EthnoScripts

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Hide and Seek a Share:
The Ethics of Sharing between Presence and Distance

Abstract

Hiding and sharing things can go together. Haillom and other San hunter-gatherers in southern Africa are considered to be a group in which there is a lot of sharing. At the same time, hiding what could be shared is not rare. The ethnographic situation that I explore in this contribution is that of hiding tobacco and other consumables. What happens when Haillom divide their tobacco into two pouches, one for sharing with others and one that is kept hidden? I argue that creating presence but also maintaining a degree of distance characterise Haillom sharing practices and their way of dealing with numerous sharing demands in everyday interaction. At a comparative theoretical level, I argue that safeguarding minimal interpersonal distance is part of habitualising a performative ethical sense of how to share. In this context, trying to store things is not necessarily considered unethical as long as those who do still continue to be appropriately responsive to the demands made. What is at stake is the learnt judgement of when demands need to be fulfilled and when other responses are in order.

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Introduction

Tsab lives in northern Namibia and he likes to keep his tobacco for smoking in small tins that originally contained snuff tobacco, because that way it keeps dry. This is, of course, not the only way to keep your personal stock of tobacco. I do not smoke, but my San interlocutors in the field in Namibia[1] expect me to provide tobacco and I am regularly asked to share the tobacco that I buy when I am doing field research in southern Africa. Some men and women who are younger than Tsab now prefer cigarettes, but I know that Tsab and most others are happier with loose tobacco. I buy it in bags of 500 grams and give a round whenever sitting down with people to talk. Pretty much every period of my field research starts with me giving rounds of tobacco to people gathered. And every time I realise how many different possibilities there are to store tobacco: some people keep it in little plastic or cloth pouches which they recycle from their original uses, others keep it in all sorts of tins or other types of bags. Sometimes the tobacco is kept in makeshift pouches folded from pieces of old newspaper, sometimes it is simply tucked under the knitted woollen beanie that many wear or stuffed into the pocket of a pair of trousers, a shirt, a jacket. The ethnographic present comes naturally as I write about this since, over several decades of field research, the routine of sharing out and receiving tobacco has hardly changed. To be sure, there are more plastic bags now than bags made of cloth. This is not appreciated by everyone because some women used to sew old tobacco bags into pieces of clothing.

The routines of sharing tobacco have also remained fairly stable (see Marshall 1961; Widlok 1999, 2017). But so have the routines for hiding tobacco. As I give out my tobacco to Tsab, he puts most of it into his snuff box, but he also places some of it into a separate little pouch. When other people approach, they not only ask me for a share of tobacco, but they also turn to Tsab because they know (or reasonably assume) that he has already been given. Tsab then produces the pouch and takes out ever smaller quantities as

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one neighbour after the other approaches us. For Tsab and many other San, it seems that, whatever the means of storage, it is important to have more than one container: one that is readily shown to others and a second that can be hidden for as long as possible. Whenever I give out tobacco to someone, other people in the camp in northern Namibia watch me keenly. In fact, they do not actually need to watch me; they know that when I am around, I will be giving out tobacco, just as they know that as soon as someone, anyone, arrives newly in the camp, people will share a smoke and maybe other things. Whenever a person approaches a fireplace, an open hand will be extended as a silent demand to request either tobacco to fill their pipe or to take at least a smoke from the pipe that has just been lit (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Sharing amongst Hai‖om San in northern Namibia. Video still: T. Widlok.

San are now subject to health education and many know that sharing the same pipe can cause the spreading of tuberculosis and other diseases. Also, the commercial tobacco bags in southern Africa now have health warnings printed on them, so it is possible that smoking might decline in the future. At this stage, however, there are only few San who do not smoke. The future of the practice of smoking is one thing, but the future of sharing practices is another matter and it is the latter that is central to this article. Other researchers working with San and other hunter-gatherers have also observed the 'two pouches syndrome' (see Marlowe 2004; Myers 1988; Woodburn 1998). But does the fact that things are hidden mean that sharing is increasingly weak-

ened? Does hiding contradict and counteract sharing? Does it necessarily undermine the ethics of sharing practices? To what extent is storage and hoarding the opposite of sharing? This contribution tries to answer some of these questions.

Sharing is not merely a technology of distribution

In this article I outline what exactly the ethics of sharing consists of, especially if practices of hiding are part and parcel of it. However, the point that needs to be established first is that, even in the rather everyday example of sharing tobacco, there is indeed an ethical dimension to sharing and that we are not just dealing with a technology of distribution or a technical means to buffer uncertainties in supply.

Tobacco (and many other products) reach Namibia largely as a consumer product bought and sold along global and local commodity chains. However, once it arrives in a San camp, as we have seen in the opening ethnographic vignette, it is hardly ever sold from person to person. Rather, it is shared. Looking at it from the outside and from a distance, the sharing mode appears primarily to provide a system of transferring goods within a camp, just as market relations provide a system of transferring goods outside the group. So why and how does sharing tobacco and similar items have anything to do with ethics? After all, we may think of it as a technicality, a technology of distribution. And at face value, the fact that San do try to hide tobacco may support this view. There seems to be no moral urge or rule to 'give away' that governs the whole process. Much of the standard evolutionary theory of sharing seems to work without any assumptions about ethics. Especially those who insist (against the evidence, see Widlok 2017) that sharing is predicated on reciprocity and is a form of balancing out (Jaeggi and Gurven 2013) manage to keep the axiom of 'the selfish gene' intact in sharing contexts. In this view, sharing is nothing but a rational strategy of buffering fluctuations in resource availability, devoid of ethics. Then there is the opposite view, namely that sharing is all about morality. It treats sharing along similar lines like practices of almsgiving and caring (see John 2016) in the Abrahamic religions. As I show in a moment, both of these positions are undermined by the comparative ethnographic record.

