

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE IMPERATIVES OF THE CONCEPT AND LIFE OF *UBUNTU* IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

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Abstract

In this article, I argue that an interface exists between the Western concept of social capital and the African concept and the way of life traditionally known as Ubuntu. Social capital generates values of co-operation and collaboration which appear to be consonant with the spirit of Ubuntu, a concept and way of life which characterize hospitality or generosity as the core values of African communality. I highlight that both concepts differ in that while social capital can be quantified Ubuntu cannot. I also show that negative consequences may emanate from the application of the concepts and their possibilities of being manipulated for selfish means in promoting the interests of the minorities at the expense of the majority. However, I suggest that the appropriation of both could enhance the capacity of communities to deal with anti-social issues such as crime.

Key Words: Community, Ubuntu, Social Capital, Partnerships, Participation

Introduction

This study is part of the National Research Foundation sponsored research project in the Eastern Cape/KwaZulu-Natal Region.² In this paper, I will argue that a close connection exists between social capital and the concept and life of *Ubuntu* in the South African context. In particular, I will show that the features of social capital as entailed in human networks of trust, loyalty and reciprocity have implications for understanding how the concept and the spirit of *Ubuntu* is expressed in African/South African society.

Defining Social Capital

Social capital lends itself to different meanings and interpretations to different scholars.³ In this study, I will use the definition as put forward by Robert Putnam, the Harvard political

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³ The concept is associated with an article in 1916 on reference to social cohesion and personal investment in the community. There are some who trace the modern use of the term to Jane Jacobs in the 1960s, political scientist Robert Salisbury in connection with group formation in 1969, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu with regard to his *Outline of a Theory of Practice* in 1972 while sociologists James Coleman, Barry Wellman and Scot Wortley used Glenn Loury's 1977 definition who not only developed it further but also popularised it. In the 1990s the concept gained wide currency; it became the focus of the World Bank research programme and

scientist. He writes that social capital “refers to features of social organisations such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit.”⁴ He further states that it is about “social networks and the norms of reciprocity associated with them...”⁵ In this regard, social capital, therefore centres on a web of ‘networks’ of human relations and ‘partnerships’ where they are reciprocated for collective benefit; hence they are considered as essential resources – vital for sustaining the life of associations and or organisations.⁶

Since these networks of human relations are considered to have a critical bearing on the performance of organisations and associations, social capital is viewed in terms of economic utility.⁷ In this respect, Nan Lin defines social capital as “...a collective asset shared by members of a defined group, with clear boundaries, obligations of exchange, and mutual recognition.”⁸ Social capital can be measured in terms of trust, whether it is high or low. Hence it is claimed that higher levels of trust enhance the performance of the organisation; inversely low levels of trust diminish the operation of the organisation.⁹ Because much time is invested in raising and maintaining these relationships, social capital is considered as an ‘asset’ or an ‘investment’, hence it can be measured in terms of economic utility. Consequently, it is argued that for social capital to be sustained relations of loyalty, trust and reciprocity have to be continually re-enforced.¹⁰ In this regard, social capital denotes the influence of structures in facilitating certain actions of individuals within the structure.¹¹

At the core of social capital, therefore lies five principle features: sharing, mutual obligations, trust, exchange (transactions) and recognition. These are elements that enhance human interactions and relations of collective mutual trust and loyalty. In other words, as Putnam stresses the importance of these elements in the generation “social capital helps to resolve dilemmas of collective action, encouraging people to act in a trustworthy way when they might not otherwise do so.”¹²

Social capital entails membership. According to D Cohen and L Prusak it implies ‘connection’; the trust, understanding, and mutuality that support collaborative, cohesive action. It implies commitment to the group and work, co-operation, and the willingness to do more for a job that is not ‘just a job’.¹³ Thus sharing characterises the essence of social capital as reciprocity defines its functional role. More importantly, it is not merely about solidarity, rather it has implications for a shared destiny of a defined group. Hence, social

the subject of a number of mainstream books, among which included Putnam’s *Bowling Alone*. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital: accessed 25/09/10.

⁴ Putnam, R ‘Bowling Alone: Americas’ Declining Social Capital,’ *Journal of Democracy* 6, no. 1 (1995), p. 65-68.

