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Sharing Land, Sharing Faith: Ground Ethics amongst Missionaries and Ik in Uganda

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Abstract

When do ethics of sharing, or 'something for something' logics of exchange, apply? This article explores this question based on fieldwork amongst the Ik community and missionaries in Uganda. It examines interactions of sharing and exchange and how situational communities of belonging and resonance are created, but also pays attention to tensions between groups. A variety of sharing ethics form the basis for everyday interactions within the Ik community, such as the sharing of mountain landscapes and the sharing of land for agriculture. These and other ethics of sharing are part of everyday life yet seldom without friction and contestation. When international missionaries came to the Ik mountains to 'spread the word of God', they too were driven by ethics of sharing: their call was to share faith. Yet, moralities of exchange were also crucial for missionaries to convey. Nuances between sharing and exchange, borrowing and stealing became continuous sources of friction and negotiation between locals and foreigners. Three cases describing different kinds of sharing and exchange between the missionaries and the Ik provide material for rethinking ethics of sharing phenomenologically in relation to territories, faith and material items. The article draws on Knud Løgstrup's ideas about ground ethics and contributes to the literature on sharing and ethics by pointing to how communities of belonging and resonance may arise out of sharing practices, but also how friction builds up when parties do not agree about whether a transaction is a form of sharing or one of exchange and which ethics to apply.

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Sharing Land, Sharing Faith: Ground Ethics amongst Missionaries and Ik in Uganda

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Introduction: sharing mountains, belonging to land

Alfred was a clan elder in the Ik community[1] and an *amazeya jumui* (elder of the soil, sing.). *Roba zeika jumui* (elders of the soil, pl.) are considered caretakers of the land and in that capacity lead processes around sharing of land for cultivation and for hunting in the Ik mountains. Most of the time, using and sharing land and mountain resources happen smoothly in and between families and generations, and without much leadership. Sharing territory is very much part of the ordinary ethics that pervades thinking, speaking, and action (Lambek 2010).[2] Inspired by philosopher Knud Løgstrup (1956), I propose the term 'ethical ground' to think about how the Ik consider access to land and a place to dwell. In the Ik mountains, all beings belong to and exist in place. This is a universal condition and demand that reaches beyond the norms and rules of right and wrong. When visitors come – from other clans, ethnic groups, or countries – and ask for access to land, the *amazeya jumui* shows the visitors where to cultivate, graze animals, or build. The visitors are then considered 'users of the land'. There is no rent or price charged for staying. The elders of the soil keep an eye on the land and on the people occupying it to ensure peace between people and they are expected to balance how much, when, and where to allow cultivation to occur in the fragile forested mountain landscape. Alfred explained it thus: 'The problem is not [the lack of] land but people who encroach on each others' gardens, pushing the boundaries. [...] So they start quarrelling and in the end they may call upon the *roba zeika jumui* to talk and do a ritual.'[3] When I asked Alfred, 'So, do you lead mediations on the land that belongs to your clan?', he laughed

1 The Ik community is a group of around 6,200 indigenous people living in the mountains bordering Kenya and South Sudan. Most live from a combination of subsistence agriculture, trading, hunting, and gathering. All names in this article have been anonymised.

2 By 'ordinary ethics' Lambek refers to 'ethical entailments of speech and action' that 'demonstrate the centrality of ethical practice, judgment, reasoning, responsibility, cultivation, and questioning in social life' (Lambek 2010: 5, 1). Rather than focus on codes of conduct or hot-button issues, he and the authors in his edited volume make the cumulative argument that ethics is profoundly 'ordinary' and pervasive – and possibly even 'intrinsic to speech and action' (Lambek 2010: 1).

3 All translations from Icetot to English were done by Jacob Lochul.

and explained a nuance about belonging worth noticing for understanding this form of sharing: 'Mmmm, you can say it like that – or the other way around: I lead the clan that belongs here to this land [...] like the Ik belong in these mountains.' This way of thinking about belonging raises the questions: Does the land belong to the people, as stated in the Ugandan constitution (see Meinert and Kjær 2018), or do the people belong to the land (Adol et al. 2023)? In this article, I take Alfred's lead to consider belonging and the ground ethics of sharing mountains and land 'the other way around'.

