what conditions could we identify a statement in a natural language (say English) as a stereotype? One way

of answering the problem without succumbing to the temptation of providing explicit definitions would be to begin with best examples of stereotypes. Here too, political correctness plays a role. One cannot choose those examples that are stereotypes by common consensus: "Jews are greedy"; "Blacks are lazy"; "Indians are dishonest"; "Mexicans are filthy"; and such like. Instead, one 'constructs' stereotypes that have a similar surface structure (linguistically speaking) under the assumption that such constructions are, indeed, examples of stereotypes. Such attempts fail: "Ravens are black", "Nuclear explosion emits radiation", "Magnets attract Iron", etc also share a similar surface structure without being stereotypes. So, which properties transform one set of statements into stereotypes and not the other set?

Many social psychologists are condescending in their reply to this question in personal conversations. Stereotypes are applicable only to human beings and one must realize that they are always members of ethnic groups. Apart from being an *ad hoc* fiat, this answer will not do for the simple reason that the demand then is that one has a prior understanding of the nature of human beings, their differences from other 'natural objects', and about the properties of an 'ethnic group' before understanding what stereotypes are. Not only is there no single commonly accepted scientific theory about any of these issues but it is also the case that people use stereotypes without having any such understanding. Surely, this is what requires studying.

Stereotypes and Quantifications

Consider the following statements, which are stereotypes by consensus:

1. "Jews are greedy", "Indians are dishonest", "Blacks are lazy", "Mexicans are filthy" and "Women are irrational".
2. "Germans are efficient" and "Asians are industrious".

These two sets are examples of negative and positive stereotypes both of which are in circulation in certain parts of the world. What makes these statements into stereotypes?

The obvious thing to notice about them is that they appear to belong to the class of statements that describe the world. They *only* appear so and this appearance is misleading because they miss the single most crucial property required of such statements: *they lack quantification.* That is to say, it is not clear how to interpret these statements, if they are taken to describe the world: are they about 'some' or 'all' (respectively, the existential and universal quantifier) of the objects under consideration? Unless quantified, no statement can describe the world.

Is there an implicit quantification in these statements? That is, could one treat these statements the way we treat the expression "Ravens are black"? In the latter case, the quantifiers function as suppressed premises. We can read the statement as saying "(All) Ravens are black". Alternately, it can also be read as saying "(Some) Ravens are black". In either of the two cases, the statement remains true. That is to say, adding quantifiers does not change the truth-value of this statement. Is this also the case with stereotypes? *The answer is a 'no'.*

If we say, "Some Jews are greedy", or add the existential quantifier to the above sets of statements, we get trivially true statements. It is true that some people are greedy, some irrational, some lazy and some filthy. However, none of these properties is the exclusive prerogative of any nation or of any group, no matter how one defines such entities. In other words, adding an existential quantifier gives us statements, which are *always true* of every class of human beings.

The negations of existentially quantified statements that have the form of a scientific law provide us with significant empirical claims, which challenge scientific theories: 'some ravens are not black', 'some magnets do not attract iron', 'some sugar cubes do not dissolve in water', 'some cigarettes are not dangerous' etc. In contradistinction to this, stereotypes, when negated and existentially quantified, provide trivial results: 'some Jews are not greedy', 'some Mexicans are not filthy', 'some Indians are not liars', etc. In other words, existential quantifications of stereotypes (whether negated or not) always result in claims true of every class of human beings.

If we add the universal quantifier, we get the opposite result. "All blacks are lazy" is a false statement because it applies to every black person who has existed, who exists now, and who will ever exist in the future. Such and analogous claims are *always false* of every class of human beings.

Unlike statements like "Ravens are Black", which presuppose the quantifiers, *stereotypes cease to be stereotypes* if they are quantified either universally or existentially. Looked at as linguistic expressions, stereotypes appear to describe the world. They cannot do so without quantification; *quantifying them, however, transforms them into either trivially true or trivially false statements.*

Not only this. Existentially quantified stereotypes are *logical contraries*. That is to say, it is almost trivially true that 'Some Mexicans are filthy' and 'Some Mexicans are not filthy'. To the extent they are logical contraries, both statements cannot be false at the same time. However, with respect to statements like "Ravens are Black", "Nuclear explosions emit radiation", "Magnets attract Iron", the existential quantifications provide us with *logical contradictions*: Some Ravens cannot be black, while some Ravens are black; it is not possible for only some nuclear ex-

plosions to emit radiation and for some others not to do so, etc. In these cases, unless the theories under consideration undergo substantial changes, the claims are contradictory.

