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The language of sharing practices among the Digo community in Tiwi, Kenya

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1 Introduction

Engaging with practices of sharing, reciprocity and hospitality in a society requires a multiple approach. We need to look at the currently active sharing system of this society and understand reciprocity, which is "a basic element of human organisation that involves the mutual exchange of goods, services and support among individuals, allowing for the distribution and augmentation of human agency in ways that individuals could not achieve alone" (Floyd et al. 2018).

We also need to understand the religious ideologies related to the commitment to the above concepts and, finally, to include –

[1] The idea and implementation of this paper arose from a joint project by Anne Storch and Angelika Mietzner on reciprocity, communality and hospitality. We are very grateful to Anne Storch for all her comments, ideas and input into this paper. We would also like to thank David Mietzner and the entire team of the Asante Tiwi Charitable Trust (ATCT) for their input into this paper. Thanks also go to colleagues who have helped with comments and ideas: the reading group of the project "Recalibrating Africanistics", Thomas Widlok and Nico Nassenstein.

especially with regard to African social systems – whether some of these concepts are a continuation of practices of reciprocity initiated by colonial governments. In the case of the Muslim Digo community, the self-evident practice of *zakat* (> Arabic 'almsgiving') and *sadāqa* (> Arabic 'voluntary sharing of one's wealth') is anchored in the Koran and requires believers to show charity towards certain groups of people (Siddiqui 2015: 41ff.). The righteousness of gift-giving also plays a role here, which presupposes generosity, because "Nemesis will take vengeance upon the excessive wealth and happiness of the rich by giving to the poor and the gods" (Mauss 1969: 15f).

Nevertheless, changes in extended reciprocity can be observed. In this study of the reciprocity of Digo people, we will consider a new aspect, namely that of a society that has had to adapt to a rapid change in customary actions and language due to global influences, especially the influence of tourism and the presence of NGOs. Thus, we will offer a short description of the development of the Tiwi region in connection with tourism and then discuss practices of mutual support that are still practised, as well as those that are no longer practised there (§3). An analysis of the verbalisation of sharing and thanksgiving (§4) provides the basis for a reinterpretation of a safe space (§5), before we examine the current realisation of sharing and reciprocity in the extreme situation of the Covid pandemic (§6). Discussing the changes in social practices which have followed from the massive influence of tourism and also of philanthropic aid, we seek to understand the social aspects of practices that describe interactions of exchange, both unilateral and reciprocal.

The fact that language plays an important role in tourism in Africa has been shown in various publications in recent years (Mietzner & Storch 2019; Storch & Mietzner 2021). The focus in this article on the effects of the collapse of global tourism networks is another aspect that plays an important role in the host-tourist encounter. Here, NGOs have an important role to play in dealing with linguistic and very often cultural differences (Maranz 2001). Here, based on our own experiences with our NGO, we have included this perspective in order to shed light on the connections in this interesting field of encounter of reciprocity, NGOs and the pandemic.[2]

The dialogue-like form of the article is our way of dealing with the thoughts, analyses and results of our interaction and of showing how much influence one has on one's own research and how important are one's own experiences of living together with the people our work is about. Our findings are the result of many years of study of the literature, theories and methods, which are, however, not fundamentally discussed here. Instead, we want to show how the conversation has influenced our thoughts and ultimately our goals. Therefore, we decided to include dialogues in our text, which are highlighted in colour.

[2] Apart from religion, both reciprocity and different forms of granting bureaucratic favours and maintaining connections can be seen as informal institutions and thus as normal and commonly practised habits (Hyden 1990). This is true in sub-Saharan Africa, where the system of reciprocity can be seen as a scheme of social protection, which was favoured by post-independence statesmen such as Julius Nyerere. As the first president of independent Tanzania, Nyerere, through the unity of *jamaa*, demanded that extended families and communities be the pillars of society, that they be the focal point for the state of Tanzania.

