Being turned inside out: researching youth, morality and restitution from the Global South

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This article maps my journey as a scholar engaged in the research of youth morality (located in the Global South); as a beneficiary of injustice having grown up as a white South African; as a navigator of complex personal histories (discovering my mixed race family origins); and arriving at restitution as a career research focus. It reflects on the experience of being turned inside out through examining personal and political locatedness in moral research and how these change as new discoveries are made. It also explores feelings of professional exclusion despite being the recipient of a privileged Northern hemisphere education and shows how the topic of restitution addresses some of the inherent tensions in my personal life, whilst offering potential for redemptive North-South partnerships. Moreover, researching restitution in global contexts of moral injustice, across the Global North–South divide, has the potential to expand the internationalisation of scholarship on morality and moral education.

The present past

> We are our past as well as our future. (Booth, 1999, p. 259)

I have always known myself to be a beneficiary of injustice. The flyleaf of my published PhD thesis reads as follows: 'To the phenomenal young men and women who made this study possible....In partial repayment of an enormous debt, from a beneficiary of injustice' (Swartz, 2010a). After submitting my dissertation I remember driving home and falling asleep in the driveway, unable even to walk from the car to my house. My PhD had drained me—emotionally, physically and

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intellectually—for all the usual reasons (long hours, anxiety and financial struggle), but also because of my own, very personal, location in the enterprise.

My study looked at the lived morality of black youth living in poverty in a township in South Africa. I had spent nearly four years working on the dissertation, half in the field. Since the age of 15 I had been involved in youth work and social justice in South Africa, but this academic milestone marked a turning point—from youth activist to understanding my own deep complicity in South Africa's past and future. About to embark on a career as a critically engaged academic researching morality, my complex biography was to become a central feature.

I am a white South African; a sociologist from the Global South, academically trained in two élite international institutions (Cambridge, UK, and Harvard, USA); and a researcher of morality and inequality. Each of these three descriptors continues to have profound implications for my life and work. My 'race'[1]— being a white South African—made me a former 'oppressor' amongst the youth I researched, a beneficiary of injustice and a player in historical discrimination and current inequalities. As a sociologist, my choice of topic ('morality') and location in the Global South instigates multiple trajectories of exclusion and invisibility. The sociology of morality is still nascent and I am outnumbered by colleagues from the Global North. In addition, my choice of morality as my field of expertise has confounded the personal and the professional, since I am a beneficiary of the injustice I now seek to investigate and ameliorate. This choice, in particular, has come to inform my latest research direction—that of restitution. Each of these themes—locatedness, exclusion and restitution—will be considered in turn.

Personal and political locatedness

When I embarked on my ethnographic research for my study in a South African township, most recognised me as a beneficiary of the Apartheid system, but few would know of my divided and complex racial and socio-economic history. My grandfather was a 'coloured' man whose parents were Griqua (the equivalent of 'first nations' in other categorisations and 'black' under Apartheid's definition). After his marriage to my grandmother he was reclassified as 'white' under the Apartheid law. Consequently, I grew up in an impoverished 'grey' community where 'black' and 'white' lived precariously alongside each other.

Later, when I began my research amongst youth in the township, my mixed race origins made me an invisible insider. I looked white but understood the rituals of exclusion and poverty—the use of money, the elevation of rituals and funerals (the time and money spent on them, as well as the physical presence of coffins and body-viewing rather than sanitised memorial services), the importance of caring for family rather than placing them in homes for the elderly—which few of my middle-class peers understood. Young people in the township were frequently amused by my insight. If they had asked where I grew up and who my family was they might have understood better, but they never did. Despite this somewhat

privileged position of invisible insider, I remained externally, a wealthy and powerful person. Young people perceived me as someone who could withhold or dispense favours and attention based on how they treated me and through what they told me. As a result our political and racial conversations were stilted until late into the study.

As I discovered young people's deeply hidden feelings and thoughts about the injustices of Apartheid, the personal and the political converged in my academic studies. My academic training was meant to allow me to dispassionately record the lives of young people for whom poverty, poor standards of education, joblessness, fear and tragedy were everyday occurrences. My political complicity and personal responses broke my heart. In my field notes, and later in an article, I wrote 'I have been surprised at my emotional response to this research.…Daily, youth ask me for money for lunch, shoes, transport…I am overwhelmed by all that I am experiencing, tears are seldom far off' (Swartz, 2011, p. 55). Of course, as part of my training I had been encouraged to exercise reflexivity, and 'not waste time trying to eliminate "investigator effects": [but] instead…[to] understand…those effects' (Delamont, 1992, p. 8). As a result, I frequently asked myself 'questions about what it means to be a "white" South African living in the midst of inequalities…and how I might best invest my privileged academic experience into the South African context' (Swartz, 2011, p. 55).