Quantifications of the stereotypes change their truth-value. From this, it logically follows that the meaning of stereotypes has changed as well. Therefore, it follows that the statements that we obtain after quantification of the stereotypes are different from the statements that express these stereotypes. The conclusion is inescapable: *quantifications involve linguistic (semantic) transformations of stereotypes*.

Stereotypes and Probabilistic Statements

A rather influential approach to tackling this problem is to look at stereotypes as 'some kind' of probabilistic statements.[9] Its weakness lies in its inability to specify the nature, structure, and the composition of the sample class as well as illumine the probabilistic reasoning used by people in this process. Apart from this, it is also susceptible to the argument that not all probabilistic statements of the same kind are stereotypes.[10]

Could we treat stereotypes as probabilistic statements? The same problems reappear: 'most', 'many', 'majority' and 'some' in statements like "most (many, some, majority) Jews are greedy" can describe the world only if these words are mathematically quantified. Once so quantified, they become empirical statements: "70% of all women drivers in the United States violated traffic rules (during 2000-2005)" is a statement about the world that is not anymore a stereotype, whereas "women are bad drivers" is. Furthermore, such mathematical quantifications require *empirical additions* (about the composition of the sample class, the range and scope of the mathematical quantifiers) to statements that are stereotypes.

There is also another possibility of looking at them as probabilistic statements made with respect to contrast sets: "women are more likely to be irrational than men are"; "Lawyers are more likely to be extroverts than librarians are", etc. This interpretation of stereotypes appears defensible if we assume the presence of *clear contrast sets*: rational men and irrational women, or extrovert lawyers as against introvert librarians. It breaks down in all other cases.

Consider the following amplification of the stereotype "The Dutch are greedy": this stereotype, one could say, partitions the world into the 'non-Dutch' and 'the Dutch'. Then, we appear to get a contrast set: "The Dutch are greedy when compared to the non-Dutch". Two problems arise in this case. The first is that one still has to quantify the statement "The Dutch are greedy". One could say that the comparison already quantifies. It does not; instead, we face the second problem: "when compared to the 'non-Dutch' *only* the Dutch are greedy". As we can ap-

preciate, we would still need to know which of the Dutch people we are talking about; secondly, the phrase 'only' raises even more problems because of the presence of other stereotypes of a similar nature: "Mexicans are filthy" and "Muslim immigrants are filthy"; "Indians are lazy" and "Blacks are lazy". Who is greedier, filthier or lazier? There are no clear contrast sets available to an individual who is familiar, for example, with both the Jews and the Dutch. Are the Dutch greedier than the Jews are? In fact, it becomes even unclear what kind of a probabilistic statement we are talking about: being both Dutch and a Jew, would a Dutch Jew be more likely to be greedy than a French Jew or an American Jew, or merely likely to be greedier than either of the two?

In sum, social psychology has not been able to answer questions about the identification of stereotypes satisfactorily. If the object of study, namely stereotypes, itself escapes the net, how could one build a theory about that object? Consequently, social psychology has not been able to make satisfactory progress in building theory about stereotypes.

The above considerations suggest that there are no implicit quantifications present in stereotypes. The very fact that a discussion is possible about the kind of quantification (universal, existential or probabilistic) tells us that we need to *transform* stereotypes through the process of quantification, if they are to describe the world. By adding quantifiers, one transforms the nature and meaning of these statements. In this sense, s*tereotypes are not descriptions of the world, even though, at first sight, they appear to be exactly that.*

Because stereotypes cannot describe the world unless quantified appropriately, but doing so transforms them into expressions that are not stereotypes, *stereotypes are neither true nor false*. That is, it is not true that "Indians are dishonest"; neither is it false. It has no truth-value at all.