⁵ Putnam, R, (ed.), ‘Introduction’, *Democracies in Flux, the Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 3.

⁶ Lin, N, *Social Capital, a Theory of Social Structure and Action*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 22.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ Lin, N, *Social Capital, a Theory of Social Structure and Action*, p. 146-148. See also Cohen, D and Prusak, L, in *Good Company, how Social Capital Makes Organisations Work*, Harvard, Boston: Harvard Business School Press, p. 43-45.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 30-51.

¹¹ *Ibid*, p. 23.

¹² Putnam, *Democracies in Flux*, p. 7.

¹³ Cohen and Prusak *In Good Company How Social Capital Makes Organisations Work* p. 61.

capital is about the people's expression of their identity and the meaning they derive there from.

The question that has to be addressed in this article is: What imperatives does *Ubuntu* have for social capital? Or how does social capital relate to the concept of and life in the spirit of *Ubuntu*? Or to put it differently once again, what aspects of the concept of *Ubuntu* in African community life are particularly beneficial for the generating of the resources for social capital?

Over centuries, there developed in Africa communities a very unique way of expressing African life centred on common norms, values and traditions, which has been defined as *Ubuntu*. What exactly is *Ubuntu*?

Networking, Partnerships: the Essence of *Ubuntu*

While the concept exists in its variant forms throughout the continent,¹⁴ African scholars have tended to giving it different shades of meanings which really all boil down to 'humanness' as opposed to 'animal like behaviour'.¹⁵ However, in South Africa, the concept of *Ubuntu* carries its own regional perspective. For instance, Desmond Tutu, Anglican Archbishop Emeritus defines *Ubuntu* as:

A person is a person through other persons.' I would not know how to be a human being at all except (that) I learned this from other human beings. We are made for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence. We are meant to complement each other. All kinds of things go horribly wrong when we break that fundamental Law of our being. Not even the most powerful nation can be completely self-sufficient.¹⁶

According to this definition, *Ubuntu* implies a web of human relationships in which Africans are engaged. These relations are characterised by the spirit of interdependence and mutual trust as people rely on each other in everyday life. In his work, *Ubuntu, an Ethic for a New South Africa*, Augustine Shutte spells out the implications of the ethic of *Ubuntu* in the context of democratic South Africa. Shutte define the core of *Ubuntu* as the dependence of a person on "...personal relations with others to exercise..." with a view to "develop and fulfil those capacities that make one a person."¹⁷ African community life experienced "as an interpersonal network of relationships, is thus the fundamental value in traditional Africa thought."¹⁸ Shutte concludes stating that, "One's life, if all goes well, is a continual becoming more of a person through ones interaction with others. Personhood comes as a gift from other."¹⁹

Gabriel Setiloane, the African theologian, takes this issue further as he states, "This manner of understanding human personality explains the interplay which takes place when

¹⁴ See Julius Gathogo, 'African Philosophy as expressed in the concepts of Hospitality and *Ubuntu*,' *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, no. 130, March, 2008, p. 44-46; see also Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener, "Ritual and the Generation of Social Capital in Contexts of Poverty: A South African Exploration" in *IJPT*, vol. 11, DOI 10.1515/IJPT. 2007. © Walter de Gruyter 2007, *Ubuntu* is translated as "I am because we are" or also "a human through other humans." Dani W Nabudere, *Ubuntu*, in: *Pieces of the puzzle. Keywords on reconciliation and transitional justice*, eds. Charles Villa-Vicencio/Erik Doxtader, Cape Town (IJR) 2004, 10-17, p. 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, p. 46-48.

¹⁶ Tutu, N, *The words of Desmond Tutu*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1989, p. 71.

¹⁷ Shutte, A, *Ubuntu, an Ethic for a new South Africa*, Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2001, p. 12.

¹⁸ *Ibid*.

¹⁹ *Ibid*.

people come into contact or live together.”²⁰ Thus according to Setiloane, “The essence of being” is determined by “‘participation’ in which humans are always interlocked with one another. The human being is not only a ‘vital force,’ but more: vital force in participation.”²¹ Thus Tutu, Shutte and Setiloane stress the critical role that human relationships and networks play in defining the role and identity of a person in an African community and the meaning they derive from those associations.