1.1 Local Background in Tourism Context

One of the most economically precarious places in Kenya is Tiwi, located on the south coast of Kenya, just between the two well-known tourist resorts Mombasa and Diani Beach. For many decades, all kinds of tourist accommodation were to be found: a big hotel resort, self-catered and catered cottages and a camping site were frequently visited. The presence of tourists enabled locals from Tiwi to sell fresh fruits, vegetables, fish and other kinds of food, as well as small handcraft souvenirs. When the big hotel, the Tiwi Beach Resort, burnt down in 2009, the only accessible restaurant was destroyed, and over the following years, the tourists stopped visiting Tiwi. Locals, who for years had sold goods to the tourists, lost their income and struggled to earn money in other ways. Men and women who were working in the cottages as cleaners or cooks lost their jobs and since no social security or unemployment benefit exists, criminality grew. It was not that the whole area could live on the revenue tourism had brought, but at least some people had earned a living and been able to support the small-scale economy in Tiwi through it. Today, many of the cottages have closed down and tourism has not recovered since then. When the worldwide Covid pandemic brought social and especially economic life to a standstill in 2020, tourism in Tiwi, which had been painstakingly rebuilt, also collapsed again. The Digo community in Tiwi suffered multiple losses. This included, on the one hand, the income from tourism, i.e. the sale of goods on the beach or to the cottages and the hotel. On the other hand, the families were confronted with another problem due to the closure of the schools, namely the problem of feeding their own children. Most of the schools offer breakfast and lunch to the children, so that the basic supply is guaranteed. With the closure of the schools, the parents had their children at home and they now had to get additional food.

This description of the development of the Tiwi area is important in order to understand the background of our investigation and analysis. In a place where a practice of sharing was lived for a long time, external factors influenced the tradition relatively quickly. How this has changed, why and what exactly has changed, and, most importantly, how sharing is practised in Tiwi today, will be highlighted in this article.

2 A conversation

Since this article is a cooperation, we will introduce ourselves and explain how the idea for this cooperation emerged and how we gained our insights. The dialogues may make the article sound a little bit like popular science, but we think that scientific articles can sound like that and that they then acquire a different indexicality that is not distanced and objectifying. The dialogical form is also meant to reflect the reciprocity that this article is about, the mutual response to the other person.

Figure 1. The authors in 2021

A.M.: My name is Angelika and I have been an Africanist for a very long time. However, because of an initiative of my mother, who is my co-author and is standing next to me in the picture here, I have also been the chairwoman of a German association for a very long time, which has made it its goal to provide children in Kenya with a good education as a basis for a better living income. I fully support this form of help for children and do not see this kind of aid as typical development aid, but as a kind of start-up aid for young people, which should be available everywhere in the world.

C.R.: My name is Christine. I have lived in Kenya for 23 years and had no intention of running a large organisation when I moved here. It just evolved out of where I was living. But I do now and therefore I often find myself in a dilemma. As the head of the very large organisation I built up in Kenya, with a school and a kindergarten, I see the problems and especially the poverty in the area where I live.

A.M.: The background of the idea behind this article lies in a discussion between the two of us that has been going on for years, about how we can combine our learned, read and applied knowledge with our findings from research/work, but above all how we can also understand what is actually happening around us.

C.R.: Yes, because I always observe everything first without analysing it, because that's the only way my work has been practicable here so far. Ideas for aid projects that I have had or, in the best case, that I have developed in Germany, have always failed when I have tried to implement them here in Tiwi. Therefore, I have learned to see how the people around me act, what they feel is important and what they say. I have also seen how mutual aid seemed to multiply in the pandemic. I saw that none of the people working with me had any money left, even though they were actually earning well. They just gave everything to their needy relatives who were in need, some of whom were on the verge of existence because of the pandemic. My discussions with Angelika brought us both insights into why the current situation among the neighbours in need is changing so much, and why their help for each other is increasing so rapidly.

A.M.: We wanted to do joint research, but research turned out to be complicated by the fact that the pandemic made travel difficult, and, more importantly, the university did not issue travel permits. In this respect, we were separated as a team and tried the variant in which I designed the questions and issues and Christine asked these questions to the people we had invited as interesting partners.

Here a structure emerged that I had never had in a research situation before: Christine was, on the one hand, my colleague, but on the other hand my "informant". What happened was that the questions I had listed did not fit at all, and some of them should have been formulated differently, and others did not fit the general field situation. When I'm in the field myself, I know what I'm getting at and can just get on with it. And that's how Christine did it, but of course with questions that were of interest to her. I then had to ask my questions again in my conversations with Christine on

the phone and so my original questions turned into completely different topics. Methodologically, it was therefore a mixture of interviews, but above all also participant observation, which ended in an interview situation.

