

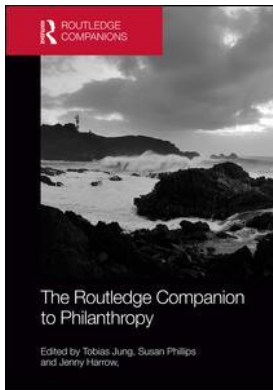
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## **The Routledge Companion to Philanthropy**

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### **Indigenous philanthropy**

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# Indigenous philanthropy

## Challenging Western preconceptions

*Shauna Mottiar and Mvuselelo Ngcoya*

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*'African philanthropy is actually at the centre of the universal meaning or even practice of world traditions of philanthropy'*

Moyo, 2011:2

Indigenous philanthropic practices in South Africa challenge a number of the, often normative, assumptions implicit in popular philanthropy literatures: that philanthropy flows from the better resourced to the lesser resourced and that philanthropy is invariably motivated by generosity or altruism (Habib *et al.*, 2008). Widespread, and rooted within the philosophy of *ubuntu*, indigenous South African philanthropy envisages an actualization of one's humanity through the act of giving in which the giver and recipient are mutual bearers of humanity. The *ubuntu* worldview stresses the importance of community, solidarity, caring, and sharing; it suggests a profound dynamic process of interdependence and emphasizes that true human potential can only be realized in partnership with others. In this way, interactions are judged by how well they promote the mutual reinforcement of both 'the self' and 'the other' in a community. The resulting forms of philanthropy are thereby more horizontal than vertical in nature. Based on reciprocity and cooperation, they cast givers as equal in standing to recipients. Furthermore, the departure point for these indigenous philanthropic practices is abundance, as opposed to scarcity, and the underlying motivations are complex. As studies of African philanthropy more generally indicate, philanthropy, or what, for ease of translation, is often termed 'giving' or 'indigenous philanthropy' is 'deeply embedded, morally grounded and operates as a vital element for both survival and progress' (Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.*, 2004: x). Some of these African conceptions of philanthropy therefore assume different forms to the dominant professional perspective of philanthropy.

Our main charge against mainstream philanthropy perspectives is that it precludes indigenous and pre-existing understandings of philanthropy. The main purpose of this chapter is to refute the hyperbolic assertion that philanthropy is a predominantly Western idea. To this end, we outline and reflect on alternative conceptualizations of philanthropy and discuss their relevance for developing a more holistic understanding of philanthropy. To begin, we trace the contours and characteristics of philanthropy among indigenous African communities, particularly

in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Thereafter, we examine motivations of these philanthropic activities and discuss the *ubuntu* philosophy, the cornerstone of indigenous understandings of philanthropy among the people we interviewed in KwaZulu-Natal. To conclude, we consider some of the implications of our argument for philanthropic studies in general.

## Indigenous forms of philanthropy in South Africa

Disentangling the ‘indigenous archive’ of philanthropy is a very complicated task in that indigenous philanthropic practices are often symbiotically related to ideas that have become more dominant. In fact, philanthropic activities inspired by indigenous perspectives, such as *ubuntu*, share certain traits with conventional understandings of philanthropy. They are voluntary activities, usually initiated by social agents, communities, individuals, and groupings outside of what we would consider the state and, in addition to individual benefit, they have a social or widespread concern at their core.

Therefore, we are not arguing, nor can we demonstrate, that all indigenous philanthropic practices are inherently positive or that dominant Western forms of philanthropy are irredeemably negative. Our argument is less ambitious but still provocative as it brings to the fore what should be a truism: there are multiple domains and types of philanthropy with differing logics and ethical considerations. The universal processes of institutional philanthropy have been emphasized at the expense of other philanthropic logics. Moreover, philanthropy was never written on a blank slate in the African context; indigenous conceptions of philanthropy are not simply knee-jerk derivatives of their more professional cousin.