Almost all social scientist scholars concur that those human networks which display trust, loyalty and reciprocity, yield social capital.²² Though the studies conducted by Anirudh Krishna and Norman Uphoff directly apply to the Indian context, nonetheless they also have some relevance to ours. In this regard they note that “It is not the networks *per se* that are important but the meanings these networks hold for their members and the possibilities for collective action and personal benefit they open up.”²³ In short, networks of human relationships, the core of social capital, give associations their meaningful purpose of existence.

Again according to Tutu, *Ubuntu* denotes a delicate network of relationships that gives meaning and purpose to the operation of the African community.²⁴ Unlike the Western concept that stresses individualism, *Ubuntu* entails the person’s identity and fulfilment within rather than versus the community. These relationships are the life-line of the society – as the persons not only derive their identity but also find fulfilment in these links. The destiny of the entire community is thus intricately entwined with that of a person.

Shutte rightly notes that networks of relationships define the spirit of *Ubuntu* as each person exists only as a part of the community in which he is fully involved and to which he is fully committed.²⁵ Hence, networks of human relationships are integral to the order and rhythm of life in the African community. As Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak state, “Networks help people develop their identities”.²⁶ More importantly, so they argue, they help forge membership, which entails connection; “the trust, understanding and mutuality that support collaborative, cohesive action”²⁷ is engineered.

Indaba/Imbizo: African Structures of Participation

In African communities, collaborative activity becomes possible precisely because of the existence of the traditional participatory structures that promote consensus on essential matters facing African communities. The institution of *Indaba* among the Zulu or *Imbizo*’s amongst the Xhosa (both terms for communal assemblies or gatherings) for example, reflect co-operative efforts to reach a common mind on critical issues, such as crime, confronting a community. In these gatherings an attempt is made for maximum participation.

²⁰ Quoted in Shutte, *op cit*, p. 14.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 12.

²² See for instance Cohen, D and Prusak, L. *In Good Company, How Social Capital Makes Organisations Work*, p. 28-31.

²³ Krishna, A and Uphoff, N, ‘Mapping and measuring social capital through assessment of collective action to conserve and develop watersheds in Rajasthan, India,’ in Grootaert, C and Van Bastelaer, T (eds.). *The Role of Social Capital in Development, an Empirical Assessment*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, p. 100.

²⁴ Tutu, *The words of Desmond Tutu*, p. 24.

²⁵ Shutte, *Ubuntu, an Ethic for a New South Africa*, p. 60.

²⁶ Cohen and Prusak *In Good Company How Social Capital Makes Organisations Work*, p. 61.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

As Shutte states, “Discussion must continue until unanimity is achieved, a really common mind and heart. This is the only adequate sign that the truth of the matter has been discovered.”²⁸ In this respect, E Ostrom makes a relevant point with regard to organisations when he says that co-operative activity becomes more likely and successful when individuals in a community abide by the rules that have been made through consultation rather than imposed from outside.²⁹ Dietlind Stolle notes that associations like these “contribute to the emergence of societal norms and generalised values.”³⁰

Spurred by trust and the loyalty of the members, these communal gatherings are attempts to promote co-operative efforts with a view to advancing the well-being of the local communities. The more regularly these meetings occur – the greater they intensify the bonds of brotherhood amongst the people. The kind of relationships involved here are similar to what Anthony Bebbington and Thomas Carroll in their studies relating to the Andes call *bonding* and *bridging* relationships.³¹ In these formal gatherings information is shared which has the capacity to influence the life of the members of the community. “Underlying such a discussion is the conviction that the community has a common mind, a common heart”, asserts Shutte.³²

Shutte rightly maintains that “Achieving a common mind and heart on a specific issue builds up the community as such intensifying the spirit of solidarity of its members.”³³ In this regard, Putnam’s observation regarding the role of voluntary organisations in democratic societies in the USA seems to have some relevance to our case. He noted, “These associations of participation promote and enhance collective norms and trust, which are central to the production and maintenance of well-being.”³⁴ The social cohesion of African communities thus depends very much on such structures. Since so much time is invested in the operation of these structures, and a sense of loyalty is fostered, they are important resources for mobilising collective action for the communities.