I consider and compare specific empirical and everyday cases of the sharing of land, the sharing of faith, and the sharing of material items, three different phenomena that give rise to both similar and varied forms of sharing. My method of delving into empirical cases and details draws on the phenomenological tradition of radical empiricism (Jackson 1989) as a way of making what Mattingly (2019) terms 'perplexing particular' data destabilise doxa and defrost (Arendt 2003) our thinking to renew concepts around ethics of sharing. It is now well established in anthropology that sharing is not a form of exchange (Marshall 1961; Peterson 1993; Woodburn 1998; Widlok 2017) and has its own logics and dynamics (Widlok 2004, 2009, 2013, 2017; Ferguson 2015). I contribute to this discussion by drawing attention to how the ethics for sharing phenomena that are radically different (for example land and faith) can be quite similar and grounded in wishes for belonging and resonance (Rosa 2019).

Mountains and land are bound to a place (they are immobile) and sharing of their resources depends on being granted access to the place by other humans or species. Faith is a mental, spiritual, existential phenomenon and sharing of faith depends on mutual understanding, communication, a sense of community, inner dedication, and imagination (Robbins 2004). Material items are visible (unlike faith), are mobile, and can move both between places and between humans (unlike land); and sharing items depends on access, giving and taking, proximity, and trust. The sharing of each of these three phenomena depends on mutual understandings and 'granting of access to something that is considered of value' (Widlok 2017: xvii). Yet the nuances between them can point to subtle aspects of sharing and can show how misunderstandings arise when actors do not agree about what kind of sharing is at stake or whether it is a kind of exchange, with a return expectation implied (Woodburn 1998). I begin with Alfred's case about land, then examine missionary faith, and end with a case about material items.

Alfred and other elders had patiently explained to me the Ik principles of sharing different kinds of territory and land and I had come to understand how these principles are similar to and different from practices in other parts of Uganda (Meinert and Whyte 2023) and East Africa (Gabbert 2021; Shipton 2009). In Alfred's words, the Ik mountains are the place of belonging for Ik people: where they are at home, where they dwell, and where they 'come

from'. The mountain landscape is considered a common existential place of belonging, which is and should be generously shared with other humans – mainly Ik, but also Turkana from Kenya and Dodoth from Uganda, missionaries, NGO people, the military, and others who come and ask for access to a place to be. The mountain terrain is also shared with other species: livestock, wild animals, insects, bees, and various kinds of spirits. Trees, rivers, plants, grass, rocks, and soil are all presences that are regarded as beings and parts that belong to the place with specific life forces. All parts are unique and contribute with what they have. In this way, humans and non-humans belong to the place and share it.

Access to land for cultivation, grazing, hunting, and gathering is based on an ethics of sharing and entrustment. Nine Ik clans belong to and each looks after a territory, but land is borrowed across clan boundaries and there is a great deal of flexibility depending on security issues and needs. There are no 'landowners' in the strict sense: people who use a piece of land for cultivation are considered caretakers of the land, but they own the crops grown from the land. A son or daughter may be entrusted with a garden that their father or mother had been using or they may be granted access to new land by elders of the soil such as Alfred. This system of entrustment and sharing expresses a radically different relationship to land than property ownership (see Shipton 2009; Laltaika and Askew 2021). You can get access to land for a garden by asking an elder of the soil, who will show you where to farm. If you do not use the land, you cannot hold on to it for long as others may start to cultivate it or ask for access. Disputes and wrangles are part of this dynamic, especially if people try to sell land (Meinert and Kusk 2023) or keep more land for themselves than they can cultivate. Crops grown on the land follow a different logic, namely one of individual and family property: they are stored, exchanged, sold, pooled, stolen, and so forth. When crops are transformed into cooked food, they are again shared within families and between neighbours and people who are present when the food is cooked.

Territories for hunting and gathering are shared differently from land for cultivation as they follow logics of larger communal belonging and shorter timespans. Gathering honey is considered individual wealth, but hunting meat is shared immediately after the hunt and in waves of sharing (see Widlok 2017) according to specific principles. These waves of sharing are not smooth and frictionless – indeed, they can cause quite a lot of palaver; and yet they seem to reinforce an ethics of sharing. Land for building houses and establishing villages is usually allocated by *roba zeika jumui* within clan territories, but settlement patterns are semi-nomadic and fractions of a village may decide to move to a new area and settle there temporarily. Until 2015 there were hardly any permanent (thus brick and corrugated iron-roofed) private houses in Ik County (Meinert et al. 2017). All houses were (and mostly still are) made of clay and grass-thatched roofs, which disintegrate with

time. Lasting building materials such as wooden poles are taken along when people move to a new place and abandoned dwellings are shared with other humans and species. Permanent houses involve a less flexible and thus more lasting attachment to the land on which they are built, which raises new questions about sharing and belonging – as we see in the following case with missionaries' houses.