Towards a Hypothesis

As human beings, we act in the world in multiple ways. Of importance to us here are two such ways: the activities of (a) thinking to describe the world and (b) going-about in the world. We do the first by using language – these are statements having truth-values. We learn the second both linguistically and extra-linguistically (for example, learning through imitation). Even though their mechanisms are unclear, we do know that some descriptions of the world, whether theories or stories, enable us to act: we can devise novel experiments to test theories, create new technologies and perform original activities in widely differing circumstances. Assuming this as a fact let us look at the domain of human goings-about. How do linguistic statements help us in this regard?

First, by telling us what there is in the world, such linguistic statements could allow us to devise appropriate actions. We have seen that stereotypes cannot be descriptions of the world. Second, they could take the form of an instruction manual, which tells us about the nature and sequence of actions that have to be executed. Stereotypes are not such explicit instructions for actions either. Third, they could rely on some features of the world to formulate some kind of heuristics for action. (For instance, the statement that 'the quickest way to Brussels is to take a train' can function as a heuristic in the context of someone wanting to go to Brussels and looking for the quickest way to reach the destination. This statement relies on some features of the world: the presence of trains, stations, routes and so on. It is also a heuristic because it suggests that the person will find a train he can board at the railway station without specifying how the person should actually get there.) I suggest this is how stereotypes fulfill their enabling function to go-about: *they are action heuristics*. As such, these linguistic expressions are neither true nor false. As heuristics, they are neither infallible nor rule-governed; they merely suggest a way of dealing with people. They merely suggest to an individual 'how' to go-about.

When and to whom is a linguistic statement also an action-heuristic? There is only one possible answer to this question: *some statement is an action-heuristic to a person if and only if it functions as one to that person*. What is an action-heuristic to one person may or may not be that for another person. That is to say, the only way to identify an action-heuristic is by looking at its function in some context or another. This also means that such heuristics are very context sensitive. Stereotypes are known to be context sensitive as well and I suggest that this context sensitivity comes from the fact that stereotypes are action heuristics.

This also suggests to us that action heuristics can be involved in any kind of going-about in the world: an individual with other people from a group ('social relation'); an individual with a significant other (an 'inter-individual relation'); and the individual with him or herself (a 'self-relation'). Corresponding to this, I would like to speak of three kinds of stereotypes: social stereotypes, psychological stereotypes and personal stereotypes. Most discussions in the literature are about social stereotypes. As far as I know, attention is not paid to other kinds of stereotypes.

However, not every action-heuristic is a stereotype even though every stereotype is an action-heuristic. What distinguishes the two? Let me begin by focusing first on their differences.

Good scientific theories (in sociology, political science, psychology, economics, ethics, etc) would be of immense help in our goings-about but, because our knowledge of human beings is severely limited, we have to make do with fragmentary theories and commonsense knowledge for the most part. In this commonsense knowledge, we use many predicates that are emotive, evaluative, and ethical in order to speak about human beings; we also include some known facts

about human beings. However, for the most part, these evaluative terms and concepts frame certain expectations regarding human beings. Almost all the stereotypes we know include such terms. Most stereotypes appear intimately related to norms in general or more specifically with ethical norms in particular ('Indians are dishonest', 'Blacks are lazy', 'Jews are greedy', etc). The above statements appear as descriptions of properties (or actions) that transgress norms ('one ought to be honest', 'one ought not to give in to sloth', 'one ought not to be greedy' are the norms in question). Alternately, they appear to carry an ethical force ('Rajputs are brave', 'Bengalis are effeminate'), or express approval ('Germans are efficient', 'Asians are industrious') or disapproval ('women are irrational'). All these axiological statements (or value statements in general) define the horizon of expectations of the actors in question. In this sense, I would like to suggest that stereotypes *help create a horizon of expectations* regarding human beings. This is one of their basic functions. This horizon of expectations, to some extent, defines and determines the way we go-about, whether in social, inter-individual or self-relation.