***Ubuntu* and Social Security: Interdependence – African Hospitality**

Essentially social capital is about the well-being of the members of a group or community – where all stand to benefit from the assets accruing from relationships of trust, loyalty and reciprocity. Shutte rightly suggests that *Ubuntu* provides *social security* to all its members in a community precisely because behind this philosophy lies the idea that “persons develop as persons the more they are subject to a certain kind of influence of others (in community).”³⁵ He maintains that the close relations in the African community facilitate a deeper sense of integration of the person, which fosters self-determination, which in turn

²⁸ Shutte, *Ubuntu, an Ethic for a New South Africa*, p. 28.

²⁹ Krishna, A and Uphoff, N, ‘Mapping and measuring social capital through assessment of collective action to conserve and develop watersheds in Rajasthan, India,’ in Grootaert, C and Van Bastelaer, T (eds.). *The Role of Social Capital in Development, an Empirical Assessment*, p. 115.

³⁰ Stolle, D, ‘The Sources of Social Capital’ in Hooghe, M and Stolle, D (eds.). *Generating Social Capital, Civil society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2003, p. 20.

³¹ Bebbington, AJ and Carroll, TF, ‘Induced social capital and federations of the rural poor in the Andes, *The role of social capital in development*, p. 237.

³² Shutte, *Ubuntu, an Ethic for a New South Africa*, p. 28.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Lin. *Social Capital*, p. 23.

³⁵ Shutte, *Ubuntu, an Ethic in a New South Africa*, p. 61.

opens up for the person broader choices in life which lead to personal fulfilment.³⁶ He attributes “the source of this power” to “a certain kind of dependence on other persons” – *Ubuntu*.³⁷ This ‘certain kind of dependence’ to which Shutte refers has the capacity to exert *influence* in society which is critical to the ‘bonding and bridging’ of relationships – the hallmarks of social capital.

In his study, *Townships and the Spirit of Ubuntu*, Mike Telschow points out that “*Ubuntu* expresses an African philosophy of life that one may perhaps describe as brotherliness, solidarity and togetherness.”³⁸ In African context these values find expression in the spirit of hospitality. Nelson Mandela, the former State President, expressed how the spirit of *Ubuntu* was lived in South Africa:

A traveller through our country would stop at a village, and he [or she] didn’t have to ask for food or for water. Once he/she stops, the people give him [or her] food, and entertain him [or her]. That is one aspect of *Ubuntu* [and generally of African hospitality] but *Ubuntu* has various aspects. *Ubuntu* does not mean that people should enrich themselves. The question therefore is: Are you going to do so in order to enable the community around you to improve?³⁹

African hospitality thus reflects the principle and the spirit in which Africans are engaged in networks of human relationships – which essentially are propelled by family, clan and tribal ties. African hospitality is at the core of the spirit of *Ubuntu*. African hospitality is accorded on the principle that the one who receives it will likewise reciprocate it in time of the need of the other person – thus expressing the spirit *Ubuntu* – “I am because we are.” Similarly, in their study of liturgy and ritual and poverty in South Africa, Johan Cilliers and Cas Wepener extolled African hospitality as an element that has important implications in generating social capital.⁴⁰ Similarly, as Gathogo states, “(It) is a powerful tool for gluing the community (which can also refer to the whole world as a global village) together as well as the community with ancestors and God.”⁴¹

Since as Gathogo rightly argues – that African hospitality acts as an important tool to bring the African community together,⁴² it is an important feature that can facilitate social capital – for social capital, after all, entails values or norms that draw people together. It is about the extent to which people are connected together and the manner in which those ties enhance their well-being.

Essentially, social capital, like *Ubuntu*, is about human solidarity – the extent to which organisations or associations enforce and display a sense of loyalty and trust among its members, a sense of belonging to its members. Similarly, the way of *Ubuntu* is about ‘brotherliness’ ‘brotherhood’, a quality that not only displays identity but more importantly defines the meaning of existence for its members. As social capital is about social ties so *Ubuntu* is about interconnectedness and interdependence.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Gathogo, ‘African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and *Ubuntu*, p. 43.

⁴⁰ Cilliers, J and Wepener, C, ‘Ritual and the Generation of Social Capital in Contexts of Poverty: A South African Exploration’, Gruyter, W. *IJPT*, vol. 11, 2007.

