

CULTIVATING MORAL EYES

Bridging the knowledge-action gap for
privilege and injustice



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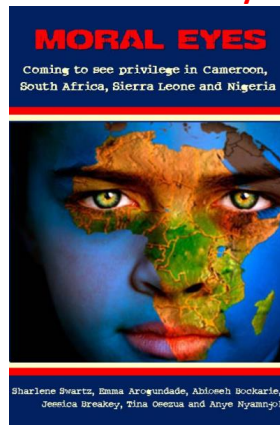
8 December 2016, 42nd annual meeting of the Association for
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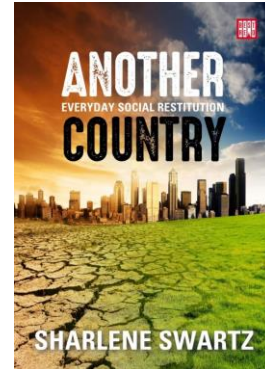
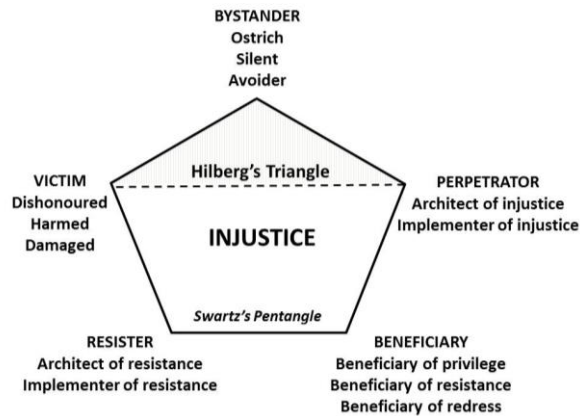
Introducing the study

1. 72 students from four countries
2. Asking how best university students can move from seeing, to knowing, to acting against privilege and injustice
3. Used qualitative research as an intervention
 - Interviews, Essays, Vignettes, Labels
4. Conceptual underpinnings: Privilege, Personhood, Dialogic interviews, Location(s)

Moralise Moral Eyes



A conceptual bedrock



Context is everything

1. **Cameroon:** 'The Anglophone Problem'
2. **Nigeria:** Religion, Ethnicity, Geography
3. **Sierra Leone:** Ethnicity and power
4. **South Africa:** The Race Divide

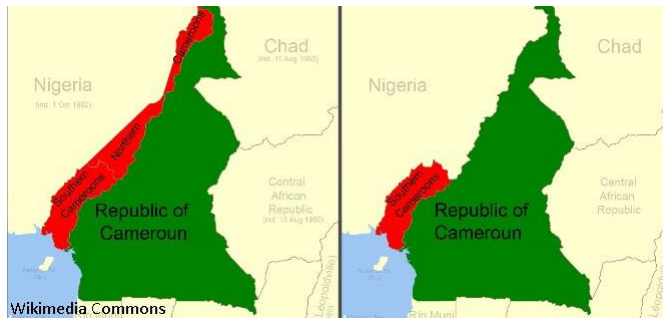
Common background

- Colonial divide and rule
- Imposed national boundaries
- Across languages and ethnicities
- Post-colonial power struggles



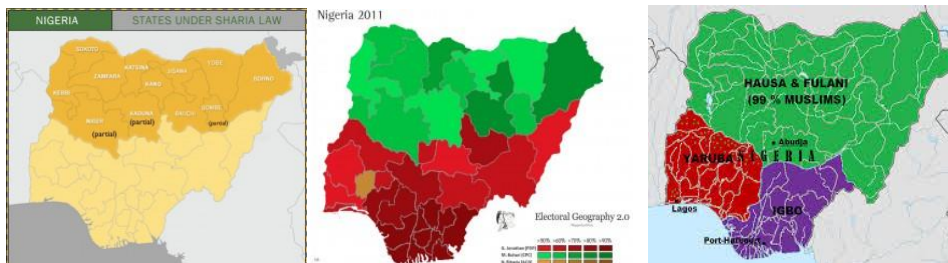
How does it affect people broadly?

Cameroon: Anglophones political influence limited, economically marginalised, second class social status, alienated, difficulty interacting with the state. SILENCING DICTATORSHIP.



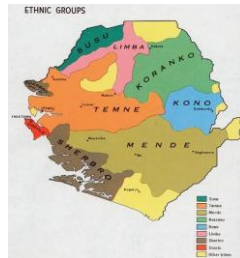
How does it affect people broadly?