This is demonstrated by a survey of giving trends in South Africa. It reflects that giving in South Africa is an act as common in poor and marginalized communities as it is in better endowed communities across the urban and rural divide (Seleoane, 2008: 121). Furthermore, patterns of giving move beyond individual to collective giving and may follow a conscious decision or may occur spontaneously and organically. Examples of such forms of philanthropy include women within a community purchasing vegetables or washing materials and sharing them with their neighbours (Seleoane, 2008). These items are a necessity for household cooking and cleaning, but when women cannot afford them all, they purchase what they can afford and share. Similarly, a young person within a community will purchase a newspaper and share it with other youngsters for the purposes of job hunting. There is no specific roster for the purchase of this paper, whoever has money will buy the paper and everyone will, in commune, peruse job adverts. Other examples include the way people in a community will assist newcomers to build a homestead or a shack. Likewise, newcomers or neighbours will be given access to water and electricity without the expectation of payment. In the case of bereavement, philanthropy would take the form of an entire community rallying around the affected family to make donations towards the burial and helping with funeral preparations. These forms of philanthropy have been described as ‘part and parcel of the social fabric’ of many African communities (Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.*, 2004: x).

Notwithstanding the definitional debates surrounding the meaning of ‘philanthropy’ highlighted by the editors in the introductory chapter, it seems that these indigenous forms of philanthropy approximate the original Greek perspective of philanthropy as ‘love for humankind’ far more than dominant institutional forms of philanthropy. Indeed, in the classic parable frequently used as a call to philanthropy, the Good Samaritan, a member of an excluded ethnic minority helps a traveler who has been brutalized by thieves. It is intriguing, that this most quintessential of philanthropic acts might not pass muster in some of the current standards of philanthropy. It does not fit the bill of institutional philanthropy on at least three fronts: it is

horizontal in that this is the case of philanthropy between social equals, wretched as they seemingly were; there is no formal philanthropic organization involved, no reports and evaluations written; and the exchange is not immediately material. These telling characteristics distinguish indigenous conceptions of philanthropy from its professional counterpart.

First of all, within the context of African indigenous philanthropy, the idea of the well-endowed almoner distributing charity to impecunious actors is put under severe assault. Symmetry obtains. While the actors in giving and receiving are often friends and neighbours, they also include local associations and formal civil society associations. Help or giving amongst members of a community is particularly strong in rural settings (Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011), where it is common for one household to provide another with food, candles or clothing. It is also common practice to assist neighbours to build or refurbish their homesteads and maintain their crops. Help or giving in urban settings (Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011) often takes the form of survivalist community based organizations or *stokvels* (saving clubs). Survivalist organizations usually provide critical services related to health, for example, or comprise charitable feeding schemes of a more vertical nature. *Stokvels* are essentially credit unions, where a group of people enter into an agreement to contribute a fixed amount of money at regular periods. The pooled money may then be drawn by participating members, either in rotation or at a time of need (Lukhele, 1990 cited by Ngcoya, 2009: 27). Examples of *stokvels* include cooking cooperatives where a group of people would pool resources to buy groceries, cook meals and share in order that there is enough food to feed their families. The practicality of a cooking cooperative is that even if a family has no income for the month, it would still be provided with food during the period by virtue of it being a member of the *stokvel*. *Stokvels* for sewing cooperatives and burial arrangements are also common. The practice of horizontal philanthropy, therefore, casts givers and recipients as equal in the philanthropic act. The implications of this are that recipients are not debased or humiliated by giving or helping nor is there a reinforcement of hierarchy established between the giver and the recipient.

Second, horizontal philanthropy is embodied in both material and nonmaterial forms, it covers the entire spectrum of philanthropy as the use of 'treasure, time and talent'. 'Giving' can include exchanges of money, food, clothing, candles and other household items, while 'helping' would include the expending of one's time, labour or skills. Nonmaterial forms of philanthropy are particularly important. An emphasis on money or financial giving devalues the human inspiration underlying African indigenous philanthropy and nonmaterial forms help to fulfil the underlying philosophy of giving: 'if you have, you must give no matter how little' (Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.*, 2004: xi). Nonmaterial giving ensures that both givers and recipients remain active philanthropists; it is also of central importance within development discourses as people coming together to build homes, grow food etc., ensure community collaborations survive and move beyond poverty.