Sharing the field

Since 2010 I have done fieldwork amongst the Ik community twice a year (except during the Covid pandemic in 2020–2021), carrying out studies on burials, death, time, land, old age, ethics, kinship, gender, and marriage. Over the years my position has been established as 'the regular visitor' who asks many questions and writes about the community. I was first introduced to the Ik mountains by my friend Hillary Lokwang, who later became a politician and Member of Parliament. Retrospectively, I see how this positioned me as one of his family's and clan's visitors, with its benefits and limitations. The first years I did fieldwork with a colleague and we were shown a place in Tultul village to build a small clay house to stay in. At that time, I was simply grateful for the hospitality and did not think far ahead about sharing the land, place, and house. Later a friend and neighbour took over the house and cared for it and I started staying as a visitor in Hillary's house. I learnt in practice that you cannot hold on to a place or house unless you use it continually. This was also the case with garden land. After some years I asked Komol, one of the elders of the soil, for some garden land for growing vegetables. Komol showed me a piece of land where my field assistant and I started growing vegetables. After a couple of years, the garden was taken over by one of Komol's sons because, as Komol rightly concluded, we did not really need or take care of the garden.

I am still only a visitor and an outsider to the Ik community, but the fact that I come back twice a year and have stayed in contact over twelve years gives me a feeling of being a long-term friend of the place, one who understands at least some of the complexity of social life.

During my first fieldwork stints, my colleague and I were worried about 'sharing the field' and being associated with Colin Turnbull and his book *The Mountain People* (1972) about social breakdown during famine in the Ik community. The book had become world famous and was highly critiqued (Barth 1974; Heine 1985; Townsend et al. 2020). But few in the Ik community knew about the book and no one seemed to have read it, partly because not many had gone to school. We reasoned with Hillary that the community had a right to know what had been written about them and we thus read selected sections of Turnbull's book out aloud for groups of elders and discussed his descriptions and recommendations with them (see Willerslev and Meinert

2017). To our surprise the elders confirmed many of the empirical descriptions; yet they strongly objected to Turnbull's bizarre recommendations of dissolving the Ik people. Even though it was a vulnerable point in the fieldwork to share Turnbull's writings, it also gave us an opportunity to create distance to his recommendations and explain the purpose of our fieldwork. In turn this created the basis for trust and mutual understanding.

In 2015, a group of eleven missionaries settled in Ik County to do what they termed 'Training in Missionary Outreach' (TIMO). They were members of different Christian denominations, including Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal, but they had teamed up through outreach training organised by Africa Inland Mission. The mission leaders had earlier worked in Western Uganda for a German mission organisation and now felt 'called' to begin their work in the Ik mountains. The leaders asked for access to land in various Ik villages to build houses for the team members. They explained to the village elders that they were not going to build churches but would use existing churches for praying; however, they did want to build houses to live in.

At first I kept a polite distance to the missionaries and it took me a while to accept that they had entered what I had, admittedly, come to perceive as 'my' field. But then I became increasingly friendly with some of them. They were eagerly learning the Ik language and building their little houses, creating Euro-American mini-universes of baked bread and brewed coffee. I began studying the relationship between the missionaries and the Ik community, focusing on mutual moral responses between the two groups.[4] My guiding question was: What dynamics occur when groups attempt to include others in their moral communities? Some of these dynamics appeared in relation to different ideas about sharing.

The missionaries built a first house for the TIMO leaders. They told me how they got permission to build from the village leader nearby. The agreement was, they said, that they would contribute 'something' to the village; and after they had left, the house would be 'for the community'. The village leader confirmed that he had given them permission to build a house but added that the missionaries agreed to pay 28 million shillings for the land, which they had not done yet. The missionaries, in turn, could not confirm this large amount and wondered why the village leader would tell me this. They expressed frustration about what they perceived as confusing and contradictory communication about the land. Seeing me as an expert on land (since I was busy studying land issues in the Ik mountains), the missionaries asked me about the Ik rules about land. I tried to convey what I had learnt about ethics of sharing, entrustment, and recent cases of selling land (Meinert and Kusk 2023), where pragmatism rather than set rules and prices applied. The

4 The research project 'Ethics after Individualism' explored questions about the moral community. It was located at Aarhus University and funded by the Danish Research Council (Louw 2022).

missionaries, I argued, must accept the ethics of sharing of common ground: agreements about land were pragmatic, flexible, and temporary and depended on the relationship with the neighbours.

When a heavily loaded truck brought the building materials for the missionary house, it lost control on the rocky road up the mountain and caused an accident through which a girl lost a leg. The tragic incident brought building to a halt. Meetings were held and the missionaries gave financial compensation to the person and family involved. The accident did not cause accusations or disagreements; rather there was a mutual acceptance of the fact that accidents happen when people live together. Indeed, the sharing of life and death seemed to bring the missionaries and the local community closer together in a generally good relationship. However, misunderstandings between the parties were also part of the everyday life that ensued and they reveal differences in ethical and moral stances – not least in relation to the sharing of land and houses.

