

Agency and impasses to success amongst higher education students in South Africa

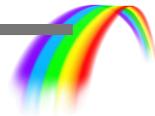


Sharlene Swartz
30 October 2018

Institute of Education
University College London



Social science that makes a difference



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 'Where's the father's
 Affidavit?'
 'I don't have a father'.
 'Go to your mom and tell her
 to write about the
 whereabouts of your father'.
 I go home.
 Write out another Affidavit.
 Go back to the police station
 Using a taxi.
 Then back to university.

Being a female at
 university is an extreme
 sport
 Every morning I wake up
 Walk down to campus
 with weapons
 Tasers and pepper spray
 There's always crime on
 campus
 Females being raped on
 campus
 With cameras.

You sit there in the
 lecture room and think:
 'What am I going to say?
 Are they going to laugh
 at me?
 Think I'm stupid?
 Some students slept.
 In the Student Building.
 For two days.
 Without food.

I wanted to study
 They said it's full.
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 If you are Black and poor,
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FINDINGS

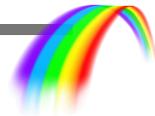
Ready or Not YouTube link:

<https://youtu.be/hFcouu8ICfk>

Poetic inquiry



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Higher education

1. 55% failure rates among students
2. Low completion rates on time (only 1 in 4)
3. White completion rates 50% higher than Black students (CHE, 2013)
4. Inequity in enrolment rates (15% Black youth 18-24 enrolled versus 54% White in 2014)

Fee-free education will only fix this last figure.



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CONTEXT

Studying while black
Race, education and emancipation in South African universities

ANOTHER COUNTRY
EVERYDAY SOCIAL RESTRICTION

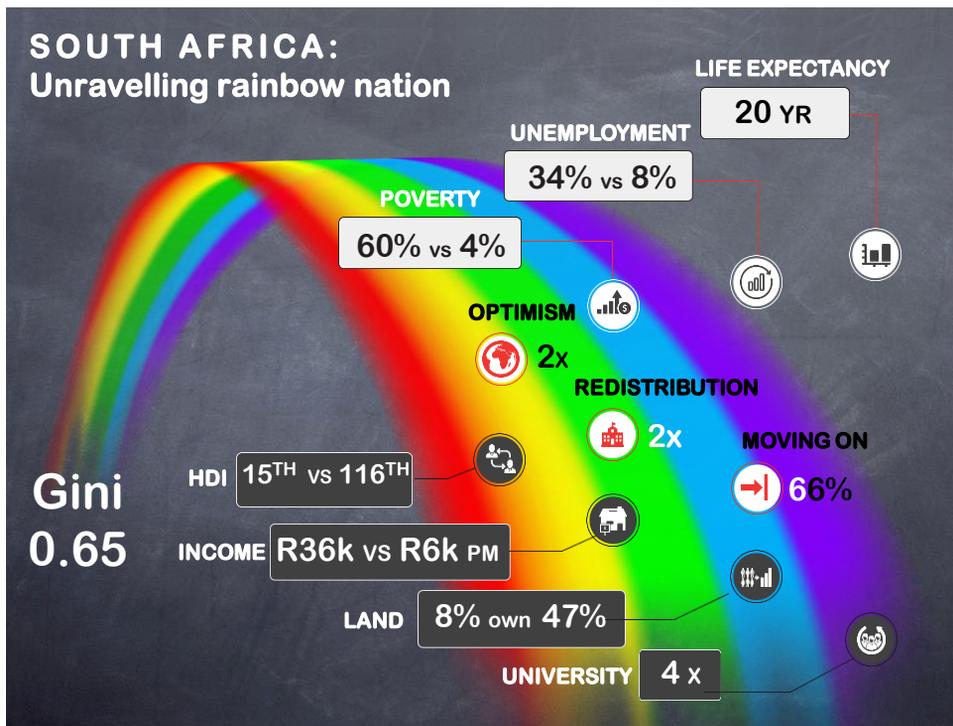
TEENAGE TATA
VOICES OF YOUNG FATHERS IN SOUTH AFRICA

