Ubuntu and asset building: Decolonising and practicalising cattle ownership in rural (South) Africa

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Abstract: This is a qualitative paper built on literature review. Some literature allege that subsistence communal cattle farmers were unwilling to participate in mainstream marketing as a matter of choice, alternatively lack of capital and skills. My doctoral thesis similarly found but one factor stood out to the contrary. It found that the majority of the participants instead kept animals for other people without owning such animals. This impacted on lack of decision regarding market participation. Various strategies and policy tools have been adopted in most African communities to empower poor individuals to own cattle, but these strategies have achieved mixed results. My lecture here this evening extracted lack of ownership as needing attention to redress the problem. This lecture builds on the assertion that African indigenous instruments and tools can address the problem. This paper adopted the *Girinka* approach which was used in Rwanda to transfer cattle to empower poor households to own cattle as the framework. This *Girinka* produced good results and empowered many households on cattle ownership. Poor households managed to build asset base which enabled them to build wealth. This lecture uses *Ubuntu* as an instrument which could be used to transfer cattle from the fortunate to the less fortunate households to empower the poor to own cattle and build sustainable wealth.

Keywords: Afrocentricity, Decoloniality, Cattle (*bos Indicus/Taurus*), *Ubuntu*, Ownership,

Introduction and Background to this paper

Prof MS Mothata, Registrar of the University of South Africa, Prof ZZ Nkosi, the Acting Executive Dean, College of Human Sciences, Prof MM Moleki, School Director of the School of Social Sciences, my respondent Dr Prof Agnes Behr from the United States International University-Africa (USIU-A), Kenya who is my fellow researcher and friend, my dear colleagues from the Department of Development Studies, my doctoral supervisor Prof Lucius Botes, the broader Unisan community, fellow professors present, the Mafukata family and relatives, colleagues from far and near, friends and admirers, I wish to take this opportunity to appreciate you for joining me this evening for this historical moment – the evening of the delivery of my inaugural lecture as Professor of Development Studies. My lecture is delivered under the title: ***Ubuntu* and asset building: Decolonising and practicalising cattle ownership in rural (South) Africa.**

My lecture starts from an incident which happened when I was visiting friends in Uganda. On disembarking my flight from Johannesburg at the Entebbe Airport, Uganda, my attention was drawn to the two gentlemen who were walking just ahead of me. I overheard their conversation which had some familiar words I once came across in a research article by Dr Agnes Behr who said - '*Farkaliya Foolmadaqto'* - meaning, one cannot wash one's face with one finger (Behr, 2020). I immediately recalled my native proverb '*munwe munwe a u tusi mathuthu*' meaning one may not use one finger to take from a pot or plate. This is very much connected to '*umuntu ngu muntu ngabantu*' in native IsiZulu, alternatively, alternatively *munhu unoitwa munhu nevamwe vanhu* in Shona of Zimbabwe, alternatively '*muthu ndi muthu nga vhathu*', alternatively '*zwanda zwi a tanzwana'* (hands wash each other) in native Luvenda of far northern South Africa (Louw, 2002; Banda, 2019; Behr, 2021; Plaatjie, 2021; Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013). I later learn the proverb used by the two men walking Infront of me cuts across Ethiopia among the country's over 80 languages just like they say in Amharic "*Ande tate fite ayatebeme*" meaning the same as '*Farkaliya Foolmadaqto'* This proverb cutting across the Ethiopian various tribes, cultures and

traditions suggests that this country is a nation of "humanness", "collectivism" and "communalism". In most African regions where Kiswahili is the spoken language, it is evident that there has been expression of humanness (Kinyanjui, 2019). Humanness and collectivism underly Africaness (Ramantswana, 2016).

The Ethiopians as I overheard them, and the rest as indicated in different literature suggest one thing in common in Africa – Africa of communalism. Communalism expresses integration and cohesiveness, and to theorise this from Harmon (2002) and Mudau (2021) provides "evidence of African warmth, gentleness, interrelatedness, and hospitality to each other … especially [to] those found to be vulnerable" Both Harmon (2002) and Mudau (2021) express the idea that in Africa, the emphasis of life is how individuals should relate with others (Osei-Hwedie; 2007; Louw, 2002). These assertions speak to the concept of '*Ubuntu*' or '*Vhuthu*' or *botho* (Mudau, 2021; Holtzhausen, 2015; Osei-Hwedie, 2007) which will form the focus of my lecture here this evening.

