

moralise moral-eyes

Investigating possibilities for restitution in
Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and
South Africa: Language, race, ethnicity
and religion

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Introduction

- Interviewed 72 students from four universities in four different countries in Africa
- Asking how best university students can move from seeing, to knowing, to acting against privilege and injustice
- Used qualitative research as an intervention
 - Interviews
 - Essays
 - Vignettes

Context is everything

Cameroon: The Anglophone Problem

Nigeria: Religion, Ethnicity, Geography in diminishing scales

Sierra Leone: Ethnicity and Violence

South Africa: The Race Divide

Background to all of these:

Colonial divide and rule

Imposed national boundaries spanning languages & ethnicities

Post-colonial power struggles along race / ethnic / religious / geographical fault lines

How does it affect people broadly?

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

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

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

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

How does it affect oppressed group personally?

Across contexts:

Lack of access to education and work opportunities

Discrimination and harassment

Cronyism for 'in' group

Shame

No hope or opportunity

In some cases, direct violence

Fear of violence

Restitution? What does it mean?

Giving Back, Restoring, Making Right – common in all contexts

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

How do we 'do' restitution?

Most emphasised individual non-discrimination and treating people fairly

Why? Barriers:

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

What did we learn?

Context is important

Knowing and understanding past is important

More education around the ideas of 'social restitution' necessary

The role/rot of the privileged (Tracing the Spiderwebs)

Only through a deep recognition of our privilege that we can *begin* to undo ourselves and explore our role in the creation of a more just society- does such a role exist or should we just be left to rot?

In the four African states privilege is the result of a direct legacy of both passive and active oppression.

Privilege is only invisible to those that hold it

To the oppressed, the privilege of particular groups is far from invisible but rather a blindingly bright reminder of the deep inequality in which they continue to exist

Privilege inflections: Who is to blame?

Cameroon: 'all', Francophones dominated state apparatus, historians, colonists, their parents

Nigeria: Complicated, participants avoided labelling selves as beneficiaries, rather assigned 'the government' or 'all of us' or 'them' (not us)

Sierra Leone: Mende & Temne hold political power, Creoles hold economic & social power

South Africa: Political power transferred 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 & blame.

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)

For Adam it is clear, as long as oppression and selective privilege continue to exist it will be impossible for any real interaction to occur.

Should the Privileged have a role in restitution?

It is necessary to interrogate the reasons why the **privileged *should*** have a role. For many of the oppressed it seems that they do not want the ‘help’ of the privilege offered to them in paternalistic and patronizing ways.

What about the victims?

Few people identified as victims

Some ‘fuzziness’ with the term (spatial, intersectional and temporal issues)

Most victims: young women

General ‘dislike’ of the term: prefer survivors of injustice

Cameroon: Most Francophone students claim victimhood

Nigeria: Muslim & Christians suffer religious injustice equally

Sierra Leone: Victims claim to suffer from ethno-political injustice

South Africa: Vivid intersectional nature of black students victimhood (race, class, gender).

What is the moral role of victims?

- To draw attention to atrocities/injustices
 - Most victims feel nothing has been done to right injustices
 - Try to make things 'better' instead of 'right'
- To forgive their perpetrators
 - Conditional forgiveness (perpetrators remorse & repentance)
 - A religious motivation & virtue
 - Increases their personal and perceived power
 - A legitimate form of revenge
- To become resister's of injustice
 - An insurance to protect them from future injustices

What of the bystanders (ostriches), why so many?

- Prevalence of ostriches/bystanders in Cameroon, Nigeria, Sierra Leone
- Don't know how to act
- Perceptions of powerlessness.
- Blindness to issues of privilege and injustice
- Socio-political context instills fear

- Consequences: No personal responsibility. Deference to God/Government.

What did we find that influences how we should see change

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Importance of Seeing clearly issues of privilege and injustice. There are people who don't see or see in distorted ways. Seeing is the first major component of change.

Stories were often helpful in mitigating distorted seeing/refusing to see

People see, but don't act. Often at times because of the perception of powerlessness. The concept of everyday actions has potential to mitigate this gap.

Resistance through everyday actions.