Third, indigenous conceptions of philanthropy in South Africa are based on principles of reciprocity and cooperation grounded in unwritten, but widely understood, behaviours of giving. When there are material exchanges, the giver does not necessarily expect the goods to be paid for or returned. The expectation is one of reciprocal behaviour in the future, where the giver becomes the recipient. In cases where money is given, reciprocity would include the 'giving back' in alternative ways, such as sharing livestock or milk and eggs from owned livestock. Philanthropy is perceived as 'sharing' and results in an intricate system of maintaining the well-being of communities.

As recent South African research studies highlight, however, such notions of horizontal philanthropy are changing (Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011). In rural settings, this has been linked to changes in the way dwellers sustain livelihoods – less by growing their own food and more

from having to trade informally. Food is, therefore, in shorter supply and attained at higher (financial) cost. The extension of the state grant to pensioners, many of whom head households, and for child support also transforms giving patterns: everyone is now being understood to be provided for, eradicating the need for systems of sharing and giving. In other words, responsibility for community members is seen to have shifted from the community to the state which, before the advent of democracy in South Africa, catered only for a white minority. In urban settings, lack of social cohesion contributes to the decline of intricate sharing and giving systems. This lack of cohesion is related, for example, to tension between formal township residents and informal, shack dwelling, township residents. The tension is often based on competition over access to housing and water, as well as electricity services. Indigenous practices of philanthropy are eroded when people 'expect rather than give' (Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011: 8). They are also affected when bonds between community members become strained.

Finally, unlike their professional counterparts, indigenous practices of philanthropy are not always structured according to formal and/or organizational lines. The traditional prominence of such boundaries in mainstream philanthropy thinking is illustrated by the approach taken by the editor and contributors to *Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy* (Schneewind, 1996). In the introductory chapter, the professional aspects of philanthropy are emphasized, focusing on the activities of formal institutions, where clear demarcations between givers and recipients can be established; philanthropy, then, is seen as a niche that can offer training in fundraising and grantmaking (Payton, 1996: xii). Similarly, notwithstanding his favourable view of indigenous philanthropy, the bias towards institutionalization is evident in Axelrad's (2011) study of philanthropy in the developing world. Because most indigenous philanthropy flows through individual and community capillaries of trust and compassion, he argues there is no evidence 'that such informal practices will be institutionalized in the long term' (Axelrad, 2011:151). As a result, his study is preoccupied with philanthropic initiatives of the new elites in the developing world. He argues that the burgeoning trend of elite driven indigenous philanthropy has expanded the 'diversity of actors involved in the delivery of public services, funding activities from public health projects to social justice campaigns' (Axelrad, 2011:145-6). We think they need not necessarily be formalized in order to count as philanthropy. The problem with standard features of organized philanthropy is that they unwittingly contribute to the view of Africans as passive objects of charity. As we further illustrate in the following section, many South Africans are involved in philanthropic acts and activities to transform their lives outside the purview of institutional philanthropy.

## Motivations for indigenous philanthropy in South Africa

Studies of horizontal philanthropy in Southern Africa and South Africa reveal that the underlying motivation for giving and helping is need (Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.*, 2004; Murenga and Chileshe, 2011). A more complex understanding of need prevails, however, in that givers are often in the same position of need as their recipients, but it is through the philanthropic act or system that this need is held off. Philanthropy is practiced by those who themselves know what it is to lack, and perhaps still lack, and for this reason they give – empathy rather than sympathy is therefore invoked. Philanthropic practice is further motivated by an element of survival, especially where there is a lack of local service delivery and socially progressive economic policy (Habib, 2005). Interestingly enough, many givers and recipients, such as *stokvel* participants do not harbour expectations of state help; they consider themselves to be independent, self-sufficient and empowered. Underlying need and survival, motivations for the practice of horizontal philanthropy include 'love', 'friendship', 'good neighbourliness' or a 'sense of community'. These infer altruism, but are still grounded in indigenous social norms.