C.R.: Much of the research includes the knowledge that I have gained in the last 20 years and I couldn't separate my knowledge from the topics that I was supposed to work on. I think this brought a positive aspect to the emergence of the research questions.

A.M.: Your expertise was of immense importance for understanding what is going on in Tiwi. It is certainly not easy to be constantly in situations where you are the only one who has the possibility to get out of the misery of the consequences of the pandemic.

From this you can see why many of the questions you asked were not understood by people. My questions were directed at the most natural thing that people do, namely help each other. And you can read in some studies about the Digo that reciprocity is so firmly anchored in social structures.

C.R.: You know, living in a region where much of the population lives below the poverty line set by the WHO has always been a challenge for me. It was not always easy to recognise poverty, as the culture of the people postulates friendliness and politeness as the entrance to any conversation. It took me years to understand the actual poverty people live in. It was also very difficult to understand that my neighbourhood was probably helping itself somehow without ever talking about it to me. I had to learn about that very slowly, bit by bit, and piece it together from bits and pieces of conversations.

3 Sharing in the Digo community – past and present

3.1 Sharing labour

Digo communities practise communal help as a continuation of a long tradition. The most practised communal help is *utsi*, which literally means 'community, people who live in the same village' (Mwalonya et al. 2004: 189).

We have talked a lot with Abdallah Mwanyumba, a Digo elder who works for the organisation Asante e.V. together with Christine in Tiwi; our conversations took place either in digital sessions, or Christine talked to him. He broadened our understanding of sharing and reciprocal acts and reported on the active practice of *utsi*:

A. Mw.: The whole community is involved in the act of *utsi*, where a group of people who represent the community decide together, who from their community needs help. The community thus cares for members who are in a precarious situation without putting them under pressure to apply for help and to return the help later on.[3]

Utsi is inherently political, which is reflected in the use of the reciprocal concept for the name of the *Utsi* Society, a political organisation which was formed in the years before

[3] Abdallah Mwanyumba p.c., 2020.

independence, supported the Kenyan African Union and Kenyatta and had a major influence on political development (Berman 2017: 72).

Different in terms of reciprocity is *mwerya*, "communal work performed in turns for the benefit of each contributor" (Mwalonya et al. 2004: 125). *Mwerya* is more informal and focuses on groups of four or five families who help each other.

A. Mw.: *Mwerya* is hardly practised anymore due to the growing population and the growing poverty, which make it impossible for people to help others besides themselves. Therefore, *mwerya* has disappeared in Tiwi but is still practised in close districts such as Kinango and Lunga Lunga.

Gillette (1978: 131f.) describes two older cooperative labour practices, which already in 1978 were ceasing to be performed anymore. *Wiri*, a communal work group, could be called by a village member, with other members of the village having to provide the applicant with farm labour or house-building help for about one to three days. The only thing the applicant had to offer was sufficient food for the workers (ibid: 132). In contrast to the unilateral *wiri*, *kukumbana* was a reciprocal exchange of labour between a small group of families where they helped each other in peak periods such as planting or harvesting (ibid: 132).

This account of *wiri* as being of a unidirectional nature contradicts to some extent the information provided by Abdallah Mwanyumba.

A. Mw.: *Wiri* is an aid that takes place in an association of no more than five families. Here, farm work or construction work is done and the family that has just benefited has to provide food. However, these families form a group that supports each other with the same work, so that everyone is a beneficiary of this mutual support.[4]

Nina Berman (2017: 70f.) describes the slow disappearance of communal solidarity and of *utsi* and *mwerya* over the past 50 years in Diani, a town about 5 km from Tiwi. Her observations correspond with those made during an initial kick-off research study in January 2020.[5] Many younger people in Diani are no longer familiar with acts of solidarity, in some cases do not even know the terms and confirm that such concepts of solidarity do not exist in their village. According to Berman's research, *mwerya* and *utsi* have gradually disappeared, mainly because mutual help was no longer necessary due to the start of paid work and an increased focus on oneself and one's own family. This is not so astonishing, since the population on Diani is far more heterogeneous than that of Tiwi, due to the fact that it is the main tourist centre south of Mombasa.

This development started around independence, when Kenyans' desire for faster development and better education increased and people, according to Berman's interlocutors, became more self-centred (Berman 2017: 71). Parallel to this, there was a strengthening of administration, which sometimes made traditions or habits difficult undertakings.