⁴¹ Gathogo, ‘African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and *Ubuntu*, p. 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*

Since the collapse of Apartheid, the government of South Africa adopted Ubuntu as a concept to foster a stronger sense of unity. The policy of Ubuntu is explained in the White Paper, published in August 1997, Point 24 of Chapter 2. There it is used as a principle “of caring of each other’s well-being..., respect for human rights and responsibilities in promoting well-being of the individuals and societal well-being.”⁴³

However, social capital and *Ubuntu* is not one and the same thing. Unlike social capital where the trust and loyalty can be measured vis-à-vis the performance of the members of the organisation in terms of its economic utility, *Ubuntu* cannot be quantified nor enumerated since the way of *Ubuntu* does not operate in Western economic terms but rather in African terms of the ‘dignity’ or ‘indignity’ of the people. Hence as a philosophy, *Ubuntu* is lived or experienced – rather than mechanically ‘generated.’

While social capital is confined to specific social units in the corporate organisations, normally people with similar interests or goals, as a philosophy – *Ubuntu* is more encompassing – its spirit embracing persons in African communities and beyond to people of other racial groups, as well who also must benefit from African hospitality.

However, some negative effects that social capital produces in society have also been noted. For instance, Cohen and Prusak noted how strong social loyalty and trust of the Nazi brown-shirts in Hitler’s time normalised their aberrant behaviour.⁴⁴ Likewise Gathogo noted that national or tribal or clan affinities, where trust and loyalty rule, may be abused to serve anti-social behaviour with catastrophic consequences. To illustrate this, Gathogo draws our attention to the Rwanda genocide of 1994.⁴⁵ Or as Sonal Panse asserts, *Ubuntu* “could lead to conformist behaviour in order to achieve solidarity ... Group Politics and Herd Mentality – which could derail the common goal.”⁴⁶

The diverse character of the South African socio-economic contexts ranging from rural to semi-rural or from semi-urban to urban pose specific challenges to the concept and the way by which *Ubuntu* can be lived.. The socio-economic realities of urban South Africa driven by a capitalist economic system tend to promote attitudes of individualism or self-interests – material acquisition, these sometimes generate greed (and consequently alienation of people) which in turn undermine the spirit of sharing and hospitality or generosity, the crux of *Ubuntu*.

Ubuntu is about recognition that “I am because we are”. Considering the vast racial, cultural, religious, educational, and socio-economic differences in South African and the world over, the concept of *Ubuntu* is certainly not irrelevant. Recognising the differences in others and coming to terms with them, understanding that others are just as good as us, would help overcome judgemental attitudes and stereotyped notions. If instead you regard someone as a fellow human being, there is perhaps a greater chance of achieving understanding.⁴⁷

Or what is the delineating line between the group/communal solidarity and the personal responsibility? A villager may want to escape his or her responsibility to work hard in the field but still expect his or her neighbour to give him or her food as a gesture of *Ubuntu*.⁴⁸

⁴³ <http://www.buzzle.com> – accessed 28/10/10.

⁴⁴ Cohen and Prusak, *In Good Company How Social Capital Makes Organisations Work*, p. 15.

⁴⁵ Gathogo, *op cit*, p. 47.

⁴⁶ <http://www.buzzle.com>, 28/10/10.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Cf. Githogo, “African Philosophy as Expressed in the Concepts of Hospitality and *Ubuntu*”, p. 51.

Or *Ubuntu* can be abused when, for instance, an extremist view is held, and a declaration made that “a person is a person only in the community” may reduce a person to nothing – thereby denying their unique contribution to the community.⁴⁹

Similarly *Ubuntu* can be abused by a group or a community seeking to assert their rights (or an ideology) over others. In some cases, *Ubuntu* has failed to address the concerns of the African women as men distort this way of life as a cover up for patriarchy when they use culture or traditions to disempower women – precisely by excluding them from the position of leadership.⁵⁰ Cases may prevail where some people may masquerade their corrupt practices as acts performed in the spirit of *Ubuntu*. For instance, a case where a ‘gift’ is presented in exchange for certain favours may be made to appear as a gesture of hospitality given in the spirit of *Ubuntu* when in fact is a corrupt practice.⁵¹