The second important property of stereotypes is their transformative function: *they transform properties belonging to one domain into properties of another domain*. For instance, properties that individuals (differentially) learn through the process of socialization (punctuality, industriousness, politeness, etc) are transformed into the psychological properties of an individual (The Swiss are punctual; the Germans are industrious; the British are polite; etc). In inter-individual relations, transient or familiar actions (expressions, tastes, preferences) of the significant other become constant and stable ('you always leer at pretty women in the parties'; 'you are always negative when it is about my parents'; 'you enjoyed this food in that restaurant, so why do you not enjoy it when I cook it now?'; 'he is power-hungry'; etc). In self-relation, the learnt tastes and abilities are transformed into innate and essential properties of oneself ('I am an optimist'; 'I have a bad character'; 'I am a very good organizer'; 'I am an introvert by nature'; 'I enjoy power'; and so on).

It is this transformational function of the stereotypes that generates the ire of many people: "what do you mean by saying 'women are irrational'? Are you suggesting that to be a woman is to be irrational?" Here, it appears as though the stereotype is suggesting that women have the innate and essential property of being irrational. In the case of inter-individual relation, we see more clearly what people mean when they claim that stereotypes over-generalize. It generalizes a specific action, a momentary preference or a temporary taste over the life-span of a given individual. In the third case, that of self-relation, no stereotype appears to be present; yet, I suggest it is. In all three cases, stereotypes are involved. In this sense, *stereotypes are a part of our cognitive makeup*.

The third important functional property of stereotypes lies in the *creation of a composite image*. The multiple social stereotypes that exist about some group build a psychological profile as though it sketches an individual. The multiple psychological stereotypes build an implicit profile of the significant other. The multiple stereotypes that an individual has are the material out of which the individual builds an identity for oneself. Each of these is a composite image; this image consists mostly of stereotypes; often, if taken together as a whole, the image is not a consistent whole; equally often, this entire composite image itself can be represented by using a stereotype as well.

Apart from these differences, stereotypes are different from action heuristics because even where they do not describe the world (the way action heuristics do not), they have the appearance of being descriptions of the world. Why? There are two reasons. The first is informational economy. An instruction for an action that makes no appeal to the properties of the world becomes not only hugely complex but also unintelligible to the human mind. The more such a statement relies on features of the world, the more economical and efficient it becomes. However, it requires to be borne in mind that even where the statement refers to the features of the world (Germans and laziness, Mexicans and filthy, Jews and greediness, etc), it is not describing the properties of the world. It is merely relying on the properties of the world the way action heuristics do. Because stereotypes are not recognized as action heuristics, their reliance on some features of the world is confused with a description of the world. There is also a second reason, an elaboration of which requires embedding this hypothesis within the framework of cultural psychology. Doing so helps me outline the difference between action-heuristic and stereotype even more clearly.

Cultures and Social Stereotypes

Consider the fact that the colonial descriptions of the colonized invariably took the form of describing the latter in inferior terms: Indians are dishonest, Egyptians cannot walk on the roads, the Orientals are inscrutable, the Blacks are sensuous, etc. Why did the colonizers do this in such a systematic manner for centuries on end? Suggesting that the origin of such descriptions lies in their racism or in imperialism etc is to provide not only an *ad hoc* explanation but also an unsatisfactory one: every European who contributed to such description could hardly be considered guilty of such crimes. Why, then, did they do this?

Balagangadhara (1994) proposes that we distinguish cultures using the hypothesis that cultures are configurations of learning. According to this, characteristic of the western configura-

tion of learning is the domination of theoretical learning, which produces theoretical knowledge as its (culturally specific) product. The natural sciences are the best examples of such knowledge. However, in each group that has survived as a culture, other learning processes are present as well: learning to build societies and sustain human interactions; learning that produces art, poetry, dance and music; and so on. The notion of cultures as configurations of learning suggests that while each of these learning processes is present in every culture, the cultural differences lie in the kind of learning process that dominates the configuration. That is to say, one kind of learning dominates and other learning processes are subordinated to the former. Only as such does a configuration of learning comes into being. In this sense, the theoretical learning (which, crudely speaking, asks the question what there is in the world) dominates the configuration of learning that we call the western culture.