> These men [three village elders] suggested that communal activities ended in the 1960s, after independence, for a number of reasons. "Watu walianza kufanya kazi" (people started working), they said, referring to the influx of salaried

[4] p.c. 2021.

[5] Research results by Storch & Mietzner 2020.

> jobs, and "watu wamesoma" (people studied), referring to increased participation in formalised education. People wanted development, I was told, they wanted modernisation, they no longer wanted to pursue the traditional ways (*utamaduni*), they wanted privacy. "Sasa hivi ni wakati ya dotcom" (today is the era of dotcom), they said, an expression that the female elders had also used and that was associated with the preeminence of privacy and doing things only for oneself. Village elders seemed torn between an endorsement of the desire for development and a longing for the traditional ways of doing things. The village elders also insisted that the government played a role in bringing about changes for the worse: today, one needed a permit for everything. (Berman 2017: 71).

It is obvious that much has changed since then. Many people, especially younger ones, have not even heard of *wiri* or *utsi*.[6] Others, especially in Tiwi, continue to engage in the practices. What has remained, however, is the personal performance of the social practice of reciprocity – daily and constantly.

3.2 Sharing goods/food

In the impoverished and largely unemployed Digo communities in Tiwi, giving alms is a common practice. Sharing within the family, but also supporting less well-off people in one's own immediate environment, are among the most important social practices. On the one hand, having an income means feeding one's own nuclear family, but it also means passing on parts of the income to the extended family. At the same time, owning food means also giving parts of the food to needy people in the neighbourhood.

In the case of sharing, the position of the giver is seen as an honourable position of which the giver is proud. However, such pride is kept to oneself and the act of sharing is not communicated.

C.R.: Within two weeks of the announcement of the Kenyan government's pandemic measures, one could see that people had used up their financial reserves. Our organisation, which offers food aid to the parents of our school children in its programmes, extended its offer to all the people in Tiwi who needed it. I am often at these distributions and usually receive thanks from the people who are there, sometimes even a small gift. But since the hardship caused by the Covid restrictions, that has changed. People take their things, hardly look at me and leave without saying thank you.

A. M.: Helping here among the Digo community follows certain rules. On the one hand, helping means 'being silent'. One should not boast with his help or tell everybody that he is helping. This is extremely impolite. There is a saying: "when you give out with the right hand, make sure that the left hand doesn't know". Thus, people are proud when they can give something to other people and take it as a matter of course.

On the other hand, even if this behaviour may be considered rude in today's sense of politeness, it is common in the context of give and take among the Digo community. It is mainly about an unexpected gift, which is regarded by the recipient as something he would be entitled to anyway, i.e. it is taken for granted.

[6] Research results by Storch & Mietzner 2020.

Questioning the principles of sharing requires a certain familiarity with the Digo community, as silence is a common practice in this area and answers to questions about it are often not immediately understandable.

Food sharing is certainly not an exceptional thing, and among the Digo community, who have a socially sophisticated system of reciprocal help, it is more of a social norm than a peculiarity. Reciprocity remains an important factor here. Widlok (2017: 2) says that "reciprocal exchange has mutuality as its defining property" and that an unreciprocal transfer among individuals in a society can be seen as "an instance of incomplete exchange of which we simply have not seen [...] the refer transaction" (ibid: 2). The reciprocity of food sharing can also become a kind of game for the Digo community in friendly relationships. From the stories of David, a German who works in Tiwi and also lives in a village in Tiwi, we learned how long the act of food sharing can take:

> D. M.: A neighbour brought me a plate of food. After eating it, I had to return the plate, which would have been impolite without edible contents. So, I put some of my dinner in the neighbour's plate and covered it with my own plate. The next day, the Digo neighbour returned the plate, put something edible in it and again covered it with a plate of his own. This exchange went back and forth a few times until I ended the exchange by bringing the full and covered plate to my neighbour but then took my own plate back home.

As can be seen here, social concepts such as politeness, reciprocity or sharing overlap and blur and must always be considered in conjunction and never as individual concepts.

3.3 The implicitness of sharing

Achille Mbembe (2018) repeatedly refers to a possible world without borders, that is, a common world that is shared, a world that undoes the past procedures of "dividing up" and brings back the normality of community, the common and the human.