Ubuntu has its origin and sustenance across many regions of Africa, although it is referred differently to demonstrate how diverse Africa is. While I have noted the opinion that *Ubuntu* is a southern Africa philosophy with roots in South Africa, I have noted in what Lefa (2015) and van Breda (2019) posited that it is an African philosophy. Both Lefa (2015) and van Breda (2019) are supported by Temitope Fagunwa (2019) who argued that *Ubuntu* has its roots in ancient African communalism relationships. Fagunwa links the popular Pan-Africanism as having been borrowed from *Ubuntu*. This assertion therefore links the ideas of Pan-Africanism popularised by among others Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah as having been influenced by African communal relations embedded in *Ubuntu* (Fagunwa, 2019).

Ubuntu as a concept has been gaining ground beyond traditional Africans to territories of the African white who have translated it into Afrikaans '*broederskap*' and English's '*brotherhood*' (Holtzhausen, 2015) for example. The genuineness of this assertion will require fundamental interrogation recalling from the archives on how *Ubuntu* is understood from African context and perspective. The hybriditisation of *Ubuntu* by Western epistemologies as revealed in Holtzhausen (2015) may not be entirely divorced from epistemological dilution which has been an attempt to perpetuate residues of coloniality beyond colonisation. I am not implying that there could be a devil in the Holtzhausen (2015) theory but attempted encroachment of African epistemologies by sentiments of Euro-American ideas have been prevalent throughout history. However, this attempt ushers contemporary scholarship on *Ubuntu* for example into "a complex archaeology of ideas and practices" (Scoones, 2009) enough to drive the agenda promoting free epistemologies – no longer confined to the narrowistic framework of Euro-American perspectives.

Ubuntu connects and binds Africa, and it appears it will soon become the bridge to connect the African peoples across their dividing regionalities and racial lines (Holtzhausen, 2015), and hence many such as Mudau (2020) calling it a possible instrument to address the scourge of xenophobia in Africa. *Ubuntu* expresses Africa's communal connection. Africa is about connection, not disconnection, and hence the historicity of colonisation of the continent being emphatic on 'discommunalising' Africa and Africans by any means possible. Therefore, the Western idea of individualised human life perspective remains a discord when smuggled into African context. It has been agreed in broader society that "the West tends towards individualism" (Lomas et al., 2023). The implication of this assertion is that the West would therefore associate with self-care and self-orientation (Lomas et al., 2023), whereas the collectivism-communalism characterized by

other-orientation and other-care would best describe an African set-up. Individualism is foreign in African cultures and traditions across their diversity. Therefore, individualism has been viewed by some as a left-over trail of the continent's colonisation by Europe. This left-over trail speaks to the persistent coloniality in the continent. I agree with Scoones' (2009) postulation that Africa is a concerted social space anchored on interconnectedness of socio-economic activities in relation to livelihood generation "in a complex bricolage" – suggesting that there is diversity in approach to this imperative – and my thesis places *Ubuntu* very much in this context. *Ubuntu* is all what Africa has, and it can be exploited as the foundation of our bricoleur dislodgement of lack of asset ownership if not the scourge of our poverty. It is intentional of my lecture not to refer to the commonly known Heifer International Pass On Programme which some of us know to have originated as an idea of one Dan West who was a farmer and church worker who had wanted to mitigate on the impact of the 1944 Spanish civil war on resource poor Spanish households (Chidembo, 2019. Dan West's idea was to provide options for the affected households to have means to access food – for example, milk (Chidembo, 2019). I have decided to connect the concept of *Ubuntu* and its practice with contemporary scientific proposition of wealth accumulation through cattle ownership to demonstrate that beyond the failing Western-centric tools and instruments of transferring wealth between people, there is this African philosophy which may provide the way out. The Heifer International Pass On Programme does not provide the intended context – especially from the perspective of African originality, and hence my preference to underpin my lecture on homegrown tools such as the *Girinka* of Rwanda.