Thus, practical or performative learning, which is the domain of human interactions, is subordinated to a kind of learning that demands descriptions of the world. Consequently, performative knowledge is cast in terms of theoretical learning, i.e., as description of the world. Performative learning is the process of learning to go-about. (Crudely speaking, it asks the question 'how to act' in the world.) When cast in terms of the descriptions of the world, such *learning invariably uses stereotypes*. That is to say, knowledge about human beings and the social groups is preserved and transmitted in the western culture in terms of stereotypes about people and social groups. Because of the dominance of theoretical learning, these social stereotypes do not take the form of action-heuristics but appear as descriptions of the world. That is, social stereotypes are *disguised* as descriptions of the world.

Let us take a step back to get hold of this point properly. If I am going to New York in December, a fact about that city, namely, New York can be very cold in the winter, functions as an action-heuristic for me: I might buy a warm winter coat, order a taxi at the airport, and seek heated houses to stay in. This is the familiar case of some feature of the world enabling me to act in particular ways in the world. (As I said before, we do not know how it happens but merely that it does.) Do social stereotypes function the same way? Do we mistakenly believe that stereotypes are statements about the world and act accordingly? Some might; but such an explanation would only tell us why some people behave the way they do. It does not tell us how it is possible that a sentence which does not describe the world ends up performing the function of a description of the world. Of course, action heuristics do not describe the world but social stereotypes do not have the form of such statements either. So, how can social stereotypes function as action heuristics at all? That is, how is it possible for a statement which is neither a description of the world nor structured as an action-heuristic to function as an action-heuristic?

Because the social stereotypes are disguised as descriptions of the world, the only way they can be action heuristics is if they are that *obliquely* and not directly. What does their obliqueness consist of? In the first place, they are oblique instructions for going-about because our repertoire of actions does not consist of ways of reacting to exaggerated representations of properties. Greed, industriousness, laziness, filthiness, dishonesty, irrationality, etc are presented in their 'full-glory' and our experiences in the world have prepared us for only for an admixture of these properties in people is some diluted fashion. In fact, we would not know how to respond to people who are 'totally dishonest, complete cheats and liars'. In most cases, we would panic, stricken by angst and be totally paralyzed if we were to confront such people. In this sense, the social stereotypes do not suggest ways of going-about but merely provide warning indicators. In the second place, through their transformational property of mapping learnt properties of a group of people into the psychological attributes of an individual, they present us with a fictitious person: we have to assume that even though some person is 'lazy' or 'greedy', he would be 'normal' (or 'suitably abnormal') in other aspects of his existence. Such a suggestion does not help us much in going-about with him. Finally, in the third place, it partially outlines the horizon of expectations only in contrast with the trusted and the familiar: these stereotypes suggest that when compared to how one goes-about in a trusted environment, one should expect some variations and changes elsewhere. For these three reasons, social stereotypes function obliquely.

We can now characterize what social stereotypes are: *disguised as descriptions of the world, they are oblique action heuristics*. In the western culture, two elements are present both of which necessitate the presence of such oblique action heuristics. The first is the dominance of theoretical learning, which subordinates practical or performative learning to itself; the second is the role that norms play in defining the horizon of mutual expectations between human beings. These two reasons, together, generate social stereotypes in this culture.

Psychological Stereotypes

Here, much research needs doing. The empirical sources are many: marriage counselors, divorce proceedings, family quarrels, inheritance disputes, dissolution of partnerships, many other kinds of civil cases, etc. In all these records, we are bound to find psychological stereotypes of the significant others: what they are, whether they have additional functions and such like.

Individual Stereotypes

Most people in the western culture not only pride themselves in their self-knowledge but also believe such knowledge to be an index of the maturity, independence and stability of a person. What they mean by self-knowledge is actually a picture they have built of themselves which is more often than not at odds with the kind of creatures they are. It is an amalgam of odds and ends: ideas, values, fantasies, ideals, etc which they slug all through their lives. The less this picture is subjected to shocks by the events that occur in their lives, the more comfortable they feel. A person is said to have a stable and mature identity, if this picture is not shaken by what happens in that individual's existence. Creation of an identity or the emergence of a self-identity refers to that process or event where the person in question begins to relate to this picture consciously and explicitly.