I left the field with a new critical consciousness. The stories young people told me left indelible impressions. Two accounts will haunt me for the rest of my life (Swartz, 2010a, pp. 130–132). When I asked how South Africa had changed since the end of Apartheid, Vuma, a 19-year-old young man, told the story of a factory distributing surplus goods and of seeing 'mothers running for the bread':

> Vuma: I was worried when I see…there were about 20 to 50 mothers you know— where they are giving bread away like. So I saw mothers they are running there to be there the first to get that bread. I thought like in SA it has changed but it didn't change that much…[I thought] like how are their children…and how do they take them to school when the farmers [their employers] give them so little money—and they have to run for bread? (Swartz, 2010a, p. 132)

Vuma was one of very few young people who made the connection between past injustice and present poverty. He told me that Apartheid had affected him by affecting his parents. 'If Apartheid didn't affect them then maybe we wouldn't be staying in that shack…I won't get corrupt —like I will be still at school.…If my parents are staying in the suburbs I wouldn't [be]…smoking *ganja* [marijuana], you know, and hijacking' (Swartz, 2010a, pp. 130–132).

Most of the other youth I interviewed reflected the pained and difficult conversation I had with Vathiswa, a 19-year-old young woman whom I unsuccessfully tried to harangue into blaming white people for black people's current circumstances of poverty and unemployment:

> Interviewer: Why do you live in that shack?
> Vathiswa: Because my mother have no money to buy and live in the other house.

Interviewer:	And why has your mother got no money?
Vathiswa:	She's not working.
Interviewer:	Why isn't your mom working?
Vathiswa:	Because she didn't get the job.
Interviewer:	And why are there no jobs?
Vathiswa:	[Long pause—hangs her head]…
Interviewer:	Why do you live in a shack and I live in a house?
Vathiswa:	Because you have money.
Interviewer:	Why do I have money and you don't?
Vathiswa:	Because my mother is not working.
Interviewer:	You think it's got nothing to do with Apartheid that I have money and you don't?
Vathiswa:	[Softly] Yes.
Interviewer:	Okay—so tell me.
Vathiswa:	Yes—Apartheid. Because [for] the black people is not easy to find a job. White people is easy to find a job. Because [pause] whites learn—so black people do not learn because in long ago—they, the black people is not getting better education. So white people have a better education, and the black people—their parents have no money to go to school. (Swartz, 2010a, p. 130–131)

Vathiswa did not (or would not) make the connections between poverty and structural injustice. Her reluctance to blame Apartheid for her current condition made this research extremely personal. I reflected heatedly: 'I, as a white South African, had been a beneficiary to the Apartheid that robbed her of her future. The least she could do was see it—and be angry about it and blame me or Apartheid' (Swartz, 2010a, p. 131).

These youth described immediate influences, such as education and unemployment, rather than the injustices of Apartheid for their current circumstances. They articulated an unrealistic belief in meritocracy and their own agency. In so doing they were generously letting white people off the hook for the past. Confronted with these views from young people—who ought to have been angry—my study ultimately and directly led me to ask 'what place restitution ought to have in South Africa's future' (Swartz, 2011, p. 55)—a subject that has gnawed at my conscience as I have sought to build an academic career back in South Africa.

Professional exclusion

To work in the area of morality and moral education, and to do so from an African or Global South perspective, is to experience multiple professional exclusions. While not insurmountable, these exclusions both shape my focus as a Global South researcher invested in social and political transformation and exacerbate its difficulty. While completing my graduate studies in the US and UK, inclusion was seamless. It was easy to obtain funding to attend American and European conferences; access to journals and publishing opportunities were vast. Having made a deliberate decision to return home to South Africa to participate in its transformation, I soon realised that access and inclusion would be increasingly

difficult. Distances and costs to travel to a two- to three-day international conference were prohibitive. Papers delivered by South scholars were poorly attended and then mainly by a handful of Global South delegates (with the exception of one or two Global North internationalists). The upside, of course, was the ability to grow South-South networks, but seldom collaborations—again due to the prohibitive costs of travel both within the African region and to other South countries.

And while it was relatively easy to be nominated and elected to boards of professional associations (frequently as the only African member), it is always difficult to attend meetings, even those held virtually, due to time and internet quality differences. I soon became resigned to having to raise more money than my Global North colleagues to attend conferences, to be thankful for a $500 reimbursement for a flight that cost $2000 (when some in the Global North made a profit from their reimbursement), to ignore wishes for a happy Spring as we headed into Autumn and to struggle to overcome exchange control regulations (absent in the Global North) to pay membership fees through PayPal. Many of these are small things, but it is precisely these small things that perpetuate the exclusion of Global South scholars from an international family of scholarship.