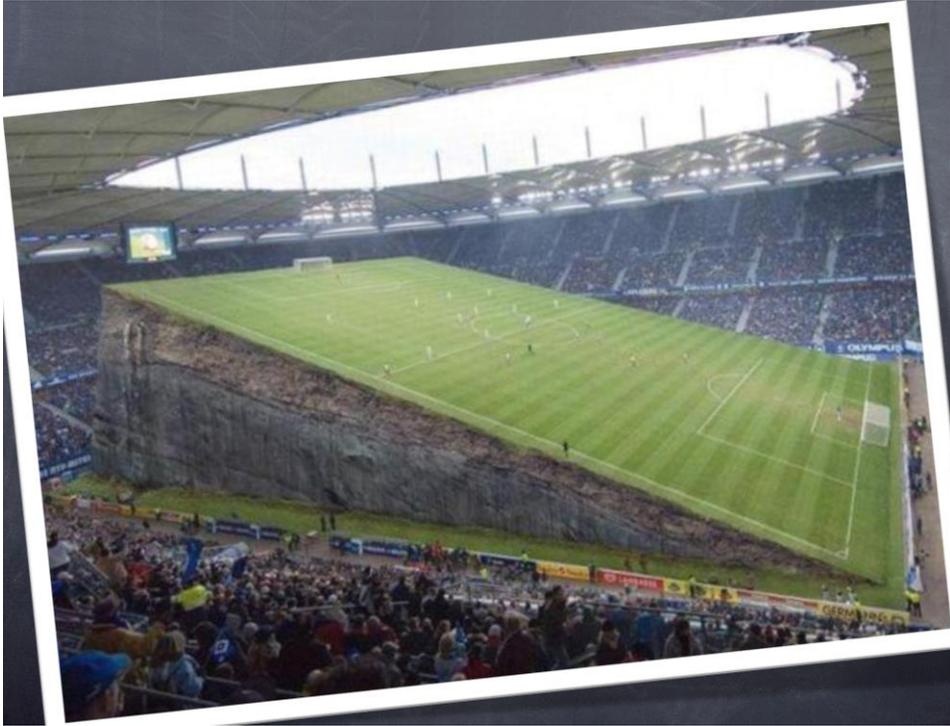
Moral Eyes
Youth and justice in Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and South Africa

iKASI
The Moral Ecology of South Africa's Township Youth

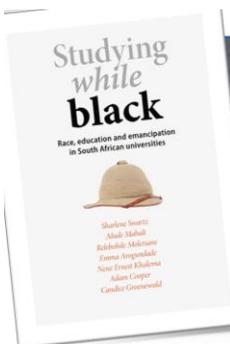
SHARLENE SWARTZ

HSRC
Human Sciences Research Council
Social science that





The study



1. The study followed 80 students in 8 universities over 5 years (2013 to 2017)
2. Used a variety of engaging methods
3. Produced two accessible outputs:
 - **Book:** *Studying while black*
 - **Documentary:** *Ready or Not!*
4. Recorded struggles and obstacles, along with strategies and resources for success



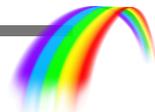
Sample Progression

<i>Category</i>	<i>Graduated</i>	<i>Still studying</i>	<i>Left university to work/seek employment</i>	<i>Untraceable</i>
Total (n=80)	27	35	7	11
School background				
<i>Township/Rural (n=38)</i>	11	17	5	5
<i>Suburban/Private (n=42)</i>	16	18	2	6
Parents' education				
<i>Higher ed (n=41)</i>	22	11	2	6
<i>No higher ed (n=39)</i>	5	24	5	5



THEORY

- **Inequality**
 - ✓ Mechanisms, institutions, systems
- **Emancipation**
 - ✓ Research as intervention





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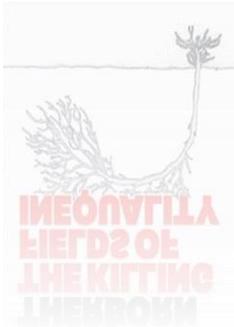
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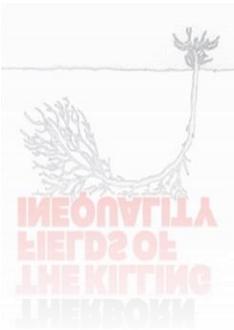
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THERBORN**
**THE KILLING
FIELDS OF
INEQUALITY**