Such social norms are well reflected in the Zulu traditions of *ukwenana*, *ukusisa* and *ilimo*. *Ukwenana* is a cultural form of exchange which does not adhere to accumulation of interest. The recipient will accept intending to return that which was accepted, or reciprocate in kind; the giver will engage in the action knowing that there may not, in fact, be reciprocation. In *ukusisa*, givers who have more or are 'wealthy' will give part of their wealth, such as cattle, to those who have less or are 'poor'. Following the same example, the cattle will eventually be returned, but the offspring of the cattle will become the property of the recipient. *Ukusisa*, or any exchange for that matter, succeeds in repelling total want and a war of all against all because it creates bonds between people. The exchange of the 'thing' is significant because the 'thing' embodies persons. The exchange of goods and services is inseparable from the persons exchanging them. This process of building the wealth of individual families or community members means that the causes of lacking are addressed as opposed to their symptoms. This is in keeping with basic distinctions that have been made between charity and philanthropy (Shaw, 2002; Faber and McCarthy, 2005; Anheier and Leat, 2006). In *ilimo*, the recipients will initiate the giving action by providing food and drink, and inviting givers to help plough or harvest their lands with the, albeit unstated understanding that the action will be reciprocated. This form of sharing labour skills and capacity has an element of sustainability in that, although noncontracted, labour will be available across the parts of the community network. This practice also ensures that although givers play an important role, recipients remain at the centre of the philanthropic action. These are important considerations given that normative critiques of (vertical) philanthropy have centred on challenges of both sustainability and legitimacy of philanthropic endeavours (Frumkin, 2006).

Taken together then, although generosity and altruism have significant bearings, the motivations underlying horizontal philanthropy are more complex than that; they are closely linked to entrenched social practices and moral obligation emanating from a shared identity based on the concept of a common humanity: 'my humanity is tainted if your humanity is not recognized and assisted when in need' (Wilkinson-Maposa *et al.*, 2004: xi). This idea of a common humanity is entrenched in the African philosophy of *ubuntu*.

## **Ubuntu**

### ***The worldview of ubuntu***

Since the end of apartheid, *ubuntu* has become one of most important keywords in South Africa (Ngcoya, 2009). While difficult to translate into English, it is generally understood to mean: I am because we are (*umuntu umuntu ngabantu*) or, a person is a person through others. This worldview is predicated on a profound sense of interdependence. It emphasizes that our true human potential can only be realized in partnership with others. The philosophy of *ubuntu* shares traits with other indigenous philosophies underpinning philanthropic action. One such example is the Indian *swadhyaya*, a process of self-study and self-development which argues that 'one is impoverished without the other' (Giri, 2011: 20). *Ubuntu* rejects the idea of a rugged sovereign individual as insanity. Accordingly, it advocates respect, autonomy, relatedness, reciprocity and hospitality, and connectedness as the ethical pillars of a just and sustainable society. As the philosopher Mogobe Ramose (2001:1) argues, the morphological structure of the word *ubuntu* consists of the prefix *ubu*, indicating a general state of being, and the stem *ntu*, meaning person, or the nodal point at which being assumes concrete form, such that *ubu* and *ntu* are mutually founding; they are two aspects of being,

an indivisible wholeness. Magobo More (2004:149) puts it well when he says in the *ubuntu* perspective,

Moral practices are founded exclusively on consideration and enhancement of human well-being; a preoccupation with “human”. It enjoins that what is morally good is what brings dignity, respect, contentment, and prosperity to others, self and the community at large.

The individual is an abbreviation of a community, and a community the amplification and self-actualization of the individual. In other words, while individual autonomy is encouraged, it is simply the other side of relatedness; to wit, the sinews of autonomy are located in a community (Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011).

The philosophy of *ubuntu* is ever present in many communities throughout Africa. Although *ubuntu* is a Nguni word – Nguni languages being those spoken throughout southern Africa and include Ndebele, Swati, Xhosa and Zulu – it is a pan-African concept, expressed in numerous African languages with multiple phonological variations: it is *umundu* in Kikuyi (Kenya), *bumuntu* in KiSukuma and KiHaya (Tanzania), *vumuntu* in shiTsonga and shiTswa (Mozambique), and *gimuntu* in the kiKongo and giKwese languages of the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ngcoya, 2009: 4). This variance is also reflected in the proverbs, idioms, and aphorisms of numerous African languages (Ngcoya, 2009: 6):

- Sesotho (Lesotho and South Africa): *A botho ba gago bo nne botho seshabeng* – let your welfare be the welfare of the nation (Mokgoro, 1997);
- IsiZulu (South Africa): *Umuntu umuntu ngabantu* – a person is a person through (or by means of other people);
- Xitsonga (Mozambique and South Africa): *Rintiho rinwe a rinusi hove* – one finger cannot pick up a grain;
- Setswana (Botswana and South Africa): *Moeng goroga re je ka wena* – come guest, we feast through you; and
- Chichewa (Malawi): *Mwana wa nzako ndi wako yemwe* – someone’s child is your child, and *Ali awiri ndi anthu ali ekha chinyama* – those that are more than one are people and s/he who is alone is an animal (Tambulasi and Kayuni, 2005: 149).