It is problematic to see sharing simply as a technicality or a technology, a mode of distribution and a kind of logistics of buffering the uneven distribution of resources. To be sure, there is no doubt that sharing does have logistic-distributive effects, or can have them, but I want to highlight that this is not its key characteristic. A main feature of San ethnography, but also of comparative ethnography from other parts of the world, is that it underlines that the distributive effects of sharing vary considerably across situations: shares can be small or large; sharing can be narrow or wide; it can take place

within households and beyond; it can involve the material or immaterial; it may be reciprocal and non-reciprocal, one-way or two-way, essential for survival or not; and – when extreme shortage hits – it can be shown to intensify in one case but it can disintegrate in another (see Widlok 2017: 51–56). This variability already throws serious doubt on the rather mechanistic models with which sociobiologists tend to approach the topic of sharing.

When Voland (2007: 15), for instance, insists that sharing is an expression of altruism, he means a mechanism that follows a programme of 'inclusive fitness' driven by 'selfish genes' which causes organisms to give in order to eventually receive back – independently of whether we are dealing with amoeba, chimps, hunter-gatherers, or urbanites. But such a programme, if it exists, seems unable to explain why sharing takes place, and in what shape or to what extent, in one case rather than in another. As a 'mechanism', it would seem to be a very unreliable technique since the dynamics and outcomes vary so widely. Apparently something else has to come in. What explains why humans find it useful and desirable to imagine that sharing of a particular kind is desirable in some instances but not in others? As the ethnography shows, sharing is highly sensitive to context and therefore not a mechanistic sequence operating in the same way everywhere. This context includes an ethical evaluation by participants as to what can be demanded and how one should respond to these demands (see also Peterson 1993, 2013). More specifically, value and evaluations enter the sharing process in two separate ways, first, morally, and second, ethically.

First, humans can take a reflexive stance towards practices of sharing (and non-sharing), they can value sharing as a morally prescribed value. But as the 'second pouch of hidden tobacco' indicates, they can also value practices of keeping for themselves which may compromise the value of sharing and they can negate individually what is socially considered to be morally 'proper'. Second, but more fundamentally, sharing is a means to respond ethically to the fact that (fellow) humans are repeatedly separated from what they value. This is captured in the common anthropological definition of sharing as 'widening the circle of people who have access to what is valued' and about 'granting others access to what is of value' (Widlok 2017: xvii). This touches upon the intrinsic ethical aspect of sharing: there are always some humans that are separated from what they value. And there are others who are in the position to change that and to create access for those who are in need. And this, I maintain, is also the foundational situation of ethics. If the human condition is characterised by 'fundamental intrinsic injustice' (see Løgstrup [1972] 1989: 188), then sharing as an expression of solidarity is the appropriate ethical stance. In many instances the transfer practice appropriate for this condition of continually reproduced inequalities is sharing.

But what about hiding tobacco or other forms of evading sharing that may be found elsewhere (see Berman 2020)? Do these practices undermine

the moral and ethical dimensions of sharing? Quite to the contrary. With regard to morals, the fact that Tsab has a second pouch of tobacco that he has to hide is proof of the strength of the sharing morality amongst San. If tobacco is visible, 'on the table' so to speak, it becomes very hard indeed to avoid sharing, given the moral pressure on those who have. Instances (and suspicions) of non-sharing are an important device when keeping up sharing as a moral value. In San conversations, a lot of complaints can be heard about people 'no longer' sharing as much as they once did or should. With regard to ethics, it is ultimately only owing to the fact that tobacco *can* be made 'invisible' through hiding and the fact that this happens regularly that it becomes an ethical issue at all, an issue that makes people ponder how to reconcile their choices, decisions, and actions (and those of others) with what is intrinsic to tobacco, namely that many like to smoke it. If there was no way of avoiding sharing tobacco, there would not be any need for the moral imperative to share it, nor would it be of ethical relevance.[2] Similarly, we do not normally consider air to be an ethical agent or breathing to be of ethical concern because air itself cannot negate being breathed in by humans, but fellow humans may act in ways that others 'cannot breathe' and that adds an ethical dimension to it.