Nigeria: Civil wars, military juntas and struggles for control of oil resources surfaces and draws on north-south/Muslim-Christian/inter-ethnic tensions that result in violence and discrimination. CORRUPTION AS IMMEDIATE.



How does it affect people broadly?

Sierra Leone: Coups, one-party state & bloody civil war over a decade-long promoted inter-ethnic violence, ongoing social, political, economic and educational opportunities denied based on ethnicity. FEAR OF VIOLENCE.



How does it affect people broadly?

South Africa: race based apartheid legislation cemented black oppression and white privilege economically & socially. VESTED RACIAL INEQUALITY.



How does it affect people personally?

Across contexts

1. Lack of access to education and work opportunities
2. Discrimination and harassment
3. Cronyism for 'in' group
4. Shame
5. No hope or opportunity
6. In some cases, direct violence
7. Fear of violence



Making good again: How speaking of restitution helps to address unjust privilege

Emma Arogundade, University of Cape Town



Restitution: What theory says

1. Restitution: Restoring what has been lost, used legally to engage with compensation for victims
2. Swartz (2016): *Another country*
 - Making right/good again/better
 - Based in notions of social justice & solidarity
 - Predicated on ideas of the restitution of emergent personhood in symbolic and material ways



Restitution: What does it mean?



Restitution: What does it mean?

"I still think it is to make things right with someone or something that has perpetrated against you – and for me when I think about it, it is how you are talking about wanting into that story, how you are taking back something that was taken from you. Whether it is an object, or more particularly your dignity and your being."
(Rogers, South Africa, Male, 24, Black, Humanities)



Restitution: Differences

- Stories elicited different emphases in different countries:
- **Cameroon:** It's necessary, but we're not sure how?
- **Nigeria & Sierra Leone:** We need to make right, but we also need to just move on
- (Nigeria – it's too complicated, where do we start; Sierra Leone – it will bring back the violence)
- **South Africa:** it's all about race, restitution is about land, money & dignity



Restitution: Differences

“We need to have policies that allow for redistribution, and I mean having a bad affirmative action policy is better than having no affirmative action policy. People shouldn’t come with ‘BEE is so wrong and it’s not effective. Doesn’t matter if its not effective, it’s better than having no redistribution at all.” (Leila, South Africa, Female, 21, Coloured, Humanities)



Restitution: Differences

“If we are seeing things in the past, we won’t be able to focus, move forward...the best way to just promote that peace, let’s just forget that for now.” (Akintayo, Nigeria, Male, 30, Christian/Yoruba, Humanities)



Restitution: Differences

“This is because restitution that is made by the government may lead to a new form of injustice by making other ethnic groups feel left out of the process and this can further exacerbate the current trend of ethnic resentment in the country.” (Iron Sky, Sierra Leone, Female, 22, Temne, Humanities)



How do we do restitution?

Government has huge role to play:

- regulation of religion (Nigeria)
- education (especially girl child raised in Sierra Leone & Nigeria)
- ensuring fairness and justice with policy (Cameroon & SA), service delivery (all countries)
- enforcing this

– BUT this is not restitution.



How do we do restitution?

At an individual level:
non-discrimination and treating people fairly

Cameroon: Give up derogatory language 'anglofou'

Nigeria: Treat everyone equally, with respect

Sierra Leone: Apologies are good, but education opportunities are better

South Africa: Whites give something up – land, wealth, superiority, privilege



Restitution: Actions

"At an individual level is, ehmm, seeing everybody as equal, seeing everybody as your friend and family." (Margaret, Nigeria, Female, 22, Christian/Esan, Humanities)



Restitution: Actions

“It’s also an acknowledgement that bad deeds were done and you are willing to give up something as acknowledgement of the bad deeds that were done either by you or in your name, and also saying that I’m willing to feel something be it within my pocket or giving away my time in order to help you out of the gutter because the situation what happened put you in some sort of a disadvantaged situation.” (Tothele South Africa, Male, 23, Black, Humanities)



Barriers to restitution

- Government initiatives fail because the social will is not there
- Ongoing social inequalities at structural levels hamper individuals from undertaking ‘social restitution’
- Bigger changes are difficult, as individuals ‘we don’t have the power’
- People are too greedy, selfish, or scared to take action



Restitution: Actions

"I think people are blinded and don't see their privilege and they don't see it as their role to kind of redistribute." (Leila, South Africa, Female, 21, Coloured, Humanities)

"They are already well placed. You know, when you're in a good condition, you don't bother again of anything happening." (Balja, Cameroon, Male, 20, Francophone, Commerce)



Restitution: Actions

"The first thing I know hinders so many people from making restitution is greed. I mean self-centredness. It's true that it's quite difficult for some people to let go of something that has been keeping them fine for a long time." (Enong, Cameroon, Male, 26, Anglophone, Humanities).