Land okay, but what about the houses?

After the missionaries had been in the Ik mountains for about four years, Alfred and his son Peter talked about a dispute which evolved towards the end of the missionaries' stay. Alfred said:

> *The missionaries asked for access to land for building, so we let them build a house near our village. They told us they were going to stay for two to four years. We give access when someone like that is here and asks for land to build. [...] You have seen how almost every year Turkana herders from Kenya come with their animals to graze when drought hits Turkanaland. They put up their kraals and small houses and, when rain returns, the Turkana also return back home. [...] We share with them the grass, water, even food when it is there. [...] With the missionaries, it was their first time to come here to the mountains and we did not know what to expect. But missionaries usually bring something [...] – like in Kaabong town they built a church, or they build a hospital, school, [...] something for the community.*
>
> *These missionaries were very quiet and they did not tell us about their intentions. They did not build a church or school. This did not happen. But they built their houses and so we thought at least they will leave this house for us to use when they are leaving. Now these missionaries are leaving but tell us that new missionaries are coming and taking over the house. They have locked the house with a padlock.*

In turn, the missionary leaders Hallie and Christian explained the situation from their perspective. They got access to land from each of the village heads to build six houses for the TIMO team. Nobody owns Ik land, the missionaries were told, so they just needed permission to stay and build. They were welcomed and got permissions from the local village heads. But to their frustration, these agreements and arrangement kept changing over time. It turned out that some of the village heads also expected them to contribute to various projects in the village, which they did. In other villages the missionaries paid for the land and considered this a sale or lease, but the village heads kept disturbing them for more money. As becomes clear, the village heads did not consider the agreements as 'done deals' but rather as continuing transactions.

Two padlocks

After about four years, some of the missionaries left and gave the key to their house to Christian, one of the mission leaders. One day not long after, Christian described, Alfred and Peter came to ask him whether they could use the house for drying their crops for some weeks. Christian let them have the key. But Alfred and Peter ended up keeping their crops in the house beyond the weeks that they had agreed on. Christian asked them to leave the house and give him back the key as he had to pass it on to the mission organisation, in preparation for the new missionary. But Alfred said that he did not know where the key was. Christian got upset and said he would have to put a new padlock on the front door and give that key to the mission office.

When I spoke to Alfred about this, a cheeky smile flit across his face before he said:

> *It is fine if they want to put another padlock. Then we will both have a key to the house. [...] It means we will have to agree on who will use it. [...] They have a key; we also have a key.*

This case about land, a house, and two padlocks points to some of the grey zones of sharing and to the questions sharing can raise. There was an interesting slide from an ethics of sharing to a logic of selling and an 'I give if you give' idea about access. The specific issue was about the house and the land, but the overall question really points to the social relationship between the parties, who seem to have been asking themselves: Are we together here? How and in what sense are we together? Who belongs to this 'we' (see also Alava 2022)? What do we share and what do we keep to ourselves? The implications and consequences of belonging and sharing emerge and we see that time and timing also matters for this.

In this case of land and house, sharing largely depends on presence. Amongst the Ik, you have to be physically present on the land to make claims

to this land. If someone makes themselves present, temporarily, and expresses a need (as the missionaries did), then land will be shared with them for some time. This way of sharing land often has a levelling effect because it prevents individuals or families from holding on to large amounts of land. They have to be present and use the land continuously. (Buying and fencing land are the opposite – methods to make claims to land even when one is absent.) The Ik way of sharing land is a continued process, based on trust and words (rather than papers). In this sense it is immaterial: you are not given soil to have but you are granted access for a time. It reverberates with Widlok's (2013: xvii) definition of sharing as 'granting others access to something that is of value'. And to some degree, sharing land with visitors also involves extending the circle of people who have access to what is valued, as Widlok (2013: 16) describes – at least temporarily (for the missionaries, two to four years). We can ask whether this sharing is about an underlying ethics of solidarity and spontaneity, which Løgstrup (1972) articulates as a universal human trait. Perhaps so, because in the situation there is an expression of a common human 'ground need' that the giver responds to spontaneously. But with time the 'free access' is partly withdrawn, in particular when the giving party realises that access and sharing could potentially be something different, something that someone could try to benefit and profit from. Sharing of land is not articulated as a solution to injustice or inequality, even though it may have this effect. Rather, many Ik consider sharing access to land to be a form of basic commonality: sharing that which is good and essential for living is necessary and thus sharing land is a pragmatic and existentially ethical stance.