The intrinsic ethical value of sharing does not disappear when humans try to 'opt out' in a particular situation. Rather, the ethical dimension is constituted by the fact that it can be denied. Moreover, sharing, even where it routinely occurs, is not promising to rid humankind of all injustices for ever. It is not a moral utopia – and in this respect, it is very unlike a once-and-for-all communist redistribution of property and also unlike the utopian liberal goal of welfare and affluence for all through free market mechanisms. The complexities of life will always result in some hunters receiving more returns to their hunts and some individuals getting more tobacco from visiting anthropologists than others. Sharing does not abolish the conditions that produce unequal access to goods in the first place, but it provides humans with an appropriate ethical and practical stance towards this feature of the human condition, and this makes it an eminently ethic affair. I argue that it is this aspect which provides sharing with its specific ethical content different

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2   This distinction between morality and ethics follows Knud Løgstrup ([1972] 1989: 59) who argued that moralism is in some ways the opposite of ethics: 'Moralism is the way of morality to be immoral' (Løgstrup [1972] 1989: 59, my translation). When we see others who suffer, Løgstrup says, we may spontaneously feel compassion, a spontaneous expression of being, which he called 'sovereign expressions of life' (or, in the original Danish, 'suveræne livsytringer'). We can also decide to distance ourselves from those who suffer by replacing the co-pain with indignation, a moral complaint that the others (or someone) did something wrong so that as a consequence they are now in a deplorable situation. But indignation and moral outrage is ultimately a form of aggression, Løgstrup argues. The ethical demand is not about applying norms but about responding spontaneously.

from that of other modes of transfer, be they gift giving, pooling, or market exchange.

Sharing is not the same as the morality of altruism

In the previous section, I argued against the notion that sharing was a distributive evolutionary mechanism devoid of an ethical dimension. I also hinted at the fact that this ethical dimension should not be confused with sharing being solely a matter of prescribed morality. San who hide tobacco are not in any ethical disagreement about the fact that sharing is about realising and performing what is good, as, for example, sharing food and drink that nourishes a person, sharing a smoke, or providing company. When they demand tobacco from one another, they perform what Løgstrup ([1956] 1997) calls 'the ethical demand'. In this context Løgstrup also refers to 'the silent demand', thus a demand that is not only non-verbalised but intrinsically an ethical demand, in his view, because it is emerges whenever humans meet as embodied beings. Løgstrup describes the silent ethical demand as being created by the presence of a person in need. He uses episodes from novels to illustrate many of his theoretical points, but the everyday practice of many hunter-gatherers in fact provides a perfect illustration for what he describes. In this practice the ethical demand is not about declaring (morally) what is good but is primarily about consummating (ethically) what is good. It is fundamentally a matter of ethics from which moral rules may be derived (and not vice versa). As soon as we stop talking about declared 'motives' and instead move on to desirable 'grounds', we move from morality as a surface phenomenon to the underlying ethics. My motives are none of the others' business (see Løgstrup [1972] 1989: 183). In fact, it seems that it is important for the stability of a central social practice such as sharing that it is not built on moral intentions or particular motives which are potentially feeble and unreliable but that it is rather grounded in underlying ethical structures.

This matches the comparative ethnography: sharing here emerges as not primarily being about a motive. You need not be a self-declared altruist or a devout giver of alms in order to be good at sharing. We see this in so many instances of demand sharing which often manifests itself in tolerated scrounging, allowing others to take, and so forth. The motivation in sharing is not predetermined in these cases. In fact, in sharing practices the motives of the giver are often unknown and excluded from consideration and amongst the San they are certainly understated. For them what counts is the task ahead. Sharing is practically defined by what it achieves, which is reflected when we define it anthropologically along the lines of 'enlarging the circle of people who have access to what is valued' or of 'allowing others to take'.

Neither in social practice nor in anthropological theory is sharing defined with regard to a moral norm, such as the golden rule 'do to others what

you would have them do to you' or 'do-ut-des' (I give so that you give) or any similar principle. This also emerges from my ethnography with Hai‖om San in Namibia, but it has been noted more widely as we have numerous ethnographic accounts that show quite explicitly that sharing does not presuppose particular moral motives. Take Fred Myers's (1988) account of Pintupi Australian Aboriginal sharing, for instance: everyone amongst the Pintupi knows well that others try to hide things so that they do not have to give up what they value themselves. But that does not prevent sharing from going ahead, however reluctantly, and it does not prevent that the practice can continue. Pintupi are not indignant about others who may not have the moral motivation to help others, but they are taking an ethical stance by demanding that those who have should, in the end, let go of whatever it is that others need. This underlines sharing as practical ethics. A corresponding morality can be a complement, but it need not be. It does not depend on your moral conviction but rather on your practical response when realising that we live in a universe that produces injustices all the time, a universe that is (and will always be) inhabited with haves and have-nots. Morality, which is often instrumentalised to flag and defend group boundaries, may in fact undermine the universalising that is characteristic for the ethics of sharing. To spell out this difference in more detail, it is useful to take a short excursion into the philosophy of ethics.

Universalised mutuality – not generalised reciprocity

How does the ethics of sharing differ from ethical concerns and moral norms that have been discussed with regards to commoning and pooling? It is helpful here to draw a sharper distinction between generalising and universalising, both of which have been discussed in the literature on ethics. The 'contextual ethics' of Løgstrup's work (see Eriksen 2020) provide a particularly promising starting point for this. In Løgstrup's scheme, 'generalising' is about rules without exceptions, generalised for 'the many': many participants and many situations (Løgstrup 1989: 59–60). Taxation, commons, many digital platforms, and other collective pooling examples work on that basis. The logic of generalisation is to determine at an abstract level as to who is part of the same group (or part of the extended self, in Belk's conceptualisation; see below). This can involve those who are very close, but in fact it can also involve those who are physically very distant as long as they are in the right category. Many pools and commons are predicated on membership, citizenship if you will, but not necessarily on situations of need.