I encountered a more serious obstacle to challenging the preponderance of Global North scholarship when asked to guest edit a special issue of the *Journal of Moral Education* (*JME*). The key question we asked was how our work in Africa 'can challenge prevailing and dominant Global North frameworks and begin conversations for mutual benefit across the North–South divide' (Swartz, 2010b, p. 268). I was excited at the challenge. This was a unique opportunity to more than double, in one issue, contributions from Africa from 6 to 13 over the almost 40 years of the *JME*'s existence. However, I was soon disappointed at the paucity and quality of papers submitted—which helped to explain why so few papers from Africa have been published in *JME* over the years. In the editorial to the special issue, Moral Education in sub-Saharan Africa—Culture, Economics, Conflict and AIDS, I wrote of the state of African scholarship on moral education, citing the minimal opportunities scholars in Africa (and those elsewhere in the Global South) have for publishing, given language barriers, the pressures of academic teaching in under-resourced institutions and limited access to current scholarship resources (Swartz, 2010b). A different kind of disappointment occurred, however, when after an inordinate effort, we produced the special issue—and received very little response, despite inviting 'critique, challenge, debate, engagement—anything but silence' (Swartz, 2010a, p. 271). Even within the moral education community—those concerned with equality, domination and injustice—there seems to be a lack of will (or perhaps only time!) to engage more deeply across the boundaries of privilege, wealth and hegemony to address international (or subaltern) contexts.

These exclusions, however, have not discouraged me. I am grateful for the nurturing and opportunities I have received in the moral education community. It is precisely the fact that I have to raise more money, look harder for collaborators and edit more deeply that has tested my commitment to rectify these imbalances,

and to ask how our collective scholarship may be better internationalised as we head into an increasingly globalised future. In turning to the final section of this reflection I offer an example of a topic in the study of morality and moral education that provides opportunities for increased and equitable partnerships across the South-North divide.

Arriving at restitution

Each of these journeys I have described—personal, political and professional—have led me to a research focus on the notion of restitution as an organising framework for social justice. I am in the formative stages of what I hope to be a long-term study entitled 'Restitution as moral imperative: international conversations about future-mindedness, transformational justice and the politics of healing'. It is envisaged as a Global South–North and South–South partnership to include partners in Peru, Burundi, Canada, New Zealand, Germany, USA and South Africa. These partnerships have been intentionally chosen so that some are strictly South–South (Burundi, South Africa, Peru), some pair scholars from indigenous populations in the Global North (New Zealand and Canada) with South scholars, while others are more conventional South–North partnerships. In each of these partnerships the aims will be both egalitarian and emancipatory.

In compiling an initial review of the literature I was immediately struck by how most theorising on restitution (broadly conceived) originated in the North, with programme examples and case studies emanating from the South. The main theorists on restitution include Elazar Barkan (USA), Todd Calder (Canada), Arthur Eglash (USA), Wendy Lambourne (Australia) and Chandran Kukathas (a Malaysian-born Australian). Each contributes an important conceptual perspective to restitution as a moral imperative, and expands the term beyond a purely legal interpretation. Barkan (2000), for example, uses the term restitution 'to include the entire spectrum of attempts to rectify historical injustices' (p. xix), and differentiates between reparations and restitution. In reparations material compensation is made for harm suffered, whereas in restitution the ideal is to restore things to the state they were prior to the injustice being committed or might have been had the injustice not been committed—a wider and more complex aim. This has implications for both the victim and beneficiary. Barkan also advocates 'the rise of international morality…[in which] both sides enter voluntarily into negotiations and agreements; they are not imposed by the winner upon the loser or by a third party' (p. 317). Kukathas (2006) argues the problem of 'agency' and contends that 'some persons can be held responsible for some of the wrongs of the past, but one *generation* cannot be asked to atone for the sins of earlier ones' (p. 331). Such a view sits in striking opposition to that articulated by Calder (2010), namely that 'whether or not we participate in, or contribute to, practices that result in injustices…we share responsibility for the injustices they [in this case, sweatshop workers] suffer because we benefit from them' (p. 264). In order to distinguish between unintentional and culpable benefit, Calder turns to the dialectical

terms 'forward-looking' and 'backward-looking' responsibility with regard to restitution (p. 269). For Calder forward-looking restitution is an individual's moral recognition and voluntary response to injustice, as opposed to a focus on blame for the past. Eglash's (1958) 'creative restitution', on the other hand, can be understood as a more holistically forward-looking model of justice that to some extent attempts consciously to pre-empt future conflict. Finally, Lambourne (2009) describes a notion of 'transformational justice', which she proposes as an alternative to transitional justice in post-conflict societies.