My lecture responds to the question: <u>How can we use *Ubuntu* to build a sustainable asset base and wealth using cattle ownership among the rural poor as example</u>. It is crucial to respond to this question lest the idea of a post-apartheid state which will respond to democratisation and justice achieved by levelling the ground in the resource economics of the new state will not yield anything. Development of the so-called SMME sub-sector in the Agri-sector of the post-apartheid state – especially in cattle production will remain an illusion or a utopia hypothesised on a dysfunctional policy framework. Redistribution of cattle ownership to include the poor will facilitate entrance of many a poor in mainstream cattle farming empire which is currently dominated by white commercial farmers. Many a reviewed literature reveal that small-scale cattle farmers have low rates of participation in the market, but they associate this with all other factors but ownership of cattle. I do not have the pleasure of time and space to showcase my exciting doctoral results which revealed that the mere fact that most of the respondents who kept cattle did not own these cattle but kept them for some people – especially migrant male relatives impeded them from participating in the market (Mafukata, 2012). They lacked decision to participate in the market because they didn't own the animals. All other negative factors addressed, would not improve the situation until such time that 'ownership' of the animals would have been addressed. This is a practical route to uplift the poor to asset ownership and therefore a means to build opportunities for wealth accumulation among resource poor households.

In fact, it has become common theorisation across discipline in post-apartheid South Africa that *Ubuntu* has a role to play in aiding human development (Holtzhausen, 2015; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2019; Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013). Some have even called for its social capital activities to be used to anchor entrepreneurial innovations and business while others have done the same with social welfare among the vulnerable such as orphaned HIV/Aids children for example (Maqoko & Dreyer, 2007). This call for Ubuntu to play facilitative tool to aid human development initiatives must happen. It must happen because Africa can't afford to nature structures which

regrettably continue to enable "the reproduction of the same system of domination and oppression in the current so-called postcolonial situation" (Ramantswana, 2016). This connects to the argument which posits that "coloniality survives colonialism" (Ramantswana, 2016). Mine is an attempt to decolonize for demobilization and disempowerment of this social demon manifesting in lack of ownership of productive assets such as cattle among poor Africans by emerging with an instrument to assist the cause of wealth transfer. In doing so, I am persuaded by Ian Scoones' (2009) appeal that maybe it is about time that policy makers in the developmental context in Africa should "look at the real world and try and understand things from local perspective" – and *Ubuntu* provides that local perspective. I say this aware of the fact that African transformation regarding wealth redistribution has always met with resistance from those who have benefited from the colonial-apartheid systems which disadvantaged Africans in the first place. The strategy has been to complexify the use of African indigenous knowledges as instruments of this transformation, and to reduce these instruments as unworkable practices. It is my belief that when the decoloniality agenda in relation to asset accumulation and building happens, it empowers the African poor to generate wealth (Davis, 2022). The idea of using cattle as a means of asset building among the poor in rural economies fits well with this assertion.

Ubuntu has been making strides as a developmental tool in the class of popular liberal approaches. In liberal approaches, there is a contract between the state and the citizenry "in which the individual is granted rights in return for fulfilling certain obligations towards the state and fellow citizens (e.g. obeying the law, participating in paid work)" (Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013). *Ubuntu* reflects aspects of 'contractual' obligations in that it has been reciprocal at some instances while it is an open transaction of voluntarism not bound by reciprocal connections – all the time. In other words, it can be anchored on both 'need to reward' and voluntarism. It is paramount to note that *Ubuntu* has graduated instead above traditional-cultural tool believed in by some radical African theorists into a viable option if not alternative to liberal approaches to address developmental targets in African communities (Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013). In corroboration with this assertion, Whitworth and Wilkinson (2013) argued that "a greater consideration of the principles, practices and policy implications of ubuntu [sic] could lead to more effective strategies for reducing [child] poverty" for example. Osei-Hwedie (2007) corroborates the idea postulating that *Ubuntu* contradicts the notion that only Western values, ideas and approaches were the drivers of development – especially where values such as *Ubuntu* were available. *Ubuntu* provides development agenda with flexibility (Osei-Hwedie, 2007). The growth and popularity of this concept has also drawn the attention of post-apartheid constitutionalits who argue that *Ubuntu* could be the answer to enforce implementation of the Constitution of the emerging post-apartheid state (Holtzhausen, 2015).