By definition, these forms of pooling do not go well with singularising and attention to the particulars of a situation because the pool is 'blind' towards the particulars: at least ideally, you pay tax because you are in a certain category, a bracket of those earning above a certain threshold amount of money,

not because of a particular personality trait or the specific life situation you find yourself in. If there were a tax that would pick on such a singular criterion, it would be deemed unjust. Sharing resources, by contrast, follows the logic of universalisation (and in that sense, too, Sahlins got it seriously wrong when he subsumed sharing under the label 'generalised reciprocity'). Sharing could be called 'ethically universalised giving' in contradistinction to 'generalised giving' because the ethical guideline here is something like 'You should do the same when faced with the same situation' (see Løgstrup [1972] 1989: 65). This is exactly what we find in the so-called 'waves of sharing' which have so often been described in the ethnography and which I was also able to observe: A big animal is slaughtered. There is a first wave of sharing for those who participated in the kill. They take the stuff back to camp, where immediately there is a second wave of sharing with those who provided the arrows to the successful hunter or information on the whereabouts of animals. Then folks start cooking and, once that is done, another wave of sharing is set in motion that involves anyone who happens to be around and who is hungry, even those who had no part in the hunt at all. The wave of sharing continues. If you do not have, you are given, but then you become someone who has and when you encounter someone else who does not have, it is your turn to share from that which you received in sharing. This is universalised in the sense that it applies to anyone who finds him/herself in that situation, indiscriminately of status or membership. But it is not generalised to a category of people or statistically generalised in the sense of you have to give up 10% of your harvest to the landlord or 25% as tax to the state, or a fixed amount of your salary as a contribution to the pension fund, and so forth. These latter examples are generalisations that rely on principles of 'apportionment'. The sharing examples, by contrast, are examples of universalising across sharing events that constitute similar situations and constellations.

As Løgstrup ([1972] 1989: 59) points out convincingly, in terms of ethics this is a major conceptual difference. Generality means no exceptions from the accepted rules, irrespective of circumstances (for Løgstrup this constitutes a moralist, not an ethical stance). Universality, by contrast, can work without reference to abstract rules. All that universality means in ethics is: 'I am not an exception, you are not an exception. We can change roles any time. I receive a share now, I may be asked a share tomorrow. There is no privilege that exempts me (or you) from these roles; there is no disciplining that bars me (or you) from any of these roles.' To say that we can change roles (or imagine changing roles) is different from saying, 'You and me are the same, we are always in the same category or pool'. In fact, the notion of changing roles assumes some minimal distance between roles but also between persons and their roles.

All of this allows us to distinguish two kinds of distance. One is 'generalising/measured distance' whereby the measures can be metric (like spatial

distance measured in meters) or kin-metric (close relatives versus generic kin). This distance follows the logic of generalising. Distance here is always between ego and other. However, there is another mode of distance, 'universalising distance'. Here it is not the distancing from an 'ego' to an 'other' but rather your ability to take distance from yourself. It is the intrinsic distance to a universe that is equidistant from me and from you and that is not ideal for either of us. Being able to distance (ex-centre) from yourself is a move of universalising, of being able to put yourself in the shoes of others because one shares the same universe in which humans have an ex-centric position (see Plessner 1980). Let us now return to the ethnography to see how this fresh conceptualisation of presence and distance works out in practice.

The ethical shape of sharing: sharing and presence

Having established above that sharing is neither a mere technical mechanism of distribution nor to be confused with moralism and generalised generosity, we still need to establish what exactly gives sharing its particular ethical shape, in the case at hand and more generally. If sharing as practice can range from providing food, tobacco, or other material means of subsistence to coming for a visit and keeping company, what unites all these instances ethically?

The cover of the paperback edition of my 2017 book *Anthropology and the Economy of Sharing* is an artist's rendition of a video still from a sequence of sharing that I filmed in the course of my field research in northern Namibia (see Figure 2). Just like Tsab whom I mentioned in the opening vignette, the people shown belong to a group of San who call themselves ‡Akhoe Haiǁom. I have accompanied them over the last thirty years as their hunter-gatherer lifestyle has been transforming, largely through attempts by the Namibian state to make them sedentary and effectively to turn them into farm laborers and welfare recipients. More precisely, what the situation in Figure 2 depicts is locally known as a practice called *ǂgona*, which translates as 'hanging around waiting for a share'. There is a lot of *ǂgona* going on in Haiǁom social life and there are parallels for this kind of behaviour which have been reported from many parts of the world where extensive sharing is practiced. It is a version of demand sharing that is a silent demand. It is important to underline here, though, that we are not simply talking about an 'unvoiced' demand expressed by a gesture. A 'silent demand' here means that the mere presence of those who lack certain things constitutes an ethical demand. Whilst Laws (2021:11), who also worked with San in southern Africa, sees demands as limited to friends and to be absent from distinct transactions amongst family, I would argue that we are dealing with a continuum. The continuum ranges from a voiced demand, across forms of voiceless (gestured) demands to those that are based on close social and spatial presence

alone. The ethical content, I argue, is independent of the particular form of an explicit or implicit demand. They are all examples of what counts as the ethical demand as defined by Løgstrup, spelt out above.

Figure 2: 'Hanging around waiting for a share' in northern Namibia. Video still: T. Widlok.