Although *ubuntu* has found wide, and varied, use in post-apartheid South Africa, it is an ancient philosophy and tradition. Notwithstanding the apartheid system’s attempt to denigrate things indigenous, *ubuntu* remained entrenched during successive apartheid governments, albeit at the family and community level. Indeed, the people we interviewed took it for granted that *ubuntu* is a quint-essential part of Zulu philosophy and practice. Moreover, *ubuntu* featured in the writing and thinking of influential activists during the struggle against apartheid. As Ngcoya (2009: 116–117) points out, Bantu Biko’s writing on the philosophy of Black Consciousness is replete with references to *ubuntu*. For example, during his 1976 trial, he offered what he called African communalism as an alternative to capitalism because ‘we are African socialists or we believe in sharing . . . [M]y relationship with my property is not so highly individualistic that it seeks to destroy others. I use it to build others’ (Biko 1979: 64). This political view is consonant with philanthropic characteristics of *ubuntu*.

### ***Ubuntu’s* relevance for understanding philanthropy**

Two of *ubuntu’s* defining and related attributes are relevant for a more encompassing perspective of philanthropy: an acceptance of the human being, and the anchoring in plenitude rather than scarcity.

First, from an *ubuntu* perspective, philanthropy is more than a mere exchange of goods or services. It suggests the recreation of humanity or ‘the whole-hearted identification of the self with the other’ (Shutte, 2001: 52). Put differently, there are no distant strangers. There are no ‘free gifts’ and no aliens as Alain Testart (1998) would have us convinced. For him, when a passerby offers money to a beggar in a city, that is an exchange between distant strangers. Such an exchange creates no expectation of any kind of reciprocation by either party and the transaction suggests no interdependence between the two. An *ubuntu* view of this transaction does not see the two parties as aliens. The very act of giving or receiving is, a priori, reciprocal in that humanity is being constructed; it is a process of mutual recognition. Thus, giving and receiving are more than material exchanges of goods or services. Philanthropy is not merely a patrician or matrician concern for the good of the poor. The giver actualizes his or her humanity by the act of giving. Both giver and recipient are mutual bearers of humanity. As the Zulu people put it: *ukupha ukuzibekela*: giving is investing in oneself. The conventional vertical lines of philanthropy are therefore breached. It seems Ralph Waldo Emerson had something similar in mind when he declared,

The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me. Therefore the poet brings his poem; the shepherd, his lamb; the farmer, corn; the miner, a gem; the sailor, coral and shells; the painter, his picture; the girl, a handkerchief of her own sewing.

(Emerson and Eliot, 1909: 230)

In other words, giving is neither the privilege nor the burden of the rich, all people can give.

Second, while conventional understandings of philanthropy are based on a theory of scarcity, *ubuntu* views of the same are grounded in plenitude. In light of assumptions that human interactions are driven by calculating, self-interested, individuals, philanthropy is seen as the exceptional opposite. In this conventional ideological framework, philanthropy is distinguished from obligatory exchanges and pure gifts that have no hallmarks of self-interest. Notwithstanding the many accents of capitalism, to neoclassical economic thinkers, the attraction of capitalist modes of production and exchange is that capitalism generates maximum returns from presupposed preliminary conditions of scarcity. Abundance, of supply or demand, is a fundamental problem. This is central to Lionel Robbins’ (1945: 16) oft-quoted definition of economics as the scientific study of ‘human behaviour as a relationship between ends and scarce means which have alternative uses’. Even the most affluent capitalist economies operate on the principle of severe scarcity. It is the fundamental determinant of value and the fuel for modern capitalism (Kincaid, 1983: 407). Conventional views of giving mirror, and are informed by, this view. Philanthropy is seen as a necessity in light of the scarcity of resources; scarcity is an inescapable constraint and ineluctable fact of political and socioeconomic life.