This lecture demonstrates that a developmental issue of poverty alleviation through asset building among the poor – in the form of transference of ownership of cattle from the fortunate to the less fortunate can be achieved through the practicalisation of *Ubuntu* - this as an instrument for post-apartheid development (Whitworth & Wilkinson, 2013). This lecture was modeled on the framework of Rwanda's Girinka project which sought to transfer at least one cow to an identified poor family (Argent et al., 2014; Rugema, 2014). The *Girinka* project distributed 130 000 animals to poor families in rural Rwanda just at its onset (Argent et al., 2014). These numbers grew to 248 000 cows by 2016 while its benefits reached approximately 101 434 poor Rwandans (Mudingu, n.d). It is remarkable that by the fall of 2017, the *Girinka* had distributed a record 350 000 cows to poor Rwandans (Mudingu, n.d). Although the *Girinka* was an action of

government, and the authors have not mentioned *Ubuntu* as the guiding principle of the programme, it is evident from the context of the paper that this programme was underpinned by the properties of *Ubuntu*. Deeper into the ideas of Ruhangawebare (2010) and Mamman (2005), it was established that although none of their works specifically mention *Ubuntu* in their narratives, it is evident that both Ruhangawebare and Mamman did speak to '*Ubuntu*' in their expression of the idea of the making of another person by another which relates to *Ubuntu*'s values of '*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' (Mabovula, 2011).

Ruhangawebare (2010) and Mamman (2005) opine that African communities in Uganda and Nigeria respectively embraced and exercised "communal cultural values of tolerance, humanity and respect" on other humans - especially those considered less fortunate wanting to uplift African values of caring, and showing humility, thoughtfulness, being considerate, understanding, wise, generous, hospitable, socially mature, socially sensitive, virtuous, and blessed for example (Mabovula, 2011). Ruhangawebare (2010) and Mamman (2005) are of the opinion that in most sub-regions of the African continent, those considered poor were those who had no livestock – specifically cattle. In fact, in Setswana they say "*Motlhoka kgomo ke mong kang a sule*" meaning that someone without cattle has no life – he/she "is as good as dead" (Ramantswana, 2016). They are considered poor because cattle provide livelihood, and anyone without cattle is deprived of that means to (sustainable) livelihood (Stroebel, 2004; Nthakheni, 2006; Mafukata, 2012). Ruhangawebare (2010) and Mamman (2005) discovered that successful Africans would become bricoleurs [users of what they must solve their problems] by using their wealth in livestock to empower the less fortunate.

It was through my doctoral research that I found that a successful and sustainable cattle owners' cohort could emerge from cultural indigenous means. This could alter the face of the political economy in the cattle production sector. The values of *Ubuntu*, if consciously harnessed, can still play a major role in the creation of sustainable cattle production economy. Not only that, but *Ubuntu* in this sense also becomes an instrument to promote equality in a social space highly charactirised by the dominance of the "White social location of privilege" (Ramantswana, 2016) which apartheid had created and maintained since 1948 to April 1994 (Mafukata, 2012). Accumulation of assets in Africa was politicised and the capabilities of the people to build that asset base was culturally transferred to people of European identity but African. The colonial powers in Africa and their counterpart apartheid masters in apartheid South Africa needed this scenario of a poor 'slave' African to sustain the idea of white supremacism while sourcing labour manpower from the Africans on the other hand (Mafukata, 2020). This not only created the poor African but a dependent one. This later cascaded to Africans themselves who were split into the elite and the peasant by colonization with the intention of keeping Africans divided and unequal.

My lecture adopts cattle as representation of asset and wealth which could be used to catalyse asset and wealth accumulation among African communities. This is because of the significance and economic value which cattle represent among African peoples (Stroebel, 2004; Nthakheni, 2006; Mafukata, 2012; Ramantswana, 2016). In fact, Ramantswana (2016) contends that "ownership of a heifer implied better prospects for the future and improvement in one's social status" for example. This resonates with the assertion that the European settlers on arriving at the Cape in the 1600, they immediately 'discover' from the Khoi and the San people that there was wealth in African cattle. Since that day, African cattle and land became the target which would spark the subsequent wars which killed many from the Cape to the foot of the Soutpansberg in Soekmansdal

and Swongozwi. This speaks to the theory that the European settlers were consumed in acts of "accumulation by dispossession" or "primitive dispossession" or "predatory practices" against Africa peoples as postulated by Arrighi et al. (2010). Evidently, cattle played a significant role in the "capitalist development approach" adopted by the colonial community referred to here as Nqcukantobi (2021) would detail. I will be making follow-up on the Nqcukantobi's thesis through my exciting paper with the title: *Elephants, guns, galloping horses, spilt milk and dust: The politics of cattle in the pre-colonial economy in the Soutpansberg* which I intend to deliver in my next lecture.