As I have explored in more detail elsewhere (see Widlok 2017), being present here matters; it is critical for sharing to take place. Moreover, the specific forms of presence involved also help to distinguish sharing from gift giving (or from almsgiving, for that matter): sharing at my field site was clearly associated not only with 'hanging around waiting for a share' but more generally with co-presence that would regularly trigger sharing. It was very hard *not* to share if a person clearly in need was right there in front of you. By contrast, reserving things over time and space, which also happens in Haiǁom society from time to time, is, I suggest, a case of gift giving, not sharing, which has also very different ethical implications. Individuals may be sitting together making a knife, carving, and blacksmithing for days and they would say things like, 'Oh, this is a gift for so and so', a particular friend or kinsperson whom they were planning to visit in the future. Reserving that item for the other person, distant in time and space, marked that transfer as really special. It was not shared but it became part of a personal gift exchange relationship that forged particular bonds (see Woodburn 1998). Such gifts

initiated the obligations of giving, receiving, and returning the gift, just as Marcel Mauss (2002) would have it.

By contrast, the sharing I observed was very different from the description of gift exchange by Mauss. It had to be extended to anyone who happened to be around. So when making knives, for instance, you would need a fire and bellows for blacksmithing and there was very little you could do to prevent others from sitting down at the same fire, joining you in blacksmithing, sharing the fire that you made, making use of your bellows, and sharing what I call *Halbzeug* (half-finished stuff), pieces of iron that have been worked on, not completed, and then temporarily discarded, allowing others to pick them up to work on and maybe to put them down again (see Widlok 2022a). A forging fire and a Haiǁom camp will be surrounded by these items which have been brought there by somebody and left there for others to take. This corresponds with what I include in my definition of sharing, namely as 'allowing others to take' and 'allowing others to access what is valued' (see Widlok 2013).

Note that I am not proposing that the embodiment of presence is only important in the specific San contexts, or only in small-scale face-to-face societies for that matter. Quite the contrary, I maintain that it is not difficult to find corresponding examples from 'the urban West' (see Widlok 2019). A modern example of such sharing is, for instance, free access to the internet that is granted in public places, for instance at railway stations. This shared access is very much tied to my presence in the train or on the station platform. I cannot claim internet connection time and take it home with me.[3]

Contrast that with an urban example of gift giving, for instance bonus programmes for long-term customers. Again, if you as a train passenger rode a certain number of miles on the network, you would get free gift vouchers to use in the train's board bistro or even to pay the train fare for someone accompanying you. As with other bonus schemes, these are not convincingly considered sharing. Rather, they are instances of gift giving because these are attempts to create a special bond between companies and their customers: customers get the bonus because of they have previously shown allegiance to the company. Not everyone gets the bonus; it is earmarked for faithful customers only and it is typically personalised so that only these specific customers can use the extra minutes, miles, or whatever it is they are given by the company that wants to cement the bond they have. The ethics of these gifts is a contractual, binding relationship of friends or members, detached from spatial presence, creating a virtual bond instead. Typically,

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3   Up until recently, at least in the Netherlands and Germany, free internet access was limited to those actually sitting on a train; it was not available within the train station. So if you were in the train station in Utrecht, you would see me and others sitting on a platform preparing emails on our electronic devices. Whenever a train pulled in, we would quickly login for free into the train's access point and send off these emails before the train left the station again.

these gifts can be accumulated and kept across time and space, at least for some extended period.

A first element of the particular shape of an ethics of sharing is, therefore, its relation to the here and now of those who are involved. But this relation is more than a correlation between 'being there' and 'sharing'. It is more dynamic. It is not just a correlation between spatial nearness and sharing but it is an active 'anchoring' of sharing in the here and now that is done repeatedly and even routinely. This requires some explanation because there have been attempts to force a straightforward linear relation between presence and modes of transfer. In Sahlins's (1988) much cited scheme of reciprocity, sharing only occurred with those with whom you are very close. However, ethnographically such a simple correlation does not hold: it is not necessarily the case that the closer people are and the more intimate presence there is, the more sharing there is. Attempts to hide things from fellows (as in the instance of the two tobacco pouches) are also found amongst close relatives and close neighbours – although hiding is more difficult to realise when a life space is shared closely, as in a small camp. Again, this is not only the case amongst the San. Myers (1988) noted the same tendency to try and hide something from close fellow residents and family amongst indigenous Australians.

Still, there is a strand of research (notably in consumer studies) in which sharing is theorised exactly in this way. For instance, in Russel Belk's view, sharing is essentially giving to oneself; it is not an exchange at all because it takes place within the boundaries of who is part of your 'extended self' (Belk 2010; see Widlok 2019). Who exactly is part of your extended self may be culturally variable, but in principle Belk argues the following: whoever you are closest with, you share most with. His prototypical example is the family fridge that is open to all members of the family to take things from. And in my book-length discussion of sharing I have suggested that examples from student flat shares (in Japan) are similar, too (see Widlok 2017). But here a word of caution is in order: most examples of the extended self, I want to argue, should actually be classified as examples of pooling rather than sharing. Pooling and sharing are closer to one another than, say, reciprocal gift exchange and sharing, but I still think it is good to treat them as separate analytic terms. Many issues discussed under the label of communalism/communism are, in fact, issues of pooling and not of sharing. For pooling, I would argue, distance (or closeness) matters in the sense that you are either in or out, member or non-member, within the circle or outside the circle, which is like 'having presence' or 'not having presence' as a status; it follows the generalising logic (see above). Sharing, by contrast, is not about membership within or without the circle but all about dynamically widening the circle of those who have access. It is not about status and membership nor about absolute closeness in that sense. Following the logic of universal-