> Community – or rather the in-common – is not based solely on the possibility of saying goodbye, that is, of having a unique encounter with others and honoring this meeting time and again. The in-common is based also on the possibility of sharing unconditionally, each time drawing from it something absolutely intrinsic, a thing uncountable, incalculable, priceless.[7]

In his book *Afrotopia*, Felwine Sarr (2016) also sees the future of the African continent in the reflection of the mainly young African population on common values and on an acceptance of their existing respect for each other. The global approach of the two authors can already be found in smaller forms of society, where sharing is seen as part of normal everyday life. Among the Digo people in Tiwi, and probably also in Digo communities further south, sharing or working together to accomplish a task or solve a problem is a normal part of social life.

Mbembe's definition of "honoring this meeting time and again" is linguistically expressed in Digo in an acknowledgement of gifts received in such a way that giving is already seen as normality and a repetition is not only

[7] On the universal right to breathe. https://www.theaterspektakel.ch/en/article/essay-achille-mbembe/(last accessed 26.4.2021).

hoped for but demanded: *mwadziko muhondo dza vivyo* 'Thank you, tomorrow again' is a thank-you phrase that informs the giver that there is definitely still a need for further support. As much as the phrase could be considered impolite in any context other than that of the Digo, it is extremely polite and appreciative in that context and in no way represents a request for further help the next day. It is a phrase of immense respect and honour and shows the naturalness with which it can be assumed that a gift represents something normal.

A. M.: I had this experience with the girl who I sponsor in the school of Asante e.V. in Tiwi. It is an experience that illuminates and highlights the importance of the issue. This year (2021) I received a letter from my sponsored child, who I know personally, who asked me for a bicycle with the words "and pelisla. I want biscole" ('and please, I want a bicycle').

C.R.: Yes, it often happens that children formulate wishes in their letters to the German sponsors. The children in the school write a letter to their German sponsors once a year. Over the years, we have learned that the children often ask for things in their letters. Sometimes a ball, sometimes a bicycle, a laptop or clothes. This was often met with astonishment by the German sponsors, so our organisation tries to ensure that the children do not make any requests in their letters. The teachers, who supervise the letter-writing, urge the children not to formulate any requests, but simply to tell about themselves.

A. M.: However, this appreciation of thanks is met by Europeans who are not aware of the inherent appreciation, but to whom it seems more like begging for more. This disruption, the disturbance which interrupts the event of communication, is more than normal. The European assists the child with the school fees, an act that normally needs no thanks, is not worth a mention, but belongs to the reciprocal social system of the Digo community. And for this, the girl thanks you by expressing the concept of utmost appreciation and writing.

C.R.: Maybe the lines include the following words*: yes, I want a bicycle. You have helped me up to here and no one could have done it. I am very grateful to you and please don't stop your help, but feel free to give me a bike too. You are a good person.* The Europeans cannot receive more appreciation and it would be nice if they knew this. But since this is not the case, the teachers, at my request, try to prevent these sentences from getting into the letter.

Even though the old concepts of coping together have changed, the internalised reciprocal actions can still be found in Tiwi today. We speak of internalisation here because our research has shown that sharing seems to be such an internalised topic that talking about it and asking questions about it led to astonishment at what was considered a completely banal and normal act. This gives a picture of how the act of sharing has changed. As we mentioned at the beginning, communal sharing acts have become less important in the past decades and have been at least partly replaced by individual sharing acts.

By shifting aid from the communal to the individual level, meaningful concepts such as *mwerya*, *utsi* or *wiri* lose their meaning, leading to a complete loss of knowledge of these sharing concepts. But even though the concepts and sensational publicly practised actions disappeared, the practice of sharing remained. However, this was deprived of its public performance. The traditional acts that accompanied sharing, such as the committee deliberating on whether or not to help at *utsi*, or cooking and brewing for neighbours who collectively helped at *mwerya*, are no longer to be found, and what remains is a label-less, modified form of mutual aid.

Not having a term for unconditional sharing makes the use of many words about the act itself redundant. And it also causes incomprehension to be asked and questioned about it.

C.R.: I remember when I went off with your first list of questions, where you wanted to know who people usually share with and how sharing might also be avoided if you don't have enough. I didn't get an answer from the group of women I asked, just confused faces. Then I was supposed to ask our greengrocer whether and how he recovers the debts that accumulate with him and if he ever releases debts. He did not understand at all what I meant by that and thought I wanted to settle all the debts of the people who are in his book. It is a subject that is just not discussed.