Defining of *Ubuntu*

To cut what could be a long story on the conceptulisation of *Ubuntu,* I borrowed from the 1997 White Paper on Social Welfare (Patel, 2014) which defined *Ubuntu* as meaning:

> The principle of caring for each other's well-being…and a spirit of mutual support…Everyone's humanity is ideally expressed through his or her relationship with others and theirs in turn through a recognition of the individual's humanity. Ubuntu means that people are people through other people. It also acknowledges both the rights and the responsibilities of every citizen in promoting individual and societal well-being (Department of Welfare, 1997).

Ubuntu in Africa: how it was used in the context of asset building and wealth accumulation

In South Africa's reference to *Ubuntu,* one sees the interrelations with the '*Girinka*' idea in Rwanda which professes similar sentiments of *Ubuntu* in that Rwandans take care of one another. *Girinka's* properties are anchored on the Rwandan proverb in Kinyarwanda which says "*Umusogongero wisi ni umubano*" – meaning "savouring the world only takes place when you get along. The world makes no sense without friendship" (Lagarde, 2015). *Girinka* means "have a cow" (Mudingu, n.d), a saying which was founded by Rwanda's King Gisanura. As a policy instrument adopted by the Rwandan government of President Paul Kagame, *Girinka* was adopted in 2006 after being initiated by the president. The *Girinka* program was used to develop a pro-poor policy which would see many advantaged Rwandans 'donate' hundreds of cows to the poor (Kayumba, 2020; Mudingu, n.d).

Being an African child who has not just heard about poverty but lived in poverty, in my study of development in Africa *visa vi*, African development, I was intrigued by the attractive argument penned by Godfrey Ejuu1 and Rose Atieno Opiyo (2022) who contended that:

> Human flourishing has recently gained more attention in the world as a prerequisite safety net for better human resilience in uncertain times. While most Western authors believe that human flourishing is an individual issue, gained in later life, African communities that are largely communal may not have the same view" for theirs has been 'communal' and integrative.

Corroborating Ejuul and Opiyo (2022), is Du Plessis (2016) who argued that "it is the task of development scholars to renegotiate … movement of wealth and resources from the haves to the vulnerable…" It is evident that this assertion is made in the context of the topical poverty alleviation debate in Africa. My lecture this evening presents important highlights on important aspect of grassroots and/or community-based empowerment strategies to build asset accumulation using the indigenous African means which are scarcely appreciated by western-centric ideas (Refer to Lomas et al., 2023). The results of my doctoral thesis revealed that this is a rare recommendation

in contemporary developmental perspectives although researchers such as Omeje and Magawi (2013) have recommended these. As follow up on Ejuul and Opiyo (2022) and Du Plessis (2016) on wealth distribution as mitigating tool for poverty in Africa, the question my lecture raises is "How then can Africa practicalise this theory considering the complexities transformists encounter regarding indigenous African instruments in contemporary political economy"? This I leave for yourselves to digest even beyond my lecture here tonight. One limited paper of this caliber may not answer all the emanating questions. However, this lecture has sought to respond to this critical question by harvesting data from my doctoral thesis which provided me with tangible evidence that *Ubuntu* as an African instrument, mixed with asset accumulation prospects and ideas could be effective combination to empower African poor to build a sustainable asset base through cattle ownership. This with be self-empowerment which would redress rural poverty, or to address it.