ising (as explained above), it is not simply about 'being close' but rather it is performative, a practice of 'making yourself present', of 'allowing others to be present', and of 'allowing others access to what is present'. This is more than a semantic subtlety because, practically, 'allowing others to be present' is something entirely different from 'being an insider'. Making yourself present is a move that requires the interplay between those who present themselves and their needs and those who recognise those needs and allow others to be present and therefore to be considered legitimate claimants. Demand sharing is based on performatively recognising that one shares the same demands of everyday life as others. Compare this to a gated community, which is a perfect example for a pool, in this case pooling privileged access to an enclosed garden and other facilities of the estate. As I have shown elsewhere, the gated community is also the perfect example of how to disable sharing in urban planning (Widlok 2019). The same is true for changes affecting the San camps in Namibia. Many of Tsab's neighbours, in their process of becoming farm labourers, have started using sheets of corrugated iron for constructing little inner courtyards around their cooking fire. These courtyards create distance insofar as they keep visitors at bay and decrease the opportunity for *‡gona* and other forms of demanding a share. Those who use enclosures have less need of carrying things around in secret pouches. However, whilst pouches are an individual affair, the enclosures made of corrugated iron foster the pooling of resources, separating an inside from an outside or, rather, creating an inside/outside boundary through distancing. It is therefore important, in the next section, to investigate more closely the relation between sharing and distance, complementing that between sharing and presence.

The ethical shape of sharing: sharing and distance

If presence is not a one-dimensional affair, if it is not only about being close versus being far away, we need to spell out all the dimensions that are involved. As we have seen, the claim 'the closer and the more intense the presence, the more frequent and intense the sharing' does not necessarily hold because presence is not only spatially constituted in interpersonal encounters. Genealogical distance, for instance, is reconcilable with creating a presence that enables sharing. San engage in demand sharing also with non-kin or distant kin. Sharing is, therefore, not impossible under conditions of genealogical or other forms of categorical distance since we can draw people near to us (also through sharing) who are otherwise distant. Practices of kinning, of drawing people closer through establishing kin relations, are the main strategies of overcoming such distance. Kin-talk, calling someone by kin terms, is a strategy commonly applied (see Widlok 2004), as are more complex arrangements such as forms of adoption (Stutzriemer 2019) or extending the kin idiom across ethnic boundaries by using namesakes or making clan

identities compatible (Widlok 2000). Spatial and genealogical distance may create obstacles in the process of sharing, but these are not insurmountable. In fact, these distances are a common feature of all social life and there are routine ways of dealing with them, of bridging space, and of overcoming genealogical or ethnic boundaries.

Generally speaking, hunter-gatherers are not collectivists (see Widlok 2022b) – they do not pool their labour, their political power, or their property – but rather recognise that individuals may own property and consider it acceptable to defend possessing personal items, including personal convictions, plans, and heterodox ideas. In this context, demand sharing is typically directed at things that people can 'spare', either temporarily as part of lending or permanently. Demands made on items that individuals not only own but also possess, in the sense of using it regularly (for instance the clothes they wear), can reasonably be deflected and rejected. In many contexts this goes hand in hand with valuing personal autonomy highly and with an aversion to being forced into collective regimes. There are many ethnographic reports indicating that San (and other hunter-gatherers) are averse to being reduced to the status of a 'follower' who has to do what others say (see Silberbauer 1982: 29; and other contributions in Leacock and Lee 1982). The ambivalence of pooled resources is that pooling is always also about enclosing a space for transfers since the pool is demarcated with regard to a specific membership or a circle of beneficiaries, whilst sharing is intrinsically opening up a space for transfers. The refusal to pool resources has, again, been documented for many hunter-gatherers. Whilst sharing is maintained as a desirable practice, contributing to a pool is not necessarily valued positively in the same way (see Widlok 2019, 2022b). We may go as far as to argue that the hidden 'second pouch' is an expression of that attempt to maintain a degree of autonomy insofar as it secures individual authority over what one is planning to use up in the near future. Unlike pooled resources, for example seasonal harvests, which are either kept for future redistribution or as an accumulated good that can be converted into other forms of 'capital' such as authority and status, the hidden tobacco is not a 'hoard'. It does not go beyond the ordinary use of the item and it is also not big enough to be turned into a form of economic capital that is easily converted into social capital, thus to make people dependent on you. Rather, the hidden pouch primarily helps to make sure that you yourself can keep going on tobacco for the foreseeable future until some new source of sharing tobacco will open up.

