

A group of diverse people, including children and adults, are actively painting a wall. The wall features large, colorful letters and words such as 'XERO', 'discrimination', and 'INEQUALITY'. The scene is set in an urban environment with a brick wall and a corrugated metal structure in the background. The overall atmosphere is one of community engagement and social activism.

# Moral education in sub-Saharan Africa

- **Dr Sharlene Swartz**  
**Research Director**  
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**Fresh insights that cut  
through inequalities**

# Welcome and introduction

1. Professor Mogobe Ramose and Tawanda Makusha
2. Inaugural meeting of the African Moral Education Network in 2008
3. Special Issue of the Journal of Moral Education - available for free download on the Ingenta website
4. A book entitled 'Moral education in sub-Saharan Africa: Culture, economics, conflict and AIDS (edited by Sharlene Swartz and Monica Taylor)

# Outline

## 1. Re-envisioning moral education

- i. Morality's central questions
- ii. Who speaks of morality?
- iii. What are the meanings of morality?
- iv. Where is moral education done?

## 2. Recent work in African ethics

- i. Ubuntu as a moral education framework
- ii. Moral education in post conflict contexts - Burundi
- iii. Interrogating the morality of cultural practices – East Africa
- iv. Sociological tools for moral education
- v. Future directions for moral education

# Re-envisioning moral education



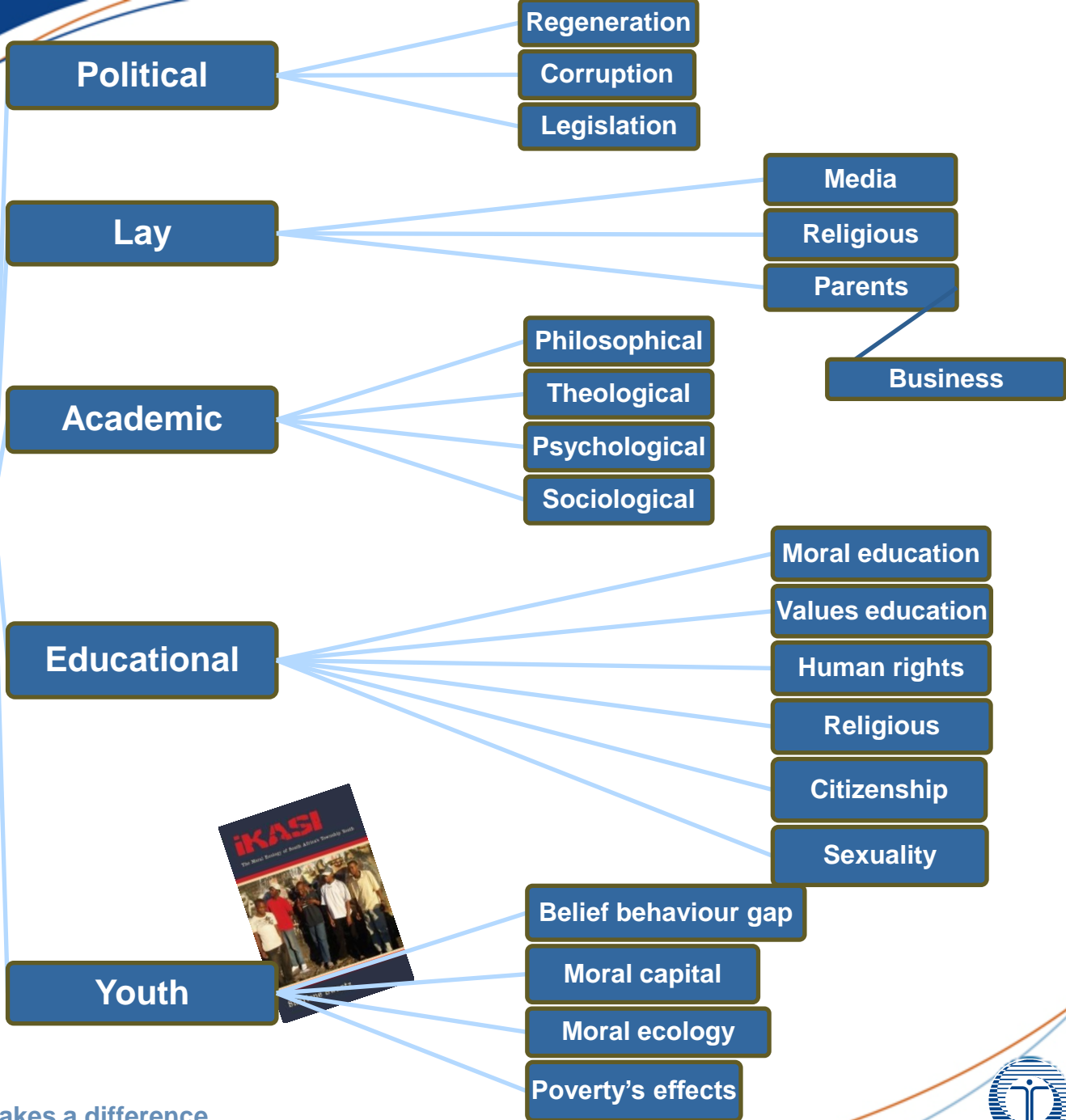
# Central and big questions

1. What is morality?
2. How do you research morality?
3. How do you speak about morality?
4. How might youth morality differ from that of adults?
5. How does poverty affect morality?