Empowerment from cattle

My lecture links the scientificality of the assumption that Ubuntu could be an instruments in the class of Rwanda's *Girika* programme to empower rural poor households build sustainable asset bases while taking them out of poverty to wealth. The idea of *Ubuntu* to addressing this imperative speaks to the idea that African communities have always "placed the values of humanity and solidarity at the centre of production and exchange" (Kinyanjui, 2019) and *Ubuntu* gets this recognition. Effectively, the perspectives of *Ubuntu* and *Girinka* underpin Afrocentricism and decoloniality as paradigms which create possibilities for the dislodgement of Western-centric approaches on rural development in Africa, and in particular my case study as has been mentioned. In a way my findings respond to Mazibuko's (2010) rhetoric that "Why is everything said about [rural] development in Africa fail to work for development?" This lecture foresightedly ushers us into a platform which supposes that policies which undermine African organic theories in favour of Western-centric ideas have failed African development. Malcolm Blackie (2006) argued that "a new way must be found to help Africa" out of its predicament. The author went on to elaborate on Africa's failures by suggesting that the failures emanated from Western development planners, theorists and practitioners who based everything on development outside 'reality' – reality being that "a new way is possible" in placing African development in indigenous resources in collaboration with "external scientific and technical support" to create an interactive environment to assist African development (Blackie, 2006). On Western approaches sidelining African knowledges and expertise on development, with the parading of their instruments as the sole and supreme, many a critic flatly denouncing 'development' in Africa emerged. In fact, some such as Plaatjie (2022) argue that 'development' in Africa is a fallacy. I situate my case study within the platform of 'rejection' and 'sidelining' as an African idea, theory, and knowledge by the Western-centric regime on [rural] development. My view agrees with that of Fagunwa (2019) who posited that *Ubuntu* fell victim to the Western crusade which sought to erode and discard African communal values such as *Ubuntu* to impose their values.

This lecture therefore contextualises its narrative on poverty as experienced by the vulnerable black African indigenous people who emerged from the apartheid legacy in South Africa. I borrowed from the ideas of Banda and Van der Merwe (2017) who posited that poverty alleviation strategies meant to empower African communities' post-colonial have not been largely informed with the context of rural reality but distorted frameworks informed by realities of the urban for example. This assertion speaks to Blackie's (2006) assertion that "the capacity of indigenous talent to drive change in Africa is consistently underestimated and undervalued" Despite this ignorance,

research informed by African approaches to socio-economic transformations and development in Africa has begun to emerge with the contestation that wealth can be transferred through African means and strategies – especially through the generosity of those considered fortunate sharing with those considered less fortunate (Mudingu, n.d; Kayumba, 2020; Ruhangawebare, 2020; Mamman, 2005; Mafukata, 2012). African wealth is best revealed in cattle (Nthakheni, 2006; Stroebel, 2004; Mafukata, 2012). This literature reveals that since its arrival in the continent approximately 5000 years ago, and specifically southern Africa approximately 2000 years ago (Van Markle-Koster et al., 2021), cattle has been at the forefront of wealth transfer between the haves and the have-nots. The Zulu's *ukusisa* was effective as a wealth transfer tool to the vulnerable. A wealthy Zulu man (*umnumzane*) would loan a few cattle to a poor person without a herd of his own. Each recipient of cattle through this practice was responsible for their care and got the right to milk them for nourishment and could keep some of their offspring when he returned or repaid the loan to the owner...The Zulus were not the only society to engage in this *ukusisa* practice. This practice had been common among in broader Africa. For better elaboration, I have merged the ideas expressed by the *Ubuntu* theorists I have mentioned earlier in the essay with that of development theorists and practitioners such as Du Plessis to theorize that development is also about wealth distribution. From this context, I re-ask the question: How can development theorists and practitioners adopt *Ubuntu* as an instrument for wealth distribution and accumulation using cattle ownership? The answering of this question would pave way for contribution of new knowledge in the literature that seeks to promote human asset building and flourishing. The adoption of *Ubuntu* in this regard would enable holistic engagement of factors which promote human flourishing instead of impeding them (Banda, 2019). Evidently, this lecture escalates the idea of poverty alleviation and asset building as evidence of socio-economic empowerment and emancipation of the poor. I argue that this will however only be made possible through collective resilience, and when priviledged humans could extract empowerment of the disadvantaged from the values of *Ubuntu*. This is something Africa needs at its moment of crisis. African economies are severely declining and battling the impacts of the Covid-19 moment to such as extent that much of the citizenry is getting 'pauperised. How do we venture into this optimism to undo the cruelty of partriachal socio-economic disparities which exist between women and men ignoring the fact that women remain the most active participants of the cattle production systems in the developing regions of the world more than men – including in South Africa? In trying to raise a fair response, I wondered into the idea that cattle could come to be of massive influence on human life (Nthakheni, 2006; Stroebel, 2004). Cattle has had widespread significance among the scattered peoples of Africa in many respects. For relevance and time, I will not elaborate on the many respects but accelerate my lecture into this one critical socio-economic factor – ownership of cattle.

