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EDITORIAL

The pain and the promise of moral education in sub-Saharan Africa

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The term ‘moral’ has had a chequered history in sub-Saharan Africa, mainly due to the legacy of colonialism in Africa and the history of Apartheid oppression in South Africa. When Apartheid’s racist policies were entrenched, through a series of legislative acts beginning in 1948, the Nationalist government notoriously enacted a statute known as *The Immorality Act* (Republic of South Africa, Parliament, 1950). Sadly, the act had nothing to do with morality as it ought to be understood. It did not deal with kindness, human flourishing or the good life, or with the inhumane ways in which people deal with each other, or with the censure of people who perpetrate violence or perpetuate injustice. Rather this notorious *Immorality Act*, prohibited sexual intercourse and marriage between people of different ‘races’. It not only served to entrench Apartheid as ‘one of the great evils of the modern era’ (Crais, 2002, p. 4) and ‘a crime against humanity’ (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 1999, p. 94), but also forever tainted the term ‘morality’ by loading it with references to miscegenation, white supremacy and social control.

Furthermore, the philosophy underpinning African colonisation was largely supported by the view that colonisation was a vehicle towards the ‘civilisation’ of the continent, with ‘civilisation’ being ‘not just a marker of material improvement, but also a normative judgment about the moral progress of society’ (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2006). Moreover ‘colonising’, ‘civilising’, ‘Christianising’ and ‘moralising’ were inextricably linked. In contrast, when renowned author, Antjie Krog (1999) speaks of ‘three centuries of fractured morality’ (p. 68), she is referring to the immoral history of colonisation, slavery, land dispossession, conquest, subjugation and inequality in sub-Saharan Africa. ‘Morality’ clearly means different things to different people and in Africa it is an especially problematic term, not least when, as is currently the case in Uganda, Malawi and Zimbabwe, sexual orientation is cause for moral censure and legal conviction.

Moral education is subsequently tainted by association, especially since it, too, has been used as a vehicle of cultural imperialism, nationalist propaganda and social (and

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sexual) control. Consequently, when one speaks of morality and moral education in sub-Saharan Africa as a progressive and democratic pursuit, much prior explanation is needed.

To be clear, moral education in Africa, and elsewhere, ought to be concerned with both private and public morality; with what it means to be a good person and to lead a good life. It covers intimate, communal and national relationships between human beings, as well as between people and their environment. It should be concerned with violence and crime, conflict and peace, slavery and human trafficking, social spending and consumption, judgement and incarceration, inequality and greed. It must be interested in the moral significance of social class, poverty and unemployment, as well as the moral implications of lack of housing, welfare, access to education, gender equality, freedom of opportunity, fairness, racism, homophobia, human rights and justice in all its forms. These are all moral issues and of importance for moral education in sub-Saharan Africa.

The key question that this Special Issue seeks to address is: what contribution can scholars from Africa concerned with moral education make to the multiple issues of culture, conflict, economics and HIV/AIDS that, while not peculiar to sub-Saharan Africa, are certainly acute in this region of the world? Furthermore, are there ways in which this work, frequently undertaken in difficult circumstances, can challenge prevailing and dominant Global North frameworks and begin conversations for mutual benefit across the North–South divide? The themes covered in this Special Issue deal with much which is painful, although some promising pathways are suggested.

The promise of *Ubuntu*, moral capital and moral education

Four papers in this Special Issue showcase the promise of doing moral education in sub-Saharan Africa. Each offers a distinctive perspective drawn from philosophy, economics (broadly conceived), sociology and education regarding what moral education may look like if the authors' recommendations are taken seriously. The African philosophy of *Ubuntu/Botho* has great promise for moral education, both through its teaching and in research. Metz and Gaie analyse *Ubuntu/Botho* and offer a 'theoretical reconstruction' of an African approach to moral education research as a plausible alternative to Western approaches to morality. They make a compelling case for *Ubuntu/Botho* as worthy of attention by international moral theorists by presenting a comprehensive principle—that of social harmony and personhood. For them the goal of moral education should be to develop the personhood of students, which means facilitating their capacity to prize community. Metz also provides an important and complementary review article on recent work in African ethics. Drawing on three main areas, namely how African ethics speaks to political and economic life, environmental concerns and medical practice, his article introduces the rich texts of African moral philosophy.

Economically, Mogobe Ramose, one of Africa's foremost philosophers, presents *Ubuntu/Botho* as an antidote to the current practice of timocracy (rule by money).

Analysing historical trends in gender relationships, franchise, development practice, the use of privatised military forces and the evolution of money, he shows how timocracy threatens to undermine democracy, not only in Africa but internationally. In concluding he expounds on *Ubuntu/Botho's* central tenet of valuing people over possessions and applies his thinking to everyday life in an African context. It is symbolic that this antidote to high capitalism comes from a continent where the effects of global greed and consumption are most acutely experienced in poverty, disease, inequality and corruption.

Sociologically, in my own paper I show how social theory has had a tentative relationship with moral education and I offer two sociological tools—the notion of ‘moral ecology’ and ‘moral capital’—that promise theoretical and analytical value in teaching and researching moral education. It is symbolic, also, that a plea to allow social context, *including impoverished environments*, to inform research and teaching in moral education should come from Africa. Ironically, it was my graduate education in the Global North that allowed me to see so starkly this missing emphasis in moral education.

Educationally, Matemba’s paper goes beyond a description of the evolution of moral education in Botswana and offers insight into the effects of culture, religion and modern secularisation on moral education. Matemba clearly analyses the progression of moral education in Botswana (mirroring that in other locations)—from indigenous moral education that was central to public life but tended to be authoritarian, to moral education inextricably linked to Christianity, through to the challenges of introducing a secular approach in a country with strong religious foundations.