More personal and philosophical:

1. What is our common vision of the good life?
  2. What makes someone a good person?
  3. How do we become good people?
- I've identified at least five discourses on morality – 5 groups that speak of morality

# MORAL DISCOURSES



# The meaning of morality

- The distinction between ‘good or bad... right and wrong, or good and evil’ in human actions (OED)
- Moral values - those ‘principles and fundamental convictions which act as general guides to behaviour, the standards by which particular actions are judged to be good or desirable’ (Halstead and Taylor, 2000, p. 175) and which ‘provide us with reasons for action’ (Halstead & Taylor, 1996, p. 69).
- ‘A... *public system* applying to all rational persons, *governing behavior that affects others...* and has the lessening of evil or harm as its goal’ (Gert, 2005, p. 14).



# What do we mean by 'moral'?

1. Moral action - Doing the right thing
2. Moral knowledge – Knowing the difference between right and wrong
3. Moral identity - Seeing yourself as a good person
4. Moral desire – Wanting to be a good person



# The history of morality

1. 'Moral' has a chequered history especially in SA.
2. Due to legacy of colonialism and Apartheid
3. Apartheid infused 'morality' with references to miscegenation, white supremacy and social control
4. Notorious *Immorality Act* (1950).
5. Made morality primarily and almost irreversibly about sex and race
6. Absent were notions of kindness, human flourishing or the good life
7. Or the inhumane ways in which people deal with each other – those who perpetrate violence or perpetuate injustice.

# The history of morality (cont.)

8. 'Morality' means different things to different people:
  - Traditional, religious, secular values
  - 'Colonising', 'civilising', 'Christianising' and 'moralising' inextricably linked.
  - Antjie Krog - 'three centuries of fractured morality' referring to slavery, land dispossession, conquest, subjugation and current day inequality.
9. Moral education tainted by association - used as a vehicle of cultural imperialism, nationalist propaganda and social (and sexual) control.
10. Consequently, when one speaks moral education in SSA as a progressive and democratic pursuit, much prior explanation is needed.

# What is morality? (JME p. 268)

To be clear, moral education should be concerned with both private and public life; 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.

# Recent work in African ethics

# Special issue outline

1. Timocracy – ubuntu as an antidote to rule by money (Magobe Ramose)
2. The morality of HIV/AIDS (Tawanda) – the nature of knowledge and both action and inaction – incl AIDS denialism
3. Ubuntu – personhood and community
4. Post conflict contexts - Burundi
5. Cultural practices in East Africa
6. Sociological tools for moral education and research
7. The secular vs religious approach to moral education
8. Training of history teachers post Apartheid

# Ubuntu – Thad Metz and Joseph Gaie

1. African philosophy of *ubuntu/Botho* has great promise for moral education
2. Offer a ‘theoretical reconstruction’ of how ubuntu offers a plausible alternative to Western approaches to morality (duty, virtue ethics, utilitarianism).
3. Central principle of ubuntu: Social harmony and personhood.
4. Goal of moral education: to develop the personhood of students and facilitate their capacity to prize community.
5. Metz reviews how African ethics addresses:
  - Political and economic life
  - Environmental concerns
  - Medical practice.



# Burundi – Moral education after conflict - Rwantabagu

1. Where did the conflict come from?
  - A critique of colonialism as a moral ill
2. What is the solution?
  - A return to traditional values – with little critique of these values as perhaps morally questionable
  - A discussion of a moral education programme in Burundian schools developed by the Catholic church
  - A call for a partnership between parents, teachers and religious institutions

# Deceptive cultural practices – Oluga et al

1. Set in the context of trainee teacher discussing cultural barriers to effective AIDS education in schools
  - The notion of ‘mila potofu’ – emerged
  - Cultural practices that cause harm or death
2. Practices identified: ‘wife inheritance’, ‘sexual cleansing’, various taboos against certain foods (problematic for PLWA and pregnant women)
3. How does one question these?
  - Uses Piaget’s theory of cognitive development - ‘assimilation’, ‘accommodation’ or ‘adaptation’
  - Adaption can help people discard *mila potofu* in a culturally sensitive manner.