Ownership of cattle has been associated with poverty alleviation (Balehegn et al., 2021; Nthakheni, 2006; Mafukata, 2012; Stroebel, 2004). The idea of the *Girinka* in Rwanda was anchored on poverty alleviation among poorer Rwandan households. The organic *Girinka* was meant to provide food in the form of milk to children in poorer households. In West Africa – particularly in Nigeria, cattle have also been used as source of therapeutic medicinal milk. The *muturu* cattle produced medicinal milk for some households in some parts of Nigeria – especially in the communities of the Koma people of Gongola State (Adebambo, 2001). The *muturu* breed of cattle does not produce large quantities of milk but enough to feed its calves and to produce the medicinal milk for humans (Adebambo, 2001). The African family household has plenty of food from its cattle. In most African tribes, food is traditionally a 'free' thing to everyone – including strangers. The idea of

marketisisation of cattle products such as milk for instance is foreign in some African communities. Among the Tigri of Ethiopia for example, selling milk is a strange culture, and so was the selling of cattle. Milk is freely given to neighbours and strangers because doing so expresses *Ubuntu.* It is part of the food sharing culture of Africans. The Tigri people here demonstrate and emphasise "the significance of fellowship, solidarity and kinship in African life" (Banda & Van der Merwe, 2017).

Among most African tribes, cattle are not about commerce but expression of Africanness, and proud identity of one's tribe. It is Eurocentrism which professes a paradigm viewing cattle as solely an economic asset discarding other viewpoints such as that of the Turkana of Kenya for example. The criticism opining the primitivity of the Turkana for example because they refuse to sell their cattle and milk emerges with distortions of the Turkanas being poor people. Turkana mainly kept their cattle for wealth and prestige as hinted by one Lokichar villager in Turkana District who said *"...the Turkana know each individual animal. It is all they do. They don't build houses, they don't drive motor cars - they just have animals. Their life is animals ... "* (Juma, 2009 in Mafukata, 2012). It is clear from this statement that the Turkana people of Kenya value their animals more than other material gains like houses and cars. If one compares this with how the same unfolds among people of Rwanda and some tribes in the north of South Africa, it becomes evident that 'asset' means different things with different cultures and people.

It is therefore easier to see that the reference of some African tribes as being poor emanates from compromised version of the values which define what poverty is – especially among the Turkanas, and their counterpart professors of Eurocentrism. What this means is that poverty can therefore be a concept emanating from a perspective, not necessarily a socio-economic reality. As a social entity, cattle have been used by many African tribes and clans for bride price. The Bapedi of northern Limpopo Province, South Africa have a proverb which says "*Ngwana wa Malome nnyale di boele sakeng*" translated to mean that let my cousin marry me so that the lobola cattle can stay within the family (Ramantswana, 2016). This is socio-economic empowerment. From the economic paradigm, I postulate that *Ubuntu* would enable poor households acquire cattle which will assist African farmer households to emerge and to actively participate in meaningful production and marketing activities. If government, or whosoever could assist these farmer households to own the animals they kept, they would gladly participate in the market.

The cattle herder who became proud owner of cattle from *Ubuntu*

I was fortunate to interview no fewer than three participants for my doctoral study who had become immense commercially viable cattle owners from traditional approaches and strategies. I will share only one story of these. One Mr Thomas Toggs (not real name) was a high school drop out because his single mother couldn't afford fees beyond high school. He was sitting at home without any job. His migrant worker neighbour owned some livestock including cattle. The neighbour proposed Mr Toggs to work for him as a cattle herder. Each year the migrant neighbour would give (*swayela*) Mr Toggs one calf to appreciate him for taking care of his animals. He would also give him some used clothes (*magabulelo*) during the holidays. Within period of five years, Mr Toggs had built an asset base of approximately six cows. He increased his cattle herd to about 35 animals within the next 12 years. The neighbour retired returned home at the village. Mr Toggs left his dear and rewarding job to concentrate on his fledging cattle farming business. He started selling some of his animals to nearby commercial farmers who visited the village for cheaper animals and the growing informal market. Mr Toggs diversified and bought sheep and goats. He was able to

generate enough cash to build his beautiful house. He is financially stable, and he can send his children to school. Had it not been *Ubuntu* of the neighbour to reward Mr Thomas Toggs through wealth transfer using cattle, Mr Thomas Toggs would still have been 'stuck' in his poverty.

