

## Information sheet

Modelling Ubuntu Economics Through Communal Writing, Publishing and Reading  
Principal investigator: T. O. Molefe  
Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity, London School of Economics and Political Science

### **Call to commune for African and African diaspora writers of narrative nonfiction who are based in South Africa**

*"... don't worry about imagination. You have all the imagination you need, and all the reading, journal writing, and learning you will be doing will stimulate it. Play with your ideas. Have fun with them. Don't worry about being silly or outrageous or wrong. So much of writing is fun. It's first letting your interests and your imagination take you anywhere at all. Once you're able to do that, you'll have more ideas than you can use. Then the real work of fashioning them into a story begins. Stay with it. Persist."*

— Octavia Butler, *Furor Scribendi* (from *Bloodchild and Other Stories*)

Applications are now open for a year-long, stokvel-style co-created writing commune. The commune is open to all African and African diaspora writers based in South Africa who are creating, revising or refining a piece of book-length narrative or creative nonfiction on any topic in English for a general audience. Ideal commune members would be critical of capitalism (and its supporting interlocking systems of domination, oppression, exploitation and exclusion) and interested in egalitarian alternatives — particularly for book production, dissemination and access.

#### **1. What is the commune about?**

The commune is an attempt to collaboratively think about and apply in practice a co-operative organizational model implicit in ubuntu, an African philosophy on the interdependent nature of human existence. Ubuntu holds that a person becomes and is a person through relations with other people, and that being an ethical person entails seeking harmony in these relations. The philosophy, therefore, has organizational and operational implications for co-operatives as entities constituted of, by and for people. The commune aims to map and explore these implications in a practical way. It is my non-residential fellowship project in the Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic Equity (AFSEE) programme hosted by the International Inequalities Institute of the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE). AFSEE provided funding for the project, which I developed independently.

#### **2. Why map and explore an ubuntu co-operative model?**

Currently, due to the pervasive and persistent effects of imperialism and colonialism, Western knowledge and experiences dominate as officially recognised co-operative models across the world—even in South Africa. At the same time, knowledge and knowledge systems beyond the Western view, including ubuntu, tend to be misconstrued and overlooked. This project is founded on the idea that if we are to find viable, sustainable alternatives to the crises and conflicts of capitalism and its basis in exclusion and exploitation over cooperation and solidarity, we need to call on all human knowledge and experience, not just those of the Western world.

#### **3. How will the commune work?**

The commune will operate and organize as a co-created workshop made up of 12 participants, including me. Each of us will work to create, revise or refine an individually authored book-length manuscript and contribute to a communal manuscript.

Commune members are free to choose the topic, length and style of their individual manuscript, and how to go about writing it—with fellow commune members providing encouragement, feedback and comradery, and sharing reading and other resources as the manuscript develops.

The themes and topics of the communal manuscript will be chosen collectively by commune members, as will the roles, responsibilities and amount of work each of us is expected to put in. My initial proposal to be revised by members of the commune is that the communal manuscript should explore connecting with audiences—as a theme and in practice in its production and distribution.

#### **4. What do you mean by co-created?**

The commune is co-created in the sense that the structure and content of the convenings will be decided by commune members based on our collective needs, aspirations and realities. It will also be co-created in the tradition of stokvels in that each member will contribute what resources they can to the commune on a purely voluntary and optional basis—with no consequence or penalty should they choose or be unable to contribute.

About 80% of the commune's initial budget of £12,000 was provided by the AFSEE programme and the rest from my own resources. From this, and subject to confirmation by commune members, the funds have been allocated as follows: a stipend of £400 per person to offset the costs of writing and participating in convenings (see next question for details on the convenings); travel, accommodation and meals for the first in-person convening; and 5GB of data per month per person for the virtual convenings and access to the commune's digital space. Under the direction of its members, the commune will work to mobilise resources for the rest of its activities as determined by members. Should this objective not be realised, the commune will cease to exist.

The aim of the co-creation process is to envision and model the application of ubuntu philosophy to the book value chain. Writers are often initiating stakeholders in this chain, but we are and become writers through our relations with others involved in the book origination, publication, dissemination and reading process. In its work, the commune will endeavour to include, as equitable stakeholders and decision-makers, others involved in this value chain.

#### **5. How often will the commune meet? And what happens between meetings?**

The commune will convene formally at least once a month between July 2023 and June 2024, on dates to be agreed once convened. Three convenings—September 2023, February 2024 and June 2024—will be in-person residential retreats over a week or a series of weekends, depending on everyone's schedules and availability, at a venue in South Africa to be chosen by commune members. Remaining convenings will be virtual, on a medium and for a duration to be decided by commune members. In periods between convenings, the members will have access to a virtual space (on a platform to be collectively decided upon) to commune. During these intersession periods, members will dedicate as much time as needed, is available and collectively agreed on to work on their individual manuscripts and contributions to the collective manuscript. As an indication, this project was developed using a target benchmark of at least 20 hours per month spent on the process, craft and act of writing.