Lest it be assumed that tobacco is a rather special case of sharing, it is useful to introduce another example of San hiding items that I observed in the field and which I documented elsewhere: preparing underground burrows for a fruit that the Hai‖om call *!no-e* (*Strychnos pungens*, see Widlok 1999: 107). This fruit is harvested when it is still unripe and is placed into sand burrows. Covering the fruit with warm sand speeds up the ripening

process but also prevents animals (and other humans) to consume the highly prized sweet fruit whilst it is still on or under the fruit-growing tree. For the time that the fruit lies in the sandy hole and is still unripe, it is considered 'private property' in the sense that the owner of the burrow has the right to decide when to dig it up and bring it into the open. Once that decision is made, however, the now ripe *!no-e* is subject to sharing demands such as any other foodstuff would be. If no one happens to be around at the time, the person emptying the burrow will be able to consume everything themselves. If there are others around, the owner of the burrow will be able to keep a few but will have to part with the 'excess'. The creation of such a storage, therefore, is not automatically judged as problematic or antisocial. Moreover, there is no discussion about the motives behind having such a storage; after all it helps the fruit to ripen and protects it from pests and animals. In that sense it is similar to putting tobacco in a safe place which keeps it dry and useful. Keeping *!no-e* in an underground burrow and keeping tobacco a pouch or a tin is, therefore, not intrinsically bad. Storage in itself is not ethically objectionable. The ethical issue emerges only when storage is kept out of reach despite legitimate demands having been made and by others in appropriate ways. Moving from individual to collective storage is not just a matter of gradual upscaling. Collective storage, even if only a small number of people are involved, would follow the logic of a 'club economy' in which ownership and access is always connected to membership (see Buchanan 1965), so that much of the social effort and the economic rationale is determined by membership issues. In other words, there is a qualitative difference between individual storing and collective storage.

Sharing, gift giving, and autonomy

In my experience, San may happily gloss over the egoistical motive of anyone wanting to secure *!no-e* or other types of tasty food – as long as the owners are prepared to give up a share when the appropriate requests are made in a situation of 'affluence'. Up until that point individual autonomy is protected and that includes the right to let go of things only begrudgingly. There is no moral expectation that people will happily give away what they are being asked for – as long as they share when the situation is right. Laws (2021) has recently observed for another San group that a sense of opacity, of concealing ill feelings and suspicions, is particularly pronounced amongst close relatives. Avoiding being confrontational, in my experience, includes not expressing suspicions of non-sharing directly but, rather, doing so indirectly in terms of gossip (see Widlok 2021 for details on the relation between opacity and autonomy). For the owners of desired objects, the easiest way of complying to expectations of sharing and individual autonomy at the same time is to avoid distribution in the form of handing things over ceremoniously. Rather

it is by 'allowing others to take' when they are present and when the item to be shared is present in sufficient quantity. In other words, the ethics is not about equal outcomes for everyone but rather equal opportunities for everyone to make a legitimate demand, to appropriately deal with such demands, and to give up things eventually when demands and responses lead to it.

When discussing ethical dilemmas with San (see Widlok 2009), it becomes clear that they, too, realise that under certain circumstances possessing a storage can be at conflict with the (maybe silent) demand of others who need whatever is being stored. But this is indeed considered a dilemma: keeping things in a safe place and for future enjoyment is good, but responding to legitimate demands is also good. In debates about such dilemmas, San tend not to invoke abstract principles but rather accept that any ethical judgement is only possible by attending to the concrete details of the case. If having is not intrinsically bad and giving is not intrinsically good, then it does depend on what exactly is kept, for how long, by whom, for whom, and so on, just as it is important to know what exactly is given, when, upon request by whom, and so on.

Thus, whilst creating presence is important for sharing to happen, the other half of the truth about sharing and presence is that a minimal distance in the sense of a zone of non-violation is being safeguarded.[4] Contrast that with many forms of gift giving which violate this distance. Here, at least in places like Melanesia and India, the ideology of the gift is actually that the transaction undoubtedly does interfere with the very identity of giver and recipient. You are someone else if you have given a lot: you become a Big Man in Melanesia and you become a lower caste member accumulating the impurity of the higher casts in India (see Busby 1997). This goes together with accountancy (and accountability) that goes into much of gift giving. During mortuary rituals in Melanesia, participants keep a painstaking public record of who gave what (see Levinson 2020). Chris Fowler's (2004) graphic description of gift exchange indicates just how much such an exchange is expected to change the identity of giver and recipient, right to the core of their personhood and bodies, obtrusive and distanceless. Here there is indeed, to some degree, a violation of persons or personal boundaries. The integrity of persons is being violated, or at least substantially affected, by the gift exchange.

I have already alluded to the fact that the ethical question of sharing is not so much about how to apportion items to be given, about how much one owes to whom, but rather about how to respond to demands, not all of which can be fulfilled. In other words, in practical matters the typical starting point is not me sitting on a heap of meat (or some other hoarded stuff) that I need to allocate; rather, sharing starts much earlier with people making claims all

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4   When looking for a corresponding term for this in Løgstrup's philosophy, we find the notion of *ukrænkelighed* (personal inviolability) (Løgstrup [1972] 1989: 186).

the time, polite requests, open claims, silent demands, the whole lot. Having a second pouch of tobacco helps in fending off claims and helps to protect the autonomy of the sharer in a sharing event. In that process, the use of intermediaries and of avoiding a celebrated public giving event helps to protect the autonomy of the recipient.

The ethical problem of gift giving (and the shape of gift-giving ethics) is, therefore, quite different from that of sharing. The strategic problem of gift giving is what to give to whom. This is not only a strategic question – thus, what to give to whom in order to receive good returns. It is also one of morality in the sense that my selection of gift-giving partners is a public statement about who I draw close to me and who I keep at a distance. Physical distance can get fairly easily ignored or overcome in gift giving. I can have a gift waiting for you, even after my death – think of inheritance. But my giving typically infringes with your public presence: I can try to promote your status or damage you through gift giving, shaming you as in the *potlatch* or outrunning you and accumulating status at your cost in the *Kula*. My gift giving affects the relation between me, you, and others, and the consequences of that can indeed make gift giving an ethically highly intricate business.