Tracing spider webs: The internal rot of the privileged

Jessica Breakey, University of the Witwatersrand



Privilege

Only through a deep recognition of our privilege can we begin to undo privilege and explore our role in the creation of a more just society.

Does such a role exist or should the privileged be left to rot?

- In all 4 four African countries, privilege is a result of a direct legacy of both passive and active oppression
- Those that carry **privilege** carry an institutional and systematic advantage over the oppressed



Privilege inflections: Who is to blame?

- **Cameroon:** 'all', Francophones, state, historians, colonists, their parents
- **South Africa:** In 1994 from white to black, social and economic power still largely in white hands
- **Cameroon & South Africa:** Just forget about the past & move on- avoiding shame, responsibility and blame.



Blame

- **Nigeria:** Complicated, participants avoided labelling selves as **beneficiaries**, rather assigned 'government' or 'all of us' or 'them' (not **us**)
- **Sierra Leone:** Mende and Temne hold political power, Creoles hold economic and social power
- **South Africa:** Political power transferred



Blame

“Our government is to be blamed. In the sense that there are some measures they are supposed to have put in place. For instance the issue of this Boko Haram...the government should have intervened, to fight, reduce or even eradicate completely the terrorism and the religious crises that...The government is not really looking towards that side, they are looking at how to get their own money.” (Tolulope, Nigeria, Female, 27, Christian/Yoruba, Humanities)



Would Restitution benefit the privileged?

“the dehumanization of blacks in the country... leads to the rot of the privileged and that makes me desperately upset” (Adam, South Africa, Male, 24, White Humanities)

- Oppression and selective privilege results in continued injustice, makes just change impossible
- **Should the Privileged have a role in restitution?**
- For many of the oppressed it seems that they do not want the ‘help’ of the privileged – patronising/ paternalistic



Invisibility of Privilege

- Peggy McIntosh refers to “Invisible Knapsack of White Privilege” (1988)
- But privilege is only **invisible** to those that hold it.
- To the oppressed the privilege of a particular group is far from invisible but rather a blindingly bright reminder of the deep inequality in which they continue to exist



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Invisibility of Privilege

“So in first year there was a physics paper that I wrote and it spoke about ping pong...but I never actually – and you had to sort of draw a sketch of how the ball has to travel and the thing is I didn’t know what a ping pong was [laughs]...For the life of me I didn’t know what ping pong was because those are not the games I grew up playing and all those sort of things” (Tothele, South Africa, Male, 23, Black, Humanities)



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Invisibility of Privilege

“One of the unearned privileges I experience as a result of my ethnic group is the fact that 85% of Sierra Leoneans speaks Krio (the language of the Creoles, mainly broken English) quite fluently. Hence, I do not need to learn any indigenous language in order to communicate with my friends” (Amalin, Sierra Leone, Female, 29, Creole, Humanities)



Accepting defeat or provoking action? The moral role of victims in injustice

Abioseh Bockarie, University of the Western Cape



Role of the victims

1. Definitional 'fuzziness' with the term (spatial, intersectional and temporal issues)
2. General 'dislike' of the term: prefer 'survivors of injustice'
3. Few students identified as victims
4. Most victims: young women across the four countries
5. General consensus that victims play a crucial role in correcting past injustices



Role of the victims

"The victim is just there. What comes along is one that has suffered from injustice. Calling myself a victim only makes me look weak. I don't like to look weak." (Michelle, Cameroon, Female, 26, Francophone, Humanities)



Role of victims in correcting in justice

- **Cameroon:** Most Anglophone students claim to be victims language injustice
- **Nigeria:** Muslim & Christians suffer religious injustice almost equally (spatially)
- **Sierra Leone:** Victims claim to suffer from ethno-political injustice and not ethnic injustice
- **South Africa:** Vivid intersectional nature of black students victimhood (race, class, gender).