When the missionaries came, both they and the Ik were trying to figure out what kind of relationship they would have with each other. Locals such as Albert were trying to find out why the missionaries had come, what they wanted, and what they had to give. The people who arrived in the Ik mountains did not seem to fit into the commonly held missionary mould: they did not build churches and they did not preach. This was puzzling to many. But it was straightforward to others, such as the local Pastor James who explained that to these missionaries it was all about sharing faith. I now turn to the issue of sharing faith, starting from the missionaries' ethical ground.

Sharing faith

The missionaries all had different individual motives for going to the Ik mountains. I interviewed six of them between two and four times over the course of four years. I had long conversations with two of them, with whom I lived for ten days in 2020. The missionaries were a diverse group in several ways. They came from a range of countries: Germany, the United States, South Africa, Uganda, and Austria. They were of different generations, gen-

ders, and walks of life. They also belonged to different Christian denominations and churches: Lutheran, Catholic, and Pentecostal. But they shared a common ground reason for being missionaries in the Ik mountains: they wanted to deepen and share their faith. They were (to me surprisingly) careful and reflexive about how they could, would, and should share their faith. Faith, in their view, could and should only be shared if the other side asked for it. It could not be forced upon anyone.

If we take Knud Løgstrup's (1956) call for the need to distinguish between motives and grounds, and between morals and ethics (Løgstrup 1956; also see Widlok, this volume), an interesting distinction appears: the missionaries' motives and moralities in relation to local practices of, for example, borrowing and stealing were topics of ongoing internal debate, but their ground project of sharing faith was a common ethical stance for all missionaries. In Løgstrup's philosophy, ethics are not primarily about distinguishing between what is morally right and wrong but rather about realising common human grounds as an ethical demand.

One of the missionaries, Karen, expressed well how the missionaries understood their presence: they were 'amongst the Ik to share the word of God and share the experience of living with Jesus'. Even though their ideas of sharing are different from those of land sharing, I argue that their grounds (different from motivations) emanate from what they perceived as an ethical demand of sharing (rather than a logic of exchange). Some of them did, however, evoke the metaphor of 'the gift' of faith and 'the obligation' to pass on this gift; and they felt they received a 'return gift' by having a 'cultural experience', thus using the rhetoric of an exchange. Yet most missionaries were also remarkably explicit about the inappropriateness of giving or 'pushing a gift' on to anybody who did not ask for it. Their specific way of doing mission work was quite opposite to the common stereotype of missionaries who force their way into their hosts' lives by visiting them in their homes and putting their foot in the door if a host attempts to refuse them access. The TIMO missionaries' strategy was rather to make themselves present in the community by living there. They were accessible if anyone wanted to talk about the Bible and about Jesus. If anyone, child or adult, initiated conversation, or stayed around the missionaries' houses, then they were welcomed and if someone asked for a Bible, the missionaries would give it to that person for free.

In relation to faith, the ground ethics were about sharing. Hallie explained: 'Jesus is not a limited resource but endless love. It is the kind of love that gets bigger when shared [...]. But the wish to take part *has* to come from within a person, it should never be forced upon anyone.'[5] To Hallie, reading

5 There is a connection here to what Child (2021) describes as 'how to sell a friend' when discussing Tupperware parties. At these parties the focus is on connecting, not selling. The host of the party transfers the responsibility of commercialising the relationship on to the buyer – but the overall goal is to sell. For the missionaries the overall goal is to share faith, but the initiative

the Bible every morning was an important routine of quiet contemplation and sharing: 'Every morning we read a section of the Bible. It is the same part as other Christians around the world. […] We call it quiet time, or you can say precious time, because this is a time alone with God'. This kind of sharing was immaterial, invisible, and in some cases implicit: there was a sense of commonality in knowing that others around the world, and perhaps around the corner, were reading the same verses and praying the same prayer. It was individual, internal, quiet prayer, and in that sense separate, and depended on physical distance (between individuals). This idea of sharing resembles Benedict Anderson's (1989) 'imagined community' of newspaper readers around the nation, which depends on the individual knowledge and imagination of others doing and believing the same across distance.