From an *ubuntu* perspective, however, this notion of scarcity is at best contrived or artificial. There is nothing inherently natural about the scarcity of time or resources; it is our creation – the bankruptcy of our morality and our understanding of our relationships with ourselves, others, and the environment. Furthermore, rectifying the problem of scarcity is not a matter of scientific-technological mastery of the environment as dominant economic theories will have us believe. There is always enough for everyone to share and everyone has a share of everything. As the Zulu proverbs go: *izingane zandawonye zihlephulelana inhloko yentethe* – children who belong together will share even a grasshopper’s head, and *akudlulwa ngendlu yakhiwa* – one does not simply walk by when a house is being built. In the *ubuntu* perspective, giving then does not create society through an immediate give-and-take approach. These transactions are long term investments; rewards may be immediate or deferred; personal and impersonal; and interested and disinterested.



## The indigenous challenge to philanthropy

What are the implications of our argument? In other words, does *ubuntu* have application more broadly? On one hand, the answer has to be an unequivocal no. *Ubuntu*, like all knowledges, is anchored in institutional, cultural, and social moorings and, therefore, relevant to particular people and specific settings and times. Yet, at the same time, the answer is in the affirmative. Instead of drawing clear lines around the domains of philanthropy, this approach highlights the importance of multiple domains and different logics in philanthropy. We are not asserting that *ubuntu*-inspired philanthropy is superior to other forms of philanthropy, especially Western understandings thereof. In the particular context of South Africa, the *ubuntu* form of philanthropy thrives alongside other more globally familiar types of philanthropy. By highlighting its continued relevance, we are contributing to the efforts of thinkers on philanthropy which show that there are many more shapes and forms of philanthropy than the dominant view has led us to believe.

Studies of Latin American philanthropic practices reveal diverse mechanisms for mutual aid and collective assistance practised among those who sought to survive economic poverty and preserve their cultural traditions in the face of political or ethnic persecution (Sanborn, 2005: 7). For example, the *ayllu* (or *wachu* in Peru) has been revitalized by indigenous societies in Bolivia and Ecuador. *Ayllu* is an ancient concept of community based on territorial federation, characterized by rotating leadership, extensive consultation, with the goals of communal consensus and an equitable distribution of resources (Korovkin, 2001: 38). Béjar (1997: 379) shows that there are thousands of what he calls peasant and native communities in Peru, involved in 'communal work, and in use and free disposition of land, as well as in economic and administrative operation'. These autonomous organizations have substituted or complemented the state's role in the building and maintenance of mainly communication, irrigation channels and schools.

In contemporary Japanese Buddhist thought, mercy (*maitracittata*) is the basic concept of charity and it has two roots: *maitrya* (true brotherly love or pure parental love) and *kurana* (affection or kindness) (Hayashi, 1991: 119 cited by Lohmann, 1995: 148). Similarly, in rural Indonesia practices of *gotong royong*, forms of mutual aid are an integral part of living, where it is believed that man does not exist alone but only as part of the community, social environment and natural, spiritual universe. This practice is underpinned by socially accepted norms of maintaining good relations among humans based on the principle of equality (Quebral and Terol, 2002). These types of knowledge and practices have often been ignored or subjugated. Without recognition by academics, government, professional philanthropy, society, and others, they will remain so. This point was highlighted at an assembly of the African Grantmakers Network in 2010, where it was argued that the impact of grantmaking and philanthropic practice in Africa is reduced by its failure to take into account traditional forms of giving. Synthesising best philanthropic practices in Africa was promoted as a potentially powerful force to address poverty (Malombe, 2010: 6).