What inequality does

1. **Short lives**
 - Lack of education US – 3 yrs white men, no degree (-5 women)
 - Lack of education + racial identity
 - Black - < 12 yrs education – 12 yrs
 - Hierarchically low jobs in government service
 - Unemployed
2. **Stunting** - Physical and cognitive
3. **Psychic/social stress** - 5 to 15 more years of illness
4. **Social sundering** - distrust, fear, violence
5. **Economic squandering** - charity after accumulation
6. **Ineffective democracy** - no substantive participation

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3 institutions of inequality

1. Family

- Parental background shapes life-chances
- Also marriage and bi-parentality

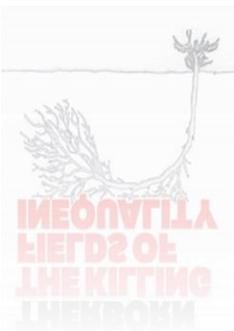
2. Capital

- Excludes (through accumulation)
- The rise of 'the precariat'
- Rights of labour and citizens not ensured

3. Nation

- Globalisation
- Power

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4 Mechanisms of inequality

1. **Distanciation** - a systemic process designed to discern 'winners and losers'

- *Approximation – close the physical distance*

2. **Exclusion** - the division of 'in-groups' and 'out-groups'

- *Inclusion*

3. **Hierarchisation** - formal organisations of inequality

- *Flattening power structures*

4. **Exploitation** - unfairly capitalising on the physical labour of others

- *Protection, redistribution and rehabilitation*



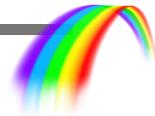
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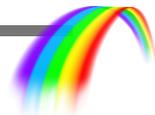


Emancipatory methodologies

1. Asks: What do you know, what do you want to know?
2. **Adopts a feminist approach – to dissolve the “the knower-known” dichotomy**
3. Attempt to counter exploitative research, “the imbalance of benefit’ (Baker, Lynch et al)
4. Part of a radical social agenda of equality (Freire – ‘The Southern Tradition’)
5. **Critical to the poor and the voiceless, aims for self-determination and sovereignty, transference of research ownership**



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Paulo Freire on Emancipation

1. Advocated '**conscientisation**' and '**dialogue**' among the 'poor and oppressed' about the conditions of oppression, to be able to 'name their world' (Freire, 1972, p. 61)
2. To 'perceive the reality of oppression **not as a closed world** from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform' (p. 25-6).
3. Using '**problem-posing**' rather than 'bank-deposit' methods
4. So that 'men and women [are able to] deal **critically** and **creatively** with reality and discover how to **participate** in the transformation of their world' (Richard Shaull, Foreword to Freire, 1972, p. 13-4).



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Participatory research

1. "**Recognises** the value of **engaging** in the research process those who are intended to be the beneficiaries, users and **stakeholders** of research" (Biggs)
2. **Key feature - location of power**, commitment to the democratisation & demystification of scientific research
3. **Community** members as knowledgeable **collaborators**
4. **Underlying values** - action-oriented, dialogue, relevant and iterative, justice (Lewin – 'The Northern Tradition')
5. **Core elements:** Mutual respect and trust, accountability and reflexivity, participative and interactive



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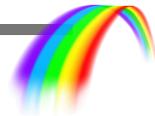


Interactive Methods

1. Photo- elicitation
2. Photo voice
3. Mini videos – current and desired
4. Life story drawings
5. Community mapping
6. Sentence completion
7. Rank order activities
8. Mind maps
9. Documentary
10. Social network interviews



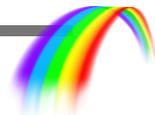
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	Interactive	Participatory	Emancipatory
Knowledge	A commitment to applied knowledge and the co-construction of knowledge		
Learning	A commitment to mutual and sustainable learning, self-reflection, and the empowerment of research participants		
Inclusion and power	Slight inclusion; shared power on researcher's terms	Modest inclusion; shared power	Complete inclusion (or partnership on participants' terms); researcher relinquishes power
Research agenda	Research agenda is predetermined	Research agenda is developed through consultation	Participants choose research agenda, enlists services of researcher