Yet experiences of sharing faith depended to a large degree on presence, according to the missionaries and other Christians in the area. On several occasions I joined the missionaries to the various churches and prayers in the area, but one morning the aspect of presence became particularly clear. I had joined two of the young missionary women for Sunday prayer in the small Pentecostal Assemblies of God church. A young Ik woman called Nakiru was leading the service and a small group of Ik girls formed the choir. We were about twenty people – mostly women and girls – in the small room, which had wooden logs for sitting. The Bible was read in Akarimojong but the missionaries showed me how to follow the text in their English Bibles. Most of the songs and chanting were in Icetot and all – including the missionaries – knew the songs by heart. The atmosphere was intense and lively with a lot of singing, dancing, and chanting, interrupted by periods of quiet individual prayer, when each prayer was turned inwards, and common prayers. The service ended with giving thanks to the Lord and everyone shaking everybody else's hand. On our way home, Karen explained that this kind of experience was particularly rewarding and worth all the hardship of staying in the mountains because it was a real experience of sharing faith, being with other believers, and sensing the Holy Spirit together: 'You just feel the presence of God so strongly when we are together in that small church.' Nakiru, the Ik woman who had led the prayers, found these words: 'When the missionaries come to church and pray with us, it a special day. They have come to share the presence of God and we all feel it.' Then she turned to me and asked: 'Did you feel it?' And I answered that even though I was not a practicing Christian, I had indeed felt the energy of being together and the sensation of being part of something larger and spiritual. When I discussed this with a small group of missionaries later, they agreed that the sensation I had felt 'is what it is all about'; 'this [spiritual experience] is what we hope for'; and 'sharing those

has to come from the seeker and the responsibility is thus transferred from the missionaries to the potential convert.

kinds of special moments is precious'; 'spending time together in the church provides a different sense, not just community but fellowship'.

Even though the missionaries and some of the local Ik like Nakiru had a mutual understanding of this kind of sharing of faith, there were others, both churchgoers and others, who were critical and felt the missionaries should do more than just share faith. They expected something more, especially something material, from the missionaries. Julie, a middle-aged Ik woman and seasoned Catholic, responded as follows when I asked her what she thought about the missionaries' mission:

> *I don't know what their mission is. You tell me! What are they here for? What are they bringing? What are they getting from us? The Catholic fathers in Kaabong, they built churches, schools, health clinics. [...] These missionaries say they are not going to build a church or a health clinic. So what are we getting from them?*

Julie and others like her did not give much for sharing faith as a human ground or ethical demand, to use Løgstrup's terms, if something material did not follow. Julie saw the relationship as a transactional one of exchange: the missionaries get access to local souls to promote their faith and in return locals should get a physical building of some kind.

Hallie strongly disagreed with Julie in many ways, but especially on this point. To her, to build infrastructure would be a very old-fashioned way of doing mission work. The sphere of faith was supposed to be one of sharing, not exchange. At school, for example, the missionaries were supporting what other churches had already built up over the years. Yet there were also spheres where the missionaries were all for, and strongly promoted, logics of exchange. I look at these in the next section.

Something for something

For the missionaries, resources such as goods, food, and most services followed a very different transactional logics to the sharing of faith, namely that of a 'something for something' exchange. Most material items were to be exchanged through trade, as gifts, or in acts of borrowing and lending, and these acts were to be clearly distinguished from stealing. The missionaries had agreed amongst themselves the prices they were prepared to pay for individual items: they would buy an egg for 500 shillings, an onion for 200, and so forth. They established small exchange markets outside their houses where their neighbours could sell vegetables and other goods when they needed cash and had something to offer. The exchange markets also worked the other way around: when people asked the missionaries for an onion or other goods, these were supposed to ask for money in exchange. If a person

was unable to pay, they might get the onion but would have to promise not let others know that they had been given the onion for free. Hallie would charge 100 shillings for repairing people's clothes on her Singer sewing machine from Germany. It was a small amount and financially insignificant for Hallie, and even for most locals, but it was the principle that counted for Hallie. When Christian lent out one of his tools, which he kept meticulously ordered in his shed, he said to the man: 'Please use this tool but bring it back! […] And next time I am stuck with my car in the mud, you will help me push!' These kinds of services of lending a tool were to be remembered and later reciprocated.

Moralities of 'something for something' transactions were imperative – especially for missionaries like Rainer who often took the moral high ground when talking about his local neighbours:

> *They need to learn and also practice the difference between borrowing and stealing. This is very important. The children borrow the toys I have in the house, and when they bring them back, I count. If something is missing, they don't get to play again before the missing toy has been returned.*

Christian did not agree with Rainer about his reaction when a toy or tool went missing. Christian thought Rainer was too strict when enforcing the rules and that this led to unnecessary tension. Rainer, on the other side, thought that Christian was too soft and was reacting emotionally. He felt that people would not learn anything from seeing Christian being sad. Christian, again, disagreed: for him showing emotions was a strong way to communicate that 'we all depend on each other and the agreements we make'.