Is this also self-knowledge? This amalgam does contain elements of insights by the person about him/herself. But these are not thought through; they are not the results of deliberate exploration and reflection into oneself. Instead, they are the insights the organism has acquired about itself during the course of its journey through life. Grafted onto this are other odds and ends: the strategies one used as a child, the remembered feelings one has had at different phases in life, a way of holding oneself while alone, different ways (both successful and failed) of going about with people, the vague images of heroes one admired but has since forgotten… In the full sense of the word, it is an assortment of junk that one somehow holds together. This junk is accumulated in the course of one's life.

What holds this junk together even as an amalgam? *Emotions*. They cement these odds and ends together and ignorance does the rest: one presupposes that this junk is a coherent picture of some sort or another. One does not know whether this amalgamated junk that we call self-knowledge is coherent; most of us might even suspect that it is not, which is perhaps why we are so afraid of attacks against it. That is why we also get so attached to it. However, the emotion invested in this amalgamated junk makes us think that this is what we are. Hence one of the reasons why we are so sensitive to remarks by others about us: the others remind us nastily that the emperor is naked. Albeit in perverse ways, these others exhibit the truth about this junk: namely, that it is junk. The fact that we get emotional (whether positively or negatively) about this amalgamated junk is the surest indication that emotions hold this junk together. If the emotions did not hold these odds and ends together, two things would have happened: (a) there would be no picture to talk about and (b) the remarks of the others would induce no emotions in us. But the emotions that hold this junk together also blunt the remarks that others make about it through redirec-

tion: the other is prejudiced, ignorant, jealous, stupid… Thus, the ideal and mature person that the western psychology talks about has two properties: (i) such a person must know which remarks from others should be recognized (even though painful) as true and (ii) which to redirect. You do not learn these two abilities in order to become a mature person; these abilities are the consequences of your maturity.

What stands in the way of achieving self-knowledge? This amalgamated junk that we call 'psychological identity'. Having such an identity is not indispensable to be a human being; instead, it stands in the way of becoming one. What prevents self-knowledge is the picture we have of ourselves as individuals.

This picture, this amalgamated junk, is the composite image I talk about. Though it is unclear to the individual whether the image he has of himself is whole or consistent, there is a sense of awareness that it is somehow woven well together. This awareness is brought through the fact that he has stereotypes about himself and their presence generates the impression that the composite image is whole and dynamic. That is to say, the odds and ends present in the composite image are not recognized as 'odds and ends'; instead, they are seen as contributing towards a coherent image because they latch on to the stereotypes. What kind of stereotypes am I talking about? I have in mind descriptions like the following: 'I am a successful entrepreneur'; 'I am a sharp intellectual'; 'I am a caring mother'; 'I have an irresistible charisma'; 'I am a good administrator' and so on. In some forms of mental depressions and nervous breakdowns, these stereotypes fail to make sense. That is to say, one gets the insight that these descriptions did not (and do not) describe the world ('oneself', in this case) and, consequently, fail to make sense any further. However, instead of realizing that such stereotypes could never describe the world, the person thinks that he had the 'wrong' insights about himself. Then, the swing goes to the other extreme: if these are the 'wrong' insights, then the only 'right' ones will have to be their negation. The loss of 'self-worth' that often accompanies such depressions is the result of assuming that negative stereotypes are true because the 'positive' stereotypes fail to make sense.

Furthermore, because stereotypes appear as self-descriptions, the breaking down of these heuristics appears to damage one's very ability to go-about with oneself. The more explicitly one depends on the stereotypes, the more severe is the impact of the breakdown: one appears (to oneself as) incapable of going-about with oneself; there is a great anxiety and 'angst' because one cannot rely on these stereotypes any longer; one feels paralyzed; and so on. The person suffering from the nervous breakdown does not realize that he has not ceased to go-about with himself but merely that he is doing it in another way. In any case, the more one's actions in the world 'fed' the stereotypes in an earlier period, the more severe is the result of a nervous breakdown. When I

speak of 'feeding' the stereotypes, I do not mean anything more than the process of strengthening of these stereotypes through one's action in the world. Such strengthening occurs when one continually relates one's actions in the world to one's individual stereotypes.