4 The verbalisation of sharing

The normality in Swahili among the coastal people and thus also among Digo people in Tiwi is verbal politeness strategies that are used in almost all areas of life and serve to save one's own face and also that of others (e.g. Yahya-Othman 1994, 1997, Orwenjo 2009).[8] The aspect of dignity and the observance of certain rules of politeness thus play such an important role in the community of Swahili speakers that both linguistic and non-verbal strategies are permanently used to preserve one's own or the other's reputation (Yahya-Othman 1994). It is also worth noting here that remedial action may be taken in relation to violations of politeness rules by third parties, as speakers must comply with society's accepted social restrictions on polite behaviour in order not to risk damage to their own social persona (Yahya-Othman 1994: 150). This can go so far that in Swahili one can speak of a "double speech", when a speaker "can always recur to the literal meaning of the message, denying any critical illocutionary force" (Vierke 2012: 279, which results in a person being unable to interpret inappropriate behaviour correctly and thus always being able to find a way out of this misbehaviour).

Now, sharing seems to be a specific social practice that turns away from the polite register and uses short statements or even silence as a common communicative practice. For example, the polite form of request *kuomba* 'ask' is not used in sharing contexts, but rather *kutaka* 'want' is applied: *nataka kahawa* 'I want coffee'. Also, thanking someone who has just given

[8] Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) added to the literature by introducing a politeness theory based on the concept of 'face'. They defined 'face' as "the public self-image that each member wants to claim for himself or herself" (1978: 61).

something is usually done in silence. Thus, gifts of food are accepted without a word of thanks in pandemic times, thus underlining the self-evident nature of sharing. However, silence also means accepting an invitation to share the food that has just been cooked. In times of food shortages, the Digo community in Tiwi still cook the food in front of the house, even though it might lead to envy or to having to share the food. Hiding in the house to avoid sharing is an antisocial practice that exposes the person cooking all the more, because you can smell from outside that there is food in the house. Now, if someone passes by while you are eating, you always invite that person (*kumkaribisha* 'to invite someone'). Usually, this person will decline with a short *asante* 'thank you' and move on. However, if there is no response to the obligatory invitation, the silence is to be taken as a commitment to that invitation (Mietzner 2021: 17).

Asking for food is the most obvious evidence of loss of agency and control over one's own life and that of loved ones. However, since in reciprocal societies giving is normality and asking and thanking are trivialities (Floyd et al. 2018), silence occurs. This praxeological perspective opens the view on the complexity of non-verbal practices and of practices of silence (Beck 2015: 266).

But how normal is sharing in certain societies? Giving, like receiving, is part of a social practice of Digo people in Tiwi, or even a norm, which is characterised above all by a pragmatic minimum through which the most necessary information is exchanged. It almost seems as if the human and polite act is calling itself into question through pragmatic minimalisms and impolite requests. This is probably a very specific strategy of reduced or even non-verbal communication in sharing situations, which differs from the common verbal politeness strategies.

The act of giving can normally entail two subsequent acts: on the one hand, that one gives something and knows that one will get it back at some point, and on the other hand, that one knows that one will not get it back. In the case of sharing in extreme situations like the pandemic, the subsequent act is reduced to the fact that one always assumes that one will not get back what one has given. The person who asks for something gets what is asked for, if it is available, without any return being associated with it or even contemplated. This is obvious in the Digo verb *kuvoya* 'request, ask, borrow', which is either unilateral in the sense that one asks for something that one knows cannot be returned. 'Begging' in the proper sense is also expressed with *kuvoya*. However, *kuvoya* can also imply a return of what is asked for, for example, a loan. According to the respondents, the act of *kuvoya* 'borrow' happens more in public spaces than in private settings. It is, for example, possible to borrow in a shop, but not from relatives, as there is usually a delay in returning what is borrowed, which would be inappropriate within a family.

Kuripha, for which Mwalonya et al. (2004) give 'pay' as a translation, is also generally used in this way in Digo. Semantically, however, the verb goes more in the direction of 'pay back' and corresponds to the semantics of the verb *kuuyiza*. *Kuuyiza* was described by Mwanyumba (p.c. 2021) as the more original Digo word before it came to be used almost synonymously with *kuripha* 'pay' (Swahili: *kulipa*).