# Sociological tools for moral education and research – Sharlene Swartz

## Moral ecology and Moral capital

### Moral ecology:

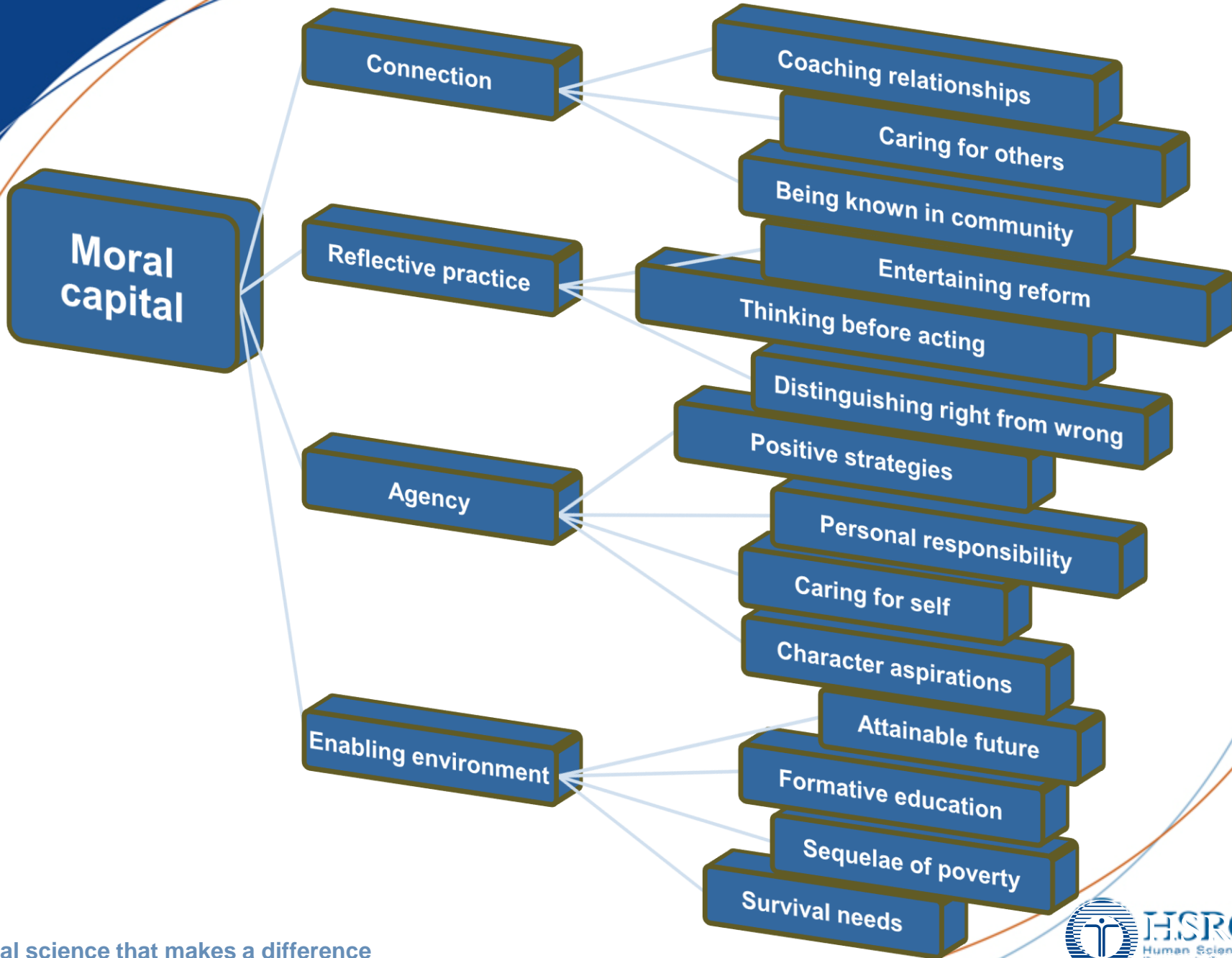
1. Environmental ecology looks at the soil, sun, rainfall, wind, topography in which a plant grows patterns
2. A moral ecology asks how self, community, home, school, streets, policy, country, apartheid, gender affects morality
3. It helps to answer a key question, regarding how poverty affects morality

# Poverty and morality

1. Alcohol and drugs sabotage intentions
2. FASD leads to ADHD and aggression
3. Poor education sabotages reflection skills
4. Lack of supervision and mentoring
5. Stress hormones, fatigue – too tired to act

# Moral capital

1. Being good as a kind of capital
2. Moral capital is the strategies and resources that young people need to be good – e.g. Connection, reflection, agency, enabling environment.
3. Moral capital is what young people acquire if they are good – e.g. a good reputation with people, prospective employees, community members – which helps them to get ahead.
4. Challenges youth cultures focus with youth disruption and subversion – to conformity





# Future directions

1. Applying indigenous philosophies to contemporary practices – foregrounding
2. Critiquing context incl. cultural practices
3. Broadening our understanding of morality – how it is cultivated, what it means and retrieving it from conservative discourses
4. Challenge prevailing and dominant Global North frameworks, largely psychological – Larry Kohlberg and Carol Giligan
5. Considering the social aspects of morality – a sociology of morality is mostly missing
6. Speaking calmly of traditional, religious and secular moral values
7. Differentiating between personal and public values
8. Re-inventing morality as rights, justice, fairness and ‘the good life’ for all – not just
9. Take Timocracy, the morality of AIDS, Restitution as moral imperative
10. Realising that almost all lifeskills education, sex education, religious education, human rights education, citizenship education, peace education is MORAL EDUCATION