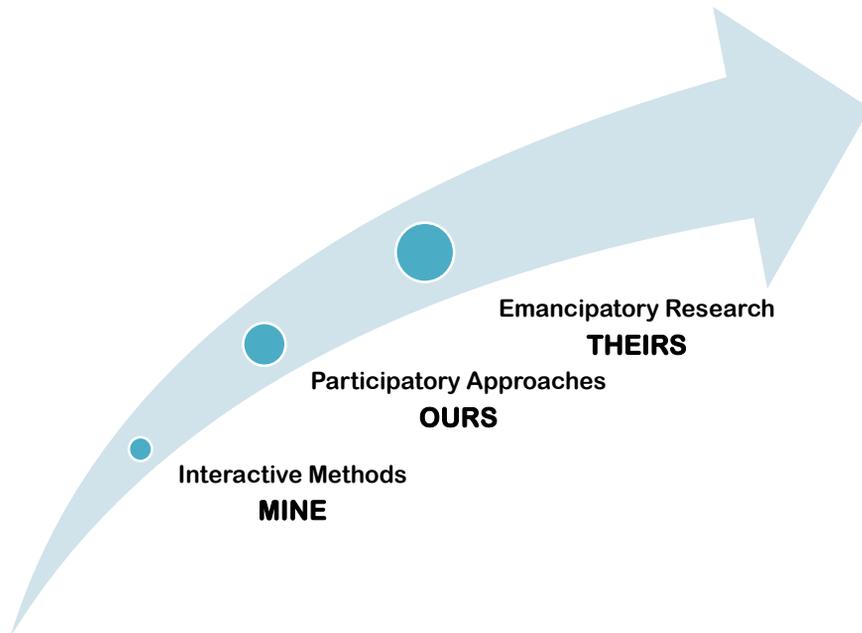
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	Interactive	Participatory	Emancipatory
Research design	Research is already designed when research commences	Joint planning of design	Design is initiated by participants
Dissemination	Dissemination is decided by researcher	Dissemination is a shared responsibility	Participants decide what is done with the research findings.
Authorship	Retained authorship	Joint authorship	Relinquished authorship
Ownership	Research is mine	Research is ours	Research is theirs



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Research as freedom

1. Research can have a justice aim
2. Research can be designed along a continuum from interactive to participatory to truly emancipatory

Swartz, S and Nyamnjoh, A. (2018) Swartz, S., and Nyamnjoh, A. (2018) Research as freedom: A continuum of interactive, participatory and emancipatory methods to understand youth marginality *HTS Theological Studies* 74 (3).



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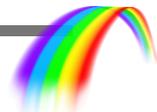


Challenges of emancipatory res

1. Time consuming
2. Internal validity – iterative nature
3. Sustaining participation
4. Uncertain outcomes
5. Who is include, who excluded, who decides?
6. Dependence on local stakeholders
7. Unintended consequences of participation
8. Money issues (e.g. funding, and paying for research)
9. Ownership of knowledge



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METHODS

1. Longitudinal cohort study
2. Annual interviews
3. **Social network interviews**
4. **Social media blogs**
5. Photo voice
6. Reflections
7. **Ethnographic documentary**

GÖRAN THERBORN THE KILLING FIELDS OF INEQUALITY

Distanciation – Approximate, close the physical distance
Exclusion – Include
Hierarchisation – Flatten power structures
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Social network interviewing

Choose from among these people to interview:

1. A person from your home town who never went to university
2. A student you consider more privileged than you
3. A student you consider less privileged than you
4. A staff contact from your previous school
5. A person in a university leadership position
6. A recent graduate that you know
7. A student like you
8. A person who works at student support services
9. A student who dropped out of university this past year
10. A person you consider to have helped you get to varsity
11. A person you consider to have helped you over this last year of university
12. A family member who has been to university



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Ask these questions (and why):

<i>Many students struggle to both enrol at and successfully complete university. This research study aims to find out why this is so and what could be done about it.</i>	Opening Declarative Statement
Question	Aims
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is it important for young South Africans to succeed at university? 2. In your opinion, what are some of the struggles facing university students in South Africa, and what are some of the reasons for these struggles? 	Ice breaker, building a discussion about community and norms

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. In your opinion, what affects someone's success at university? 4. Who is responsible for students succeeding at University? 	Evaluating social context and external agency – what can and cannot be changed.
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. From what you know of me (or students in general), what do I do that stops (sabotages) me from succeeding at varsity? What should I be doing? 	Inviting constructive analysis, specifically with regard to internal agency.