#### **6. What happens at the convenings?**

The purpose of the convenings is to plan, share what we have been working on, and explore specific topics and themes about the book production, dissemination and reading value chain. The structure and content of each will be decided collectively by commune members. Possible topics included in the initial proposal and to be reviewed, revise and confirmed by commune members are:

- Reaffirming and restoring African personhood
- Writing nonfiction with readers in mind

- The true costs of writing meaningful nonfiction
- On being edited and editing with care
- Nonfiction publishing norms in South Africa and how to challenge them
- Recognition from readers and critics.

## **7. What is expected of commune members?**

The commune members will collectively decide on shared expectations, guided by the objective of creating harmonious relations. As an initial proposal, commune members will:

- Dedicate time to the process, craft and act of writing,
- Be present at each convening,
- Take an active interest in their own work and that of other members and the commune,
- Be open, engaged, reflexive, critical and encouraging, and
- Value harmonious relations.

## **8. How do I take part?**

To take part, read this information sheet carefully and complete the application form. If you do not understand or need more information about the project to help you decide if you would like to apply, email [commune@collectivecoop.co.za](mailto:commune@collectivecoop.co.za). If your application is a fit for the commune, you may be invited to join. Please note spaces are limited, so not everyone whose application is a fit can be invited to join. I aim to confirm participants by early July 2023.

## **9. Do I have to take part? What if I change my mind after joining the commune?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to apply and, if offered, accept a place in the commune. You do not have to apply or accept an invitation to join if you do not want to or expect that you will not be able to participate fully. If you do decide to join, you will be asked to complete and sign an informed consent form.

If any questions or discussions during the commune make you uncomfortable, you do not have to engage with them. However, you are encouraged to use the commune as a space to work through interpersonal issues with other members, based on our collectively determined shared expectations of each other. You can withdraw from the commune at any point, without having to give a reason and without penalty. If you withdraw, I will not retain any information you have shared, unless you are happy for me to do so. If you withdraw after November 2023, when my submissions to the AFSEE programme are due, I will not be able to remove your information from these submissions but will do so elsewhere and in any future submissions and publications related to the project.

## **10. What information will be collected and what will it be used for?**

In addition to the details collected in the application form, certain sessions of the commune will be recorded digitally with consent and in a manner to be agreed upon by all members. I will use this data to write a reflective essay on the commune's activities and also an academic paper on the co-operative model implicit in ubuntu philosophy. Both of these, along with a preliminary outline or draft of the communal manuscript, will be submitted to AFSEE as the outputs of the project. In addition, I may also use the information in my own book-length manuscript that I am developing as a member of the commune. Only the period July to November 2023 forms part of the data gathering period for the AFSEE project.

## **11. Will my taking part and my data be kept confidential? Will it be anonymised?**

For all these uses, or any future uses, your information will be kept as confidential as possible and anonymised. Any transcripts and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from any names or other direct identification of participants. Any hard copies of research information will be

kept in locked files at all times. Only myself and others in the commune will have access to the files and any recordings.

You will also have the choice to opt out of anonymity. You will also have the opportunity to review all the project outputs, now and in future, before submission to anyone outside of the commune.

Limits to confidentiality: Confidentiality will be maintained as far as it is possible, unless you tell me something that suggests you or someone you mention might be in significant danger of harm and unable to act for themselves. In this case, I may have to check with my AFSEE mentor and inform the relevant agencies equipped to provide the care needed to keep you or that someone out of harm's way. But I would discuss this with you first.

## **12. Who has reviewed this study?**

This study has undergone ethics review in accordance with the LSE Research Ethics Policy and Procedure.

## **13. Data Protection Privacy Notice**

The LSE Research Privacy Policy can be found at:

[https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from\\_serp=1](https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Secretarys-Division/Assets/Documents/Information-Records-Management/Privacy-Notice-for-Research-v1.2.pdf?from_serp=1)

The legal basis used to process your personal data will be "Legitimate interests". The legal basis used to process special category personal data (e.g. data that reveals racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, health, sex life or sexual orientation, genetic or biometric data) will be for scientific and historical research or statistical purposes. To request a copy of the data held about you please contact: [glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk](mailto:glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk).

## **14. What if I have a question or complaint?**

If you have any questions regarding this study please contact the researcher, T. O. Molefe, on [tomolefe@gmail.com](mailto:tomolefe@gmail.com). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of this research, please contact the AFSEE team at [afsee@lse.ac.uk](mailto:afsee@lse.ac.uk) or the LSE Research Governance Manager via [research.ethics@lse.ac.uk](mailto:research.ethics@lse.ac.uk).

If you are happy to take part in this study, please complete the application form.