In the Global South various Truth Commissions (a programmatic intervention) form the focus of attempts at restitution and healing. Nevins (2003) writes that, 'Truth commissions have become an almost obligatory component of the process by which national societies attempt to reconstruct themselves in the aftermath of, and recover from, periods of violent, authoritarian rule, and/or war, especially of the civil variety' (p. 677). Twenty-one Truth Commissions have been held and completed since 1974, for example in post-Pinochet Chile, post-Apartheid South Africa, East Timor, Mauritius and Sierra Leone (Nevins, 2003, p. 678). An almost lone theorist from the South, Mahmood Mamdani (2002), argues for the importance of restitution towards communities in addition to individuals since the harm done has been a corporate injury. A number of other Global South scholars focus on theorising land restitution (Bourassa & Strong, 2000; Walker, 2005). Few, if any, deal with the wider psychological, emotional and moral elements of restitution. Limited empirical studies (from the North or the South) have been conducted on the notion of restitution as such (rather than restorative justice, forgiveness or peace education). Iyer *et al.*'s (2004) study that interrogates the role of guilt in efforts to make restitution in Australia is one such example.

So while theorising around restitution seems to be the purview of Global North scholars, and Global South scholars provide case studies of particular atrocities or interventions, what appears to be lacking is the rigorous investigation of restitution as a social and moral discourse. Is it possible that the notion of restitution may be a productive organising principle for understanding multiple aspects of lived human experience in which injustice has occurred, such as genocide, imperialism, subjugation, environmental degradation and interpersonal conflict? Other questions that might be asked include: (1) How is restitution understood in various national contexts and sectors (such as government, legal, civic, theological, individual)?; (2) How do national, communal and personal processes of restitution differ?; (3) What roles do time, responsibility, guilt and grace play in restitution?; (4) How are reconciliation, reparation, healing, justice and restitution related?; (5) What are the possibilities and promises of restitution-based social movements?; and (6) How might the notion of restitution be included in moral education for children and youth?

My journey over the past decade of being turned inside out and experiencing multiple levels of inclusion and exclusion, visibility and invisibility, personally, politically and professionally, has contributed to my arrival at such a research agenda. It may not prove to be a politically popular study; it might not fit neatly

into the academy or into sociology; there may be a paucity of funding available. However, my involvement over the past few years with the Association for Moral Education (AME) and the *JME* has incubated, encouraged and interrogated my ideas, and offered support, motivation and courage to pursue such a course. It has provided me with colleagues and mentors for the journey and lengthy discussions about justice, morality and academic imperialism, whether in Cape Town or Cambridge, Nanjing or Nantucket. The challenge that remains is to establish *equal* and accommodating partnerships across the South-North divide in order to do justice to the important, yet volatile, topic of restitution.

Creating redemptive partnerships

In this reflection I have spoken of my personal situatedness in moral education research: as a Global South scholar with a privileged Global North education; as an invisible insider with some unique insights with regard to race and poverty; and as a beneficiary of injustice who has been turned inside out through investigating restitution in local and international contexts.

Clearly Global South scholarship is crucial to the future of both the AME and the *JME*, since moral education increasingly takes place in pluralist contexts, amidst economic disparity and against interpersonal and national conflict—all areas in which the Global South has first-hand experience. Many of the world's greatest moral challenges, including inequality, conflict and cultural oppression, and many of its solutions such as truth commissions and indigenous moral codes, are to be found in the Global South.

However, it is not merely enough to invite Global South scholars to the table. Their struggles with access, finance and quality require special accommodation, through the many ways that this reflection has highlighted, and which dominant academic groups have not always succeeded in providing. Inclusion means levelling the playing fields: encouraging opportunities for Global South voices (even if it takes time and effort to develop capacity, overcome the linguistic imperialism of English in journal articles or symposia—and requires selfless acts of editorial altruism); creating spaces for moral researchers to examine and write about their own locatedness as sympathiser, beneficiary, bystander or victim in research (as this special issue does); and urging Global South researchers to develop theory rather than being the ones to provide the research site, the social context and the sensational case study.

This reflection on my journey, from beneficiary to activist, outsider to insider, and straddler of both North and South through partnerships and education, has been a rare privilege. I now see more clearly the redemptive possibilities of North-South partnerships in which agendas are co-created and accommodations made, without domination or subjugation. I recognise how personal locatedness creates both distance and engagement, especially in the context of a volatile subject such as restitution. I reluctantly accept how this self-knowledge will keep turning me inside out, but am confident of the worth of its results.

Note

1.   Race in the South African context is especially problematic. Under Apartheid (Republic of South Africa, 1950), people were classified and reclassified according to arbitrary criteria: 'Black' (or 'African' or 'Black African'), 'White', 'Coloured' and 'Indian/Asian'. As a small protest to these artificial categories, though I use them for descriptive purposes, I do not capitalise these terms.

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