Thus, being aware of these complex socio-economic and political dynamics in Africa and in this case South Africa as a concept and way of life, *Ubuntu* must be re-configured to meet these challenges. Just as education is a process through which people learn, people can be socialised into the way of *Ubuntu* – embrace *Ubuntu* as a way of life. In this respect, *Ubuntu* places obligations and therefore responsibilities for others as well. Charles Villa-Vincencio makes an important point when he asserts that the ideal notion of *Ubuntu* must entail the concept itself transcending the communal spirit and collectivism and become all-encompassing and all-embracing.⁵²

Mobilising people in the spirit or ‘banner’ of *Ubuntu* in the rural and urban context of South Africa can go a long way to galvanise communities to collaborate in challenging anti-social behaviour in the neighbourhood that dehumanise people, such as drug abuse, women and child abuse – as *Ubuntu*, being an African value, will naturally resonate in the African people. This is where social capital interface with *Ubuntu* – for as Putnam asserts social capital “would facilitate co-operation and mutually supportive relations in the communities and nations and would therefore be available means of combating many of the social disorders inherent in modern societies, for example crime.”⁵³

Thus while *Ubuntu* affirms and celebrates the rights and concerns of communities it must equally address the concerns of the minorities, the vulnerable in society, women, children, the disabled and the like. It must be oriented to encompass the interests of the marginalised. In this case the members of the Corinthian Church of South Africa making annual donations in kind and cash to the blind at their annual service of the burning of the heifer at Mlazi, south of Durban, has become over the years a way of affirming the needs of the socially marginalised minorities in the spirit of *Ubuntu*.⁵⁴ However, what happens in Durban must extend to other contexts as well. Thus *Ubuntu* must be oriented to encompass the interests of the marginalised in communities.

On the other hand, just as *Ubuntu* can yield some negative aspects or consequences so too some constraints can and do impact on social capital. Irrespective of his agreement with James Coleman that “social capital in the abstract is a neutral resource”, Pierre Bourdieu’s

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁵³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital, p. 3: accessed 25/09/10.

⁵⁴ See Mbaya, H, “The Socio-practical dimensions of *Isitshisa* in the Corinthian Church of South Africa”, a paper presented at Stellenbosch University on poverty and social development, International Conference held at Holy Trinity Anglican Church Halla, Kokstad, 19-21 February, 2010.

work seem to show that social capital can generate inequality, illustrating, “for instance how people gain access to powerful positions through the direct and indirect employment of social connections”, relations that can help communities fight crime.⁵⁵ In other words, trust and reciprocity, critical elements of social capital as defined by Putnam, provide a conducive atmosphere where the spirit of *Ubuntu* can work.

However, social capital is not entirely free of negative aspects. Alejandro Portes outlined four negative consequences of social capital. First, social capital is not accessible to all, “in the much the same way that other forms of capital are differently available”.⁵⁶ Geographic and social isolation constrain availability of this resource. Social capital is not created equally as location to the socio-economic source effectively determines how social capital is distributed in society. Besides these, he also outlined four negative consequences of social capital: “exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members; restrictions on individual freedom; and downward levelling.”⁵⁷

On the other hand, irrespective of his agreement with James Coleman that “social capital in the abstract is a neutral resource,” Pierre Bourdieu’s work seems to show that social capital can generate inequality, illustrating, “for instance how people gain access to powerful positions through the direct and indirect employment of social connections”.⁵⁸

Conclusion

In conclusion, in the preceding discussion, I have tried to show the bearing critical elements of social capital, notably networks of human relationships propelled by mutuality, trust and loyalty, have on the understanding of *Ubuntu*. In particular, I argued that structures of participation, such as *Indaba*, or *Imbizos* play a significant role in enhancing collective action. Likewise, I argued that African hospitality expresses the spirit of *Ubuntu*, which in fact is a principal asset that entails social security in the African community. Finally, I argued that social capital and *Ubuntu* is about solidarity, ‘brotherliness’, a spirit that undergirds networks and partnerships – the cardinal principles of social capital.

However, I also drew attention to the fact that blind loyalty and trust can sometimes yield anti-social behaviour amongst organised groups or within African tribal societies, where the spirit of *Ubuntu* can be distorted for ideological purposes. In view of what I have put before you could it not be said that the traditions, norms and values of *Ubuntu* already in place in Africa today are developing and facilitating social capital?

⁵⁵ See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital, p. 3: accessed 25/09/10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

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