The pain of AIDS, conflict and poverty

Of course, each of the papers described as holding promise for moral education also hints at the pain inherent in a region facing multiple challenges. The second set of three papers and the review article dealing with HIV/AIDS describe more fully what these challenges are and how moral education might address them. Sub-Saharan Africa has the ignominy of having the worst AIDS pandemic in the world. Of the 33.4 million people living with HIV worldwide, 67% live in sub-Saharan Africa (UNAIDS, 2009). The moral issues that emanate from the AIDS pandemic include the effects that a group of dissident intellectuals have had on vulnerable and poorly educated people by denying its existence and causes (known as ‘AIDS denialism’); the reluctant provision of anti-retroviral medication to those infected; the daily discrimination against and stigmatisation of those who are infected; and the cultural practices that exacerbate the epidemic. The paper by Oluga, Kiragu, Mohamed and Walli provides important data, obtained from teacher educators and teacher trainees, regarding the cultural barriers to effective AIDS education in schools. In their review article, as well as discussing the moral impact of AIDS denialism, DeKadt, Makusha and Richter lay out the moral dimensions of the struggle to make life-saving treatment and drug-based prevention available to the poor. They also address the moral

implications of the convergence between scientific method, indigenous knowledge and cultural practice, with respect to human health and well-being.

The issue of conflict is a further context of pain in which moral education occurs or needs to occur. The legacies of ethnic conflict, genocide and Apartheid are evident in many countries of the sub-Sahara region. Moral education has an important role to play and Rwantabagu's short paper on moral education in the aftermath of the Burundian genocide and Weldon's paper on refashioning the history curriculum after Apartheid in South Africa are important contributions. Weldon focuses on the transformation required of teachers who teach the moral lessons of the past through the new history curriculum in a new South Africa. In contrast, Rwantabagu provides a commentary on the community embeddedness of moral education. While he may not have addressed the many debates surrounding modern versus traditional values, and religious versus secular values, nevertheless he does provide an insider perspective on the future of moral (and peace) education in a region that has undergone massive and pervasive human suffering and conflict.

These contributions deserve to be widely read and discussed because of their global implications, not just, but especially, where moral education is undertaken in pluralist contexts and in the presence of economic disparity—for is that not now everywhere? Together these themes of the role of moral education in economics, conflict and culture and a moral response to AIDS constitute the pain and the promise of doing moral education in sub-Saharan Africa. But there is further anguish for moral education in Africa; it concerns the state of academic scholarship in the region.

The state of African scholarship on morality

African scholarship as a whole faces enormous challenges. These include an academic brain drain to the Global North, little interest in African publishing by international publishers, even less opportunity for African academics to publish given the pressures of academic teaching in under-resourced institutions and limited access to current scholarship through publications, the Internet and due to the high costs of intra-continental travel. These challenges are similarly experienced in African moral education scholarship and have affected the circumstances under which this Special Issue has been produced. Many contributions that were received were in need of deeper thought, clearer argument and more precise expression. Over the past two years, many of the papers now in this Special Issue have been refined beyond what is usual for an internationally accredited journal. For this I am indebted to the journal editor (Monica Taylor), my research assistants (Valerie Anderson and Ingrid van der Heijden) and to the 20 referees whose names appear on pp. 416–417. Even so, a few important contributions could not be completed due to competing demands or, in the end, a lack of capacity. Thus this Special Issue is an *initial* attempt to bring some of the current work in moral education in sub-Saharan Africa to wider attention and an attempt to encourage scholarship on moral education in Africa.

There remain a number of gaps in African moral education scholarship. There are as yet few empirically evaluated success stories about peace, citizenship, sex or moral

education that address the deep challenges of this region. Neither are there documented and analysed examples of countries that have managed to implement progressive, contextual programmes of scale. Unlike the case in the Global North, where psychological approaches to moral education predominate, there are also no obvious contributions from scholars working in moral psychology *in an African context*. It is hoped that this Special Issue will be a catalyst to endeavours in these and other areas of moral education from an African perspective.

The seven articles, two review articles and four book reviews in this Special Issue are written by 19 contributors from eight countries: Botswana (1), Burundi (1), Kenya (3), Nigeria (1), South Africa (8), Tanzania (2), the USA (1) and Zimbabwe (2). While contributors are not representative of the sub-region, much less the continent, their numbers and country representation extend the group of 16 participants from six countries who met for the first time in September 2008 at the inaugural meeting of the African Moral Education Network held in Cape Town, under the sponsorship of the *Journal of Moral Education (JME)* and the Human Sciences Research Council, South Africa. Moreover, this Special Issue more than doubles, in one issue, the number of contributions from Africa which the *JME* has been able to publish in the almost 40 years of its existence. Until now there have been only six published papers, written by Africans or dealing with Africa (Verhoef & Michel, 1997; McCormick, 1980; Potgieter, 1980; Lawrence, 1982; Swartz, 2006; Haste & Abrahams, 2008).

For too long, moral education scholarship (as with most areas of scholarship) has been centred in the Global North. This Special Issue offers a small corrective and provides thought-provoking and challenging ways in which contributions from the Global South impact on wider contexts of moral education. A key measure of success in offering to *JME* readers 'another voice', a distinctive sub-Saharan voice, is *response*. My co-contributors and I invite critique, challenge, debate, engagement—anything but silence—since, from the perspective of sub-Saharan Africa, that would be further cultural imperialism and at its core an act of immorality.

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