It should be emphasized, however, that indigenous philanthropy is not always informal and horizontal. There are various contemporary examples of indigenous philanthropic initiatives that have developed formalized structures. For example, the International Funders for Indigenous Peoples (IFIP) is the only affinity group in the US solely dedicated to international philanthropy (IFIP, 2015). Through education, conferences and publications, IFIP seeks to bridge the cultural gulfs between grantmakers and indigenous communities. That way, the organization encourages innovative investment strategies in indigenous and philanthropic worlds. The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada (CPAPC) does the same in Canada. A network of foundations, nongovernmental organisations and individuals, it is committed to

promoting philanthropy (giving, sharing and social investing) to empower indigenous peoples of Canada to build stronger, healthier communities (CPAPC, 2009: 5). It notes that while every indigenous culture has an embedded rich history of giving and sharing, there is a vast chasm between modern philanthropy and indigenous peoples. However, while the organization recognizes that indigenous communities are not ‘charity cases’, nor philanthropy a strange concept in indigenous cultures, it focuses on formal institutions and philanthropic structures that promote interventions among indigenous societies (CPAPC, 2009: 40). A good example is the work of the National Aboriginal Achievement Foundation (NAAF), a philanthropic organization run by indigenous peoples themselves ‘dedicated to raising funds to deliver programs that provide the tools necessary for Aboriginal peoples, especially youth, to achieve their potential’ (CPAPC, 2009: 40).

We cite these examples to highlight the varied experiments in indigenous philanthropy and to emphasize the global breadth of the revival of indigenous philanthropic initiatives. Furthermore, it is important to stress that we are not of the view that indigenous perspectives of philanthropy are beyond critique; quite the opposite. They should be interrogated and expanded upon. Indeed, as we have pointed out elsewhere, the idea of giving or sharing for the ‘good of the community’ is too easily exploited (see Ngcoya and Mottiar, 2011).

The consequences of neoliberal economic policies, for example, especially privatization, is that while profit is individualized, risk is collectivized and indigenous philanthropic perspectives are most useful in this regard. In the South African context, *ubuntu* has been marshaled by government to promote home-based care for HIV/AIDS patients. Lund (2010: 505) argues that this community care has led to task shifting whereby tasks that were previously reserved for skilful and thus expensive workers, such as qualified nurses, are delegated to community workers with lower skills to take the burden of care. In the context of limited resources and a burdened health services system, the state saves money by delegating its functions to communities, thus abrogating its social responsibilities.

## Conclusion

These political and ethical dilemmas notwithstanding, the broadening of philanthropy’s conceptualization is a matter of urgency. There are numerous reasons why indigenous philanthropy deserves attention. First, as Axelrad (2011: 151) points out, such contributions ‘sustain essential social work and strengthen civil society in the developing world’. Second, this is not just a concern with philanthropy in the developing world. Examining indigenous philanthropic activities might further contribute to identifying alternative philanthropic activities within the West. For example, in a survey of African American philanthropy from slavery to the present, the historian Adrienne Lash Jones (2004) provides a strong account of mutual support and demonstrates how this tradition has been inferiorized as ‘self-help’, and not philanthropy which is deemed superior. The race and class connotations of such distinctions are all too apparent when understandings of philanthropy contribute to the elision of the contribution of blacks in philanthropic studies. So, by retrieving the plurivocal expressions of philanthropy, we might be able to rescue ‘other’ conceptions of philanthropy within the modern world. In short, this is no exercise in relativism or provincialism but an attempt to emphasize that indigenous philanthropic approaches have received scant attention in philanthropic studies. This has come at a great cost for non-Western peoples and limited our understanding of philanthropy in the West itself.

We have demonstrated the benefit of interrogating *ubuntu* inspired forms of philanthropy in South Africa. Our investigation challenges various normative assumptions implicit in philanthropy literature, key among which is that philanthropic acts flow from the top (well resourced)

to the bottom (poor). Thus horizontal philanthropy among indigenous communities tends to be more circular than unidirectional. The flattening of the structures of giving in indigenous philanthropy has other implications. Instead of simple altruism and generosity, we found many actors were influenced by a desire for the actualization of one's own humanity. Here, the act of giving was seen as a coproduction of selves in which the giver and recipient are mutual bearers of humanity. The complexity of indigenous philanthropy disrupts the familiar conceptions of philanthropy in the literature. If we are to cultivate a more global understanding of philanthropy, we have to explore those paths and take unfamiliar routes through unfamiliar terrain.

## Notes

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