It is important here to separate thanking as a linguistic practice from gratitude as an emotion (see also Floyd et al. 2018). The explicit ex-

pression of gratitude as a linguistic practice is universally less common and less taken for granted than the expression of it, as is common in European cultural contexts (Floyd et al. 2018). It can be assumed that social reciprocity is based more on a silent agreement regarding the rights and duties people have, than on verbal expressions of gratitude. This rationale can also be found in Tamil, where giving is governed by the idea that persons have to give something to other persons and that it is everybody's duty to do so. It is regarded as moral giving, where everyone who gives something is only doing their duty and thanking is not relevant. So Appadurai reflects that "if every giver, […] is only doing his duty (dharma), why should the receiver be grateful? Indeed, leaving aside the question of hierarchy for a moment, thanking someone who is simply doing his duty is not simply linguistically infelicitous but, if I am right, potentially morally inappropriate, for it implies a voluntaristic act of generosity rather than a morally prescribed gift" (Appadurai 1985: 238).

The procedures of the Digo community in Tiwi are therefore not an exception, but rather a practice commonly found worldwide. Such practices of not expressing thanks will not create misunderstandings within the same community, group or religion but are likely to cause difficulties if the safe space in which the practices are habitually carried out is left.

5 The safe space

This safe space is, as the safe space of intimacy (Storch to appear: 147), a space where intimate dialogues are possible without violating social conventions. This means that actions can be carried out without hurting the other person and the non-verbal processes of asking or thanking can also happen without any problems. On this, Appadurai writes:

> […] gratitude implies appreciation, appreciation involves acknowledgment, and the only significant form of acknowledgment is return. Thus in all societies where nonmarket reciprocities are critical to the construction and maintenance of social relations, it may be that direct, immediate, and verbal expressions of gratitude are regarded either as inappropriate or simply as modest promissory notes for the substantial thanks that must take the form of the eventual return gift. (Appadurai 1985: 240)

One of the safe spaces of the Digo people is their language, although in Tiwi in particular there are indications that Digo is no longer widely used and is in the process of being lost.

In short, Digo people in Tiwi now speak Swahili and the new generation of children and youth are no longer growing up with Digo as their mother tongue. English is the compulsory language of instruction in schools from the fourth grade onwards, but schools often start speaking English with the children as early as kindergarten. This makes it easier for many young people to enter the business of tourism, where English is indispensable. But even when the old language is missing, cultural concepts carry over and are adopted into the other language. The safe space is translatable into other languages and so reciprocity can continue without problems.

The concept of reciprocity and gratitude in Tiwi is found in an interesting multicultural space filled with Digo people and Kenyans from other parts of the country, expatriates and tourists. Many of the people in the area make

their living from tourism, be it beach tourism or philanthropic tourism, and thus encounter English speakers who, as Floyd et al. (2018: 8) write, "place a special cultural value on saying 'thank you' as an important aspect of politeness". The situation with the food aid issue, as we have described above, encounters two extremes of agents of the appreciation: on the one hand the Swahili-speaking Digo people, on the other the English-speaking Europeans.

6 Sharing in times of Covid

With all this knowledge on sharing, reciprocity and appreciation, it is worth considering how social practices alter in particular situations, e.g. in crisis situations. All the practices of reciprocal help and sharing are normal everyday practices, if one disregards organised communal help like *mwerya* or *utsi*. As described above, these have become so integrated into interpersonal interaction that it seems completely absurd to even talk about them. But how have these everyday practices changed in the time since the outbreak of the Covid pandemic? In most of the conversations conducted for the purpose of researching this article, the authors of the article could not even say whether anything had changed or not, because again, the topic of conversation was taken so much for granted that it was not elaborated on.

A. M.: Mama, how do you see the change of reciprocal actions now in times of extremes? In times of curfew, joblessness, hunger and closed schools?

C.R.: Today? Today with Covid? How do starving, impoverished people deal with their neighbourhood, which has been starving just like them for exactly one year now?