Role of victims in correcting injustice

1. To draw attention to atrocities/injustices
 - Most victims feel nothing has been done to right the past injustices
 - The main reason for this is the lack of awareness of existing injustices
 - Hence, victims of injustice have the moral responsibility to 'speak up' to make things 'better' instead of 'right'



Role of victims

*“We need to find ways of squashing tribalism
...tribal injustices should be reported and
rebuked and the victims of ethnic injustice must
speak up and create awareness in Sierra Leone.”*
(Momoh, Sierra Leone, Male, 34, Mende, Humanities)



Role of the victims

2. To forgive their perpetrators

- Increases the victims' personal and perceived power
- A religious motivation & virtue
- A legitimate form of revenge
- Conditional forgiveness (perpetrators remorse & repentance)



Role of the victims

3. To become resister's of injustice
 - An insurance to protect them from future injustices
 - To also ensure that other people do not become victims
 - To overcome their struggle with victimhood



**The hands can't hit what the eyes
can't see: Theorising restitutive
change as a relation between
knowledge and action**

Anye Nyamnjoh, University of Cape Town



Theory of Change

Social restitution makes good again the damage done to our personhood.

What does this change entail?

Making good again involves two commitments:
(A) Seeing Clearly/Knowing and (B) Acting



Theory of Change

- How best university students can move from *seeing, to knowing, to acting against privilege and injustice?*
- How best can we translate knowledge of these issues into action?



Theory of Change

Strategies

1. Replicating and tailoring this research to other contexts. Helpfulness of speaking about restitution and the potential for research as intervention.
2. Using the ways in which people locate themselves in narratives of privilege and injustice as a basis for generating roles and obligations of social restitution. (Different positionalities: privileged – perpetrators & beneficiaries, and victims)



Theory of Change

3. Making resisters of ostriches. Ostriches fail to translate knowledge of privilege and injustice into action. What accounts for the knowledge-action gap? How can we address these issues?

- *Powerlessness,*
- *Distorted seeing*
- *Epistemic limitations (Not knowing what one can do)*
- *Fear of repression (Self-preservation)*



Theory of change

“Tribalism, ethnic discrimination... whatever you want to call it, will never disappear in Sierra Leone. It is the black man’s way of life and this is why Sierra Leone is backwards till today.” (Fatimah Sinneh, Female, Sierra Leone, Ethnicity, 23)



Theory of Change

4. The concept of **‘everyday actions’** (Essed, 1991) can help mitigate some of the issues raised above. Everyday actions make restitution a matter of **individual moral and interpersonal responsibility** and mitigate some issues raised by ostriches.

Some examples

- i. Have dialogic conversation to enable clear seeing
- ii. Self-reflexivity and self-education (esp. white SAs)



More examples

- iii. Resistance through disruption of spaces (e.g. Black excellence as a disruption in a previously whites only institution in South Africa)
- iv. Learning and respecting English Language (Cameroon)
- v. Consciously being aware of the way in which one interacts with the oppressed other/Treating others with respect (All contexts) e.g.:
"I should not treat them as if they are inferior because they are not inferior. We are all human beings so we should interact, uh work together, yes that's what I think. Language should not be a barrier." (Babson, Cameroon, Female, 21, Francophone, Humanities)



More examples

- vi. Material Compensation (South Africa):
"Like you will say you acknowledge your privilege but then you say 'but'. I acknowledge my privilege but there's nothing I can do. Like of course there's something you can do. You can give me your house. So yes so I think first and foremost, the primary thing that needs to happen is acknowledgement. Like acknowledge your male privilege, your white privilege, your ablest privileges and all those things right. But then you can't just sit on your ass and enjoy those privileges... There's money that you've stolen, there's money that you've benefitted from that has been stolen, and same thing with land, give it back." (Niel, South Africa, Male, 21, Black, Humanities)



Conclusion

Can qualitative research be a moral intervention?

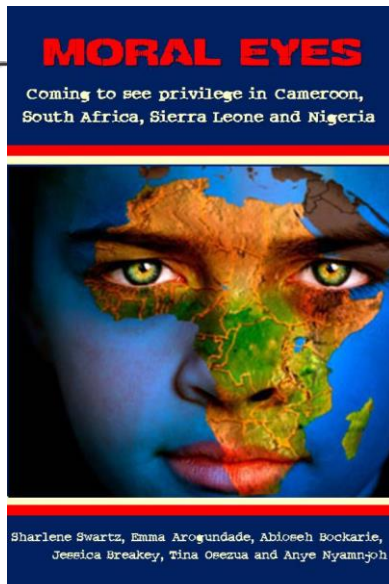
1. Depends on the climate in the context
2. Depends on the relationship
3. Time needed for dialogic conversations is also critical
4. Level of preceding knowledge (history) and awareness
5. The need for practical examples
6. Expectations of being led in action
7. More ways to motivate moral action



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