Another scenario is that of Rwanda's beneficiary of the Girinka programme Murekeyesoni Gorrette who built her wealth from the Girinka. Murekeyesoni commented "My son has completed University and my daughter is joining University this year plus two in secondary school, all this being possible because of the cows that have brought me massive wealth" (Mudingu, n.d).

The successes of Mr Thomas Toggs and Murekeyesoni of Rwanda through *Ubuntu* are corroborated by another story of a Mr Uzabakiriho Gervais of Gicumbi district, Uzabakiriho, Rwanda who through the Rwandan *Girinka* program owned his 1st cow in 2006 at the initiation of the *Girinka* programme. Gervais went on to grow his herd to 24 exotic cattle of Dutch origin (Mudingu, n.d). Gervais went on to diversify his asset building capacity by acquiring 10 acres of agricultural land with a further four having been purchased for his pine plantation business (Mudingu, n.d). Gervais employs 10 permanent employees (Mudingu, n.d). Gervais had this to say on his successes through the *Girinka* program "…with my savings, I joined "Muhima Group" which comprises of serious businessmen. We recently acquired land, put up a commercial building in Nyabugogo commercial area. This would never have been possible if I had not received a cow from *Girinka* program" (Mudingu, n.d).

These three accounts demonstrate that material wealth can be created even for the poor using cultural-traditional means such as the *Girinka* and *Ubuntu* for example.

Conclusion

Looking at the outputs of *Ubuntu* and *Girinka* on poverty alleviation as shared by Mr Thomas Toggs in South Africa and the other two Rwandan cases, it is concluded that African traditional and cultural practices such as *Ubuntu and Girinka* can build sustainable asset bases for the poor. Therefore, the concept of 'start up' capital popular in entrepreneurial studies and mainstream economic studies is in fact not 'new' in Africa. It emanates from the culture and philosophy of *Ubuntu – Vhuthu*, and the likes of *Girinka* in Africa rather than contemporary commerce. *Ubuntu* has been practicalised in many African societies to achieve human socio-economic advancement as you can see from the three presented cases. *Ubuntu* as has been practicalised in this regard on the empowerment of the poor on asset building regarding cattle ownership in some African communities is a serious contender against the idea that Africanisation and decolonisation of African economies are figmentations without any practical economic meaning - and therefore unimplemetable *buzz* concepts - especially for 'modern' and contemporary economies. The successes of this African systems of asset building among the poor as has been demonstrated in this lecture, speak to the idea of Africanisation and decoloniality of poverty emancipation and eradication tools and strategies as means and tools to dislodge societal poverty. You will discover that ownership patterns of livestock – especially cattle in as it is practised today is survival of the fittest – especially when commercial farming manipulatively invades its market space for cheaper prices without thinking of empowering the informal farmer. It is the politics of the 'haves' versus the politics of the 'have-nots' and what emanates from this is *status quo* of poverty. Only those who have the means and capital would own cattle - and would build asset bases as the poor remain poor. The *Girinka* is a shining example of how the rest of Africa can learn how to empower even women in the male-dominated cattle production systems – especially in Africa where this system is highly partriachised. The call for *Ubuntu* in the empowerment of the poor, will be the call to

redress the injustices facing women in cattle farming**.** The question is, what do we do to distribute this wealth to the poor? Instead of going Western approaches and treat the means and strategies as sacrosanct, I call for a hybrid approach which combines the Western and the African cultural-traditional forms of asset building – *Ubuntu* must underly this initiative. Moving forward there needs to be a community-engagement (CE) exercise which places the university as the facilitator to conscientize rural communities on the power of *Ubuntu* on asset building and poverty alleviation. This calls for collaboration among those who have been a step-ahead in the adoption of African instruments such as the *Girinka* in Rwanda to share the practicalities of the programme with newcomers elsewhere in Africa to grow the idea. For lack of time, allow me honourable Prof Mothata and all the guests present to pause here.

I thank you all and have a lovely evening!

Zikomo Kwambili

Lokovhela, nnda!

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