6. How does racism and gender discrimination affect student's lives?	Talking about peer and/or gendered norms. Inviting analysis of behaviours
7. How is success at university affected by people's backgrounds? (Prompt: gender, education, race, social class)	
8. In your opinion, who should be helping students succeed at university, and what should they be doing to help?	Developing strategies
9. What steps have you taken (or are you taking) in order to be successful in your life?	
10. Who else should I talk to that might be able to help me to be successful at university?	Referral to enlarge social connections



RECOMMENDATIONS

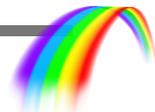
Three spaces for action

- Individual/personal
- Institutional
- National/structural

Actions for **management and administrators**, for **lecturers and support staff**, for **students/student leaders**, for **government**



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University leadership

1. Symbols
2. Accommodation
3. Access to facilities
4. Race/gender ombud
5. Diverse lecturing experience
6. Diverse management
7. Spatial planning - safety of female students
10. Translanguaging
11. Writing centres
12. Compulsory African language
10. Use of dictionaries in exams
11. Transit time increased for consultation
12. Formal mechanism to complain about lecturer conduct
13. Administrators equipped for students' realities
14. Hardship funds
15. Funding information officers



University leadership (2)

18. Commissioners of oaths available in funding offices
19. Administrative offices accessible hours
20. Free or subsidised transport
21. Technology proficiency capacity development
22. Improved mental health facilities
23. Institutional justice processes
24. Formal mentoring programmes for all undergraduate students.
25. Resources for student self-management
26. Family events part of student orientation
27. Multiple orientations - compulsory
28. Course on other directed and self-directed learning



Lecturers and support staff

1. Formal course on the social history of SA
2. Relevant Southern material
3. Formal reporting mechanism for GBV and harassment
4. Accents
5. Lecturers trained to communicate
6. Translanguaging
7. Lecturers as enablers of learning
8. Lecturers accessible
9. Course content to include academic know-how
10. Lectures compulsory for 1st yrs
11. Lecturers trained for referral e.g. mental health & crime
12. Faculty to act as mediators between students and management
13. Academic credit for reflections on transformation
14. Faculty to offer/administer mentorship programmes



Student leaders and students

1. Student activities must encourage diversity
2. Mechanisms to report staff who gender discriminate
3. Awareness of support services – academic and mental health
4. Compulsory courses to disrupt patriarchy.
5. Mobilise peer academic support (incl. social media)
6. Students helped to include family in study progress
7. Compulsory lectures
8. Frequent incentivised check-ups (study skills, career guidance, mental health, time use and writing).
9. Opportunities for funding
10. Watchdog over residence allocations, incl. racial mix
11. Technology courses required
12. Public service messages
13. Student protests as opportunities for reflection
14. Student orientation repeated



Government and policy makers

1. External structures for victimized students
2. Dedicate funding for Southern knowledge production
3. Multilingualism encouraged from school level
4. Change monitored
5. policy-makers should
6. Student funding reforms and accountability
7. No withholding of marks for non-payment of fees
8. Incentives for faith communities to assist students (eg. Accommodation, study spaces, com of oaths)
9. Private security firms to be held to strict codes of conduct
10. A standing forum for students to engage policy makers
11. Govt funded research on learning from students
12. Money for peer support and mentoring programmes



Questions

1. How does this account of the students in South Africa differ from others you've heard?
2. What questions do you have about the role of research in bringing about social justice?
3. How useful in Therborn's categories of disrupting inequality? Can you give examples of which recommendations addresses each?

GÖRAN THERBORN THE KILLING FIELDS OF INEQUALITY

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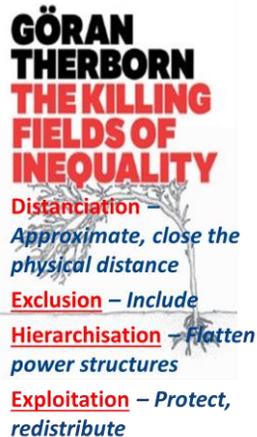
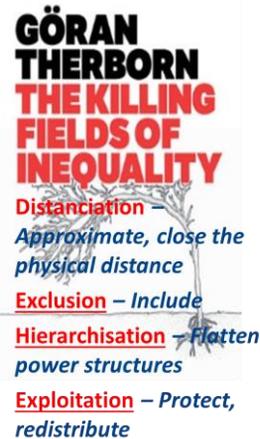
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