By contrast, what counts – ethically – in sharing is not simply 'presence' in the naturalist sense of 'proxemics', which would mean the closer in physical space, the more sharing. Proxemics do matter insofar as bodily performativity is the main means whereby humans create presence. However, it is not the only way to create distance and closeness. Therefore, the ethical problem of sharing has to include presence also in the sense of social personhood. First, I have to recognise your presence as a social person and partner, then you have to recognise me in my attempt to make autonomous decisions, and then the modalities of sharing kick in. In everyday life, this mutual recognition is achieved through acts of greetings, of establishing mutual terms of address and other ways of recognising others as relevant persons, even if they are (temporarily) distant in terms of spatial proxemics. Acts of sharing, of allowing others to take, then help to maintain presence and to reassure one another of the mutual recognition as relevant persons.

Conclusion

This contribution began with the counter-intuitive observation that hiding is often part and parcel of a successful economy of sharing. Moving towards a resolution of this apparent paradox requires us to understand that sharing is not a mere 'technical' adaptation. Sociobiology has for a long time treated sharing as something like an automatism that is in the self-interest of those who share (and therefore is not really an issue of morality or ethics) because it optimally distributes scarce resources for the benefit of the inclusive fitness of everyone involved. The ethnographic accounts of practices of hiding,

by contrast, underline that sharing is not mechanistic and that people often also have an interest in keeping things. Even in societies where a lot of sharing takes place, individuals can on occasions negate when others demand a share and they are not necessarily confronted directly when they attempt to hide things. Comparatively, 'granting others access to what is valued' (the definition of sharing employed here) varies in depth, width, intensity, and frequency. Therefore, positing an 'ultimate' fitness rationale as a driver for sharing is not enough to explain in which situation sharing takes place and to what degree. Here the ethical component of sharing needs to be spelt out.

I have argued that it is also not sufficient to think of the ethics of sharing in terms of a prescribed morality. The morality of altruism, which is often mentioned in this context, is not characteristic for many situations in which sharing takes place. Moral rules and norms of altruism are evidentially neither necessary nor sufficient for sharing to occur. My own findings support Pryor and Graburn (1980: 235) who found that empirically there was an inverse relationship between acclaimed generosity and actual acts of sharing: those who held up sharing in terms of morality were giving less in acts of sharing than those who questioned the prevalence of generosity (see Widlok 2017:20). Hence, sharing often does not occur where moral discourses demand it. In fact, the latter can cover up cases where little sharing takes place. Moreover, as the ethnography of hunter-gatherers shows, there are many cases where sharing takes place without a morality of charity or altruistic conviction. Here, strikingly, the motives of those who are involved are understated or not stated at all and may even be considered to be unknowable or oblique (see Laws 2021; Widlok 2021).

In this contribution, I have argued that moral discourse – as distinct from ethical practice – of prescribed giving is typically found in cases that are best described as 'commoning' or pooling resources (also called 'club economics'). These require a more or less clearly delimited 'pool' and 'commons' for which membership criteria and group boundaries and a morally prescribed solidarity within these boundaries have to be defined. The explications of Løgstrup have proven useful in this regard since they allow us to differentiate the 'generalising' of moral rules in pooling practices from the 'universalising' taking place in sharing practices. Whilst generalising produces moral rules and principles for 'the many' (many participants and many situations), universalising can be reconciled with context-sensitivity since it only requires that a role reversal between giver and taker is accepted in its dependency on the actual circumstances. A universalising type of ethics matches what we find in sharing practices, specifically with regard to presence and distance. Whilst generalising requires measuring distance (between ego and other), universalising requires the ability to ex-centre one's position (to take distance from oneself).

The relation between presence/distance and sharing is intricate, as I have shown in this contribution. Earlier theories assumed that there is a tight linear correlation between increasing nearness and increasing sharing. On the basis of hunter-gatherer ethnography such a unilinear correlation is not warranted. Embodied presence is indeed an important ingredient of sharing practices. At the same time, hiding as an attempt to avoid sharing can occur between close relatives just as rather distant non-kin who are present can be drawn near through sharing practices. Closeness in the sense of 'being in the circle' (and keeping others out) may be appropriate to describe as a precondition for pooling or commons arrangements. Sharing, by contrast, always safeguards a degree of autonomy, which in turn means that participants can, through their acts, enlarge the circle of who is granted access or decide not to. This zone of non-violation is integral to the way in which sharing works, namely that it begins with an ethical demand (often a silent demand) to which those who have need to react. The need to respond to the needs of others is the ethical space of sharing. This space has its specific design. Above all, it recognises the right to demand a fair share, it comprises institutionalised waves of sharing in which providers and receivers can (and often do) exchange their roles, and it puts the onus on the provider to deal with the many forms of demands made, be they explicit or simply in terms of being present as a fellow person in need. If sharing was only possible in close relationships, or if it was the only possible response when being in close relations, then there would hardly be any acts of hiding and avoiding sharing to be observed across the spectrum. In other words, by placing sharing conceptually in an ethical space that is characterised by a degree of presence but also by a degree of minimal distance in terms of non-violating the autonomy of individuals, we can explain why hiding regularly occurs in social systems that are otherwise characterised by sharing.

Acknowledgements

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