The question you asked me forced me to think about it. Through our organisation[9], we help many residents in Tiwi, mostly women and their children. This gives weight to the women we help and makes them visible in their community in a region that has always known poverty but is now facing hopelessness. What do the women who receive help from our organisation in the form of food, money or work do with their neighbourhood, which has to sleep through the day so as not to feel the hunger? What do they do with their even poorer neighbours who are now literally starving? Well, they come to me. They come and ask for one of their neighbours to be included in our food distribution. Recently, a woman came whose neighbour had just given birth and whose child died shortly after birth. The young mother sits and stares into emptiness, not wanting to be spoken to. She is starving and no one can help her. But – we do help because someone brought it to our attention. Fortunately, we have the opportunity to help, because now, because of Covid, hardly anyone can provide neighbourly help.

Or Hamisi, who we have provided schooling for, comes and asks for a very old woman who lives next door to him and is hungry. Normally, she is supported by her children, but the children now need support themselves. But they have nothing left, as they have lost their jobs in tourism because of Covid. So the old woman receives help from us and will share it with her children.

[9] Asante-ev.org

Or a woman asks for urgent help for a mother of three children. Before, they could get support from relatives. But now the pandemic has made all means of earning money in Tiwi impossible. No one in this family is getting help from anywhere – we are now stepping in for all the people who were supporting each other before the pandemic.

Or a woman who has been supported by our organisation for a long time asks us to include an old obviously sick man in our food aid. The woman had observed the man showing 2 Kenya shillings[10] to the vendor at a stall and asking: "Can I have a small tomato for this?"

Or the mother of two of our supported school children, who is included in our food aid through her children. She approached me: "My neighbour has five children, there has been no work for almost a year, everyone in this family is starving. Whenever I receive food from you, I share it with her. Please include her in your food aid.

I see that many people divert their otherwise normal help for even poorer people to me. They themselves cannot share, they either have practically nothing to eat or they already support many people from their own family with our food aid. There is not enough for more.

Angi, the women from our handicraft project have become very quiet. They work tirelessly in the women's project, but any joy has disappeared. Outside, many of their children and relatives are waiting for their wages. Sharing even more is not possible, but they still try to help their neighbourhood by giving their requests to me.

Covid has changed the situation in which mutual help is required in that sharing from one's own property is hardly possible any more. However, it is possible to ask for help from an external party for acquaintances, neighbours and friends whom one otherwise supports. "No one boasts that they have arranged help," says Abdallah Mwanyumba. This is the current form of reciprocity in the pandemic, where it is evident that the social practice of mutual aid and support continues in ways that deviate from the normal practice, but remains in the sense that help is guaranteed in some form.

7 Conclusion

As we have shown in this paper, reciprocity and sharing in Tiwi have gone through different phases. The language in which the practices of sharing were carried out is lost due to the supremacy of Swahili. However, the self-evident nature of sharing has persisted through all the changes. This can be well demonstrated by the example of the Digo community in Tiwi, even though it cannot be seen as universal, but quite a lot of factors have to be considered (dependence on tourism; influence of tourism on jobs; influence of charity tourism). In her analysis, Berman (2017) blames charity tourism for the fact that people stopped helping each other because it was much easier to live off the donations of Europeans.

This may be a one-sided approach, as many other factors have influenced practices along the coast in Kenya. The impact of the

[10] A tomato costs around 10 Kenya shillings per piece. It is important here to highlight the coins the man used for buying the tomato. The 1 shilling piece is hard to find in Kenya and there are few to no things that cost less than 5 shillings. This implies the desperation of the man, who is sure that he cannot get anything with 2 shillings and that any tomato he gets for it is a gift from the seller.

economic and therefore environmental exploitation of the coastline, such as the broken reefs or the empty, fished-out coastline, leads to a reduction in livelihood opportunities for the local residents. In addition, there is the human-altered fauna, which in its original state was the spiritual basis for communities where a sovereign use of resources made reciprocity, spirituality and help possible. Colonial structures have left their mark and still do in the form of neo-colonial tourism.

Adapting to the development of the economy, the people along Kenya's coast have fully embraced tourism and made it their livelihood.

But we have been able to see in the current extreme situation that tourism is vulnerable in terms of the stability of income opportunities. For social strata where no reserves can be built up and where no state aid is available, the social system of help and reciprocity must be in place and resorted to in case of need. This article shows that this is still the case within the Digo community in Tiwi. The fact that the linguistic practices are then also transferred to the participants inreciprocity practices who do not come from a Digo community was a gain in knowledge that we were able to present here.

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