In the process of constructing a self-identity, an individual chances upon the individual stereotypes present in his culture. Through the socialization process, such a person chooses some stereotypes (while discarding others) and weaves them into a composite image. The transformational property of stereotypes convinces him that these are his essential properties and he goes-about in the world on the basis of this assumption. What prevents him from acquiring self-knowledge is the composite image that hints that it is knitted together because of the presence of stereotypes. In some kinds of depressions, this woven image comes apart.

Tentative Conclusions

1. In the previous draft, I was working under the assumption that stereotypes were an undifferentiated group even when I spoke of their presence in inter-individual relations and with respect to one's self-image. I am now forced to speak of three *kinds* of stereotypes. As of this moment, I am not sure whether we can speak of stereotypes in the last two cases in the same way we speak about them in the case of social stereotypes.

2. It is not very clear to me the sense in which individual stereotypes can be described as oblique action heuristics. Though I vaguely sense that they are also indirect the way social stereotypes are, they also appear to have a property that social stereotypes lack: that of being true or false. At best, they appear as cases of misidentification (suggesting, for instance, that the 'I' is rich or poor, intelligent or stupid) or as category mistakes (applying properties to the 'I' that can only be ascribed to other things).

3. Of course, I have no idea about psychological stereotypes. More work is needed in this regard.

4. While social stereotypes appear culturally specific, both psychological and individual stereotypes seem to transcend boundaries of cultures, languages and regions. Given the tendency of human beings to use what I have called as individual stereotypes universally, we need to formulate clearer answers to the question of how this universality is possible. The only avenue we have here is to appeal to our evolutionary inheritance. In that case, we

need to have a clearer idea of how and where cultural learning influences a (possibly innate) biological tendency.

5. Finally, there is the question of the relationship between these three kinds of stereotypes. How are they connected to each other? Does one stereotype function as a base upon which other stereotypes come into being? Do all the three derive their origin elsewhere?

Some Predictions and Consequences

1. If practical or performative learning dominates Asian cultures then the number of social stereotypes there will be significantly less when compared to the western culture. Where they do exist ('Rajputs are brave'; 'Sikhs are a martial race', 'Bengalis are effeminate', etc[11]), there historical research will show that most such social stereotypes have been introduced during colonization. In other words, unlike the West, Asian cultures have less of a need to work with social stereotypes because they teach action-heuristics through stories and not through disguised descriptions of the world. There will be a significantly greater *stock of stories instead of social stereotypes* in the Asian culture, whereas the opposite will be the case for the western culture.

   Some nuances as well as some explanations are required here. We have very little understanding of the different types of linguistic expressions present in the Asian languages. Consider, as an example, the so-called 'wise-sayings' in some of the Indian languages: for instance, 'do not trust a crying man or a laughing woman'. Notice that the sentence is a direct instruction for action and is not disguised. Whether or not this saying is also 'wise' is not an issue for now (they are not called 'wise' sayings in the Indian languages). The point is that it is an explicit instruction for action. Then, there are sayings about other groups: 'do not trust a Malayali' (one who speaks a Malayalam language, normally hailing from the southern Indian state of Kerala). Again here, it is an explicit instruction for action. Of course, it is possible to transform the above sentence into a stereotype: "Malayalis are not trustworthy". This possibility tells us two things: (a) one can transform direct instructions for actions into disguised instructions for actions; (b) such a transformation is necessary when one has to 'justify' an action. ('Why do you not trust this Malayali?' 'Because Malayalis are not trustworthy'.) More often then not, Asians 'justify' their actions not by deducing some specific action from a universal premise but through citing stories. Such stories do not 'justify' but, instead, provide a 'model' for the said action. These 'models' or stories lend intelligibility to the actions but do not justify

them. The notion that only ideas (or claims about the world) can justify human actions is a typical cultural characteristic of the West; almost totally absent is the notion that some actions could justify some other actions. The Asian notion of 'tradition' preserves and extends the latter suggestion.