Hallie explained why she took the trouble of having people pay for her services of repairing their clothes: 'So even though people don't give much, it is the principle that they *have* to give something in exchange.' She was particularly aware of earlier missionary work creating what she and her colleagues called 'the dependency syndrome'. When things were given out for free, it created unhealthy dependency in the long run and undermined people's own dignity. So the missionaries' efforts to enforce the rules of exchange was not simply about communicating a Protestant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism (Weber 1934) but also about communicating the conscious relational ethics that guided the missionaries. Hallie commented on my habit of giving second-hand clothes to people I knew. She asked me whether I was aware of the risk of creating a kind of dependency. I had not thought about my small gifts in this light, so Hallie lent me her copy of Glen Schwartz's (2015) *When Charity Destroys Dignity* to read. The blurb on the back cover read as follows:

> *'Give generously' is our biblical mandate (Romans 12:8), but generous giving to the missionary cause, though essential to the expansion of the church, can create unhealthy dependency. [...] A powerful factor in the growth of Christianity is the use and misuse of financial resources both local and foreign.*

The book was part of the TIMO curriculum and it was clear that the missionaries were trying hard to apply its lessons to avoid creating 'unhealth dependency' by practicing small-scale trade. China Scherz (2013, 2014) describes dynamics of dependency and market economics in relation to churches and charity work in much more detail for elsewhere in Uganda.

Access to certain services were, at least partly, exempted from the 'something for something' paradigm and shared freely. The missionaries all had strong solar panels for power and water tanks for collecting rainwater. Neighbours who needed to have their phones charged would come by and hand in their devices for charging and pick them up later in the day, without any fee or expectation of reciprocity. This practice seemed natural and implicit and was not discussed; but in situations when locals raised the critique that the missionaries were not contributing to the local community, some of the missionaries mentioned this service. Access to rainwater from the missionaries' overflow water tanks was also given freely. Christian even built a small fence to guide those fetching water at the overflow tank: he agreed that the missionaries should share the water freely, but he expected order when the people came to fill their jerrycans. When one day the crowd pushed over the fence in their excitement, he felt quite disappointed. Hallie commented on Christian's disappointment: 'Giving is not easy. [...] It is very complicated to help people in a way where you do not create conflict and dependency, but dignity.' She explained that a similar situation had developed when she was selling second-hand clothes cheaply from their compound and Christian gave the many buyers access to drinking water from their own water tank inside the compound. After everyone had left Christian and Hallie realised that someone had 'punctured' the water tank with a nail. The felt very disappointed, Hallie explained: 'We give something freely, and then you expect [...] at least that people are careful, grateful, friendly [...]. But, ah, the water tank is punctured!' It is not of importance here who punctured the water tank or how they did it; the point for my discussion of the difference between the moralities of sharing and exchange is that, as they shared their power and water generously, the missionaries expected something in return. For the missionaries the morality of exchange and 'something for something' surpassed the ethical demand of sharing.

The expectation of mutual understanding and a 'we are together here' feeling was held not only by the missionaries towards the local population but was also extended by members of the Ik community towards the missionaries. I

end with a story about a blue basin that points to how assumptions and expectations about sharing or exchanging material items can cause confusion.

Taking the blue basin

Compared to most in the local population, the missionaries had very many different material items: tools, cooking utensils, books, toys, clothes, furniture, and so on. The missionaries considered these items their 'belongings' in the sense that they belonged to individuals or households. These belongings were neatly unpacked for use during the day and packed away and stored carefully every night. Hallie showed me with quiet pride how she kept order in her sewing box, inherited from her grandmother, with the thread organised by colour, the needles neatly arranged, and the buttons sorted by size and material. It seemed like an entire cosmology of order. When the Ik girls that Hallie was teaching to sew used something from this box, learning how to place it back into the box was clearly part of the lesson. Order and the taking, using and replacing of items were important virtues for Hallie. She kept a close eye on her belongings and wanted to pass these virtues on to others.

Hallie recalled how one day she discovered that she had lost one of her basins for washing clothes. She needed all her basins for doing laundry, a laborious task. But she also saw the missing basin as a chance to talk to the young Ik who were interested in Christianity about borrowing and stealing. Hallie thus brought up the missing basin during their next meeting. But weeks passed without any word about the basin. Then one day Clement, one of the preachers, said, 'I know where it is.' He led Hallie to a home in a village nearby and said, 'It is inside this house of Martha.' Hallie knew Martha from everyday interactions. She entered Martha's house and found the basin, filled with grains. When Hallie said to Martha, 'This is mine,' Martha grumpily emptied the basin but did indeed give it back. Hallie explained: 'When people here see you have something they need, and they think you have plenty, they simply take. But this is not okay. You should ask! This is the difference between stealing and borrowing.' Did Martha consider it stealing, I asked her. Hallie replied:

> *I don't think so. She was just annoyed because she had to empty the basin and find another way to store her grains. […] But my point is that she should have known that this was not right and this was stealing, because she did not ask. […] There are different Ik words for stealing, and for borrowing, lending, giving, taking […], so they know of the difference.*

As Marilyn Strathern (2012) points out with an example of missionaries in the Pacific, the boundaries between sharing, borrowing, and stealing often appear differently for actors in various positions. And as Widlok (2017: 29)

explains, what is considered a simple transfer of sharing from one perspective may be considered an exchange from a different perspective; as a consequence, different expectations emerge. Assumptions about a transfer imply expectations and moral evaluations of motivations: what is right and wrong depends on whether participants in a transfer perceive it to be an act of sharing or an act of exchange. The moral evaluations also reveal whether the two sides share an ethical stance, thus the basic ideas about the deeper grounds they stand on. If we think about Martha's grounds from Widlok's sharing perspective, we might say: Martha did not criticise the missionaries for not giving out material objects or building a church (as she and others had expected), but she made an ethical stance by taking a basin. Implicitly she was saying that 'we are together here, we all belong here, belonging(s) are for all: we share what we have and take what we need from each other'. In a sharing ethics she was demanding that those who have should let go of some of their belongings when there are others who are in need. As Widlok points out, that way sharing is a practical ethical response in a world of haves and have-nots. Some of the missionaries might have agreed to this overall ethical stance, but Hallie would still have observed that Martha forgot the most important part of the sharing logic: she should have asked for permission.

Concluding the sharing grounds

Looking more closely at the negotiations of ethics around sharing and exchange between members of the Ik community and a group of international missionaries reveals that both groups had distinct ideas that differed between sharing and exchange. They all considered the need, wish, or ethical demand to respond with sharing when what they held as the basic ground for existence was requested from others, be it land for dwelling or faith for meaning. At the heart of sharing lay ideas about belonging as a common human ground: belonging to a place, belonging to a group or humanity, and belongings as items perceived as extensions between selves and others. Friction between the groups occurred when members did not agree on what should be shared and what should be exchanged. Tension built up when mutual assumptions and expectations did not fit as to whether something can change over time from being sharable to being exchangeable and vice versa. I explored sharing and disputes over land, faith, and material items that are phenomena holding significantly different properties: land *is* ground, fixed in space, tangible and finite, and sharing is granted by others. Faith is spiritual, infinite, and intangible; it can be accessed by an internal demand and can increase when shared. Material items are tangible, finite, and mobile, and decrease for the giver when shared. At the heart of the disputes, I argue, were different ideas about whether something is to be shared freely or exchanged

with an obligation to reciprocate – and ideas about what kind of belonging is at stake.

In the Ik community, sharing of land was perceived as an ethical demand. When a human in need asked for access – such as the missionaries who expressed wish for land to build on – it was usually granted freely. This system of sharing land and entrusting it over generations had a social levelling effect. But access to land depended on presence on the land; no one could 'own' or sit on large tracts of land they did not need or use. The sharing of land thus came with the important condition of letting go of one's share with time and sharing the land with others. Disagreements occurred about the temporality of access to land, in particular if a durable house had been built on it as the missionaries did, making the claim to land appear permanent. This raised questions about belonging: Who should have access to the house in the future? Who belongs to the group or lineage with whom land and property should be shared? Who gets to decide who could 'inherit' access? Disputes occurred when it was unclear whether a transaction was temporary entrustment sharing, an exchange with mutual obligations, or a sale with finitude.

For the missionaries, sharing of faith should be done in a manner where receivers demanded this sharing to happen. Experiences of sharing faith could occur spontaneously or through prayer and create feelings of universal being. In this sense the missionaries' idea about sharing faith resembled Ik ideas about sharing land as an existential ground. Yet some of the Ik assumptions and anticipations to missionaries about faith were outright transactional: they expected the building of a church, a school, or a clinic in return for being available for preaching and praying.

Transactions such as the taking of a basin might have appeared as sharing from one perspective, as borrowing from another, and as stealing from yet another. These were not necessarily Ik versus missionary perspectives; there was overlap between as well as internal disagreement within the groups.

With these cases I hope to have destabilised some of our thinking around sharing as phenomena mainly understood and practiced by former hunter-gatherers such as the Ik and principles of exchange practiced most purely by westerners such as the missionaries. Both groups practiced and made a virtue of both forms of transaction; and a transaction could slide from one paradigm to the other, as a pragmatic response to others. The ethics of sharing were not so much about following rules, logics, and agreements but about understanding the other's grounds, their situation, and their longing for belonging and resonance.

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