Finally, I am not suggesting a total absence of social stereotyping in the Asian culture, even though I am inclined in this direction. It is my suspicion that even apparent social stereotypes in the Asian culture are mere mnemonic devices: that is, they are a way of remembering stories about peoples, groups and human beings. Even though I lack the expertise to empirically prove this, it is my belief that stereotypes (in most cases) in Asia function the way 'maxims' functioned in the Roman Law: as mnemonic devices and not as norms or principles or claims about the world.

2. However, the folk-knowledge that the Asian cultures will have of the western culture will inevitably be shallow and superficial. Because, such an understanding of the West will consist mostly of *western social stereotypes about the western culture*. Both the press and popular literature provide an easy way to verify or falsify this consequence.

3. These stereotypes do not help the Asians in generating action heuristics because practical knowledge is transmitted in a different form in their culture. Consequently, to the extent they take these social stereotypes about the West as true statements about a part of the world, to that extent, the comparisons they make between themselves and the West follow the western comparisons of these cultures.

4. The late Edward Said coined the term 'Orientalism' to refer to the western discourse about the East.[12] Today, this term picks out the western discourse about non-western cultures. One of the facts noticed but not explained by Said is that Orientalism is not only a cultural enterprise but also that it is replete with stereotypes. Our hypothesis suggests that their interconnectedness is necessary. Among other things, *what makes Orientalist discourse a specific cultural discourse is precisely the presence of social stereotypes*. However, unlike Said and the post-colonial writers who follow him, we can appreciate that what makes Orientalism an unacceptable form of discourse about other cultures is *not* the presence of stereotypes but something else altogether. Because action-knowledge, knowledge of other peoples and groups, is preserved and transmitted in the western culture through social stereotypes, their presence is not objectionable in and of itself.

A Brief Defense

(a) *Context dependency*. Even though the social psychologists are unanimous[13] in agreeing that stereotypes are contextually dependent,[14] they do not explain the 'why'.[15] The hypothesis shows why such context dependency exists and what it means: in his interaction with another human being, stereotypes suggest courses of action to some individual to the extent knowledge about these others are significant to that particular person.[16] It is dependent on the group to which the individual belongs because each group transmits action knowledge (about how to go about with other groups) to the individual. It is dependent also on the group and culture because it helps him to formulate courses of action in dealing with himself and his immediately 'significant others'.

(b) The *necessity* of stereotypes. In a culture where theoretical learning subordinates practical or performative learning, action heuristics *have* to take the form of descriptions of the world. Furthermore, any action heuristic has to appeal to descriptions of the world in order to remain useful and intelligible to the actors. However, this applies to social stereotypes alone.

(c) The *value-ladenness*. This has to do with the fact that values define the horizon of expectations between members in the western culture. Consequently, their stereotypes cultivate an orientation or an attitude among individuals.

(d) The *in-group* and *out-group* difference. Action heuristics, by necessity, have to be individually productive to the individual in question. As we expand outwards[17] from the individual towards his contexts, in each circle of that expansion (family, friends, school, group, culture), the number of shared action heuristics diminish.[18] By the same token, the generality of such action heuristics increase. The more general such a heuristic is, the less nuanced and sensitive it is. Hence, action-heuristics are more differentiated with respect to members from the 'in-group' when compared to the heuristics used to go-about with members from the 'out-group'.[19]

(e) This hypothesis is ontologically *neutral*. We need not take any position with respect to the existence of either groups or individuals.[20] Whether only individuals exist, or whether

groups also exist is an irrelevant philosophical thesis as far as developing a theory about stereotypes are concerned.

(f) The hypothesis *bridges* both the cognitive[21] and the social[22] approaches[23] to a study of stereotypes. The reduction of complexity argument,[24] which the cognitive approach to the study of stereotypes prefers, is as much a part of this proposal as the dependency of stereotypes on groups.

(g) It *undercuts* all discussions about the truth and falsity of stereotypes.[25] In doing so, it allows tackling the questions about racism and prejudice in a novel way. Fighting either of the two is not a matter of discussing or debating about the truth-value of doctrines[26] or of developing a new attitude.[27] It is about the efficacy of using such stereotypes in going about with people.

(h) Finally, this hypothesis generates new problems and solves some of the existing unsolved disputes. This pleads for the cognitive productivity of the approach.

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